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October 21, 2009

Dr. Janelle C. Ashley
President
Worcester State College
486 Chandler Street
Worcester, MA 01602-2597

Dear President Ashley:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on September 18, 2009, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by Worcester State College and took the following action:

that the report submitted by Worcester State College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2012 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, as well as the matters specified in our letter of March 4, 2008, the self-study prepared for the Fall 2012 comprehensive evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in reviewing the impact of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum and its cornerstone, the First-Year Experience program, on students and the institution as a whole.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The report submitted by Worcester State College was accepted because it was generally responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of March 4, 2008. We are gratified to find evidence in the present report that implementation of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum (LASC) is following a well-formulated process. We understand that the College used the 2008-09 academic year to mount an extensive professional development program for its faculty and staff, underwritten by a grant from the Davis Educational Foundation, in support of the LASC and its cornerstone, the First-Year Experience (FYE). We take favorable note that the College began the Fall 2009 semester with a total of 148 courses and 32 first-year seminars meeting the LASC requirements, surpassing its goal of 120 courses.

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In addition, we commend the College for the progress it has made with regard to the assessment of student learning across all the College's programs. We note with particular approval the College's ability to increase the number of programs with developed plans for assessing student learning outcomes from 83% in 2007 to 92% in the most recent year. Similarly, we are pleased to learn that the proportion of programs using feedback from their assessment plans has increased in the same two-year period from 50% to 76%. We take favorable note that the College's efforts in this arena extend past the program level to the institutional level. We note with favor that the College has begun participating in several national initiatives focusing on assessment of student learning, including the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education; the nationally-normed Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP); and the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). In addition, we applaud the activity undertaken by the Student Affairs Division to facilitate program review of its constituent departments through the adoption of standards promulgated by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2012 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. In addition to the matters normally addressed in a self-study, as well as the matters specified in our letter of March 4, 2008, we ask that Worcester State College devote particular attention to a matter related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program*.

The present report explains that implementation of the new LASC, originally scheduled for Fall 2008, was delayed to Fall 2009. As a result, the institution has not yet been able to assess the impact of LASC and its cornerstone, the First-Year Experience (FYE) program. In the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2012 comprehensive evaluation, we look forward to learning in greater detail of the College's success in this regard, particularly what it has learned from reviewing the impact of LASC and FYE on students and the College as a whole. We are guided here by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program*:

The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide relevant and trustworthy information to support institutional improvement, with an emphasis on the academic program (2.4).

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.15).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.16).

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge

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and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind (4.18).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Worcester State College and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Dr. George Tetler. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Elsa M. Nuñez

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Enclosure

cc: Dr. George Tetler