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April 28, 2014

Dr. Christopher E. Hopey  
President  
Merrimack College  
315 Turnpike Street A21  
North Andover, MA 01845

Dear President Hopey:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on March 7, 2014, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by Merrimack College, as well as the report of the visiting team, and took the following action:

that the report submitted by Merrimack College be accepted;

that inclusion within the institution's accreditation of the Master of Science programs in Engineering and Management be confirmed;

that the College be granted general approval to offer Master's-level programs within the scope of its mission;

that the fifth-year interim report scheduled for consideration in Fall 2016 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports as well as the matters specified in our letter of April 17, 2012, the institution give emphasis to its success in:

- 1) continuing to implement its long-term operational and financial plans;
- 2) developing a culture of assessment and implementing a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, including assessment of the core curriculum in liberal studies;
- 3) addressing faculty workload issues and assuring appropriate support for faculty scholarship and professional development;
- 4) achieving its goals for diversity;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2021 be confirmed.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The report submitted by Merrimack College was accepted because it was responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of April 17, 2012 and June 5, 2013. As validated by the report of the visiting team, the College is engaged in a strategic vision and planning process that is widely understood and that has created a “phenomenal, campus-wide, dynamic environment on campus that motivates and energizes all the stakeholders to strive for genuine progress.” The strategic plan, *Agenda for Distinction*, functions as the framework for the planning process that has ensued during the past two years. Stage Two of the process has included the appointment of several key administrators and the reorganization of the College into four Units: Academics, Mission and Student Affairs, Athletics, and Administration. We note with favor that all Units are expected to develop strategic plans that will, during Stage Three of the process, be integrated into the College’s long-term financial plan to guide decision-making about new academic programs, enrollment management, student services, and facilities and infrastructure.

Inclusion with the institution’s accreditation of the Master of Science programs in Engineering and Management was confirmed because Merrimack College provided evidence that it is implementing these programs in a manner consistent with the *Standards for Accreditation* and Commission policy. We note with favor that the College exceeded its enrollment and net revenue goals for both programs in FY2013 and anticipates strong enrollment and a positive financial result in FY2014. Merrimack has implemented a comprehensive array of graduate-level student services and has been especially attentive to the needs of international students, as evidenced by a more formalized advising process and reduced course loads during the initial semester to allow students to better adapt to graduate study in English. We are pleased to learn of the “process of strategic new faculty hires” underway at the College to accommodate growth in graduate programs and of the \$100,000 Innovation Fund that has been established to support improvement in teaching and learning.

Merrimack College is granted general approval to offer Master’s-level programs within the scope of its mission because the institution provided evidence of its capacity to offer high-quality Master’s programs. We note with favor that the College is building “a culture of graduate education that is both distinctive and seamlessly integrated into the fabric of the institution.” We concur with the visiting team that graduate curricula are appropriately rigorous and that the “academic and developmental needs” of graduate students are met through the services provided by the writing center, career center, and library. We understand that the College’s long-term goal is to offer 10-12 Master’s programs in fields that build on current areas of curricular strength and respond to regional needs in finance, public affairs, and health sciences.

Commission policy requires a fifth-year report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution’s current status in keeping with the policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all fifth-year reports and the items specified for attention in the Commission’s letter of April 17, 2012, the College is asked, in Fall 2016, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Financial Resources, The Academic Program, Faculty, and Students*.

As noted above, Stage Three of Merrimack College’s strategic planning process involves the integration of Unit operational plans into the institution’s long-range financial plan. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2016 report, of the College’s continued success in undertaking planning that is “systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution” (2.1) and to receiving further evidence that the “institution’s financial planning ... is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes” (9.9).

The Commission is gratified to learn of Merrimack College's commitment to deepening its culture of assessment, including the use of data and assessment results to inform planning and decision-making. We note with approval that the College has established an Office of Planning, Institutional Research, and Assessment to provide "executive oversight and strategic guidance" in these areas and has received a \$200,000 grant from the Davis Foundation to support faculty professional development in assessment. The Fall 2016 report will afford Merrimack an opportunity to demonstrate its effective engagement in "systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom" (4.48), including its review of the core curriculum in liberal studies. Our standard on *The Academic Program* provides this additional guidance:

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

The Commission notes with approval the College's support for faculty professional development through faculty development grants, travel funding, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and the Office of Sponsored Research. We concur with the visiting team, however, that Merrimack College would benefit from ongoing analysis of graduate faculty workloads to assure that they "allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, contribute to program and institutional assessment and improvement, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, creative activities and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution" (5.7). We anticipate being apprised of the College's success with this matter through the Fall 2016 interim report.

Finally, we are gratified to learn that Merrimack College has engaged a team of consultants to provide "strategic guidance and training on diversity" and intends to "plan proactively" for anticipated changes in the student body profile resulting from implementation of the institution's enrollment plan. We anticipate being apprised, in Fall 2016, of the College's success in addressing "its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students" (6.1).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2021 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report prepared by Merrimack College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Russell Mayer, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, as well as Evangelos Hadjimichael, team chair during its deliberations.


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 Mr. Timothy Murphy. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process 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.

Dr. Christopher E. Hopey  
April 28, 2014  
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,  
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

  
Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Timothy Murphy  
Visiting team



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Public Disclosure of Information  
About Affiliated Institutions**

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The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and by the Commission.

**1. Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation  
Following Commission Action**

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts from these materials.

While the Commission does not release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

While the Commission does not initiate public release of information on actions of show cause or deferral, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action publicly correcting any misleading information it may have disseminated, including but not limited to the accreditation status of the institution, the contents of evaluation reports, and the Commission actions with respect to the institution. Should it fail to do so, the New England Association, acting through its Chief Executive Officer, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information.

## 2. Published Statement on Accredited Status

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

\_\_\_\_\_ College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the New England Association indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the New England Association is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
**3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514**  
**(781) 425 7785**  
**E-Mail: [cihe@neasc.org](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)**

The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

\_\_\_\_\_ College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
**3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514**  
**(781) 425 7785**  
**E-Mail: [cihe@neasc.org](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)**

Accreditation by the New England Association has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the New England Association” or “this degree is accredited by the New England Association” are incorrect and should not be used.

### 3. **Published Statement on Candidate Status**

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:

\_\_\_\_\_ College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Candidacy for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with the Commission which indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation.

Inquiries regarding the status of an institution affiliated with the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the college or university. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
**3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514**  
**(781) 425 7785**  
**E-Mail: [cihe@neasc.org](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)**

### 4. **Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions by the Commission**

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about affiliated institutions:

- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation;
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission;
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation;
- In cases of adverse action (denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on probation), the Commission's reasons for recommending that status and, in the case of probation, its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement. The institution will also be offered the opportunity to make its official comment; if the institution does make an official comment, the comment will be made available by the Commission.
- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been withdrawn, the date of, and reasons for, withdrawal.

The Commission does not provide information about deferments of action on candidate or accreditation status, or show-cause orders. However, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, revocation of candidacy, and withdrawal of accreditation) are communicated after the available appeals process is completed. The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before an appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies



and procedures of the Commission and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

#### **5. Public Disclosure of Institutional Actions**

Within 30 days after the action on accreditation status is taken, the Commission will notify the Secretary of Education, New England state higher education officers, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the accreditation of an institution

Place an institution on probation

Approve substantive change (e.g., moving to a higher degree level)

A decision by an accredited or candidate institution to voluntarily withdraw from affiliation with the Commission.

*November 1998*

*September 2001*

*April 2010*

*September 2011*

*Editorial Changes, March 2014*