



June 11, 2019

Dr. Kumble R. Subbaswamy  
Chancellor  
University of Massachusetts Amherst  
181 Presidents Drive  
374 Whitmore Administration Building  
Amherst, MA 01003-9313

Dear Chancellor Subbaswamy:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 12, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Massachusetts Amherst:

that University of Massachusetts Amherst be continued in accreditation;

that inclusion of University of Massachusetts Amherst's partnership with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. within the accreditation of the institution be confirmed;

that inclusion of the Mount Ida College campus as an instructional location in the accreditation of University of Massachusetts Amherst be confirmed;

that the University submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2023;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University give emphasis to its success in:

1. accomplishing its plans to ensure its institutional research capacity is sufficient to support decision-making, refine its system of assessing educational effectiveness, and provide a consistent quality of advising across academic units;
2. planning to ensure sufficient qualified faculty for continued achievement of the institution's goals for academic programming and research;

DAVID QUIGLEY, Chair (2021)  
Boston College

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Worcester, MA

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JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)  
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University of Rhode Island

PAMY EDDINGER (2020)  
Bunker Hill Community College

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Thomas College

KIMBERLY M. GOFF-CREWS (2020)  
Yale University

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Manchester Community College (NH)

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ELEANOR BAKER (2021)  
Falmouth, ME

KATHERINE BERGERON (2021)  
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Wheaton College

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Johnson & Wales University

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Berkshire Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2021)  
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JOHN M. SWEENEY (2021)  
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3. developing the Mount Ida instructional location to serve the University's mission and purposes;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2028.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

University of Massachusetts Amherst is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

Along with the visiting team, the Commission commends University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass Amherst) for its "substantive, significant, and impressive" progress made over the past decade to become an institution characterized by innovation, transparency, and inclusion. Supported by its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan (*Be Revolutionary: A Vision for the Future*), UMass Amherst has been successful in building a campus-wide culture of assessment and evaluation as demonstrated by its established Academic Quality and Development process (AQAD) and the more recent Administrative Quality and Development process (AdQAD), and by the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment's exemplary website that tracks program improvements. The University's record of achieving its strategic goals is impressive, including improving and diversifying the profile of its undergraduate student body now comprised of 30% ALANA students that was, in part, accomplished by doubling institutional aid over the past ten years from \$26 million to \$54 million. In addition, a cabinet-level position was added in 2017 to lead UMass Amherst's efforts to advance equity and inclusion across the institution. The University's "high tech, high touch" approach to student services is also notable as apparent from the implementation of advancements such as a mobile platform to facilitate deferrals, development of a "forward-thinking" Student Experience Master Plan, and creation of an Office of First Generation students. At the graduate level, the significant growth in UMass Amherst's enrollment over the past four years (an increase of 10,280 credit hours), the high quality of its research centers/institutes, and the \$146.3 million in total sponsored research awards received in 2017 all provide evidence of the institution's success in realizing its strategic goal to "strengthen the University's research and development enterprise." We also acknowledge the University's financial stability and its realistic planning and are pleased to learn that it exceeded the goal of its most recent comprehensive campaign by raising \$379 million with \$108 million added to the permanent endowment. In addition, investments in a new data center, computer network improvements, and renovations completed to enhance campus learning and research facilities, among other projects, totaled approximately \$1.5 billion since 2009. Given the "strength and agility" exhibited by UMass Amherst's committed Board, skilled and respected leadership and staff, talented faculty, along with its students and alumni, we are confident that the state's flagship public institution will continue to move forward to be "a destination of choice, a partner of choice, and a community of choice."

The Commission confirmed inclusion of University of Massachusetts Amherst's partnership with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. within the institution's accreditation because the self-study was responsive to the concerns raised in our letter of November 30, 2016 and provided evidence that the University is implementing the programs in a manner consistent with Commission standards and policies.

We note positively the launch of UMass Amherst's first global program – a hybrid Master of Science degree in electrical and computer engineering in Shanghai, China in Summer 2017 – in partnership with Shorelight Education, L.L.C. We support the visiting team's observation that the degree program, which has the same requirements as that offered on campus, is appropriately integrated into the University's governance structures through a joint steering committee that provides oversight and regular updates to the Faculty Senate. We are also assured that the administrative services offered by Shorelight in China and the technology support that allows for a "high level of both written and visual information exchange" are rated highly by students and

faculty, and that UMass Amherst faculty are positive about the “readiness to learn” of the students electing to complete their second year on the Amherst campus. While the partnership is currently limited in scope, we understand that plans for expansion are under discussion.

The Commission also encompassed the Mount Ida College campus instructional location within the University’s accreditation because the Commission finds the activity to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies.

We are aware that, at a cost of \$74 million, UMass Amherst acquired the campus of Mount Ida College in 2018 providing the University a career and professional education location in the greater Boston area. With 800+ beds, 57 classrooms and labs, and dining and recreational facilities, the site is intended to provide a “value-added” component to the student experience by offering experiential learning opportunities including credit-bearing internships, as well as to facilitate greater research-industry collaborations with “wide-ranging benefits to the region.” We appreciate, too, that UMass Amherst assumed responsibility for the teach out of Mount Ida College’s Associate of Arts and Bachelor of Science programs in Veterinary Technology that will eventually be housed in the University’s Department of Veterinary and Animal Science.

Commission policy requires an interim (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 interim reports, the University is asked, in Fall 2023, to report on five matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; The Academic Program; Mission and Purposes; and Organization and Governance*.

Particularly given UMass Amherst’s drive toward data-driven decision-making, as recognized by the institution, the capacity of the Office of Institutional Research is currently insufficient to meet all requests for data support. We therefore note with approval the recent hiring of a Director for Strategic Analysis and Decision Support and support the institution’s goal to develop more self-service analytics by moving to a “data lake” and dashboards that will provide units direct access to student data. We also note with favor the recent design and implementation of the Educational Effective Plan (EEP) that includes measurable student learning outcomes, and understand that, to date, 96% of the University’s academic departments have developed EEPs (with 100% expected by Fall 2019), and we are further encouraged that Student Affairs and Campus Life plans to use the model as a guide to its assessment of co-curricular learning. With the framework in place, work still remains to “fine-tune” student learning outcomes and Phase II of the initiative will focus on “closing the loop” to ensure “continuous monitoring of student learning and success.” In addition, we are pleased to note the University’s increased focus on academic advising and career development to improve student success, expanding its academic support staff by 14% since 2015 and decentralizing the offering of these services. While increased satisfaction with academic advising as measured by student surveys over the past decade provides some evidence of the success of these initiatives, at the same time we understand from the visiting team that the quality of academic advising varies across departments in part due to the variability of available resources such as professional advisors and faculty time to mentor students. Consistent with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, we ask that the Fall 2023 interim report give emphasis to the success of the University’s success in accomplishing its goals to ensure its institutional research capacity is sufficient to support decision-making, refine its system of assessing educational effectiveness, and provide a consistent quality of advising across academic units.

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

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 valid information to support institutional improvement. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods (2.6).

The institution's principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

As indicated by the institution in its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, a challenge UMass Amherst faces is replacing the large number of faculty nearing retirement age, particularly in fields that have experienced significant salary escalation. We therefore note with approval the initiatives that have been implemented to help recruit and retain top-quality faculty including partner hires, mentoring programs, and the targeting of funds to provide competitive salaries. As expressed in our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, we look forward to learning, in the Fall 2023 interim report, of the effectiveness of these and other initiatives employed to ensure the institution has sufficient qualified faculty for continued achievement of its goals for academic programming and research.

Faculty responsible for graduate programs are sufficient by credentials, experience, number, and time commitment for the successful accomplishment of program objectives and program improvement (4.22).

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes (6.2).

Salaries and benefits are set at levels that ensure the institution's continued ability to attract and retain appropriately qualified faculty and academic staff whose profiles are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes (6.6).

As UMass Amherst's plans for the Mount Ida College site unfold over the next few years, we seek to be assured, through the Fall 2023 interim report, that use of the instructional location serves the University's mission and purposes. We appreciate the "be creative, think big" charge given to all academic units submitting proposals for academic programs to be offered on the campus and understand that these programs will be subject to the University's standard channels of approval and evaluation. In addition, we view positively that plans are being developed to "build out a comprehensive array of student services" for the site. With estimated revenue sufficient to cover annual debt payments and direct academic and student support costs, a positive operating margin of \$1.3 million is projected. This section of the report should be informed by our standards on *Mission and Purposes*, *Planning and Evaluation*, and *Organization and Governance*:

The mission of the institution defines its distinctive character, addresses the needs of society, identifies the students the institution seeks to serve, and reflects both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future. The institution's mission provides the

basis upon which the institution identifies its priorities, plans its future, and evaluates its endeavors; it provides a basis for the evaluation of the institution against the Commission's Standards (1.1).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.5).

... The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered. Off-campus ... programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2028 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Massachusetts Amherst and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Susan Hunter, 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 and the head of the University system on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Robert Manning and Martin Meehan. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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.

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

Sincerely,

  
David Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Robert Manning  
Mr. Martin Meehan  
Visiting team