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April 14, 2010

Dr. Robert C. Holub
Chancellor
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Room 374 Whitmore Building
Amherst, MA 01003-9313

Dear Chancellor Holub:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 4, 2010, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Massachusetts Amherst:

that University of Massachusetts Amherst be continued in accreditation;

that distance education programming be encompassed within the University's accreditation;

that the University submit an interim report for consideration in Fall 2013;

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

1. developing a strategic plan that sets overall institutional priorities;
2. developing a facilities master plan and priorities for addressing deferred maintenance;
3. implementing the new general education program, following a four-credit plan, ensuring that quality is sustained and that student learning is in concert with the stated learning outcomes;
4. implementing a strategic enrollment plan which includes a focus on the institution's goals for retention and graduation of ALANA students and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds;
5. achieving a balanced and sustainable operating budget;

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that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2018.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

We commend the University for the quality of its academic programs, its commitment to excellence, its pragmatic approach to the current fiscal challenges, and the energy and effectiveness of its faculty and staff. We take further positive note of the professional operation in all divisions, the clarity and broadly understood nature of the University's land-grant/flagship mission, the investments being made in assessment, and the institution's persistence in pursuing broad-based strategic planning. We are gratified to note the helpful summaries of assessment of student learning outcomes, the use of those assessments, and the indicators of student success in the E and S forms.

Like all institutions of its size and complexity, University of Massachusetts Amherst is addressing multiple problems and challenges simultaneously while wrestling with a corrosive financial environment which retards progress and, in some key areas, has caused backward movement, as with the decline in the number of full-time faculty and sustained deferred maintenance issues. The University is lauded for its effort to maintain momentum and undertake significant change in such deeply challenging circumstances. Future progress depends significantly on improving financial conditions and the level of commitment from the Commonwealth to give meaning to the institution's assigned mission as the state's public flagship university.

The University is approved to have distance education included within its accreditation because the Commission finds that these programs are designed and delivered at a level of quality meeting the expectations of the institution and the Commission. We are gratified to note that the University's Faculty Senate initiative requires that all distance learning be subject to the same academic standards as on-campus academic programs.

Commission policy requires a fifth-year interim report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. At the request of the institution, the comprehensive evaluation was delayed one year; hence, the interim report will be due in Fall 2013. 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, the University is asked, in Fall 2013, to report on five matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Physical and Technological Resources, The Academic Program, Students and Financial Resources*.

We are gratified to learn that the University has placed a high priority on the development of a strategic plan and concur with the team that the *Framework for Excellence* serves as a useful basis for such a plan. The working priorities are consistent with the findings of the institution's self-study and the team report, including returning the size of the faculty to the level it attained 15 years ago; addressing facilities issues, particularly laboratory and classroom space; and stabilizing financial resources and generating new sources of revenue. We take favorable note of the involvement of the operating units in developing plans consonant with the overall directions established by the *Framework*. The interim report will afford the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in strategic planning. We concur with the team's observation about the importance of an inclusive process among the administration, Faculty Senate and other stakeholder groups, consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes (2.1).

We note that the condition of the campus facilities, cited as a concern in the Commission's 1999 letter to Chancellor Scott, remains a significant issue for the University and, in the words of the *Framework for Excellence*, "perhaps its greatest challenge." More than half of the University's buildings are more than 40 years old, and estimates of deferred maintenance needs are in the \$2 billion range. Also, state funding for a new academic and classroom building has been delayed, leading to a search for alternatives. The lack of a facilities master plan has left the campus with, in the words of the team, "visible stigmata." Through the interim report we look forward to learning of the University's success in developing a facilities plan that is realistic for the times. Our standard on *Physical and Technological Resources* includes:

The institution undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning. It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs. Space planning occurs on a regular basis as part of physical resource evaluation and planning, and is consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution (8.4).

The University has developed a new General Education program, a central feature of which is moving from a three- to a four-credit basis for courses in the program. We note that the plan provides for an expanded award of credit without additional class time, and we share the concern of the team that the change be carefully monitored so that academic quality is not diluted and that student learning in each class increases in proportion to the credits awarded. Our standard on *The Academic Program* specifies, "Credit awards are consistent with the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning" (4.33). We have enclosed our Statement on Credits and Degrees, which is relevant to this matter. As the program is implemented we also look forward to learning of the institution's success in assessing the learning outcomes of students:

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).

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

The University has had considerable recent success in matters pertinent to undergraduate enrollment: applications rose 64 percent from 2004 to 2009, the student profile of qualifications has improved, and ALANA representation has increased by 20 percent during that period. We take favorable note of the University's success in increasing retention and graduation rates from 81 percent in 1998 to 86 percent in 2007 and from 62 percent in 1998 to 69 percent for Fall 2002 respectively. However, we note that the yield of out-of-state students has declined from 21 percent to 11 percent, and also that the six-year graduation rate for ALANA students is nearly ten percent lower than for majority students. The interim report will provide the University with the

opportunity to report on its success in increasing the yield of out-of-state students and of its newly designed academic and support programs to address the gap in success measures between majority students and ALANA and economically disadvantaged students. Our standard on *Students* is relevant here:

Consistent with its mission, the institution enrolls a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve (6.1).

Rates of retention and graduation are separately determined for any group that the institution specifically recruits, and those rates are used in evaluating the success of specialized recruitment and the services and opportunities provided for the recruited students (6.6).

As with public universities in general, the University of Massachusetts Amherst has experienced a decline in state support as the Commonwealth wrestled with competing demands and challenging economic circumstances. Coping with declines in state allocations, shifting fringe benefit costs from the Commonwealth to the University on the one hand, and the use of budgetary reserves and the infusion of federal stimulus funds on the other hand has left the University with a projected \$22 million surplus for the current year but a projected \$49 million deficit in FY2011. The University's plans call for increasing tuition revenue by enrolling more out-of-state students, increasing private fundraising, and providing incentives to departments and colleges to generate external support for research. Through the interim report, we look forward to learning of the institution's success in achieving a balanced and sustainable operating budget, consistent with our standard on *Financial Resources*:

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (9.8).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2018 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. At the request of the institution, the current comprehensive evaluation was delayed one year; hence, the next comprehensive evaluation will be in Fall 2018.

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 Dr. Daniel Fogel, 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. Robert J. Manning. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Dr. Robert C. Holub
April 14, 2010
Page 5

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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo Maydew

MJM/jm

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Robert J. Manning
Visiting Team