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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

November 15, 2012

Dr. Dennis D. Berkey
President
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
100 Institute Road
Worcester, MA 01609-2280

Dear President Berkey:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 20, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Worcester Polytechnic Institute:

that Worcester Polytechnic Institute be continued in accreditation;

that the Institute submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall, 2016;

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

1. addressing the impact of undergraduate and graduate enrollment growth on faculty workload, advising, and student services;
2. developing clear terms of appointment and promotion for non-tenure-track faculty and provisions for their meaningful participation in governance, to include updating the Faculty Handbook to reflect the status of non-tenure-track faculty and the new decanal structure;
3. revising the student course report to accurately estimate time on task;
4. systematically using the Great Problems Seminars and Major Qualifying Project to assess student achievement and using the results to improve academic programming;
5. achieving its goals for the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students of color;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2021.

RICHARD L. PATTENAUDE, Chair (2013)
University of Maine

JEAN A. WYLD, Vice Chair (2015)
Springfield College

DAVID F. FINNEY (2013)
Champlain College

MARTY W. KRAUSS (2013)
Brandeis University

WILFREDO NIEVES (2013)
Capital Community College

LINDA S. WELLS (2013)
Boston University

ANDREW B. EVANS (2014)
Wellesley College

DAVID S. GRAVES (2014)
Laureate Hospitality, Art & Design

R. BRUCE HITCHNER (2014)
Tufts University

MARY ELLEN JUKOSKI (2014)
Mitchell College

DAVID L. LEVINSON (2014)
Norwalk Community College

BRUCE L. MALLORY (2014)
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PATRICIA MAGUIRE MESERVEY (2014)
Salem State University

WALLACE NUTTING (2014)
Saco, ME

CHRISTOPHER J. SULLIVAN (2014)
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NEIL G. BUCKLEY (2015)
Emmanuel College

DAVID E.A. CARSON (2015)
Hartford, CT

THOMAS L.G. DWYER (2015)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2015)
Haydenville, MA

WILLIAM F. KENNEDY (2015)
Boston, MA

JON S. OXMAN (2015)
Auburn, ME

JACQUELINE D. PETERSON (2015)
College of the Holy Cross

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2015)
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The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends WPI for its informative and candid self-study documenting the institution's remarkable turnaround in the past decade. We concur with the team that the Institute's distinctive project-based education focused on science and engineering permeates its academic programs and student support systems. We are pleased to learn the Institute has effective assessment practices in place as evidenced by the three capstone projects used to assess undergraduate student achievement and the poster symposium that showcases master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations. We note with favor the institution's robust student services and state-of-the-art library and technology resources, and understand that the Institute's online courses are taught by the same faculty who offer the courses on campus. In addition, we are gratified to learn that academic and programmatic priorities established in the Institute's strategic plan drive the process of resource allocation. Particularly noteworthy accomplishments are the sizable operating surpluses achieved (\$12 million in FY2011), the "extraordinary" expansion and renovation of the campus over the past ten years including the development of Gateway Park as a center for faculty research and entrepreneurial activity, and the \$200 million capital campaign (2008-2015) which as of the date of the visit had raised \$111 million. We share the judgment of the team that the strong sense of responsibility for the Institute's success, and the pride in its achievements, shared by the trustees, senior administration, faculty, students and staff position WPI well to continue its institutional innovation and to carry out its mission to provide students with a balance of technical, scientific, and liberal studies aimed at "active lifelong learning" and "the betterment of society."

Commission policy requires a fifth-year interim 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 the Institute is asked, in Fall, 2016, to report on five matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Faculty, Students, Organization and Governance, The Academic Program, and Integrity*.

We recognize that a major theme of both the self-study and the team report is growth and the challenges it brings. We commend the Institute for its success in achieving its strategic goal to increase the size of its undergraduate student body – ahead of schedule – by enrolling over 900 new students each year since 2008. We also note with favor the significant growth in graduate enrollments that has occurred over the past several years. We understand that WPI has "adjusted its faculty numbers and workload on a yearly basis" in response to the rapid growth, but that increased class sizes and heavy project and advising loads have nonetheless "created stresses on faculty." At the same time, expectations for scholarly productivity have also increased. With respect to student services, we share the concern of the visiting team that a review had not been conducted to evaluate the impact of enrollment growth on the adequacy of staffing. The Commission understands that WPI has reached "equilibrium" enrollment at the undergraduate level and has plans to continue to grow at the graduate level; consequently, we welcome further information in the Fall 2016 report on the institution's success in addressing the impact of enrollment growth on faculty workload, advising, and student services. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Faculty, and Students* provide this guidance:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. (2.3)

Faculty assignments and workloads are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to 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. Faculty workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change. (5.7)

The institution offers an array of student services appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students.... The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance. (6.11)

We note with approval that updating the Faculty Handbook to encompass non-tenure-track faculty (now considered staff) is a priority for the current academic year and understand that the review will also be used to clarify the role of the three new academic deans in Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Business. We share the team's concern that although non-tenure-track faculty are "valued and appreciated" by the institution, the integration of these faculty into the department and institution is "unclear." We therefore are encouraged to learn of the recent steps taken to amend the faculty constitution to eliminate limits on the duration of non-tenure-track faculty appointments and to approve new evaluation and promotion procedures, and of the institution's commitment to define more clearly the role of non-tenure-track faculty members in faculty governance. As specified by our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *Faculty*, we ask that the Fall 2016 report give emphasis to the institution's success in developing clear terms of appointment and promotion for non-tenure track faculty and provisions for their meaningful participation in governance and in ensuring the Faculty Handbook accurately reflects the status of non-tenure-track faculty and the new decanal structure:

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators is responsible for the quality of the academic program. (3.10)

Faculty categories (e.g., full-time, part-time, adjunct) are clearly defined by the institution as is the role of each category in fulfilling the institution's mission and purposes. Should part-time or adjunct faculty be utilized, the institution has in place policies governing their role compatible with its mission and purposes and the Standards of the Commission. (5.1)

The institution's academic organization and governance structures and policies reflect the composition and variety of faculty appointments. (5.9)

In a faculty handbook or in other written documents that are current and readily available, the institution clearly defines the responsibilities of faculty and the criteria for their recruitment, appointment, evaluation, promotion, and, if applicable, tenure. Such policies are equitable and compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution; they provide for the fair redress of grievances, and they are consistently applied and periodically reviewed. (5.10)

As noted in the report of the visiting team, with few exceptions, undergraduate courses are offered by WPI in seven-week terms and carry 1/3 unit of credit (or three credits) requiring students to spend between 15-17 hours of work each week of "time on task." We understand that a one-time survey used by the Institute to measure actual student time did not clearly specify that class contact time should be included and therefore, according to the Undergraduate Outcomes

Assessment Committee, may have underestimated a student's true time on task. The Commission is aware that the faculty have recently approved changes to the student course report to provide a more accurate estimate of student time on task and that this report will be used to validate the institution's continued compliance with Commission policy. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2016 report, of the success of this effort. We remind you of our standard on *The Academic Program*:

Credit awards are consistent with Commission policy and the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning. The award of credit is based on policies developed and overseen by the faculty and academic administration. There is demonstrable academic content for all experiences for which credit is awarded, including study abroad, internships, independent study, and service learning. No credit toward graduation is awarded for pre-collegiate level or remedial work designed to prepare the student for collegiate study. (4.34)

The Institute's systematic use of assessment results to ensure the high quality of its focused, mission-driven programs, including the use of Association of Independent Technological Universities data to benchmark its progress with that of its peers, is commended. We are pleased to learn that the Great Problem Seminars (GPS) were designed to introduce the student project experience in the freshman year and that learning outcomes for the GPS are in the process of being developed. We also note with favor that each department requires a senior capstone experience, the Master Qualifying Project (MQP), to demonstrate student achievement in the major discipline. The team, however, found inconsistent practices across departments in the review and analysis of results. We therefore are encouraged by the improvements planned to ensure regular assessment of student learning and the quality of faculty advising for the MQP, including the allocation of resources to "return to a regular schedule of MQP reviews by departments and programs." The Fall 2016 report will enable the institution to provide evidence that it systematically uses the Great Problems Seminars and MQP to assess student achievement and that it uses the results to improve academic programming. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program* are relevant here:

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. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods. (2.5)

The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded. (4.48)

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)

We commend WPI for its commitment to support a diverse community and are gratified to learn of the notable progress made to diversify the undergraduate student body as demonstrated by the

increased number of students representing minority groups – from 18% in Fall 2001 to 29% in Fall 2010. However, as noted by the team and acknowledged by the institution, work remains to increase the diversity of the institution's faculty and staff. We therefore recognize the efforts of the President's Council for the Support of Women and Minorities and the creation of a Chief Diversity Officer position. In addition, initiatives including the ACT/SAT optional application Flex Path process and the commitment of financial aid resources are noteworthy, as is the institution's plan to work with HBCUs to increase applications from students of color. In keeping with our standards on *Faculty*, *Students*, and *Integrity*, the Fall 2016 report will afford the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on the success of these and other initiatives implemented to achieve its goals for the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students of color.

The institution employs an open and orderly process for recruiting and appointing its faculty. Faculty participate in the search process for new members of the instructional staff. The institution ensures equal employment opportunity consistent with legal requirements and any other dimensions of its own choosing; compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty. Faculty selection reflects the effectiveness of this process and results in a variety of intellectual backgrounds and training. (5.4)

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve and addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students. (6.1)

The institution adheres to non-discriminatory policies and practices in recruitment, admissions, employment, evaluation, disciplinary action, and advancement. It fosters an atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds. (11.5)

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. Since the Institute delayed the current evaluation by a semester, scheduling the next comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2021 restores the institution to its original evaluation schedule.

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 Worcester Polytechnic Institute and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Dr. Marlene Fine representing the team 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. Stephen Rubin. 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. Dennis D. Berkey
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,
Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,


Richard L. Pattenaude

RLP/sjp

cc: Mr. Stephen Rubin
Visiting team