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January 12, 2017

Dr. Laurie A. Leshin  
President  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute  
100 Institute Road  
Worcester, MA 01609-2280

Dear President Leshin:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2016, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Worcester Polytechnic Institute and voted to take the following action:

that the interim report submitted by Worcester Polytechnic Institute be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2021 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2021 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. achieving the goals specified in its strategic plan;
2. clarifying strategic enrollment plans for its undergraduate and graduate programs and ensuring that student support services are sufficient;
3. evaluating the impact of enrollment growth on faculty workload and addressing concerns related to the fraction of credits delivered by non-tenure track faculty;
4. ensuring that non-tenure track faculty are appropriately integrated into the institution's governance structure;
5. implementing plans to improve the effectiveness of space utilization and expanding the space allocated for academic activities;
6. achieving diversity goals set for faculty, staff, and students.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim report submitted by Worcester Polytechnic Institute was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of November 15, 2012, and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) for its significant accomplishments over the last five years. Particularly notable is WPI's recent development of *Elevate Impact: A Strategic Plan for 2015-2018* comprising three major goals: extend the success of WPI's undergraduate education; expand transformative research and graduate education; and enhance reputation and visibility. We also note with approval that the Division of Student Affairs implemented a strategic plan in January 2016 in support of institution-wide strategic initiatives. In addition, changes to the institution's Board structure and leadership have led to the addition of voting roles for two faculty members on each standing committee, and internal governance has been enhanced by the reorganization of the senior leadership team into a more broad-based and inclusive Management Council. WPI has also clarified and documented the equivalence between "units" and the standard "credit," included non-tenure track faculty in the Faculty Constitution, and substantially increased student support services as evidenced by the addition of 16 full-time staff members to support residence life, student development and counseling, career services, and health services. We further note with favor that WPI has significantly enhanced its infrastructure to support research activity and, in spite of a "very challenging funding environment," has doubled its annual expenditures on grants from \$14.8 million in FY2012 to \$29.4 million in FY2016.

The Commission also commends Worcester Polytechnic Institute for its comprehensive reflective essay that articulates the measures it uses to evaluate student success, including: retention and graduation rates; career placement; student learning outcomes; and alumni perceptions of the impact of the educational program. We concur with the Institute's judgment that maintaining first-to-second year retention rates of 96% is "exceptional," and the institution's success in increasing four-year graduation rates from 60% in AY2011 to 80% in AY2016 is also commendable. In addition, we are gratified to learn that the proportion of graduates employed, in graduate school, or serving in the military within six months after graduation is around 90%, and those bachelor-level graduates who are employed have increased salary levels from an average of \$60,803 in 2013 to \$66,805 in 2015, earning WPI a spot among the top 20 schools nationwide recognized for educational return on investment.

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 items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation; Students; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Organization and Governance; and Institutional Resources*.

As noted above, we are gratified to learn that, under the leadership of a new president, WPI developed a new strategic plan: *Elevate Impact: A Strategic Plan for WPI 2015-2018*. According to the report, WPI used Spring 2016 to "organize and mobilize the strategic plan" and implementation of the plan will begin in earnest in AY2016-17. Goals set forth in the plan include: providing up to 200 students per year the opportunity to participate in a co-op program; implementing the "*Major and a Mission*" initiative that will allow students to more effectively connect academic coursework with co-curricular pursuits; expanding the number of global projects available to students; expanding transformative research and graduate education; expanding competency-based online education; and enhancing opportunities for students to

engage in projected-based learning experiences. We also note that the plan will expire in 2018. Accordingly, we look forward, in the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2021 comprehensive evaluation, to learning of the institution's success in achieving the goals specified in its 2015-2018 strategic plan as evidence that "the institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5). We also anticipate an update on the progress WPI is making on its subsequent strategic planning efforts as evidence that "[t]he institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints" (2.3).

According to the interim report, over the last five years applications have increased by 84% and first-year enrollment has increased 39%, from 1,049 students to 1,122 students. While the rate of growth has decreased slightly (to about 2.7% per year) between AY2012 and AY2016 compared to the previous five years, enrollment at WPI is still strong with master's programs increasing an average of 5.5%, and doctoral programs growing at a rate of 9.2% each year. We appreciate WPI's candid acknowledgement that, while additional staff have been added to facilitate growth, "some functional areas have experienced an increase in students served that surpasses capacity and has resulted in greater strains in staffing." We further understand that WPI plans to "stabilize" enrollments; however, the report does not specify the institution's goals for enrollment in undergraduate and graduate programs. The self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2021 comprehensive evaluation will provide WPI an opportunity to clarify its enrollment plans for undergraduate and graduate programs as evidence that "[t]he institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints," (2.3) and that WPI "sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve" (Statement of Standard 5, *Students*). Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Students* provide additional guidance here:

The institution plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.4).

The institution ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success (5.7).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

As noted positively above, WPI has increased the number of faculty at the institution to support enrollment growth. We also appreciate WPI's candid acknowledgment that growth has "strained resources" in some areas, including academic advising, resulting in decreased student satisfaction in this area. Therefore, we are gratified to learn that WPI has "shifted resources" to address this issue and additional staff have been hired to support faculty advisors. We are further pleased to note that over the next five years, the institution is committed to "growing support service staffing commensurate with enrollment, exploring creative delivery methods, and developing stronger support structures for the graduate population." In addition we understand from the report that the fraction of credits delivered by tenured and tenure-track faculty decreased from



60% to 50.4% in AY2015-2016. The institution, however, has been in discussions for the past two years about this matter, which will “be a central theme in the next comprehensive review in 2021.” As evidence that “[f]aculty assignments and workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change” (6.7), we look forward, in the Fall 2021 self-study, to being apprised of WPI’s success in evaluating the impact of enrollment growth on faculty workload. We also anticipate being apprised of the institution’s success in addressing concerns related to the fraction of credits delivered by non-tenure track faculty. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* are pertinent here:

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 has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation (2.8).

The composition of the faculty reflects the institution’s mission, programs, and student body and is periodically reviewed. The institution’s use of all categories of faculty and teaching assistants to conduct instruction is regularly assessed, properly overseen, and consistent with its mission (6.1).

Faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of appointments, performance, and retention. The evaluative criteria reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of, e.g., teaching, advising, assessment, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process (6.10).

We concur with WPI’s assessment that the institution has made significant progress integrating full-time non-tenure track (NTT) faculty into the governance structure. We also share the institution’s concern that, while NTT faculty in some departments participate in governance-related activities – such as serving on curriculum, program review, and search committees – this practice is not consistent across all departments. Accordingly, we support WPI’s appraisal that there is still work to be done to improve the meaningful participation of NTT faculty in the governance process. In keeping with our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*, we ask that the Fall 2021 self-study include an update on the institution’s success in ensuring that non-tenure track faculty are appropriately integrated into WPI’s governance structure:

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution’s internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational

programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

Faculty categories (e.g., full-time, part-time, clinical, research, adjunct) are clearly defined by the institution as is the role of each category in fulfilling the institution's mission. All faculty are appropriately integrated into the department and institution and have appropriate opportunities for professional development (6.1).

As WPI candidly acknowledges in its report, "space on campus continues to be at a premium." We are therefore pleased to learn that WPI established an Academic Space Planning committee that will use the "most recent" master plan to maximize the current use and assignment of space on campus. We are also gratified to learn that the Foisie Innovation Studio, scheduled to open in Fall 2018, will allow WPI "to realize [its] academic ambitions." We understand that the new studio is designed, primarily, to provide space for the institution to "showcase distinctive academic programs and give students and faculty members the tools they need to pursue their ideas to the fullest." The Fall 2021 self-study will provide WPI an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in implementing plans to improve the effectiveness of space utilization and expand the space allocated for academic activities. Our standard on *Institutional Resources* is relevant here:

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

As noted in the report, one of WPI's "steadfast goals" – as well as one of its "most significant challenges" – is to increase the gender and ethnic diversity of its faculty, staff, and students. Accordingly, we are heartened to learn that, in addition to hiring the first female president in WPI's 150-year history, the institution has made "a few significant developments" in this area, including: the implementation of a new STEM Faculty Launch program; the assignment of a Diversity Advocate for each faculty search; and the hiring of a female Vice President for Talent Development and Chief Diversity Officer who is "strategically focused on identifying opportunities for creating a more diverse and inclusive campus community." We are further gratified to learn of the "significant gains" WPI has made in increasing student diversity: the number of women enrolled in the first-year class is up 25% from five years ago, and the enrollment of underrepresented minorities has increased 46%. We look forward, in the Fall 2021 self-study, to learning of WPI's continued success in this area as evidence that the institution is addressing "its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff" (6.5), and that "[t]he institution addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students" (Statement of the Standard, *Students*).

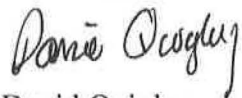
The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Worcester Polytechnic Institute and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

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 Mr. John T. Mollen. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

Dr. Laurie A. Leshin  
January 12, 2017  
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Quigley".

David Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. John T. Mollen