

PRESIDENT'S
OFFICE
MAY 07 2002



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

May 6, 2002

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Dr. Edward Alton Parrish
President
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
100 Institute Road
Worcester, MA 01609-2280

Dear President Parrish:

It is my pleasure to inform you that at its meeting on April 19, 2002, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education voted to take the following action with regard to Worcester Polytechnic Institute:

that Worcester Polytechnic Institute be continued in accreditation;

that the Institute submit a fifth-year report in Fall, 2006;

that, in addition to the information provided in all interim reports, the Institute give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. achieving its own goals for diversifying its faculty and student body;
2. providing research faculty with support for identifying and competing for extramural grant funds;
3. addressing the residential and co-curricular needs of graduate and international students;
4. meeting its physical resource needs;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2011.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Continuation of Worcester Polytechnic Institute's accreditation is based upon the Commission's finding that its *Standards for Accreditation* are being substantially met by the institution. We warmly commend the Institute for its many distinctive qualities and admirable accomplishments. Notable among these are: its innovative and effective approach to technological education that integrates

theory and practice and that is ably supported by a highly-qualified, fully-committed faculty; its strategic planning process, which is central to the institution's culture and admirable for its emphasis on the assessment of student learning outcomes; and its able senior leadership team. The Commission is pleased to endorse the visiting team's judgment that Worcester Polytechnic Institute is "one of the nation's truly fine technological institutes."

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 information provided in all interim reports, the matters to be given emphasis in the 2006 report are related to our standards on *Programs and Instruction*, *Faculty*, *Student Services*, and *Physical Resources*.

We recognize that a number of factors, such as the paucity of appropriate candidates for teaching positions in certain disciplines and the somewhat limited degree of interest in engineering careers among high-school students with divergent racial backgrounds, have proved to be obstacles to the Institute's fulfillment of its goals for diversifying its faculty and student body. Thus we are pleased to know that significant progress has been made of late with regard to gender diversity in the faculty, and are also heartened to learn of the many recent initiatives designed to further diversify the campus, including enhanced efforts in the area of recruitment, increased funds for scholarships, plans for a multi-cultural center, and involvement in a National Science Foundation grant to support minority participation. The Commission looks forward to learning of the Institute's further progress in this area in the 2006 report, in keeping with our standard on *Programs and Instruction*, which asks that an institution endeavor "to develop a student body which as a whole is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve" (4.33) and our standard on *Faculty*, which specifies that an institution "addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity of race, gender, and ethnicity" (5.4).

The Commission finds highly admirable the dedication of the Institute's talented faculty, evident in their willingness to assume extensive non-instructional responsibilities such as advising, leading teams overseas, and participating in governance, and in their readiness to collaborate across departments and programs. At the same time, however, the Institute's desire to continue increasing its research profile and to strengthen its graduate programs is exacerbating the demands on faculty, and it is not clear that the institution is providing all of the support needed for faculty to obtain the grant funding required for such items as research assistants or laboratory expansion. The visiting team noted that the Office of Research Administration is understaffed and there is limited help for faculty in identifying and developing grant proposals. Thus we wish to be apprised, in the 2006 report, of support being provided for Institute faculty in this endeavor, in fulfillment of our standards on *Programs and Instruction* and *Faculty*, which state in part:

Physical and administrative resources together with academic services are adequate to support the institution's research commitment (4.27).

Scholarship and research receive encouragement and support appropriate to the institution's purposes and objectives (4.28).

The institution provides its faculty with substantial and equitable opportunities for continued professional development throughout their careers. Such opportunities are consistent with and enhance the achievement of the institution's mission and purposes (5.12).

The visiting team had high praise for the Institute's "student body of exceptionally fine quality and character," and we were gratified to learn that these students are provided with an excellent

array of services by the capable and committed staff in the Division of Student Affairs, which contributes to the stimulating environment on campus. It also appears to be the case, though, that the needs of traditional undergraduate students are being met better than those of other constituencies; the visiting team noted that graduate and international students are underserved in some respects. Complete closing of the campus during the winter break, for example, creates hardships for these two groups, and graduate students planning to become research assistants also expressed a desire for better orientation and language instruction. The Commission looks forward to learning in 2006 of further steps that have been taken to meet the needs of all Institute students, in keeping with our standard on *Student Services* and its specifications that "the institution provides an environment which fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students consistent with its mission and purposes and mode of educational delivery. It is sensitive to the non-academic needs of its students" (6.1) and "It ensures that appropriate services, facilities, and technology are readily accessible to students in all programs in the institution" (6.2).

We applaud the Institute's commitment to maintaining a balanced budget, a conservative endowment-spending rate, and a minimal rate of debt service. At the same time, however, it appears that the institution's cautious approach to capital expenditures has deferred the construction of a new academic building and delayed the renovation of several facilities, including student residences, an academic building and, perhaps most importantly, the library, beyond a point that seems warranted by fiscal conservatism, particularly in view of the Institute's excellent credit rating and growing endowment. While the Commission in no way wishes to offer specific advice on facilities management and spending policy, we would like to remind you of our standard on *Physical Resources* and its requirement that "the institution has sufficient and appropriate physical resources, including laboratories, network infrastructure, materials, equipment, and buildings and grounds, whether owned or rented; these are designed, maintained, and managed at both on- and off-campus sites to serve institutional needs as defined by its mission and purposes" (8.1). We anticipate hearing in 2006 of the ways in which the need for new construction and deferred maintenance of existing buildings has been addressed by the Institute.

Finally, the scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2011, is consistent with commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive visit 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 its appreciation for the self-study prepared by Worcester Polytechnic Institute and for the evaluation report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Institute's representative, Provost John F. Carney, as well as the team chair, Dr. Dennis D. Berkey, during its deliberations.

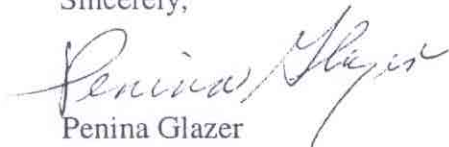
You are encouraged to share this letter and the team's complete report with all of the Institute's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Ronald L. Zarrella. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Dr. Edward Alton Parrish
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The Commission hopes that the evaluation process 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.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Charles M. Cook, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Penina Glazer".

Penina Glazer

PG/slo

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Ronald L. Zarrella
Visiting Team