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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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May 6, 1998

Dr. Robert L. Carothers  
President  
University of Rhode Island  
75 Lower College Road, Suite 7  
Kingston, RI 02881-0806

Dear President Carothers:

It is my pleasure to inform you that at its meeting on April 17, 1998, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with regard to the University of Rhode Island:

that the University of Rhode Island be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a progress report for consideration in Spring, 2001, giving emphasis to the completion of a systematic, broad-based, interrelated plan, incorporating current academic, financial, and facilities planning;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall, 2002;

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

1. assessing educational outcomes;
2. developing a coherent general education program;
3. improving the quality of student life on campus;
4. assuring financial stability with particular focus on the relationships among tuition, state appropriations, external grants and contracts, and private giving;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2007.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Continuation of the University of Rhode Island's accreditation is based upon the Commission's finding that its standards are being substantially met by the University. The Commission commends the University for its comprehensive self-study, providing an accurate and detailed picture of the recent history and current state of the institution. Further, we commend the institution's leadership for its commitment to innovation and for continuing enrichment of the academic environment. The University has improved its planning activities with the adoption of the new Mission Statement and the Vision Statement, "Building a New Culture for Learning," the Program Contribution Analysis Methodology, the partnerships program, and the four areas of academic focus. The Division of Student Affairs enjoys widespread student support and its staff is rated by students as accessible and highly competent. In addition, we take note of the facts that the University College staff and Dean are universally praised for their exceptionally successful work in student advising and mentoring and for their personal interest in students and that the Provost and her staff are a major factor in the enrichment of the academic environment. We note, too, that the University has just completed an ambitious \$60 million capital campaign. Finally, we take note of the team's observation that a hard working and well-prepared faculty provides a high quality curriculum at the undergraduate and graduate level to a strong and engaged student body.

We concur with the team that the University has made progress in its planning and evaluation activities since 1992. Specifically, for example, in response to the challenge from the President, the Faculty Senate adopted a Vision Statement to guide the planning operation, calling for a "new culture of learning and discovery." Thereupon the President issued a strategic plan, "Building a New Culture for Learning," consisting of five key components: a new structure for general education, more clearly defined learning and performance standards for degree programs, the establishment of partnerships coupling research and education, the realignment of academic programs to achieve these ends and reduce costs, and enhancement of the University's service sector.

We share the team's view that there have been some successes in this plan and believe that a more developed and broad-based participatory planning process will aid the institution in moving from the point of vision to the point of implementation of vision. The team endorsed the institution's self-study observation that "The colleges and departments involved should be consulted not only in the initial data-gathering phase, but also as the final recommendations are prepared in order to get their reactions and rebuttal data." The central strategic plan itself could aid the process by developing clearer pathways to get from vision to implementation, including some guidance for units in the development of their own plans to contribute to that effort. Thus, the University needs to establish an organized, comprehensive strategic approach to planning that involves all affected campus constituencies. Successive periodic accreditation reviews have emphasized the need for the University to improve its planning and evaluation processes. For that reason the Commission requests the University submit a report in Spring, 2001, focused on progress it has made in developing a comprehensive plan for the University, including institutional priorities, steps to implement those priorities, and means to evaluate plans. Development of a comprehensive plan is directly related to our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution undertakes planning and evaluation appropriate to its needs to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes (2.1).

Planning and evaluation are systematic, broad-based, interrelated, and appropriate to the institution's circumstances. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.2).

The institution undertakes both short- and long-term planning, including candid and realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It 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. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.3).

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.

The areas to be given emphasis in the University of Rhode Island's report are matters related primarily to the standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Programs and Instruction*, *Student Services* and *Financial Resources*.

We concur with the team that the University offers a broad and traditional array of quality academic programs that meet the needs and expectations of its strong student body. The Program Contribution Analysis Methodology has proven to be a useful tool to help identify ineffective and marginal programs and to help reallocate resources to programs with either current or potential strength. In addition, the University needs to bolster its efforts to determine the effectiveness of its curriculum and to institute a comprehensive system of assessment for all its academic and professional programs by developing and instituting a comprehensive outcomes-based assessment program for its academic programs, a matter directly related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Programs and Instruction*:

The institution evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its education objectives. Its evaluative procedures are appropriate and effective for addressing its unique circumstances. To the extent possible, evaluation enables the institution to demonstrate through verifiable means its attainment of purposes and objectives both inside and outside of the classroom (*Planning and Evaluation*, 2.4).

The institution systematically applies information obtained through its evaluation activities to inform institutional planning, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness especially as it relates to student achievement (*Planning and Evaluation*, 2.5).

Students who successfully complete a graduate program demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as the program's objectives (*Programs and Instruction*, 4.25).

The general education program has been under scrutiny for several years; there is widespread agreement among most campus constituencies that the program needs reforming. Recent efforts have produced some changes, such as a pilot initiative in writing across the curriculum, and an orientation course, URI 101, has been implemented. We understand the Faculty Senate Executive Committee recently has discussed a strategy for building on and benefiting from extensive prior efforts to make improvements in the general education component of undergraduate education. Given this commitment, we urge the University to redouble its efforts to reinvigorate and enhance general education so that it is "coherent and substantive, and it embodies the institution's definition of an education person. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation" (*Programs and Instruction*, 4.15). Simultaneously, we urge the institution to develop a program to assess students' general education outcomes to determine students' competence (4.19). Through the

institution's interim report we seek to learn of progress the institution has made in developing a coherent general education program and means to assess student outcomes.

The Division of Student Affairs, representing a wide array of programs and services, has clearly embraced the mission of URI as a learning-centered institution with its long-range plan responding to the President's call for "A New Culture for Learning." Hallmarks of the Division have also included an entrepreneurial spirit of auxiliary managers in Health Services, Housing, Residential and Dining Services, the Memorial Union and Bookstore. We concur with the team that there is a critical need for both new and renovated student residential space that deserves attention as is already evident in the planning process currently being discussed in the Office of Housing and Residential Life. Both the President and the Division are to be commended for a courageous stand on alcohol and substance abuse and for coupling it with the building of a new culture for learning, although there appears yet to be dissonance between the stated goals and policies and the behavior and expectations of some students. Through the University's interim report we wish to learn of further progress the institution has made in rehabilitating the residence halls and continuing to address the existing tension between continued alcohol abuse and the University's commitment to a stronger student learning culture, matters directly related to our standard on *Student Services*: "The institution provides an environment which fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students consistent with its mission and purposes (6.1)"; "It ensures that appropriate services and facilities are readily accessible to students in all programs in the institution 6.2)"; and "It assists students to resolve personal, physical, and educational problems" (6.3).

The University deserves praise for some of the strategies and resources it has brought to bear on its financial needs, such as adoption of the Program Contribution Analysis as a Tool for Resource Allocation, the University of Rhode Island's newly acquired freedom to control some aspects of purchasing, reduction of administrative expenses through the work of the financial structure team, successful completion of a \$60 million capital campaign, and upgrading of the financial record system. Because of the complex and volatile mix of tuition revenues, investment in student aid, and limited state support, the University should develop and implement annually with the Board of Governors and the Commissioner of Higher Education a plan of action that balances University of Rhode Island's share of the state appropriations, its budgetary commitment to student financial assistance, its other budgetary expenditures for the year, and its increases in tuition and fees. In this plan, the University's mission and its long-range planning and evaluation efforts must be consistent with the resources that these annual plans are able to provide. Through the University's interim report the Commission wishes to become apprised of progress the institution has made in assuring financial stability with particular attention to relationships among tuition, state appropriations, external grants and contracts, and private giving. Fiscal stability is a matter directly related to our standard on *Financial Resources*:

The institution is financially stable. The institution's financial resources are sufficient to sustain the achievement of its educational objectives and to further institutional improvement now and in the foreseeable future. The institution reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution has the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (9.1).

The institution controls its financial resources and allocates them in a way which reflects its mission and purposes. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or a historically narrow base of support (9.2).

Dr. Robert L. Carothers

May 6, 1998

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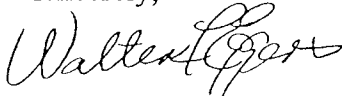
Confirmation of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2007, is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive visit at least once every ten years. The University's last such visit took place in Fall, 1997.

The Commission expressed its appreciation for the report prepared by the University of Rhode Island and hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, as well as the team chair, Dr. Karen Hitchcock, during its deliberations. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide the public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the University'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. George Grabois. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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

Sincerely,



Walter F. Eggers

WFE/ams

cc: Mr. George Grabois  
Dr. Stephen T. Hulbert  
Visiting Committee



Founded In 1885

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

**PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION ABOUT AFFILIATED  
INSTITUTIONS**

The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and the Commission.

**1. Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation  
Following Commission Action**

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. While the Commission does not release copies of self-studies, other institutional reports, evaluation reports, or notification letters, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available after notification of action on their status. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts only from these materials. While the Commission does not initiate public release of information on actions of show cause or deferral, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action. Should it fail to do so, the New England Association, acting through its Chief Executive Officer, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information.

**2. Published Statement on Accredited Status**

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the New England Association indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the New England Association is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
209 Burlington Road  
Bedford, MA 01730-1433  
(617) 271-0022  
E-Mail: [cihc@neasc.org](mailto:cihc@neasc.org)

The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

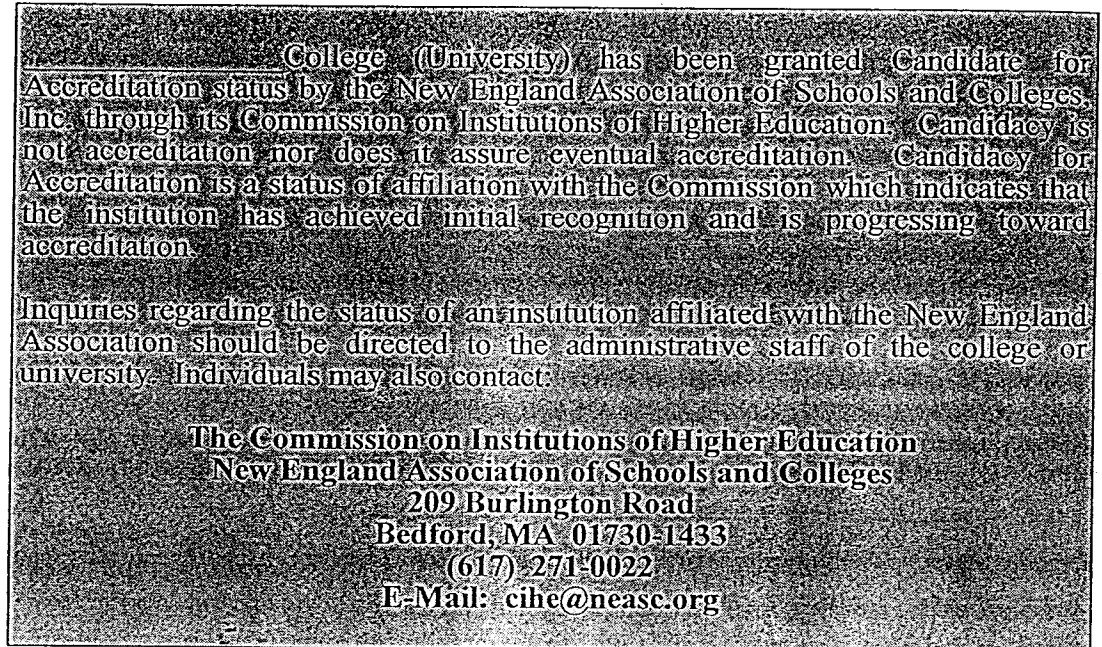
Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
209 Burlington Road  
Bedford, MA 01730-1433  
(617) 271-0022  
E-Mail: [cihc@neasc.org](mailto:cihc@neasc.org)

Accreditation by the New England Association has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the New England Association” or “this degree is accredited by the New England Association” are incorrect and should not be used.

### 3. Published Statement on Candidate Status

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:



### 4. Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions by the Commission.

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about affiliated institutions:

- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation;
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission;
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation;



- For institutions on probation, the Commission's reasons for recommending that status and its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement.
- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been terminated, the date of, and reasons for, termination.

The Commission does not provide information about deferments of action on candidate or accreditation status, or show-cause orders. However, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries. Also, adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, revocation of candidacy and termination of accreditation) are not communicated until the available appeals process is completed.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies and procedures of the Commission and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

The Commission does not release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, but institutions are encouraged to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

November, 1996