



November 15, 2021

Dr. Lane A. Glenn
President
Northern Essex Community College
100 Elliott Street
Haverhill, MA 01830

Dear President Glenn:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 24, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Northern Essex Community College:

that Northern Essex Community College be continued in accreditation;

that inclusion of (1) the off-campus location at The Heights and (2) six early childhood education courses and English Composition II course offered in CBE format within the institution's accreditation be confirmed;

that the visit to assess implementation of the Early Childhood Education CBE program scheduled for Spring 2022 be confirmed;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by August 15, 2025 for consideration in Fall 2025;

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

- 1) engaging in multi-year financial and enrollment planning;
- 2) continuing to make progress on meeting its goals to diversify its board, faculty, and staff;
- 3) continuing to maintain a culture of assessment;
- 4) assuring the sufficiency of faculty and academic staff;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2030.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Northern Essex Community College is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Northern Essex Community College (NECC) for its well written and candid self-study. We note with favor the culture of leadership development evidenced throughout the College and that there is strong encouragement for faculty and staff to provide support and guidance to empower every student. We acknowledge this student-centered support is driven by innovation, experimentation, and a passion to see students succeed, and we are pleased to learn of the many opportunities available for students to gain leadership skills, including through service as Student Ambassadors. In addition, faculty and staff have indicated high levels of satisfaction with the Center for Professional Development and President's Leadership Academy that provide them with growth opportunities. As noted in the team report, NECC "maintains a meticulous process of academic program review" and provides ample evidence that this review process is central "to the ongoing improvement of the College's academic programs." NECC has a long and successful record of utilizing the Appreciative Inquiry approach toward strategic planning, and the result has generated a "strong sense of ownership" by participants in both the planning process and the final planning documents. Finally, we are gratified to learn of the central role that the Integrated Student Experience (ISE), with its five Academic Centers that integrate the instructional and student support sectors of the institution, plays in the College's strategic response to "the stagnation of student success rates." We concur with the visiting team that the "innovative and resilient spirit has led to the Integrated Student Experience and the Academic Centers that are catalysts for a whole-college transformation."

The Commission confirmed inclusion of the off-campus location "The Heights" within the institution's accreditation because the self-study addressed the matters raised in our letter of February 10, 2020 and provided evidence that the institution is implementing the additional instructional location in a manner consistent with Commission standards and policies. We are gratified to learn from the team's report that course completion and certification exam passage rates for students enrolled at The Heights are high and further note with favor that there is, across the industry, "huge demand" for graduates of the program. We understand the College is planning to expand program offerings at The Heights to include an associate degree program and the Baking and Pastry Certificate. In addition, the six early childhood education courses and English Composition II course offered in CBE format are also confirmed within the institution's accreditation. We note with favor that all CBE faculty have "the same hiring credentials that exist for all faculty" and are required to "undergo specialized CBE and online course delivery trainings." Moreover, a review of syllabi and competency maps by the visiting team found the same learning outcomes and requirements in the CBE coursework as courses delivered on campus.

The Spring 2022 visit to assess the implementation of NECC's Early Childhood Education Competency Based Education program is confirmed. We refer you to our April 26, 2021 letter which specifies areas of emphasis to be addressed in the implementation report preceding the review.

Commission policy requires an interim (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 the information included in all interim reports the College is asked, in Fall 2025, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Institutional Resources*; *Organization and Governance*; *Students*; *Educational Effectiveness*; and *Teaching, Learning and Scholarship*.

As noted previously, Northern Essex Community College's use of Appreciative Inquiry has resulted in robust and transformative strategic planning initiatives including the Integrative Student Experience. However, as noted in the College's self-study, the College has not yet developed formal financial or enrollment management plans, and while acknowledging the College's intention to "significantly" increase enrollment, we share the visiting team's concern that "the

enrollment goals are substantial given the current national outlook for community colleges and the institution's lack of systematic planning and evaluation of enrollment management." We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2025 interim report, of the progress NECC has made in its multi-year financial and enrollment planning. We are guided by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources*:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The governing board understands, reviews, and approves the institution's financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting (7.7).

As noted in the self-study, NECC continuously strives to ensure that the diversity of the population it serves is reflected in the composition of its board, faculty, and staff. We are pleased to learn that the most recent trustee appointment brings the board closer to reflecting the student population which is majority non-white. Furthermore, we understand that, over the past two years, close to half of all new hires have been people of color and that the College intends to "develop and implement new approaches in the hiring process by 2023, including a new academic staff equity and inclusion program and ways to assess its effectiveness." The Fall 2025 interim report will afford NECC an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued progress in meeting its diversity goals for the board, faculty, and staff. As noted in our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *Students*, and *Institutional Resources*:

The board addresses its goals for diversity within its membership (3.8).

Compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty and academic staff and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals (6.5).

The institution ... addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its personnel and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals (7.1).

The Commission agrees with the visiting team that the College has "established organizational structures and processes that foster its growing culture of assessment." We acknowledge the work of the Assessment of Student Learning Committee as well as NECC's participation in the state Board of Higher Education's Advancing a Massachusetts Culture of Assessment. The team found that while there was evidence provided for two core outcome assessments (out of six Core Academic Skills), it "was unclear if and how the data were used for the improvement of student learning, as there was no follow-up study." We are therefore pleased to learn from the institutional response that Northern Essex Community College has been working with an external consultant to "repurpose" the Office of Institutional Research "as the newly chartered Office of Institutional Effectiveness" and that several new positions have been added to lead and support this area. The Commission requests an update, in the Fall 2025 interim report, on NECC's progress in continuing to enhance its culture of assessment. We remind you of our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the curriculum and learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

The institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its institutional and program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students (8.10).

The Commission shares the judgment of the visiting team that while the number of full-time faculty at Northern Essex Community College is "sufficient to meet current instructional needs, particularly after recent enrollment declines," the reduced number of full-time faculty (down from 115 to 92) could have an impact on educational quality and services for students. We commend the College for achieving its goal to have 65% of courses taught by full-time faculty and for its commitment to ensuring the allocation of resources to staff its academic centers. We appreciate the College's candid acknowledgment that "non-competitive" faculty salaries remain a challenge and are gratified to learn of the efforts of the Massachusetts Community College presidents to advocate for higher salaries. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2025 interim report, of the College's continued success in assuring the sufficiency of faculty and academic staff. Relevant here is our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes (6.2).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2030 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. Since Northern Essex Community College delayed its comprehensive visit by a semester, scheduling the next comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2030 restores the institution to its original accreditation cycle.

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 Northern Essex Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Cheryl Goodwin, Chief of Staff, Mike McCarthy, Chief Financial Officer/Chief Operating Officer, and Sonya Christian, 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 and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Ms. Jennifer A. Borislow and Dr. Carlos E. Santiago. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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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.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm

cc: Ms. Jennifer A. Borislow
Dr. Carlos E. Santiago
Visiting Team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions