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April 2, 2015

Dr. James C. Mabry  
President  
Middlesex Community College  
591 Springs Road  
Bedford, MA 01730

Dear President Mabry:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2015, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Middlesex Community College:

that Middlesex Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2019;

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

1. continuing to enhance communication between the Board of Trustees and members of the campus community, with attention to articulating the authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff;
2. achieving its goals to diversify its faculty and establishing a consistent approach to the orientation and support of part-time faculty;
3. continuing to advance the culture of assessment and using data to improve institutional effectiveness;
4. communicating learning outcome expectations more effectively to ensure a consistent learning experience for all students regardless of the class section;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2024.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

The Commission commends Middlesex Community College (MCC) for its thoughtful, comprehensive self-study that demonstrates the institution's many strengths and accomplishments. Over the last decade the institution has periodically revised its mission statement as a means of continually enhancing the College's effectiveness; it has successfully implemented three strategic plans and is currently formulating a new strategic plan that aligns institutional goals and initiatives with statewide mandates and requirements; and the College is well on its way to developing a culture of assessment as evidenced by the implementation of assessment strategies across the institution. In addition, governance structures are in place to ensure academic quality; faculty are qualified, committed, and engaged in the work of the College; and we concur with the judgment of the visiting team that MCC's dedication to providing a comprehensive array of student-centered support services is commendable. Academic programs offered on campus and online are comparable in content and rigor, and we note with approval that, in support of its mission, MCC's programs address the educational needs of its student population as well as the broader community. The Bedford and Lowell campuses are well maintained; the library and the Academic Career and Transfer Center have been renovated; and MCC has invested \$1.0 million in IT projects to improve the teaching and learning environment and support energy efficiency. Comprehensive financial planning, sound fiscal management, and the efficient use of resources enable the College to maintain essential operations and also to invest in the fulfillment of strategic priorities despite challenges posed by reduced state allocations. As the team highlighted in its report, and we concur, MCC's success in identifying alternative sources of revenue, such as acquiring grants, to fund important initiatives is noteworthy. With its committed Board of Trustees, capable leadership, and dedicated faculty and staff, Middlesex Community College is positioned to continue the momentum it has gained over the last decade to further its mission and achieve its goals well into the future.

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 2019, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *Faculty*, and *The Academic Program*.

We acknowledge the visiting team's observation that, although the Middlesex Community College Board of Trustees is responsible, effective, and actively involved in the institution, the policy development function of the Board and the policy implementation role of MCC administration, faculty, and staff are not clearly delineated. As such, we are gratified to learn that the College's President and the Chair of the Board of Trustees are engaged in discussions relating to this matter, and the Board is in agreement that its role is to "develop strategic policies and achieve outcomes and not manage the process." Especially encouraging to note is that Board members are enthusiastic about a training program on this topic that is under development. We look forward, in the Fall 2019 interim report, to being apprised of the institution's continued progress regarding this matter in keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff are clearly described in the institution's by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution's official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles. The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent



with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.1).

Utilizing the institutional governance structure, the board establishes and maintains appropriate and productive channels of communication among its members and with the institutional community. Its role and functions are effectively carried out through appropriate committees and meetings (3.5).

The institution's success in increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of full-time faculty from 16% in 2008 to 20% in 2013 and the implementation of an effective faculty orientation program support the visiting team's observation that Middlesex Community College is committed to achieving its faculty diversity goals and supporting faculty. However, as MCC candidly acknowledges in its self-study, "there is still more work to be done." The College has identified obstacles to increasing diversity among its part-time faculty, including compensation and time constraints. In response, MCC has begun to use its full-time faculty hiring model in an effort to increase diversity among part-time faculty, and that model is currently in the "pilot and assessment phase." MCC also recognizes that part-time faculty are not consistently integrated into the institution, and we are encouraged to learn that a new Part-time Faculty Engagement Liaison position has been created to increase effectiveness in this area. The Fall 2019 interim report will provide an opportunity for the College to update the Commission on the institution's continued success in achieving "its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty" (5.4) and establishing a consistent approach to the orientation and support of its part-time faculty. Our standard on *Faculty* provides this additional guidance:

... Institutions that employ part-time, adjunct, clinical or temporary faculty assure their appropriate integration into the department and institution and provide opportunities for faculty development (5.8).

As validated by the visiting team, institutional support of assessment activities and participation by faculty and staff in the assessment of student learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels have contributed to MCC's notable progress in establishing a culture of assessment. We also share the team's judgment that gathering consistent and broad-based evidence of student learning is challenging. Therefore, we note favorably that the College is exploring data management tools to streamline the assessment process and, in an effort to continue to enhance faculty understanding of assessment and strengthen participation in assessment activities, professional development opportunities are offered on a regular basis. The Fall 2019 interim report will provide MCC an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success in advancing the culture of assessment and using data to improve institutional effectiveness. Our standard on *The Academic Program* will inform this section of the report:

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 understand from the team report that, as part of its assessment work, Middlesex Community College is actively engaged in developing strategies to more clearly articulate learning outcome expectations to ensure that, when multiple sections of a course are offered, the learning experience for all students is consistent. For example, MCC is considering such approaches as “infusing” outcomes work into faculty contracts, requiring a minimum number of student learning outcomes for each course, and embedding student learning outcomes in the course definition. We look forward, in the Fall 2019 interim report, to being apprised of the institution’s progress in this area as evidence that “[t]he evaluation of student learning or achievement and the award of credit are based upon clearly stated criteria that reflect learning objectives and are consistently and effectively applied” (4.33) and that “multiple sections of the same course ensure an appropriate balance between achieving consistency in learning outcomes and flexibility, allowing students to benefit from individual faculty members’ experience and teaching style” (5.17).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2024 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation 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 appreciation for the self-study prepared by Middlesex Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Dr. Philip Sisson, Provost and Vice President Academic and Student Affairs, and Dr. Ronald Schertz, representing the visiting 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. James G. Hicks. 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.

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.

If you have any questions about the Commission’s action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. James G. Hicks  
Visiting Team