



New England Commission
of Higher Education

April 4, 2019

Dr. Meghan Hughes
President
Community College of Rhode Island
400 East Avenue, Room 3328
Warwick, RI 02886

Dear President Hughes:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 1, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Community College of Rhode Island and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Community College of Rhode Island be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2024 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2024 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) continuing to evaluate the impact of changes in Rhode Island's governance of public higher education on the College;
- 2) assessing student learning outcomes and using the results to make improvements with emphasis on assessing the learning outcomes identified in the College's revised definition of an "educated person;"
- 3) completing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of its institutional plans with emphasis on the Master Plan, Academic Plan, and Technology Plan.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Community College of Rhode Island was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of December 2, 2014 and July 11, 2017 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

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The Commission commends Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) for preparing a comprehensive and informative interim report that highlights the institution's many accomplishments over the last five years. Under the leadership of a new president, CCRI implemented an "inclusive and transparent" process to examine the College's strengths and challenges, review its mission, and create its 2018-2021 Strategic Plan. Also noteworthy is the restructuring of the Leadership Team to a more "dispersed" governance model that has resulted in improved communications throughout the campus community and increased participation on committees. We further note with approval that CCRI has increased the percentage of courses taught by full-time faculty from a low of 51% in Fall 2015 to 58% in Fall 2017, updated its faculty handbook, and established an online orientation for new faculty. CCRI students enroll, "sometimes concurrently," in courses on four different campuses in Rhode Island or online, and the report assures that academic and student support services are sufficient to support programs at each location and in all delivery modalities. While CCRI has offered online courses for nearly two decades, we note the College will launch its first fully online program – the Associates in Business Administration (ABA) with a concentration in General Business – in Spring 2019 and anticipates that the new online delivery format will be approved by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) when the College submits its Quality Assurance Report in Fall 2019. In addition, a new Strategic Enrollment Management Team has grown CCRI's dual enrollment program, created an Office of Advising staffed by full-time advisors, and implemented "intrusive advising" programs to support student retention. Although state support has diminished from 53% to 46% of the College's operational budget in recent years, the Rhode Island Promise has helped to offset the decrease, and the Council on Post-secondary Education (CPE) is preparing a five-year tuition and fee proposal to stabilize funding. The report also details the institution's progress in evaluating the impact of changes in Rhode Island's governance of public higher education on the College and provides an update on matters related to ADA compliance. Evidence of the College's commitment to serving students who require special accommodations includes the hiring of four campus coordinators, updating the institution's website to make it ADA compliant, relocating Disability Services offices to more accessible locations, and restructuring the learning community course to enhance awareness about students with disabilities.

We are further pleased to receive CCRI's detailed and substantive reflective essay that specifies the College's assessment efforts and multifaceted approach to defining and measuring student success; we are particularly impressed by the resources and processes CCRI has added to promote student learning. Of note is the hiring of the College's first Director of Academic Program Review and Accreditation who is leading efforts to "co-develop and institute processes in support of CCRI's efforts to promote a sustainable culture of assessment." In addition, department chairs and program directors will be provided longitudinal data on program retention, graduation, and transfer rates that can be used to make curricular improvements and inform planning, decision-making, and resource allocation. We are also impressed by the wide array of assessment methods CCRI implements to measure student learning outcomes, including licensure exams, industry certification exams, case studies, musical performances, career related projects and portfolios. We are particularly encouraged to learn of the "multiple-measures" approach to placing students into college-level English and math courses that has resulted in a significant increase in the percentage of students who passed both English and math with a minimum grade of C. The College's progress in assessing institution-level student learning outcomes and its participation in the Multi-State Collaborative Project to Advance Learning Outcomes Assessment Study are also commendable.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2024 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 Spring 2024 comprehensive evaluation are three matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *The Academic Program*, *Educational Effectiveness*, *Planning and Evaluation*, and *Institutional Resources*.

According to the report, the state of Rhode Island has implemented changes to its governance of public higher education that involve the creation of a Council on Post-Secondary Education (CPE) and the hiring of a new Commissioner. We take favorable note that the CPE “has provided more clarity, improved oversight, and increased collaboration between the College and the board,” and that there have been some organizational changes to the Commissioner’s office that are “intended to facilitate better communication, organization, and policy for the system.” We look forward, in Spring 2024, to learning of CCRI’s ongoing assessment of the impact on the College of the changes to the oversight of public higher education in Rhode Island. We are informed here by our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered (3.6).

As noted positively above, the substantial progress CCRI has made in enhancing its culture of assessment is impressive. The report also demonstrated the ways in which the College is using assessment results to make improvements. For example, once the College recognized there were inconsistencies in the application of its Academic Program Review process, strategies to make improvements were rapidly identified and are now being implemented, and some of the “most important” outcomes assessment and accreditation-related activities have been shifted from the current five-year cycle to an annual cycle. In Fall 2017, CCRI launched an online Annual Academic Program Report (AAPR) platform to support its academic program review and accreditation efforts. In addition, CCRI’s General Education Committee used the results of Fall 2018 assessment data to update the College’s definition of an “educated person,” which comprises four key skill sets: effective communication; critical thinking; quantitative, mathematical and scientific reasoning; and social interaction. This revised definition will allow faculty from across the College to assess students on these four dimensions through courses offered within the framework of the institution’s current general education curriculum. We are further encouraged to note CCRI’s candid acknowledgment of its need to examine general education outcomes more closely at the program and institutional levels. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the College’s sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that the Spring 2024 self-study include an update on the institution’s continued success in assessing student learning outcomes and using the results to make improvements with emphasis on assessing the learning outcomes identified in the College’s revised definition of an “educated person.” We are informed here by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution’s definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).

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

Finally, we understand that CCRI has engaged an architecture and planning firm to assist in the creation of a formal facilities Master Plan that aligns with its new strategic plan, and that the College recently joined the National Community College Cost and Productivity Project to guide academic planning and assessment. As benchmarking information about instructional costs, instructor workloads, and faculty requirements becomes available, it will be used to "inform academic staffing plans, program improvements, and requirements for new programs." We further note with approval that CCRI has entered into a contract with a third-party vendor to develop and implement plans related to cybersecurity. As evidence that "planning and evaluation are systematic, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution" (2.1), we ask that the self-study submitted for consideration in Spring 2024 include an update on the College's success in completing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of its institutional plans with emphasis on the Master Plan, Academic Plan, and Technology Plan. Our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Institutional Resources* are also relevant here:

The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. Additions and deletions of programs are consistent with institutional mission and capacity, faculty expertise, student needs, and the availability of sufficient resources required for the development and improvement of academic programs. The institution allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives (4.7).

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).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Community College of Rhode Island and hopes 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.

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 state system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Timothy DelGiudice and Brenda Dann-Messier. 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. Meghan Hughes
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,


David Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Timothy DelGiudice
Brenda Dann-Messier