



October 17, 2024

Dr. Rosemary A. Costigan  
Interim President  
Community College of Rhode Island  
400 East Avenue  
Warwick, RI 02886

Dear President Costigan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 26, 2024, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Community College of Rhode Island:

that Community College of Rhode Island be continued in accreditation;

that Community College of Rhode Island's plans to establish Certificates in Business Administration, Workplace Essentials; Business Administration, Entrepreneurship; Business Administration, Management; and Advanced Manufacturing and Design, Manufacturing and Design as Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility be approved;

that Community College of Rhode Island notify the Commission upon receipt of approval by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to offer the Certificates in Business Administration, Workplace Essentials; Business Administration, Entrepreneurship; Business Administration, Management; and Advanced Manufacturing and Design, Manufacturing and Design as Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility;

that the site visit to assess implementation of the four certificates at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility be conducted within six months of the institution's receipt of USDOE approval;

that the report prepared in advance of the visit include an update on Community College of Rhode Island's continued success in implementing the four certificates at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility as Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by January 15, 2029 for consideration in Spring 2029;

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

1. implementing the College's plans for its presidential transition and internal governance improvements;

2. there are sufficient resources to support the program;
3. continuing to develop a culture of assessment;
4. completing, implementing, and evaluating the effectiveness of its IT Strategic Plan; revising its developmental education program, CCRI Advantage, and ensuring that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2034.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

The Commission commends Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) for its candid, thorough, and well-written self-study. We note with favor that CCRI's internal shared governance has been "reenergized" through the creation of a Faculty Senate and Staff Assembly. We also appreciate learning that the College is moving to a multi-year budget plan that will support long-term planning, and that the team found the Division of Administration and Finance has experienced "significant and positive recent position transitions" including the hiring of a Chief Financial Officer and Chief Information Officer. Additionally, completion of the institution's Facilities Master Plan has led to increased capital investment in "much-needed" renovations and deferred maintenance, and the Academic Master plan is producing improvements in retention, graduation, and transfer success. The Commission is encouraged that total undergraduate enrollment has risen slightly – from 11,962 in Fall 2021 to 12,518 in Fall 2023 – with CCRI's dual enrollment programs helping to increase the racial/ethnic diversity of its student population, and that, at the same time, the College's one-year retention rate has experienced an "upward trend" reaching 59% in Fall 2022. With its committed and caring leadership, energized and engaged faculty, staff, and student body, the Community College of Rhode Island is well-positioned to continue to offer "high school graduates and returning adults the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for intellectual, professional and personal growth through an array of academic, career, and lifelong learning programs" well into the future.

The Commission approves Community College of Rhode Island's proposal to offer Certificates in Business Administration, Workplace Essentials; Business Administration, Entrepreneurship; Business Administration, Management; and Advanced Manufacturing and Design, Manufacturing and Design as Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility because the proposal provided evidence that the institution has experience successfully implementing prison education programs in a manner consistent with Commission standards and policies. In addition, the report included a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding between CCRI and the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) documenting approval of the programs at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility. We appreciate that the College has partnered with RIDOC for more than 20 years and that the certificate programs offered are designed to "prepare students for employment opportunities in the state and regional economies and further educational opportunities." The Commission also notes with favor that 28 students have been enrolled through the Second Chance Pell program since its inception with five earning certificates; the institution projects it will serve approximately 98 students in the 2025-2026 academic year.

The Commission understands that CCRI plans to apply for USDOE approval to offer its Certificates in Business Administration, Workplace Essentials; Business Administration, Entrepreneurship; Business Administration, Management; and Advanced Manufacturing and Design, Manufacturing and Design at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility as Pell-Eligible Prison Education Programs. We therefore ask that the institution inform the Commission when approval from the USDOE has been received so that, in accordance with federal regulations, a site visit can be scheduled within six months.

As noted in the attached Procedures for the Substantive Change Evaluation Visit, the report prepared in advance of the Pell-Eligible Prison Education Program evaluation should reflect and assess the institution's experience in implementing the four certificate programs at the John J. Moran Medium Security Facility including its success in:

1. achieving the enrollment and financial goals set for the programs.
2. ensuring sufficient faculty and staff to oversee the quality of the programs;
3. providing adequate resources and student services to support the programs; and
4. implementing relevant approaches to assess student achievement and success.

The standards on *Students; Institutional Resources; The Academic Program; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Educational Effectiveness* will inform these sections of the report:

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

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 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 institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate (7.22).

The institution undertaking substantive changes ... demonstrates its capacity to undertake and sustain such initiatives and to assure that the new academic programming meets the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's Standards and policies. ... The institution recognizes and takes account of the increased demands on resources made by programs offered at a higher degree level (4.8).

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 preparation and qualifications of all faculty and academic staff are appropriate to the nature of their assignments. Qualifications are measured by advanced degrees held, evidence of scholarship, advanced study, creative activities, and teaching abilities, as well as relevant professional experience, training, and credentials (6.3).

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).

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 the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions. In addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College is asked, in Spring 2029, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *The Academic Program*; *Students*; *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*; *Planning and Evaluation*; and *Educational Effectiveness*.

The Commission understands that Rhode Island's Council on Postsecondary Education will lead a nationwide search for CCRI's next president with a projected starting date in July 2025. We appreciate that, during this time of transition, the current interim president and interim vice-president for academic affairs, both former faculty members in leadership roles at the College, are guiding the continued evolution of the institution's internal governance structure. In collaboration with members of the Faculty Senate, we understand that the process underway is intended to "examine areas for further clarification and continuous improvement in the processes for shared governance and institutional decision-making." We ask that the Spring 2029 report include an update on the College's success in hiring its next president and in implementing its plans to improve the College's internal governance systems. This request is in keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

The board appoints and periodically reviews the performance of the chief executive officer whose full-time or major responsibility is to the institution (3.10).

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs,

and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key consideration (3.17).

The effectiveness of the institution's organizational structure and system of governance is improved through regular and systematic review (3.19).

The Commission understands that CCRI introduced a pilot initiative, the CCRI Advantage program, to support incoming CCRI students who would benefit from additional preparation in college-level reading, writing, math, and success skills. We understand that the initiative will involve student cohorts in developmental English and math enrolling in a seven-week non-credit immersion course followed by a seven-week college-level course, and that these students will have access to success coaches and a shared advisor. With an anticipated enrollment of 100 students over the academic year, we note with approval that faculty will be provided curriculum development resources and an adult education instructor will be "embedded" in the classroom. We look forward to learning, in the Spring 2029 interim (fifth-year) report, of the College's success in implementing its CCRI Advantage program ensuring sufficient resources are available to support students and faculty. We are guided here by our standards on *The Academic Program*; *Students*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

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 ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success (5.7).

The institution periodically evaluates the sufficiency of and support for academic staff and their effectiveness in teaching and advising, scholarship, service, and as appropriate to institutional mission, research, and creative activity. The results of these evaluations are used to enhance fulfillment of the institution's mission (6.14).

The Commission concurs with the visiting team that Community College of Rhode Island has made significant progress toward developing a college-wide culture of assessment, particularly at the course and program level, and gives credit to the institution for hiring of a Director of Annual Program Review and Accreditation, appointing a faculty Director of General Education, and implementing the Blackboard assessment tool to collect student learning data. We are also pleased to learn that CCRI faculty have "engaged in the complete assessment process for the Educated Person outcomes," and that the General Education Committee will now focus on using assessment results "to identify areas across

domains of knowledge for shared analysis and improvement.” We ask that the Spring 2029 interim report include an update on the College’s success in continuing to establish a culture of assessment across all academic programs at the institution. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Educational Effectiveness* provide guidance here:

The institution’s principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

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. The institution ensures that information about student success is easily accessible on its website (8.6).

The institution uses additional quantitative measures of success, such as further education, civic participation, religious formation, and others, as appropriate to its mission, to understand the success of its recent graduates. Information from students and former students is regularly considered (8.7).

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 Commission is aware that, while CCRI has successfully completed and implemented its Facilities Master Plan and Academic Master Plan, the Technology Plan “remains incomplete.” We are therefore pleased to learn that the College hired a CIO in February 2024 and, as a result, anticipates being able to “finalize and publish” its IT Strategic Plan by Spring 2025. We ask that the Spring 2029 report give emphasis to CCRI’s success in “implementing the results of its planning” (2.5). Relevant here is our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

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 scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2034 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 Community College of Rhode Island and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Lauren Webb, Director of

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Assessment & Accreditation, and Richard Sullivan, Vice President for Finance, 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 Shannon Gilkey and David Caprio. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the attached 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.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Whelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Michael Whelan

MW/sjp

cc: Shannon Gilkey  
David Caprio

Attachment: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions