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March 21, 2012

Mr. Leo I. Higdon
President
Connecticut College
270 Mohegan Avenue
New London, CT 06320-4125

Dear President Higdon:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 1, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by Connecticut College and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by Connecticut College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring, 2017 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring, 2017 evaluation give emphasis to the institution’s success in:

1) continuing to address the areas of emphasis specified in the fifth-year interim report;

2) implementing the strategic plan;

3) evaluating the Master of Arts program in Psychology with respect to student outcomes.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The fifth-year interim report submitted by Connecticut College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of October 30, 2007 and April 23, 2009, and it also addressed each of the eleven standards.
We commend Connecticut College for its impressive progress with assessment of student learning that is data-driven, multi-layered, and action oriented. With regard to governance, we are pleased to learn that the Dean of Faculty now has authority for allocating academic resources as needed; as noted in the institution’s report, this is particularly important at this point in time to enable incremental resourcing of heavily enrolled programs. Additionally, we understand that a new advisory committee will support the Dean with advising on curriculum and staffing needs. We note with favor that the institution has raised $165 million of the $200 million goal for the capital campaign. Finally, the report provided evidence of the College’s success in strengthening its Master of Arts in Psychology program.

Connecticut College provided detailed and focused responses to each of the 11 standards. We particularly acknowledge revisions to the enrollment management models and changes within the senior leadership that are viewed as positive developments to ensure enhanced performance. We also find noteworthy initiatives that focus on intellectual challenge and rigor, extending intellectual life into the residence halls, and internationalizing the curriculum. Finally, we are pleased to learn of the efforts that have been focused on recruiting and retaining faculty of color, enhancing the support available to the faculty, and clarifying the standards related to teaching and research.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2017 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 comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Governance, The Academic Program, and Financial Resources.

Due to their nature, the four matters that were addressed within the fifth-year report will take time to resolve. Therefore, we ask that the College provide evidence of its continued progress with these areas as part of the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2017 evaluation.

The College’s 2007 strategic plan has guided annual goals and objectives that are monitored by institutional dashboards identifying areas of strengths and comparative weakness. We take note that with the completion of the comprehensive campaign in 2013, the College intends to review the degree to which strategic priorities have been accomplished and to begin the next strategic planning cycle. As part of the self-study prepared for the 2017 comprehensive evaluation, we look forward to learning about the College’s success with these planning endeavors. Our standard on Planning and Evaluation provides useful guidance here:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and 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 (2.3).

The institution determines the effectiveness of its planning and evaluation activities on an ongoing basis. Results of these activities are used to further enhance the institution’s implementation of its purposes and objectives (2.8).
Given that the MA in Psychology program is the College’s sole remaining graduate program, the Graduate Studies Committee will be discontinued, with its responsibilities taken up by the Academic and Administrative Procedures Committee to ensure that the program continues to comply with NEASC standards and to be of high quality. We take favorable note that one particular emphasis will be to specify more explicit learning goals for the program. We would like to be apprised of the institution’s progress here as part of the next self-study, in accordance with our standard on *The Academic Program*:

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 (4.29).

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, and includes external perspectives. The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide information useful in the continuing improvement of programs and services for students (4.54).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Connecticut College and hopes that its preparation 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 of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Jim Berrien. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Maydew

MJJ/ sjp

cc: Mr. Jim Berrien