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December 22, 2015

Dr. Anne E. Huot  
President  
Keene State College  
229 Main Street, MS 1504  
Keene, NH 03435-1504

Dear President Huot:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 25, 2015, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Keene State College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Keene State College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2020 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2020 comprehensive evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. implementing its strategic plan;
2. assessing its College-Wide Learning Outcomes;
3. achieving its goals for the success of nursing graduates on the NCLEX examination;
4. implementing strategies to improve retention and graduation rates, particularly among students of color, first-generation, and Pell-eligible students.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Keene State College (KSC) was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of May 4, 2011 and January 23, 2014, addressed each of the eleven standards, and included a reflective essay on student learning and success.

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Office of the President

The Commission commends Keene State College for its well-written and cogent report that discusses the progress made by the College during the last five years, a time of “major transition” for the institution. We understand that resource constraints and changes in leadership prompted the College to suspend its strategic initiatives process; work on a new strategic plan was begun in March 2015. The Commission notes with favor Keene State College’s continued commitment to increase the number of full-time, tenure-track faculty members and its success in increasing the percentage of courses taught by full-time faculty members by hiring two to four new tenure-track faculty each year from 2012 to 2015. Although KSC has not yet achieved its goal to have 66% of courses taught by full-time faculty, the percentage increased from 51% in 2009 to 58% in 2014. The College has reorganized its approach to enrollment management by expanding the responsibilities of the Vice President for Student Affairs – now the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management – and establishing an Enrollment Management Council to oversee a “college-wide approach to managing enrollment from recruitment to graduation.” We are gratified to learn of KSC’s substantial progress in enhancing its use of data to support planning and decision-making; the use of assessment results to reconfigure the Integrative Study Program (general education) is especially noteworthy, as is the collaborative work that led to development of College-Wide Learning Outcomes and assessment plans in the academic disciplines. The Commission commends Keene State College for its “prudent budget planning” that has enabled the College to achieve an operating margin of \$4 million in FY 2014, despite “unprecedented” decreases in state appropriations. The College is ensuring the quality of its programming and services through implementation of a number of initiatives, including tuition increases coupled with increased institutional aid for financially needy students, use of reserves, investment in high enrollment areas, and revised timelines for strategic plan investments.

The report submitted by Keene State College also provided a comprehensive, candid discussion of the steps taken by the institution to address two “high profile” situations affecting the integrity of the College: an allegation of sexual misconduct by an athletic coach and a disturbance at the annual Pumpkin Festival. The Commission commends the College for its forthright response to these incidents and the steps taken to improve policies, campus climate, and communication with internal and external constituencies.

The reflective essay submitted by Keene State College details the institution’s substantial efforts to support the engagement, retention, and graduation of the “promising students” its mission statement says the College seeks to serve. We take favorable note of the College’s success in achieving first-year retention rates consistently in the high 70<sup>th</sup> percentile and four-year graduation rates above 50%. KSC measures student success with both internal data and national benchmarking tools, including the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the National Student Clearinghouse, and tracks the impact of various student support initiatives, including the Structured Success Initiative designed to address the needs of at-risk students, and the BEST (Building Excellence in Science and Technology) project, aimed at improving success in gateway courses in STEM fields.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2020 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 four matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, The Academic Program, Students, and Public Disclosure*.

The Commission is gratified to learn of Keene State College’s attentive approach to addressing its short- and long-term operational and strategic priorities. The newly adopted *Strategic Plan 2015-2020*, developed through an inclusive and participatory process, is organized around four themes: identity and distinction, student achievement, institutional sustainability, and community and culture. The Fall 2020 report will afford the College an opportunity to update the

Commission on its success in implementing its strategic plan, as specified by 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. 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 has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.4).

We note with favor the involvement of the campus community in the development of KSC's College-Wide Learning Outcomes. We understand that the Director of Institutional Research is developing plans to assess these outcomes; the College anticipates that assessment tools will include the Critical Thinking Assessment Test and student portfolios. As a part of the comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2020, we look forward to learning about the institution's success in implementing its plans to assess the College-Wide Learning Outcomes. Our standard on *The Academic Program* provides this guidance:

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).

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 (4.54).

The Commission is pleased to learn that KSC's B.S. in Nursing program met its enrollment goals, achieved the faculty-to-student ratios required by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), acquired lab facilities at the Nursing Simulation Center and Lab, and graduated its first cohort of students in spring 2013. However, we also understand that the program is on "conditional approval" status from CCNE due to the low (42.28%) first-time licensure (NCLEX) examination pass rates achieved by the College's second cohort of Nursing students. The College took "immediate corrective action" to address this issue; initiatives include creating the Nursing Simulation Center and Lab, hiring an additional faculty member, improving test preparation and review sessions, and providing enhanced mentoring and support to students. At the time KSC submitted its interim report, the College was awaiting the NCLEX results for its third cohort of Nursing students. As a part of the comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2020, we look forward to learning about the institution's success in achieving its goals for NCLEX examination passage rates, as informed by our standards on *Students* and *Public Disclosure*:

The institution measures student success, including rates of retention and graduation and other measures of success appropriate to institutional mission (6.6).

The institution publishes statements of its goals for students' education and the success of students in achieving those goals. Information on student success includes rates of retention and graduation and other measures of student success appropriate to institutional mission. As appropriate, recent information on passage rates for licensure examinations is also published (10.10).

The Commission commends Keene State College for its success in increasing its four-year graduation rate “steadily” from 29% for the 2002 cohort to 54% for the 2010 cohort. We note from the S-2 forms submitted with the institution’s report, however, that the rates for students of color (37% for the 2010 cohort), first generation students (47%), and Pell-grant recipients (48%) lag behind the overall rate. We appreciate KSC’s commitment to the success for all students, as evidenced by its goal to achieve an overall retention rate of 85% and the implementation of purposeful initiatives designed to support at-risk students. We anticipate being apprised in the Fall 2020 self-study of the institution’s success in achieving its goals for retention and graduation, as informed by our standard on *Students*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve and addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students (6.1).

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution’s academic program, including specifically recruited populations. It 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 academic goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their academic success (6.5).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Keene State 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 Ms. Pamela Diamantis. 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.

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

Sincerely,



Patricia Maguire Meservey

PMM/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Pamela Diamantis