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April 9, 2014

Dr. James McCarthy
President
Suffolk University
8 Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108-2770

Dear President McCarthy:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 7, 2014, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Suffolk University:

that Suffolk University be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall 2017;

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

1. integrating the three academic units into one unified, cohesive university;
2. assuring the effectiveness of its governance structure by clarifying the authority, responsibilities, and relationships of the board, administration, and faculty;
3. developing and implementing a long-term financial plan to support the University's strategic plan, including meeting its facility needs;
4. clarifying the role of faculty scholarship within the context of the institution's mission;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2022.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Suffolk University is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Suffolk University for its candid and evidence-based self-study that documents the progress made since its last comprehensive evaluation, a period during which the institution developed from being primarily a commuter institution to one that now offers an array of recognized graduate and professional programs with a residential undergraduate student population. We note with favor that since the arrival of a new president in 2012, the University has adopted a new mission statement that has already become the “driving force” for University planning and priorities and undertaken a broad and inclusive strategic planning process. We concur with the visiting team that the University has made strides to use assessment data to improve student learning, especially to shape the freshman academic experience, as demonstrated by the creation of an Institutional Research and Assessment Office that will “increase the University’s capacity to centralize [the] collection and distribution of data.” Construction of a new academic building that will provide enhanced classroom and laboratory space and the comprehensive review of the University’s real estate portfolio are particularly noteworthy given the institution’s central urban location. The University’s focus on affordability, keeping tuition increases to a minimum (2%) and creating opportunities that lower the overall cost of a Suffolk education, is commendable. In addition, we are pleased to learn that students at the Madrid campus have “ready access” to all necessary resources and that the courses offered are aligned with those on the Boston campus. Overall, we share the judgment of the visiting team that the new energy generated by the transformation underway, embraced by Suffolk University’s supportive Board, committed administration, and talented faculty, position the institution well to achieve its ambition to be a “talent catalyst,” thereby continuing, as it has for the last 100 years, to provide access to a career-focused, student-centered education.

Commission policy requires a fifth-year interim 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 fifth-year reports the University is asked, in Fall 2017, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *The Academic Program*, *Planning and Evaluation*, *Physical and Technological Resources*, *Financial Resources*, and *Faculty*.

We understand that one of the seven strategic imperatives included in *Charting the Future: A Plan for Suffolk University 2012-2017* is building a more unified, cohesive university by integrating the institution’s three distinctive academic units – the College of Arts and Sciences, the Sawyer Business School, and the Law School. We note with favor that considerable progress has already been made to “find efficiencies, avoid duplication of services, and improv[e] communication across the units.” Examples include a consolidated Division of Student Success, a new University-wide Assessment Committee, and a Joint-Degrees Committee. In addition, to eliminate duplicated functions, a number of offices – technology, diversity, and communications and marketing – have been centralized. We commend the development of the institution’s first unified Faculty Handbook that will provide “consistency in policies and procedures” across the three schools, and the creation of a common undergraduate core curriculum that will “open the door to a wide variety of interdisciplinary course opportunities for students.” In keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*, the Fall 2017 report will provide an opportunity for the institution to appraise the Commission on its success in achieving its strategic imperative to become one University.

... 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).

... The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.9).

Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered (4.2).

We concur with the visiting team that over the past two years Suffolk University has experienced "substantive changes to its organizational and governance structure." We are aware that in addition to a number of new senior-level hires, 50% of the Board's 32 trustees have been appointed since the arrival of the new president. We are encouraged that the Board expects to complete new by-laws in 2014 that are based on best practices of similar institutions, and that it recognizes the need to return to a more appropriate oversight and advisory role now that the new senior leadership team is in place. We also note with approval that a new Faculty Senate has been created that comprises elected representatives from each of the three schools and that there is optimism that the new body will "better position faculty to exercise their role in assuring the academic integrity of the curriculum." In the Fall 2017 report, we seek to be assured that clear lines of authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the board, the administration, and faculty have been established to ensure an effective governance structure. This section of the report should be informed by our standard on *Organization and Governance* (cited above and below).

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 (3.1).

The board delegates to the chief executive officer and, as appropriate, to others the requisite authority and autonomy to manage the institution compatible with the board's intentions and the institutional mission (3.7).

Faculty exercise an important role in assuring the academic integrity of the institution's educational programs. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.12).

While the growth in the University's unrestricted net assets, totaling \$68.6 million in FY2013, and its record of positive operating margins provide evidence of its strong financial position, we share the visiting team's concern that the institution remains primarily dependent on tuition with 95% of its revenue coming from student tuition and fees. Among the financial challenges the University faces going forward is the nationwide decline in law school enrollments, and we understand that Suffolk has taken a proactive approach to downsize its incoming class to preserve the quality of students accepted. In addition, we are aware that the institution has significant outstanding debt that constrains its "ability to respond to facility limitations in the areas of student athletics and recreation, residential capacity, and student activities." We therefore commend the University for including in its strategic plan an imperative to "achieve and sustain financial stability through increased fund-raising, a larger endowment, and a diversified revenue mix," but note that an accompanying financial plan is yet to be developed. We are pleased to learn that action has already been taken to strengthen the University's

advancement efforts by appointing a new Vice President for Advancement, adding staff, and restructuring the office. We welcome further information, in the Fall 2017 report, on the institution's success to develop a long-term financial plan to ensure funding is available to support its strategic planning initiatives. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Physical and Technological Resources*, and *Financial Resources* provide this guidance:

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 undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning. It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs. Space planning occurs on a regular basis as part of physical resource evaluation and planning, and is consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution (8.4).

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 (9.3).

As the visiting team reports and the institution acknowledges, the University's expectation for scholarship is evolving as Suffolk "transitions from three schools with teaching faculties to a university of teacher-scholars." We therefore are pleased to learn that the University has established both a Center for Teaching Excellence and an Office of Research and Sponsored Programs that together will be instrumental in helping the institution accomplish its strategic imperative to foster a teacher-scholar model. At the same time, we concur with the visiting team that if scholarship is to play a more significant role in the evaluation of faculty, additional resources, including a review of required teaching loads, will be needed to permit faculty to more fully engage in research. The Fall 2017 report will afford the institution the opportunity to reflect on its efforts to ensure its "scholarly expectations for faculty [are] consistent with its mission and purposes ..." and that "... [s]cholarship and instruction are integrated and mutually supportive" (5.21).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2022 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. Because Suffolk University delayed its comprehensive evaluation by a year, scheduling the next comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2022 returns the University to its original evaluation schedule.

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 Suffolk University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Linda Hanson, team chair, during its deliberations.

Dr. James McCarthy

April 9, 2014

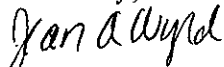
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You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days, we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Andrew Meyer. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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,


Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Andrew Meyer
Visiting team