



New England Commission
of Higher Education

May 22, 2019

Dr. Zulma Toro
President
Central Connecticut State University
1615 Stanley Street
New Britain, CT 06050-4010

Dear President Toro:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 12, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Central Connecticut State University:

that Central Connecticut State University be continued in accreditation;

that the information regarding implementation of the Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Program be accepted and inclusion of the program within the institution's accreditation be confirmed;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Fall 2020 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. completing the strategic planning process and beginning to implement its strategic plan;
2. achieving its enrollment goals;
3. documenting compliance with Title IV and Title IX requirements with attention to ensuring that staffing is sufficient to comply with Title IX requirements;

that the University submit an interim report for consideration in Fall 2023;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University address the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2020 report, as well as its success in clarifying expectations and demonstrating outcomes related to the Board of Regents' shared services and "Students First" initiatives;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2028.

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Providence College

President of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neche.org

Sr. Vice President of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrian@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission
CAROL L. ANDERSON
canderson@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission
LAURA M. GAMBINO
lgambino@neche.org

Vice President of the Commission
PAULA A. HARBECKE
pharbecke@neche.org

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) for preparing a comprehensive and candid self-study that highlights the institution's many accomplishments over the last decade and documents the ways in which the University is achieving its mission. The visiting team verified that University governance processes are clear: the roles and responsibilities of the committees are differentiated and understood; stakeholders feel included; and faculty have a voice in decision-making. CCSU has also made significant gains in student learning outcomes assessment over the last few years; we are particularly gratified to learn of the faculty-driven structure that is in place for evaluating student learning, as well as the enthusiasm with which faculty and staff embrace continuous improvement through evaluation and assessment. We are further encouraged to note that the University has increased its institutional research capacity by establishing a new full-time position in the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA). While the position is currently filled temporarily, a search is underway to hire a well-qualified staff member who will "help coordinate assessment activities," thus allowing the Director of OIRA "to devote more time to activities related to institutional effectiveness." Additional evidence of the institution's commitment to its mission is the \$254 million (funded by the State of Connecticut) used to construct new academic and student services spaces and renovate a number of facilities, including the library and science center; we also understand that plans are underway to establish a new engineering building in support of the institution's strategic plans to expand its graduate programs in engineering. With Central Connecticut State University's long history of educating teachers in Connecticut and its vision for increasing its programs to meet the needs of contemporary learners, combined with the leadership of a capable president and the dedication of its qualified faculty and staff, the University is poised to address its challenges and continue achieving its mission well into the future.

The Commission further appreciates receiving an update regarding the implementation of CCSU's Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Program (DNAP), the University's second doctoral-level program, that was launched in Fall 2017. We understand that the DNAP has two specialization tracks: (1) a three-year entry-level program for licensed registered nurses with a bachelor's degree to become certified registered nurse anesthetists; and (2) a two-year, part-time, Advanced DNAP program for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) with master's degrees allowing them to expand their backgrounds in biology and anesthesia-specific areas. The visiting team confirmed that the DNAP, offered in collaboration with the Nurse Anesthesia Program of Hartford and the Yale New Haven Hospital School of Nurse Anesthesia Programs, was accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Programs in 2015 for a ten-year period. The DNAP is supported by seven full-time, appropriately credentialed faculty members and 11 part-time faculty members who are either CRNA's or anesthesiologists, and we appreciate CCSU's candid acknowledgment that the University will need to hire more faculty as the program grows. Finally, we note positively that CCSU has updated its information resources (e.g., journal and book offerings) to support the DNAP, plans are in place to add online resources, and students have access to "excellent" resources at the clinical sites. Lastly, we are especially gratified to learn that DNAP students reported to the visiting team that they are happy with the program.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2020 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Students*; and *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*.

The visiting team confirmed that CCSU is developing its new strategic plan, and we particularly note with approval that this is a highly participatory process that engages members of the campus

community at all levels. It is also noteworthy that, since the time of the visit, the University has developed a framework for the plan that includes project and communication plans, as well as a timeline for completion in December 2019. We ask that the report submitted for consideration in Fall 2020 include an update on the institution's progress in completing the strategic planning process and implementing the plan as evidence that "[t]he institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5).

The team further confirmed during its visit that CCSU's overall headcount enrollment in Fall 2018 was 11,822 students, down from 12,233 students in 2008: undergraduate enrollment was down 3.6% to 9,546 students, and graduate enrollment was down 2.2% to 2,276 students. We therefore appreciate CCSU's candid acknowledgment that its plan to increase its overall headcount enrollment to 15,000 students by Fall 2023 is ambitious. To achieve this goal, CCSU has implemented a "multi-pronged" approach aimed at transitioning its enrollment profile toward adult learners and graduate students, expanding online options, developing new programs in high demand disciplines (e.g., engineering), and implementing a "more aggressive" marketing campaign. To further support this goal, the University has created a new Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management position, established a faculty liaison position to facilitate communication between students and academic departments, and submitted a first-year experience model to the faculty senate for consideration and recommendations. As evidence that "the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve" (*Students*, Statement of the Standard), we look forward, in Fall 2020, to receiving an update on the University's success in achieving its enrollment goals. We remind you, also, of our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* (cited above).

Through the report of the visiting team, we understand that it is the perception of some members of the campus community that Title IX investigations of employees may be somewhat unsatisfactory due to limited staffing of this area. We therefore appreciate learning that CCSU has established a Task Force on Sexual Misconduct and Campus Climate that is examining programmatic initiatives currently in place to prevent sexual misconduct and also exploring best practices to improve the handling of such complaints. In particular, the University is seeking a vendor to examine the Office of Diversity and Equity and the Department of Human Resources to identify opportunities to improve functionality and foster a more inclusive culture at the University. Additional evidence that CCSU is committed to adhering to federal and state regulations is the institution's compliance with additional requirements related to Title IV funding associated with being placed on Provisional Certification Status in March 2017. In addition to implementing a corrective action plan to address one "non-repeat finding," and preparing documents for recertification in September 2019, CCSU is making "critical investments to address opportunities for improvement." For example, a division of Enrollment Management has been established, the University is "actively working" to fill vacant positions in the Financial Aid office, and, as noted above, a new cabinet-level position, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, has been established to "provide a more focused layer of supervision for the Office of Financial Aid." To demonstrate that "[t]he institution observes the spirit as well as the letter of applicable legal requirements" (9.4), we ask that the University assure the Commission, in the Fall 2020 report, that it is in compliance with Title IV and Title IX requirements, with attention to ensuring that staffing is sufficient to comply with Title IX requirements. Our standard on *Students* is also relevant here:

Student financial aid is provided through a well-organized program. Awards are based on the equitable application of clear and publicized criteria (5.13).

Through a systematic program, the institution regularly provides students before borrowing with clear and timely information about cost, debt, and repayment (5.14).

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 Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University is asked, in Fall 2023, to address the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2020 report. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the institution's sustained attention; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the interim report. We also ask that the University address a matter related to our standard on *Organization and Governance*.

The Commission shares the concerns expressed to the visiting team by members of the campus community related to the Board of Regents' (BOR) shared services and "Students First" initiatives. Particularly troubling is that a comprehensive plan detailing the consolidation of university services and documenting the potential impact of "Students First" on the campus planning process was not available at the time of the visit. For example, CCSU is waiting for clarification from the BOR as to "how much effort/time IR personnel [at CCSU] will be expected to put towards the Functional Groups, how much the Functional Groups will be able to support CCSU priorities in return, and how prioritization of projects will be determined." While we appreciate that the BOR candidly acknowledges "the four-year campuses [in the Connecticut State System] have campus-specific needs, such as institutional research, that cannot be met by a fully centralized entity," we also support the assessment of the team that, without receiving clear expectations and guidance from the BOR, it will be difficult for CCSU to establish the impact the Connecticut State System's shared services and "Students First" initiatives will have on setting the University's strategic priorities. We therefore note favorably that CCSU "should have finalized the metrics, collected the data, and be well into the interpretation [of the impact of the shared services and "Students First" initiative on CCSU] before July 1, 2019 when the Functional Groups are fully implemented." Through the Fall 2023 interim report, we look forward to receiving an update on the University's success in clarifying expectations and demonstrating outcomes related to the Board of Regents' shared services and "Students First" initiatives. 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).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2028 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 Central Connecticut State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Yvonne Kirby, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, and Jacqueline Maloney, team chair, 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 Mr. Matt Fleury and Mr. Mark E. Ojakian. The institution is free to release information

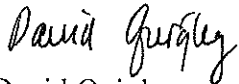
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about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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 in New England.

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

Sincerely,



David Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Matt Fleury
Mr. Mark E. Ojakian
Visiting Team