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July 1, 2010

Dr. Ronald A. Crutcher  
President  
Wheaton College  
115 Park Hall  
East Main Street  
Norton, MA 02766-2322

Dear President Crutcher:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 15, 2010, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Wheaton College:

that Wheaton College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2012 that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

- 1) addressing the College's financial challenges, including through actions taken in light of current economic conditions;
- 2) integrating strategic and financial planning to achieve short- and long-term goals;

that the College submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Spring 2014;

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

- 1) continuing to integrate strategic and financial planning;
- 2) integrating assessment into all units of the College, with particular attention given to direct measures of student learning and using the results of assessment to guide improvement and planning;
- 3) improving student retention and graduation rates in line with the institution's goals;

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- 4) achieving the institution's goals in recruiting and retaining students and faculty of color; and
- 5) implementing the plans delayed by the global financial downturn to construct a new science center, and address needs in the areas of residence halls, faculty salaries, and student financial aid;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2019.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

We commend Wheaton College for the considerable progress in addressing several important issues since the time of the previous comprehensive evaluation. The College has a clear mission shared by all constituencies. The mission is made manifest by the shared pride in the transformational power of the educational experience for students and through guidance that it provided to both the content and process for developing a new general education curriculum. The institution has made significant gains in growing the student body both in numbers and selectivity, adding to the faculty to reduce the student:faculty ratio to 10:1, and increasing the diversity of both the student body and faculty in line with the College's goals. The time since the prior comprehensive evaluation has also been marked by major improvements in service through merger of the library, computing and administrative systems, along with successful fund raising that allowed facilities improvements while retaining the institution's record of conservative financial management. We join the team in applauding the Wheaton College community for the good work that made the self-study and comprehensive evaluation a worthwhile process.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2012 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Financial Resources*.

The College responded to the recent economic challenges by reducing expenses through eliminating vacant staff positions, reducing adjunct faculty, lowering non-personnel expenses, reducing facilities maintenance, and freezing faculty and staff salaries. We concur with the team's observations that these reductions are not collectively sustainable, and through the report in Spring 2012, we ask that the College demonstrate that its "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).

We concur with the team that the institution has sufficient financial resources to support its mission and is to be commended for concluding FY2009 with a modest surplus of \$0.5 million. Also, the College has an A2 bond rating from Moody's and reported a \$140 million endowment as of June 30, 2009. The institution's market position is challenged, however, as it competes with several institutions in the Northeast that have larger endowments and can provide greater financial aid for students. We concur with the team's observation that while the College has a strategic plan and a workable annual budgeting process, given the challenges ahead, the College has not yet demonstrated the useful integration of strategic and financial planning. We ask that this area be addressed through the report due in Spring 2012, so that the institution can demonstrate its progress, as informed by our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution (2.1).

[The institution] 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 (2.2).

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 College is asked, in Spring 2014, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Students*, and *Faculty*.

The integration of strategic and financial planning, as noted above, is also identified as an area of focus for the interim report due in Spring 2014. The Commission understands that this integration is a matter that will take continuing attention of the institution and therefore asks that a report of success in this area be given emphasis in the interim report.

The Commission also asks that the College use the interim report to update us on its success in integrating assessment into all units of the College, so that analysis and evaluation are undertaken early enough in the process to become a "system of evaluation. . . . designed to provide relevant and trustworthy information to support institutional improvement" (2.4). Most centrally, we concur with the observation of the visiting team that the College should make continued assessment of student learning a priority. The College is in the early stages of developing learning objectives for its students and has only recently begun to focus assessment at the program level. While some progress has been made in the area of formative assessments, and the assessment in the Connections program, using surveys, focus groups and outside consultants is laudable, more work is needed to develop an effective and integrated system of assessing student learning. In this regard, we remind the College of the importance of including direct as well as indirect measures of student learning as part of understanding what and how students are learning. Our standard on *The Academic Program* provides guidance here:

The institution implements and supports a systematic and broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning focused on educational improvement through understanding what and how students are learning through their academic program and, as appropriate, through experiences outside the classroom. This approach is based on a clear statement or statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The approach provides useful information to help the institution understand what and how students are learning, improve the experiences provided for students, and assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded. Institutional support is provided for these activities (4.44).

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Data and other evidence generated through this approach are considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.45).

Retention and graduation rates were cited as a concern in the Commission's letter at the time of the 2004 interim report. We concur with the team that they remain points of vulnerability for the College. Retention rates from first-to-second year are in the mid-to-high eighties, with graduation rates in the low-to-mid seventies in four years and mid-seventies in five years. The College has taken some initiatives to understand and address retention rates, including the NSSE survey and work groups for the First- and Second-Year Experience. Through the interim report, we look forward to the College's success in addressing issues of retention and graduation, consistent with our standard on *Students*:

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. Rates of retention and graduation are separately determined for any group that the institution specifically recruits, and those rates are used in evaluating the success of specialized recruitment and the services and opportunities provided for the recruited students (6.6).

The institution has enjoyed considerable success in attracting students of color. We note that even with the challenging admissions year of 2009, the College enjoyed a 5% increase in the application numbers in this population, comparing favorably with a decline of 14% in the total number of applications, and comprising 21.9% of the first-year class. In the past five years, the overall student body has included 14-16% students of color. The College appears to have had more success in recruiting faculty of color – 24 tenure track faculty between 1998 and 2008 – than retaining them – 75% remained at the time of the visit, and we take note of the concern expressed in the team report. The interim report will afford the College an opportunity to address its goals in ensuring that it “enrolls a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve” (6.1), and that with respect to faculty composition it successfully “addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity of race, gender, and ethnicity” (5.4).

Finally, as with most institutions, Wheaton College found its plans to be affected by the global financial downturn, delaying its intentions to construct a new science center and address key needs in the areas of residence halls, faculty salaries, and student financial aid. We ask that the College provide us an update in the 2014 interim report on the institution's success in “implementing the results of its planning” (2.3) in these areas.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2019 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. Scheduling the comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2019 returns Wheaton College 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 Wheaton College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Dr. Joanne V. Creighton, 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 of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Thomas J.

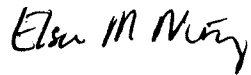
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Hollister. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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.

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

Sincerely,



Elsa M. Nuñez

EMN/slo

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Thomas J. Hollister  
Visiting Team