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June 15, 2012

Dr. Donald J. Farish
President
Roger Williams University
One Old Ferry Road
Bristol, RI 02809-2921

Dear President Farish:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 19, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by Roger Williams University and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by Roger Williams University be accepted;

that the progress report scheduled for Fall, 2013 be confirmed;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall, 2016 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall, 2016 evaluation give emphasis to the institution’s success in:

1. continuing to strengthen the role of faculty in shared governance;

2. clarifying enrollment goals and the target student population for the institution’s College Unbound program;

3. meeting enrollment goals for online programs and engaging full-time faculty in the support of these programs;

4. clarifying the institution’s standards for faculty scholarship and promotion.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The fifth-year interim report submitted by Roger Williams University was accepted because it responded to concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of March 23, 2007, April 20, 2010 and June 9, 2011, and it also addressed each of the eleven standards.
Roger Williams University (RWU) submitted a candid and comprehensive fifth-year interim report which describes significant changes in leadership, including a new President, six of the ten members of his Cabinet, and seven of the 13 members of the Dean’s Council. The institution has strengthened the Board with clearly formulated by-laws outlining processes for the election of officers, succession planning, and diversification of committee leadership. A conflict of interest policy was also developed. The College Unbound program has received significant national recognition for innovation and has evolved from serving residential traditional aged students to targeting non-residential adult learners. We are pleased to learn that student success has been significant with retention rates for the first two years at 81%, and a graduation rate of 70% for the first cohort completing the program in Spring, 2012.

The data provided in the fifth-year interim report indicates that the institution is in substantial compliance with the Standards for Accreditation, and the E&S and Data First forms indicate sufficient attention to the assessment of student learning as well as systematic program reviews.

As specified in our letter of June 9, 2011, the progress report requested for consideration in Fall, 2013 will enable Roger Williams University to provide further evidence of its ongoing efforts to strengthen Board governance.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2016 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 Organization and Governance, The Academic Program, Faculty and Students.

The University’s interim report acknowledges that “a commitment to shared governance requires a constant and ongoing dialogue.” We are particularly interested in how this pertains to the institution’s efforts with faculty in this regard. As part of the self-study prepared for the Fall 2016 comprehensive evaluation, we look forward to learning of the institution’s success with engaging faculty in shared governance, as guided by our standard on Organization and Governance:

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)

The effectiveness of the institution’s organizational structure and system of governance is improved through periodic and systematic review. (3.15)

We understand that the pilot College Unbound program will be presented to the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee this spring (2012) for approval as a permanent academic program. However, as the program has evolved, the target student population has changed from recent high school graduates to adult learners, and enrollment, which was originally limited to 10 students, has grown to 25 in the most recent cohort. As part of the next self-study, we ask that the University provide an update about the status of the College Unbound program, with particular attention to the intended student population and enrollment goals, in accordance with 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)

We appreciate the information supplied by Roger Williams University about enrollment in its distance education programs. However, the report included no discussion regarding enrollment goals for these programs or how full-time faculty are engaged in supporting these programs, as requested in our letter of April 20, 2010. As part of the self-study prepared for the 2016 comprehensive evaluation, we would appreciate information in this regard, on The Academic Program, and Faculty and Students (cited above) as guided by our standards:

Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through distance or correspondence education, or through continuing education, evening or week-end divisions are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. They receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality. (4.40)

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation with methods to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is periodically and systematically assessed using adequate and reliable procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty collectively and individually endeavor to fulfill their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task. (5.18)

The report submitted by the University highlights a faculty focus on scholarship and creative activities and indicates that the most recent contract contains over 20 pages addressing the faculty review process and the criteria for faculty evaluation. However, the report also acknowledges the need for a higher level of scholarship for those who teach in graduate programs. The next self-study will provide the institution the opportunity to address its efforts here including how implementation of the faculty contract has contributed to success with these matters. Relevant here is our standard on Faculty:

Faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of faculty appointments, performance, and retention. The evaluative criteria reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of faculty, e.g., teaching, advising, assessment, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation applying to both full- and part-time faculty, in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process. (5.11)

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Roger Williams University 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. Richard Bready. 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

MJM/sjp

cc: Mr. Richard Bready

Enclosure