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April 24, 2018

Dr. Protik K. Majumder
Interim President/Barclay Jermain Professor of Natural Philosophy
Williams College
PO Box 687
Williamstown, MA 01267

Dear President Majumder:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 2, 2018, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Williams College:

that Williams College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2022;

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

1. developing a comprehensive and integrated approach to strategic planning with attention to strengthening the use of data to inform planning and decision-making;
2. establishing a comprehensive approach to assessing student learning outcomes at the institutional level and in the General Education program;
3. diversifying its faculty and academic staff and assuring appropriate resources are available to support its increasingly diverse student body;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2027.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

We join the visiting team in congratulating Williams College (Williams) for submitting an excellent self-study that documents the College's many strengths and highlights its accomplishments over the last decade. Noteworthy is the College's active and engaged Board of Trustees, accomplished faculty and staff who are deeply committed to student learning, and diverse and highly motivated student body. Consistently high graduation rates of 94% to 96% and the growth in Williams' financial assets to over \$3.5 billion over the last ten years are especially impressive. As Williams prepares to welcome a new president, we support the judgment of the College that this is an opportune "moment in time" to reflect on the institution's mission and goals and evaluate the challenges and opportunities presented by a world that is "changing at a different frequency" than Williams. As an extraordinary institution that has built upon its long history as a distinguished liberal arts institution, Williams College is well positioned to continue achieving its mission as it "thinks seriously about its future."

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 College is asked, in Fall 2022, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Educational Effectiveness*; *Students*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

We understand from the visiting team that, while Williams engages in robust decentralized planning activities, the College has not yet established a comprehensive strategic plan, institutional data are not systematically used to inform planning, and decisions are typically made by individual departments or "sectors." We therefore appreciate the institution's insight that, once the new president is on board, the opportunity will be ripe for Williams to evaluate its approach to strategic planning and decision-making. Accordingly, we look forward, in the interim report submitted for consideration in Fall 2022, to receiving information about this matter as evidence that "[t]he institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness" (2.2). Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* provides this additional guidance:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

While we note with approval that Williams has made great strides in assessing student learning outcomes, particularly at the course and program levels, we also recognize that the College has not yet established a comprehensive approach to systematically assess student learning outcomes at an institutional level or in the General Education program. We are therefore encouraged to learn that Williams has convened groups to discuss the assessment of general education skills and competencies, demonstrating the institution's commitment to strengthening its assessment practices. We ask that the Fall 2022 interim report update the Commission on its progress in this area as informed by our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*:

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).

Finally, we note that Williams is planning for the pending retirement of 100 faculty members, and we concur that this is a “transitional moment” in the institution’s history. In addition to hiring faculty who will play a strong role in the College’s evolving academic enterprise, Williams plans to be intentional in its efforts to select faculty members who reflect the diversity of its student population, “bring more diverse voices to campus,” and demonstrate a “special balance of teacher/scholar/citizen.” We further support the observation from the College’s self-study that as its student body becomes more diverse “along many dimensions,” Williams will need to assure it has “appropriate institutional structures in place to support all students.” We look forward, in the Fall 2022 interim report, to learning of the institution’s success in these matters, consistent with our standards on *Students and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:

The institution 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 educational goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success (5.7).

The institution ... addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff (6.5).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2027 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 Williams College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Dukes Love, Provost and Professor of Economics, and Robert Zimmer, 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. Michael Eisenson. The institution is free to release information 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.

Dr. Protik K. Majumder
April 24, 2018
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David P. Angel".

David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Michael Eisenson
Visiting Team