



February 1, 2023

Dr. Maud S. Mandel  
President  
Williams College  
880 Main Street  
Williamstown, MA 01267

Dear President Mandel:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Williams College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Williams College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2027 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 evaluation give continued emphasis to two of the items specified for attention in the interim report, namely 1) advancing institutional data capabilities and making strategic use of data, and 2) establishing a comprehensive approach to assessing student learning outcomes at the institutional level, as well as the institution's success in:

1. implementing its key academic initiatives and co-curricular learning goals.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Williams College (Williams) was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of April 24, 2018 and December 15, 2020, and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Williams College for its detailed, thoughtful interim report. We note with favor the completion of the College's strategic plan in September 2021, which was the result of a comprehensive and inclusive process that included "students, faculty, staff, alumni, local community members, and peer institutions." The Commission is also gratified to learn of Williams' continued progress in "diversifying its faculty and academic staff in terms of racial and ethnic diversity" and its plans to have "each unit on campus develop its own

diversity, equity, and inclusion plans.” We appreciate that, after a review of the College’s faculty committee structure, the faculty voted to disband or sunset a number of legacy committees. Recent curricular revisions include the change from a Writing Intensive graduation requirement to a Writing Skills requirement, moving Psychology from Division II to Division III, and reconfiguring the Asian Studies department. Also noteworthy are the College’s effort to create an “all-grant financial aid program” for students, the first in the nation, and its expanded effort to support faculty development.

The Commission further commends Williams College for its significant progress in assessing student learning and success. We are pleased to acknowledge the College’s pilot writing assessment initiative and the valuable conversations it generated among faculty. The Commission understands that the student learning strategic planning working groups engaged in a comprehensive and “holistic examination” of student learning, which led to the identification of strategic goals and strategies including: encourage intellectual breadth and risk-taking; position all students for academic success; and support faculty and staff in their roles as educators. Lastly, we appreciate the efforts of the Diversity Action Research Team which “uses data to better understand emerging issues of diversity and inclusion.”

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. The Commission asks that, as part of the Fall 2027 self-study, Williams give emphasis to its continued success in addressing two of the matters specified for attention in the interim report, namely 1) advancing institutional data capabilities and making strategic use of data, and 2) establishing a comprehensive approach to assessing student learning outcomes at the institutional level. The Commission appreciates, as noted above, the College’s progress in implementing its strategic plan and understands that Williams “still [has] a long way to go in terms of systematically collecting, verifying, and understanding data necessary to enhance institutional effectiveness.” We also understand that Williams’ assessment efforts are ongoing, and we look forward to learning of the College’s success in moving to a “more coordinated approach” for institutional learning outcomes assessment.

In addition, the Commission asks that one other matter be given emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation. This item is related to our standard on *The Academic Program* and *Students*.

We understand that three key strategic academic initiatives emerged from Williams’ strategic planning process: technology and the liberal arts, the future of the arts, and global Williams; each of these areas is expected to have a “long-term impact on the curriculum.” The Commission is gratified to learn that Williams will continue its efforts to “streamline, coordinate, and revitalize co-curricular and extracurricular student programming,” focusing on well-being, residential education, and student success and academic engagement. We look forward to learning, through the self-study prepared in advanced of the Fall 2027 comprehensive evaluation, of Williams College’s success in these endeavors. We are guided here by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Students*:

The institution’s academic programs are consistent with and serve to fulfill its mission and purposes. The institution works systematically and effectively to plan, provide, oversee, evaluate, improve, and assure the academic quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded (*The Academic Program*, Statement of the Standard).

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus,

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at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Williams College and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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 Liz Robinson. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Carey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Russell Carey

RC/sjp

cc: Liz Robinson

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions