

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID P. ANGEL, Chair (2018)
Clark University

DAVID QUIGLEY, Vice Chair (2018)
Boston College

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2017)
Trustee Member, Concord, NH

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2017)
Thomas College

THOMAS CHRISTOPHER GREENE (2017)
Vermont College of Fine Arts

MARY ELLEN JUKOSKI (2017)
Three Rivers Community College

PETER J. LANGER (2017)
University of Massachusetts Boston

DAVID L. LEVINSON (2017)
Norwalk Community College

PATRICIA MAGUIRE MESERVEY (2017)
Salem State University

G. TIMOTHY BOWMAN (2018)
Harvard University

THOMAS L. G. DWYER (2018)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2018)
Haydenville, MA

CATHRAEL KAZIN (2018)
Southern New Hampshire University

KAREN L. MUNCASTER (2018)
Brandeis University

CHRISTINE ORTIZ (2018)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JON S. OXMAN (2018)
Auburn, ME

JACQUELINE D. PETERSON (2018)
College of the Holy Cross

ROBERT L. PURA (2018)
Greenfield Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2018)
Lebanese American University

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2018)
Providence College

HARRY EMMANUEL DUMAY (2019)
Saint Anselm College

JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)
Groton, CT

STEPHEN JOHN HODGES (2019)
Hult International Business School

COLEEN C. PANTALONE (2019)
Northeastern University

MARIKO SILVER (2019)
Bennington College

GEORGE W. TETLER (2019)
Worcester, MA

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

Senior Vice President of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrien@neasc.org

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

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

Vice President of the Commission
TALA KHUDAIRI
tkhudairi@neasc.org

January 12, 2017

Mr. David S. Wolk
President
Castleton University
62 Alumni Drive
Castleton, VT 05735

Dear President Wolk:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2016, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Castleton University and voted to take the following action:

that the interim report submitted by Castleton University be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2021 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2021 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. implementing its online programs with emphasis on achieving enrollment and financial goals and ensuring academic quality;
2. assessing student success and achievement and using results to improve educational effectiveness in its undergraduate and graduate programs;
3. achieving its strategic initiatives with attention to establishing long-term entrepreneurial ventures with the City of Rutland.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim report submitted by Castleton University was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of June 28, 2012, May 14, 2014, and November 16, 2015, and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Castleton University (CU) for submitting a well-written and cogent interim report that highlights the institution's emphasis on intellectual and personal growth of students with a commitment to supporting and improving the region's communities, schools, organizations, businesses, and environment. Notable is Castleton's progress in implementing its strategic plan and making positive progress toward increasing enrollment, improving retention and graduation rates, creating additional housing, and expanding entrepreneurial programming and collaboration with the community. Specifically, we note with approval that CU increased its overall retention rate from one that was "chronically mired in the 68-70% range" to 71%, and first-year to second-year retention rates reached 75.3% in Fall 2016, an improvement of 5.9% over Fall 2013. In addition, 91% of recent graduates are currently employed and 30% have enrolled in an advanced degree program. The President's Initiative on Inclusive Excellence that promotes an environment where "all constituents of the University feel valued, respected, and celebrated" is noteworthy, as is the institution's commitment to relationship-based education that encourages a mix of face-to-face engagement with the use of technology as a support. The report assures that student services and library and information resources are sufficient to support programs, and we further appreciate learning that "with the ongoing expansion of the University's employment of distance-based teaching methods, anticipatory upgrades of technology remain an essential institutional priority in terms of resource distribution."

The Commission also commends Castleton University for its well-written reflective essay that provides an overview of the University's philosophy of education and emphasizes the institution's commitment to civic engagement, respecting differences, and encouraging creative and critical thinking. The essay documents the variety of ways in which the University assesses student learning, including standardized tests and national surveys. We are pleased to learn that the results of CIRP and NSSE surveys validate the University's claim that "it exerts a transformative influence beyond national averages," and retention and graduation rates exceed the rates of peer institutions and "outpace" national averages. We also appreciate the University's candid acknowledgment that, although CU's AY2016 six-year graduation rate of 50.3% is higher than the national average for peer institutions and is an improvement over the AY2015 rate of 48%, there is still work to be done to improve in this area. Finally, the Commission is pleased to note that the University uses the results of its assessment activities to inform decision-making and continuous improvement. For example, CU determined through its assessment process that students use synthetic thinking to make meaningful connections about their General Education learning experience; however, they are less adept at connecting their major, General Education, and co-curricular learning "with the level of depth and sophistication to which [the University] had aspired for them." Accordingly, CU has implemented a three-phase integrative learning initiative that will be implemented over a three-year period. Phase I entails establishing institutional learning outcomes, designing curricular and co-curricular strategies for strengthening integrative learning, and establishing an approach to assessment, a process that will be completed during the AY2017 academic year. Phase II and Phase III "will refine assessment measures and curricular efforts over the two succeeding years."

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2021 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 three matters related to our standards on *Students*, *The Academic Program*, *Institutional Resources*, *Educational Effectiveness*, *Planning and Evaluation*, and *Mission and Purposes*.

According to the interim report, since implementing its three distance-based degree programs (B.A.S. in Career and Technical Education; M.A. in Arts Administration; and M.S. in Athletic Leadership) in 2015, the University has met or exceeded enrollment projections in two of the programs (Arts Administration and Athletic Leadership). While CU expected that some non-tuition-paying graduate assistants would enroll in the Athletic Leadership program, an

unexpected number of “regular” non-tuition paying employees also enrolled in the program, resulting in a revenue shortfall. CU anticipates that it will continue to achieve its enrollment projections in the Athletic Leadership program, and “the bulk of new inquiries and applicants will be from tuition-generating individuals.” We also understand that the University is no longer admitting students to the B.A.S. in Career and Technical Education – a program that was developed at the request of superintendents and state education leaders – due to a low market demand and “unfortunately weak enrollments.” In an effort to boost enrollment in the future, Castleton plans to expand its distance-based graduate-level offerings to “catch the next wave of online innovation at its curl;” however, the University will also “conduct [its] own market research” before committing resources to the development of new programs. We note with approval that protocols are in place to ensure quality in online programming: faculty develop online courses using the policies and procedures that are in place at the University; all faculty members assigned to teach online courses must complete a “Castleton-developed training;” and the University “has worked to prepare its infrastructure and support mechanisms for distance-based delivery of courses.” The self-study submitted in advance of the Fall 2021 comprehensive evaluation will provide Castleton University an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in implementing online programs with emphasis on achieving enrollment and financial goals and assuring academic quality 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” (Statement of the Standard: *Students*). Our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Institutional Resources* are also relevant here:

Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered (4.5).

The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. Additions and deletions of programs are consistent with institutional mission and capacity, faculty expertise, student needs, and the availability of sufficient resources required for the development and improvement of academic programs. The institution allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives (4.7).

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution’s 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 (7.6).

We understand that assessment of student learning at Castleton University is guided by system-wide efforts with regularly scheduled reviews as outlined in Vermont State Colleges Program Review and Continuous Improvement Process. As the University candidly acknowledges in its report, while all programs are required to demonstrate student success in meeting published learning outcomes, assessment at the program level “varies in vitality and applicability across departments.” In addition, while CU has undertaken a comprehensive approach to assessment in an effort to improve the manner in which undergraduate students synthesize learning, the University also recognizes that more work is needed in this area. Further, we note that offering programs at the master’s-level is a relatively new endeavor for the University, and we appreciate that CU “looks forward to making these programs even stronger.” Accordingly, the Fall 2021 self-study will provide CU an opportunity to apprise the Commission of its continued success in

assessing student success and achievement and using results to improve educational effectiveness in its undergraduate and graduate programs. Our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness* will inform this section of the report:

Graduate degree programs are designed to give students a mastery of a complex field of study or professional area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements, in relevant official publications, and in the learning outcomes of graduates. Learning objectives reflect the high level of complexity, specialization, and generalization inherent in advanced academic study (4.20).

The institution's graduate programs have cohesive curricula and require scholarly and professional activities designed to advance the student substantially beyond the educational accomplishments of a baccalaureate degree program. The demands made by the institution's graduate programs on students' intellectual and creative capacities are also significantly greater than those expected at the undergraduate level; graduate programs build upon and challenge students beyond the levels of knowledge and competence acquired at the undergraduate level. The institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs assesses the relationship and interdependence of the two levels and utilizes the results for improvement (4.24).

The institution demonstrates its effectiveness by ensuring satisfactory levels of student achievement on mission-appropriate student outcomes. Based on verifiable information, the institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and improvement, resource allocation, and to inform the public about the institution. Student achievement is at a level appropriate for the degree awarded (Statement of the Standard: *Educational Effectiveness*).

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).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

We understand through the report that, in support of Castleton's mission and strategic initiatives, the University plans to continue to grow its "presence in and value to the City of Rutland." Most recently, the resettlement of Syrian refugees is providing opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to volunteer in the Rutland Welcomes efforts, and "as resettlement becomes a reality," the University anticipates there will be opportunities for students to participate in internships and civic engagement activities and for faculty to "play vital leadership roles" in general support activities. We also note the University's success with its "residential venture" in the City of Rutland, and we understand that CU will continue to "look for other avenues of positive impact in Rutland County." If these ventures prove to be financially viable, CU anticipates that one or more of them "might also grow into an ongoing presence." We ask that the self-study submitted in Fall 2021 include an update on the University's success in achieving its strategic initiatives with attention to establishing long-term entrepreneurial ventures with the City of Rutland as evidence that "[t]he institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5). Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Mission and Purposes* are also pertinent here:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

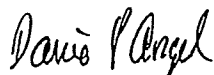
The institution's purposes are concrete and realistic and further define its educational and other dimensions, including scholarship, research, and public service. Consistent with its mission, the institution endeavors to enhance the communities it serves (1.3).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Castleton 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 Ms. Martha O'Connor. 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 Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Martha O'Connor



COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

3 Burlington Woods, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Voice: (781) 425 7785 Fax: (781) 425 1001 Web: <https://cihe.neasc.org>

Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions

The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and by the Commission.

1. Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation Following Commission Action

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts from these materials.

While the Commission does not release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

While the Commission does not initiate public release of information on actions of show cause or deferral, if such information is released by the institution in question or is otherwise made public, the Commission will respond to related inquiries and may issue a public statement.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action publicly correcting any misleading information it may have disseminated, including but not limited to the accreditation status of the institution, the contents of evaluation reports, and the Commission actions with respect to the institution. Should it fail to do so, the Commission, acting through its President, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information. This may include release of notification letters sent by the Commission to the institution, and/or a press release.

2. Published Statement on Accredited Status

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by Commission indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the Commission is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org

The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org**

Accreditation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the Commission” or “this degree is accredited by the Commission” are incorrect and should not be used.

3. **Published Statement on Candidate Status**

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:

_____ College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. Candidacy for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with the Commission which indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation.

Inquiries regarding the status of an institution affiliated with the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the college or university. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org**

4. **Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions by the Commission**

The Commission publishes the following information about member and candidate institutions on its website:

- Name of the institution
- Accreditation status (member or candidate)
- Address
- Phone and fax numbers
- CEO name and title
- Degree levels awarded
- Dates of initial accreditation (or candidacy), last review and next review
- Locations of off-campus instructional sites

The Commission may also publish on its website a public statement about an action taken regarding a member or candidate institution when further information about the action and the Commission's reasons for taking the action would be helpful to members of the public.

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about affiliated institutions:

- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation;
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission;
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation;
- In cases of adverse action (denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on probation), the Commission's reasons for that status and, in the case of probation, its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement. The institution will also be offered the opportunity to make its official comment; if the institution does make an official comment, the comment will be made available by the Commission.

- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been withdrawn, the date of, and reasons for, withdrawal.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies and procedures of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

The Commission does not generally provide information about deferments of action on candidate or accreditation status, or show-cause orders. However, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries and may issue its own statement.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, and withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation) are communicated when the decision becomes final (i.e., when the institution does not appeal or when the appeals process is completed and the decision is upheld). The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before the decision is final or the appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

5. Public Disclosure of Institutional Actions

Within 30 days after the action on accreditation status is taken, the Commission will notify the Secretary of Education, New England state higher education officers, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the candidacy or accreditation of an institution

Place an institution on probation

Approve substantive change (e.g., moving to a higher degree level)

A decision by an accredited or candidate institution to voluntarily withdraw from affiliation with the Commission.

November 1998

September 2001

April 2010

September 2011

Editorial Changes, March 2014

April 2015