December 5, 2018

Dr. Lucille A. Jordan
President
Nashua Community College
505 Amherst Street
Nashua, NH 03063

Dear President Jordan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 21, 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Nashua Community College:

that Nashua Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Fall 2020 that gives emphasis to the institution’s success in:

1) achieving its enrollment, retention, and financial goals;

2) staffing the position of Chief Financial Officer;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2023;

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

1) developing its strategic plan and ensuring that the institution’s academic, financial, and master plans are appropriately integrated;

2) assessing student learning outcomes and using results to make improvements with attention to its general education and co-curricular programs and activities;

3) evaluating the effectiveness of its student success initiatives;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2028.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.
Nashua Community College is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation.

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending Nashua Community College (NCC) for its comprehensive and candid self-study that documents the institution’s numerous strengths and accomplishments over the last decade. We are particularly gratified to learn that the College is realizing its mission (revised most recently in 2015) with the support of an engaged Board of Trustees, a dedicated and experienced president, and deeply committed and qualified faculty and staff. The institution’s well-established multi-year strategic planning process, improvements to the institution’s governance structures (e.g., reorganization of its academic department structure around the Guided Pathways framework), and the significant strides the College has made in the collection and use of data for institutional evaluation and improvement are especially noteworthy. With the institution’s continued dedication and strategic attention to addressing its challenges and improving student success through data-informed planning, decision-making, and resource allocation, Nashua Community College is well-positioned to “provide quality academically rigorous, higher-education programs focused on the diverse needs of students and the community” well into the future.

The two items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2020 are related to our standards on Students and Institutional Resources.

We share the concern of the visiting team that to achieve the goals projected in NCC’s financial plans, the College must meet the ambitious projections it has set for increasing enrollment (by 2%) and retention rates (from 55% to 65%) over the next fiscal year. While enrollment data generated by the system office at the time of the team visit indicated a positive trend in credits generated for the Fall 2018 semester compared to the Fall 2017 semester, the projected 2% enrollment increase appears to be inconsistent with NCC’s forthright recognition that the institution is “facing a new reality of lower enrollment” as recent new-student enrollment trends illustrate: 494 students in FY2015; 447 students in FY2016; and 416 students in FY2017. This decline in enrollment combined with the year-over-year fluctuation in retention rates (58% in FY2015; 64% in FY2016; and 55% in FY2017) reinforces the Commission’s impression that increasing net assets by $1.4 million by 2022 may prove to be a challenge. Therefore, we ask that the report submitted for consideration in Fall 2020 include an update on the institution’s success in achieving its enrollment, retention, and financial goals as evidence that NCC “sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve” (Students: Statement of the Standard). We are further informed here by our standards on Students and Institutional Resources:

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution’s academic program, including specifically recruited populations. 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 (5.6).

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 is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).
The institution’s financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

At the time of the team’s visit, the position of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) was vacant. Although NCC contracts the services of a competent financial consultant who works closely with the College’s very capable president, we concur with the observation of the team that filling this position with a permanent CFO is consistent with the College’s plans and the Commission’s standards. We therefore note favorably that NCC is currently searching for a well-qualified candidate to fill this role, although we also understand that the College may consider “sharing” a permanently assigned CFO with another institution. The Fall 2020 report will provide NCC an opportunity to assure the Commission that it “has sufficient professionally qualified finance staff, led by a chief financial officer whose primary responsibility to the institution is reflected in the organizational chart” (7.11).

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 Spring 2023, to report on three matters related to our standards on Planning and Evaluation, Institutional Resources, and Educational Effectiveness.

We understand that NCC’s current strategic plan ends in 2019 and the College is in the process of developing a new plan that will be informed by objectives set forth in the institution’s financial, academic, and master plans. We also concur with NCC’s candid recognition that to achieve its strategic goals, the College will need to explicitly link its institutional plans to its strategic priorities. As evidence that “[p]lanning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution” (2.1), we look forward, through the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2023, to receiving an update on the institution’s success in developing its strategic plan and ensuring that the institution’s academic, financial, and master plans are appropriately integrated. We remind you of our standard on Institutional Resources (cited above and below).

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).

As documented in the self-study and verified by the visiting team, NCC has made significant progress in its assessment activities over the last five years. However, while we are gratified to learn that General Education learning outcomes are assessed at the course level, according to the team report, the College has not adopted institutional learning outcomes, and a process to evaluate General Education outcomes in the aggregate as a program has not been established. Further, although NCC has implemented Tracdat, a process that enables students to plan, track, and report their learning experiences, we note from the visiting team’s report that the College has yet to develop learning outcomes for its co-curricular activities, including advising and student engagement. As confirmation of NCC’s continued success in strengthening its “process of understanding what and how students are learning [and focusing] on the course, competency, program, and institutional level” (8.3), we welcome further information, in Spring 2023, on the institution’s continued success in this area. Our standard on Educational Effectiveness should inform this section of the report:
The institution with stated goals for students’ co-curricular learning systematically assesses their achievement (8.4).

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 institution uses additional quantitative measures of success, such as further education, civic participation, religious formation, and others, as appropriate to its mission, to understand the success of its recent graduates. Information from students and former students is regularly considered (8.7).

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).

Finally, NCC’s commitment to achieving its enrollment and retention goals is evidenced by the many initiatives the College has implemented to more effectively measure and improve student success. For instance, to promote educational “Best Practices” through data analysis, the College has established partnerships with the Education Advisory Board and Complete College America; EAB Navigate, a software package designed to promote student success, was recently adopted; and “Guided Pathways for Success,” a set of initiatives that comprises co-requisite remediation, program maps, and improved onboarding and advising protocols, was implemented to enhance student engagement. We look forward to being apprised, through the Spring 2023 interim report, of the College’s success in evaluating the effectiveness of its student success initiatives to affirm to the Commission that, “[b]ased 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, [and that t]his information is used for planning and improvement, resource allocation, and to inform the public about the institution” (Educational Effectiveness: Statement of the Standard). The sections of our standard on Educational Effectiveness cited above are also relevant here.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2028 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 Nashua Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, 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 and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Jeremy Hitchcock and Ross Gittell. 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.

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

Sincerely,

[Signature]

David Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Jeremy Hitchcock
    Ross Gittell
    Visiting team