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November 4, 2015

Mr. Thomas C. Galligan, Jr.
President
Colby-Sawyer College
541 Main Street
New London, NH 03257-7835

Dear President Galligan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 25, 2015, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Colby-Sawyer College:

that Colby-Sawyer College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Fall 2018 that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

1. implementing and achieving the goals of its new strategic plan;
2. assessing the effectiveness of its distance education programs;
3. enhancing the College's financial stability by reducing its financial aid discount rate and achieving its fundraising goals;
4. continuing to address the College's deferred maintenance needs,
5. successfully transitioning to new institutional leadership;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2020;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2025.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

The Commission commends Colby-Sawyer College for its preparation of a thoughtful, evidence-based self-study that candidly describes the institution's

progress over the past ten years, a decade of “great change” for the institution. We are pleased to learn the College’s distinctive mission that offers students a “transformative learning experience” by integrating the liberal arts with professional preparation is widely understood and permeates all of the institution’s programs and services. With 31% of respondents employed by their internship organizations upon graduation, the College’s Harrington Center for Career and Academic Advising has become a model for other institutions. We further note with approval that Colby-Sawyer has made the assessment of student learning an institutional priority and, as observed by the team, has successfully developed a “robust” culture of assessment as demonstrated by a faculty knowledgeable and involved in the theory and practice of assessment, an Assessment Committee and Teaching Excellence Center to provide guidance and support, and the presentation of senior capstone projects at the annual Susan Colby Colgate Scholars’ Symposium. The institution’s improved retention rate – from 65% of the 2009 cohort to 77.9% of the 2014 cohort – is impressive, as is the institution’s commitment to the diversity of its student body of which 20% are students of color. We recognize the implementation of a new Liberal Education program in Fall 2014 and the successful and smooth transition to a 4x4 course model that included a rigorous review of all courses as part of the conversion process. Also of note is the establishment of the College’s first school, the School of Health Professions, and the strong ties the institution has developed with the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. We share the judgment of the visiting team that through the engagement of the College’s Board, the leadership of a respected president and administrative team, and the “remarkable” commitment of its faculty and staff, the institution is well positioned to continue its own institutional development and to achieve its goal to attract even more students who make Colby-Sawyer their first choice.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2018 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Financial Resources*, *Physical and Technological Resources*, and *Organization and Governance*.

We note with favor that Colby-Sawyer has perfected a data-driven approach to planning and evaluation that includes the use of Key Performance Indicators to help monitor progress in achieving its strategic goals through an annual planning process. As we understand that the development of a new strategic plan is underway, we look forward to learning, in Fall 2018, of the institution’s success in implementing this new plan and achieving its goals. Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* offers this guidance:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.3).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.4).

We commend the institution for its faculty-developed online programs and its efforts to ensure that these are comparable with the institution’s on-ground programs, and are aware that the College now offers four distance education programs. We understand that Colby-Sawyer plans to grow a “stable” number of programs to full capacity that, with the exception of the R.N. to B.S. in Nursing program, will primarily serve on-campus students. In keeping with our standard on *The Academic Program*, we ask that the Fall 2018 report give emphasis to the institution’s assessment of the effectiveness of its distance education programs.

Courses and programs offered for credit ... through distance or correspondence education ... 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 (4.40).

The Commission notes that enrollment at Colby-Sawyer College over the past several years has been “volatile” – from 1,258 FTE in FY2012 to 1,391 FTE in FY2014 and projected to fall back to 1,140 FTE in FY2017. Particularly given that the institution remains dependent on tuition revenue (exceeding 90%), we share the visiting team’s concern that while resources have been adequate, the College has “increasingly stressed unrestricted net assets and operating revenue.” We are aware that one contributing factor, as recognized by the College, is the “unsustainable” increase in the institutional aid discount rate which grew from 60% in FY2012 to 77.2% in FY2014. As a result, net revenue per FTE has decreased resulting in a FY2014 net operating loss of \$582,000. We therefore are pleased to learn that in addition to setting “ambitious” goals to increase yield and to grow student headcount to the “optimal goal” of 1,500 students, the College is reviewing its financial aid policies with the target of lowering its discount rate to 65% by FY2020. In addition, we are encouraged that \$23 million has been raised to date toward the College’s comprehensive capital campaign goal of \$60 million. As informed by our standard on *Financial Resources*, the Fall 2018 report will enable the institution to demonstrate its continuing progress to enhance its financial stability by reducing its discount rate and achieving its fundraising goals.

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 (9.3).

The institution and its governing board regularly and systematically review the effectiveness of the institution’s financial aid policy and practices in advancing the institution’s mission and helping to ensure that the institution enrolls and supports the student body it seeks to serve (9.5).

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 (9.9).

The significant planning undertaken by Colby-Sawyer to address its facilities needs in support of the College’s enrollment goal is laudable, to include the development of an Institutional Space Analysis Report and Campus Master Plan. We particularly note that a total of over \$17 million has been invested in facility renovations, maintenance, and new equipment over the past four years, and commend the College for its prudent decision to “rethink” the art building project so that it could be done without borrowing thereby not increasing its debt service. Through the Fall 2018 report, we welcome further information about the College’s continued efforts to address its deferred maintenance needs as specified in our standard on *Physical and Technological Resources*.

The institution undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning. It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs (8.4).

We concur with the visiting team's observation that a "... primary strength of the College lies in its talented team, dedicated teachers and staff committed to students, and a creative and equally committed leadership group" and that "[m]aintaining the quality and commitment of personnel is crucial." Given the recent change in the board chair and the pending departure of both the president and provost, we ask that the Fall 2018 report provide an update on the College's successful transition to new institutional leadership. Our standard on *Organization and Governance* is relevant here:

... The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution's official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles (3.1).

The chief executive officer through an appropriate administrative structure effectively manages the institution so as to fulfill its purposes and objectives and establishes the means to assess the effectiveness of the institution ... The chief executive officer assures that the institution employs staff sufficient in role, number, and qualifications appropriate to the institution's mission, size, and scope (3.8).

The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators is responsible for the quality of the academic program (3.10).

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.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2025 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 Colby-Sawyer College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Deborah Taylor, Academic Vice President and Dean of Faculty, and John Bassett, 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. Thomas Csatari. 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.

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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,



Patricia Maguire Meservey

PMM/sjp

cc: Mr. Thomas Csatari
Visiting team

Enclosure