



DAVID GUIDLEY, Chair (2021)
Boston College

GEORGE W. TETLER, Vice Chair (2022)
Worcester, MA

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2020)
Trustee Member, Concord, NH

RUSSELL CAREY (2020)
Brown University

FRANCESCO C. CESAREO (2020)
Assumption College

F. JAVIER CEVALLOS (2020)
Framingham State University

RICK DANIELS (2020)
Cohasset, MA

DONALD O. DEHAYES (2020)
University of Rhode Island

PAM Y. EDDINGER (2020)
Bunker Hill Community College

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2020)
Thomas College

KIMBERLY M. GOFF-CREWS (2020)
Yale University

MARTIN J. HOWARD (2020)
Boston University

SUSAN D. HJARD (2020)
Manchester Community College (NH)

JEFFREY S. SOLOMON (2020)
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

ELEANOR BAKER (2021)
Falmouth, ME

KATHERINE BERGERON (2021)
Connecticut College

PETER L. EBB (2021)
Trustee Member, Boston, MA

GREGORY W. FOWLER (2021)
Southern New Hampshire University

DENNIS M. HAWMO (2021)
Wheaton College

ELLEN L. KENNEDY (2021)
Babson Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2021)
Lebanese American University

JOHN M. SWANEY (2021)
Providence College

ELAINE COLLINS (2022)
Northern Vermont University

DAISY EDGCO DE FILIPPIS (2022)
Naugatuck Valley Community College

HARRY E. DUMAY (2022)
College of Our Lady of the Ems

DANIEL J. MAY (2022)
University of New Haven

P. MICHAEL LAHAN (2022)
Newich, CT

President of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTONCHAM
bbrittoncham@neche.org

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

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

Vice President of the Commission
LAURA M. GAMBINO
lgambino@neche.org

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

November 15, 2019

Dr. Lisa Larson
President
Eastern Maine Community College
354 Hogan Road
Bangor, ME 04401-4280

Dear President Larson:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 19, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Eastern Maine Community College:

that Eastern Maine Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the substantive change visit to assess implementation of the AMC Food and Lodging Certificate program scheduled for Spring 2020 be confirmed;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2022 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. evaluating the impact of declining enrollment on institutional resources with emphasis on staffing, faculty, scheduled maintenance, and IT security;
2. developing and implementing a transparent decision-making process with emphasis on strengthening the channels of communication within the institution;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2024;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College give emphasis to its continued success in developing and implementing a comprehensive approach to assessing educational effectiveness at the course, program, and institutional levels and using the results to make improvements;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2029.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Eastern Maine Community 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 commending Eastern Maine Community College (EMCC) for submitting a thorough and informative self-study that documents the institution's progress and accomplishments over the last decade. Completion of the institution's 2011-2016 Strategic Plan and engaging in a campus-wide, participatory process to develop its 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, for example, is evidence of the College's "culture of planning," and we are especially encouraged to note that there is a clearly defined system of governance at the College and that EMCC receives strong support from the Maine Community College System. We are further impressed with the institution's commitment to and focused attention on the support and success of its students. Noteworthy is the hiring of a psychologist to provide therapy and crisis intervention on campus for the growing number of students in need of mental health support and developing relationships with other community organizations to provide additional resources for students; the implementation of the TRIO program, which we understand from the team has been very successful in improving retention rates; and the recent implementation of the Jenzabar Early Alert System. In addition, although there is no Career Services office at EMCC, the College hosts career fairs, the most recent of which attracted 90 employers; students are encouraged to reach out to faculty and staff members for career guidance; and EMCC has partnered with the Bangor Career Center to provide some career counseling support. Since EMCC began offering online courses in 2012, enrollment has increased to 343 students in AY2019; enrollment in dual enrollment courses has also grown significantly, from 366 students in AY2017 to 501 students in AY2019. Finally, we are heartened to learn from the visiting team that, in spite of existing and projected budget reductions, the College demonstrates overall good fiscal planning and management and organization of its financial resources. We share the judgment of the visiting team that, with the continued support of its Board of Trustees, combined with the institution's capable leadership and faculty and staff who are competent and dedicated to the College, Eastern Maine Community College is well positioned to build upon its strengths and address the areas that need focused attention as the College community builds a successful future.

The Commission confirms the Spring 2020 substantive change visit to assess implementation of the AMC Food and Lodging Certificate program. We refer you to our letter of January 22, 2019, which specifies matters to receive attention in the report prepared for the evaluation.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2022 are related to our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; The Academic Program; Institutional Resources; Planning and Evaluation; Organization and Governance; and Educational Effectiveness*.

We understand from the Data First Forms included with the self-study that enrollment at EMCC has dropped significantly in recent years, from 1,708 FTE in AY2016 to 1,467 FTE in AY2019, which has had a negative impact on the institution's operating budget. This year alone the College experienced a 14.85% decline in tuition revenues and a 16.3% decline in housing and food services revenues, and, at the time of the team's visit, the shortfall in revenues for FY2019 was estimated to be \$1.1 million. While, as noted positively above, we recognize that EMCC is exercising commendable fiscal responsibility, we are also concerned that these shortages could severely affect operational areas critical to the support of the institution's mission. For example, not filling vacant positions (e.g., Chief Information Officer; Planning and Research Associate; Department Chairs in Fire Science, Career Studies, and Business and Hospitality Management; Accountant II; Coordinator of Accessibility Services; Dean of Information Technology and Communications) could have an adverse impact on the integrity of academic programs and assessment efforts and also jeopardize the institution's ability to retain staff and faculty, especially in high-demand fields. In addition, an IT audit conducted in July 2018 identified "the current IT environment which relates to the infrastructure, support matrix, security posture and policy" as an area of high risk and, at the time of the visit, this matter had not been addressed.

We understand, however, that state funding for the upgrading of IT systems at EMCC is “earmarked” in FY2019 and FY2020. The team further noted that the maintenance of the main campus and other instructional sites has been limited by funding, and planning and funding budgeted for deferred maintenance has been reallocated, in whole or in part, to address other campus priorities. We therefore ask that, in Spring 2022, EMCC update the Commission on its success in addressing these matters as evidence that “[t]here are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes” (6.2). Our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Institutional Resources* are also relevant here:

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 has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

Facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements to ensure access, safety, security, and a healthy environment with consideration for environmental and ecological concerns (7.23).

As EMCC candidly recognizes in its self-study, members of the campus community have expressed concerns about a lack of transparency in the decision-making processes at the institution, and strains on institutional capacity have, at times, hampered communication between College leadership and faculty and staff. We understand that during the development of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, the campus community “asked that a transparent decision-making process be developed as part of the Academic Program Initiative [that will include] criteria used to determine program closure, suspension, or reduction, as well as a guarantee that all stakeholders be involved and informed throughout the process.” As evidence that EMCC “has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning” (2.5), we look forward, in Spring 2022, to receiving information pertaining to the College’s success in developing and implementing a transparent decision-making process with emphasis on strengthening the channels of communication within the institution. Our standard on *Organization and Governance* will further inform this portion of the report:

The institution’s organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution’s system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

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 2024, to report on a matter related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Educational Effectiveness*, and *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*.

We are encouraged to learn that the assessment of student-learning is an institutional priority at EMCC, and the College has implemented a “systematic framework” that includes protocols for assessing course and program learning outcomes, assessment tools, and discipline-relevant goals. We also note that the analysis of program learning outcomes and the subsequent implementation of changes to complete the assessment cycle is still in the early stages, and we concur with the College’s realistic acknowledgment that there is still much work to be done in this area. For example: consistent follow-through on course and program assessment will be essential to ensure the overall quality of the academic programing; EMCC’s plans to establish a cross-functional team to assess “Essential Learning Outcomes” have yet to be implemented; and there are opportunities to strengthen the assessment of concurrent enrollment courses. The institution further documents in its self-study that “assessment of online courses still presents a problem; in order to be confident in its online program, the College must develop guidelines for the quality assurance of online learning. This includes ensuring that online course offerings are of comparable rigor to face-to-face coursework.” We recognize these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the College’s sustained attention over time; hence, we will appreciate receiving information, in the Spring 2024 interim report, about EMCC’s continued success in developing and implementing a comprehensive approach to assessing educational effectiveness at the course, program, and institutional levels and using the results to make improvements. We are informed here by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation; The Academic Program; Educational Effectiveness; and Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*:

The institution’s principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.6).

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).

The institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students (8.10).

The institution publishes statements of its goals for students’ education and the success of students in achieving those goals. Information on student success includes rates of retention and graduation and other measures of student success appropriate to

institutional mission. If applicable, recent information on passage rates for licensure examinations is also published (9.24).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2029 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.

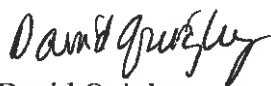
The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Eastern Maine Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Robert Pura, team chair, during its deliberations.

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 state system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Ms. Jean Ginn Marvin and Mr. David Daigler. 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,



David Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Jean Ginn Marvin
Mr. David Daigler
Visiting Team