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November 14, 2016

Dr. James Dlugos
President
Saint Joseph's College of Maine
278 Whites Bridge Road
Standish, ME 04084-5263

Dear President Dlugos:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 22, 2016, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Saint Joseph's College of Maine and voted to take the following action:

that the interim report submitted by Saint Joseph's College of Maine be accepted;

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

1. continuing to develop an integrated academic structure;
2. implementing its plans to assess student learning and using the results for improvement;
3. implementing its multi-year budget and integrating its financial and strategic planning;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2021 be confirmed.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim report submitted by Saint Joseph's College of Maine was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of June 15, 2012 and April 28, 2014 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The interim report submitted by Saint Joseph's College of Maine (SJCM) documents the institution's many accomplishments over the last five years. We note favorably the College's significant progress in implementing the goals and initiatives of its strategic plan, "Sustaining the Promise," and commend

the College for its identification of metrics and the use of a “cascading format” to evaluate progress. The Commission is pleased to learn that organizational changes have been undertaken to unify the online and on-campus academic communities under the leadership of the Vice President-Chief Learning Officer, Dean of Undergraduate Studies, and Graduate Program Chair. Integration of online and on-campus programs has also been facilitated through collaborative committee work across modalities. We understand that, following an April 2013 retreat facilitated by an outside consultant, the Board of Trustees has adopted several “best practices” in board governance, recruited nine new board members, and reorganized its committee structure. We are pleased to learn that the Strategic Directions Committee is charged with evaluating the effectiveness of the Board, and that the Board recently approved the College’s updated By-Laws and Faculty Handbook. We further commend SJCM on its on-campus full-time enrollment growth over the past four years, from 945 to 1,077, and for achieving positive operating results for the past three years despite decreases in revenue. We understand that the decrease in overall full-time enrollment, from 1,794 to 1,515, was due to the declining trend in on-line enrollments.

We note favorably that the mission and core values of Saint Joseph’s College of Maine are integrated in many aspects of administration and campus life. The Commission is gratified to learn of the appointment of an Associate Vice President and Chief Information Officer and of the improvements and investments in classroom and campus technology and facilities including upgrades to the library, learning management and student information systems, renovations to the physical plant, and the relocation of many student services offices to a more spacious, centrally situated venue.

We are pleased to learn from the College’s reflective essay of the institution’s commitment to the assessment of student learning and the work undertaken at the course, program, and institutional level. The Commission notes with favor the recent approval of the new core curriculum and institutional learning outcomes by the Faculty Senate, and the progress made in monitoring educational effectiveness by the Educational Standards Committee. We are gratified to learn that the College uses the results of course program evaluations, National Survey of Student Engagement, and Noel Levitz student satisfaction survey to inform institutional planning, as well as curricular and co-curricular improvements, including the development of the College’s first immersion program for Environmental Science in Fall 2014 and the establishment of an Office of Student Success. The Commission notes with favor that, in response to faculty and student feedback, the College implemented improvements to student support services and advising practices and revised the First Year Experience and Peer Mentor programs. We are also gratified to learn that the College has set long-term goals to increase its first-to-second year retention rate to 95% and its four-year graduation rate to 75%.

The three items the institution is asked to report on in the Spring 2018 report are related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *The Academic Program*, *Educational Effectiveness*, *Planning and Evaluation*, and *Institutional Resources*.

As noted above, Saint Joseph’s College of Maine has made good progress to integrate what previously had been “two distinct entities” into a single academic structure and to achieve the goals articulated for the integration: “creating a culture of collaboration, creativity, and appropriately integrated decision-making.” We are gratified to learn that integration continues to “build momentum,” and we look forward to learning, through the Spring 2018 report, of the College’s ongoing success in this regard. We remind you of our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *The Academic Program*:

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. The institution’s organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and

wherever offered. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.14).

Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through dual enrollment, through distance or correspondence education, or through continuing education, evening, or weekend divisions 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. Faculty and students receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality (4.46).

The Commission is pleased to learn that the assessment of student learning will continue to remain a “critical focus” for Saint Joseph’s College of Maine, and we take favorable note of the plans outlined by the institution at the end of its reflective essay to further its efforts in this regard. These include an analysis of the qualitative impact of peer mentors through the First Year Experience program; the use of self-assessment protocols and external reviews in annual academic program reviews; the use of the Gradleaders Outcomes Survey by the Career Development Office; and implementation of a multi-pronged approach to student persistence for Sebago Lake (on-ground) programs that will encompass financial aid, technology, student life, academic programs, and career development. The Spring 2018 report will enable the institution to provide evidence of its success in implementing these plans and using assessment results for improvement. We are guided here by our standards on *Educational Effectiveness and Planning and Evaluation*:

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution’s academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

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 has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation (2.8).

The Commission is pleased to learn of SJCM’s development of a ten-year budget forecast “embedded” in its Strategic Plan to guide financial planning and enhance financial stability. The Spring 2018 report will afford the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on the continuing implementation of its multi-year financial plan and the integration of its financial and strategic planning. We ask that the Spring 2018 report include a copy of the multi-year financial plan along with an explanation of the assumptions underlying the projections included in the plan. This section of the report should be informed by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation and Institutional Resources*:

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 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 (2.4).

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).

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 Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Saint Joseph's College of Maine 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 Mr. Matthew Monaghan. 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: Mr. Matthew Monaghan