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June 15, 2012

Mr. Kenneth M. Lemanski, J.D.  
President  
Saint Joseph's College of Maine  
278 White's Bridge Road  
Standish, ME 04084-5263

Dear President Lemanski:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on April 20, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Saint Joseph's College of Maine:

that Saint Joseph's College of Maine be continued in accreditation;

that inclusion of the Bachelor of Fine Arts and the Master's of Accountancy degree programs within the institution's accreditation be confirmed;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2014 that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

1. implementing initiatives of the new strategic plan;
2. continuing to develop an integrated academic structure, with clear lines of responsibility, that provides effective oversight of all academic programs however delivered;
3. continuing to develop the governing board, ensuring the expertise and experience needed to fulfill its responsibilities;

that the Commission will, at the time of its review of the Spring 2014 report, make a determination about the College's request for general approval for distance education programming;

that the institution be reminded that, until the Commission has granted general approval for distance education, plans to offer additional distance education programs need to be submitted to the Commission for approval, consistent with our Policy on Substantive Change;

that the College submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall 2016;

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

1. developing a multi-year financial plan, linked to the strategic plan, that addresses the institution's financial challenges;
2. using the results of assessment efforts for improvement;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2021.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Saint Joseph's College of Maine is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Saint Joseph's College of Maine for its preparation of a thoughtful self-study that candidly describes the institution's progress over the past decade. We concur with the visiting team that the College's deliberate mission-centric approach and commitment to the "Mercy Tradition," reflected in its strategic plan, academic programs, and student services, focus the institution "clearly upon its students' success and well-being." We are pleased to learn of the progress made to develop a culture of assessment and note with approval the work of the Assessment Management Team and the development of an Institutional Learning Assessment Plan, based on ten institutional learning outcomes, that received unanimous approval from the Faculty Senate. In addition, prudent financial management and board oversight, which resulted in endowment growth from \$4 million to \$12 million, are noteworthy, as is the College's investment in online programs as a way to diversify its revenue streams and to help stabilize the budget. As Saint Joseph's College of Maine celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we concur with the visiting team that the dedication of the trustees, senior administration, faculty, students, and staff position it well to "realize the promise" and to continue its institutional development.

The Commission confirmed inclusion of the Bachelor of Fine Arts and the Master's of Accountancy degree programs within the institution's accreditation because the self-study was responsive to the concerns raised in our letter of February 10, 2010, and provided evidence that the new academic programs are being implemented by the College in a manner consistent with Commission standards and policies. While the Fall 2011 enrollment numbers were small – five students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree program and seventeen in the online Master's of Accountancy program – we understand that the College anticipates growth in both programs.

The three items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2014 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Organization and Governance*, and *The Academic Program*.

We are gratified to learn of the inclusive process undertaken to develop the College's current strategic plan for 2010-2015 and note the impressive participation of the faculty. We understand that along with a timeline, strategies and action steps have been established for the plan's five goals, each of which falls under the responsibility of a vice president, and note with approval the development of the Planning and Assessment Committee led by the board chair to monitor progress of the plan's implementation. We also recognize that the College's leadership is in a period of transition with the expectation that a new president, who will bring "fresh and realistic thinking to the existing plan," will be in place by Fall 2012. The Spring 2014 report will provide an opportunity for the institution to update the Commission on progress made to achieve its strategic planning goals as evidence that "[t]he institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.4).

We recognize that the College has two distinct educational divisions – one comprised of the College’s campus-based undergraduate programs and the other, Graduate and Professional Studies (GPS), that includes all online programs (undergraduate and graduate) and other nontraditional programs. We are pleased to learn of the progress made to integrate the two divisions more closely, for example, by including GPS Academic Program Directors as full voting members of the College’s faculty senate. However, we share the team’s judgment that additional efforts are still needed for the institution to become one college. In addition, although the team was assured that “all purely academic matters” do fall within the purview of the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA), we note that both the VPAA and the Dean of Graduate and Professional Studies report to the Executive Vice President who has responsibility for the management and marketing of the College’s online programs. From the team’s report, we are also aware that it is likely, with new presidential leadership, that “there may be changes in administrative responsibilities and reporting relationships.” Consistent with our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *The Academic Program*, in the Spring 2014 report, we continue to seek assurance that the College’s academic structure is integrated, with clear lines of responsibility, and provides effective oversight of all academic programs however delivered:

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 week-end programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, and academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution (3.10).

Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through distance or correspondence education, or through continuing education, evening or week-end 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. They 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 (4.40).

Along with the team, the Commission takes favorable note of the board’s clear understanding of the College’s mission and purposes and of its recognition that the institution is now in a period of transition. We are encouraged to learn that endowment growth is a board priority and that a \$10 million capital campaign is scheduled to launch in the fall. To support this goal, as well as implementation of the institution’s strategic plan, we note with favor that the addition of trustees who would bring to the board expertise in fundraising, financial acumen, and/or expertise in turnaround situations is being considered. We welcome further information in the Spring 2014 report to ensure that “[t]he composition of the board ... reflects the areas of competence needed to fulfill its responsibilities” (3.2).

The Commission deferred action on Saint Joseph’s College of Maine’s request for general approval to offer distance education programming within the scope of its mission pending its review of the Spring 2014 report, in particular evidence of an integrated academic structure with clear lines of responsibility that provides effective oversight of all academic programs however delivered.

We remind the College that until the Commission has granted general approval for distance education, plans to offer additional programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be earned

online need to be submitted to the Commission for approval, consistent with our Policy on Substantive Change.

Commission policy requires a fifth-year interim 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 fifth-year reports, the College is asked to report on two matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Financial Resources*, and *The Academic Program*.

While we are encouraged that the institution has developed a five-year budget projection, we understand from the team that it does not yet include the strategies and goals of the strategic plan for 2010-2015 intended to achieve financial stability. In addition, as acknowledged by the College, it is unclear whether some of the assumptions made, including tuition and room and board increases of 4-5% per year, are realistic in the current economy. We ask that the Fall 2016 report give emphasis to the institution's success in developing a multi-year financial plan, linked to the strategic plan, that addresses the institution's financial challenges. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Financial Resources* are relevant here:

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'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. The governing board reviews and approves the institution's financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting (9.3).

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 (9.9).

Finally, as noted above, the Commission commends the institution for its collaborative effort to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to assessment. We understand that all programs – both on-campus and online – have identified direct and indirect measures to gather evidence of student learning. We are also pleased to learn of the recent appointment of a Director of Institutional Research who will assist with the analysis of survey results and assessment data as part of the Institutional Learning Assessment Plan. In keeping with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program*, the Fall 2016 report will afford the institution an opportunity to demonstrate its use of assessment results to improve its academic programs and experiences provided for students.

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 resource allocation and to inform the public about the institution (2.7).

Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

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.

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.

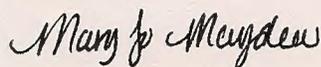
The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Saint Joseph's College of Maine and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Claire Bowen, Chairwoman of the Board, Randall Krieg, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Holly Braley, Controller, and Julia McNamara, 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 Claire Bowen. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo Maydew

MJM/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Claire Bowen  
Visiting Team