



Founded in 1885

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID P. ANGEL, Chair (2018)
Clark University

DAVID QUIGLEY, Vice Chair (2018)
Boston College

G. TIMOTHY BOWMAN (2018)
Harvard University

THOMAS L. G. DWYER (2018)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2018)
Haydenville, MA

KAREN L. MUNCASTER (2018)
Brandeis University

CHRISTINE ORTIZ (2018)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JON S. OXMAN (2018)
Auburn, ME

ROBERT L. PURA (2018)
Greenfield Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2018)
Lebanese American University

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2018)
Providence College

HARRY E. DUMAY (2019)
College of Our Lady of the Elms

JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)
Groton, CT

COLEEN C. PANTALONE (2019)
Northeastern University

MARIKO SILVER (2019)
Bennington College

GEORGE W. TETLER (2019)
Worcester, MA

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

RUSSELL CAREY (2020)
Brown University

FRANCESCO C. CESAREO (2020)
Assumption College

RICK DANIELS (2020)
Cohasset, MA

DONALD H. 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

THOMAS C. GREENE (2020)
Vermont College of Fine Arts

MARTIN J. HOWARD (2020)
Boston University

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

PETER J. LANGER (2020)
University of Massachusetts Boston

JEFFREY S. SOLOMON (2020)
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

President of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neasc.org

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

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

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

Vice President of the Commission
TALA KHUDAIRI
tkhudairi@neasc.org

January 17, 2018

Dr. Joanne E. Berger-Sweeney
President
Trinity College
Williams Memorial Hall
300 Summit Street
Hartford, CT 06106-3100



Dear President Berger-Sweeney:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 16, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Trinity College:

that Trinity College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2019 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. continuing to strengthen its financial position with emphasis on reducing operating budget deficits;
2. developing and implementing its deferred maintenance plan;
3. achieving its enrollment goals;
4. implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of its credit-hour policy;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2022;

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

1. evaluating the effectiveness of its internal governance structures;
2. integrating planning, assessment, and budgeting across the institution;
3. implementing its strategic initiatives related to building sustainable partnerships within the City of Hartford;

4. implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its Graduate Studies strategic plan;
that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2027.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

We commend Trinity College for its preparation of a thorough and candid self-study that details the many ways in which the College is achieving its mission, offering programs and services appropriate to its mission, and serving its students well. We are especially gratified to learn that the Board of Trustees adopted a new mission statement in October 2016 and the *Bicentennial Strategic Plan* in October 2017. The visiting team verified that dedicated and well-qualified faculty oversee the quality of academic programs through strong faculty committees and, while Trinity does not offer online programs within its curriculum, the College has evaluated its experience with its new edX courses and identified pedagogical lessons and novel learning opportunities for undergraduates, reinforcing the College's mission. While retention rates at Trinity are impressive – ranging from 91% in FY2014 to 88% in FY2016 – and six-year graduation rates have remained constant – 84% to 86% between FY2014 and FY2017 – we note with favor that the College has hired a new Vice President for Enrollment and Student Success who will oversee the development and implementation of strategies to improve retention rates and to achieve Trinity's FY2018 graduation rate goal of 88%. Finally, we concur with the judgment of the visiting team that Trinity College is a strong and admirable institution, and we further join the team in congratulating Trinity College on its upcoming bicentennial. Under the leadership of a dynamic and talented President, an enthusiastic and committed Board of Trustees, and a well-qualified faculty and staff who are devoted to serving the needs of students, the College is well positioned to “*prepare students to be bold, independent thinkers who lead transformative lives*” well into the future.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2019 are related to our standards on *Institutional Resources, Students, and The Academic Program*.

Although Trinity College balanced its FY2017 and FY2018 budgets, we understand that the College is forecasting operating deficits from FY2019 to FY2022, with the greatest deficit (\$5.7 million) projected in FY2020. We recognize that these operating deficits are “part of a longer term financial plan,” and that the College is working closely with its Board and credit agencies to keep them informed of “strategies and progress” in this area. We further note that while Trinity projected a \$1.3 million deficit in FY2023 at the time of the team visit, the College has since re-evaluated its fundraising projections and revised its future forecast to show “a positive bottom line of \$1.4 million” for that year. In keeping with our standard on *Institutional Resources*, the report submitted for consideration in Spring 2019 will provide Trinity an opportunity to apprise the Commission of its success in continuing to strengthen its financial position with emphasis on reducing operating budget deficits:

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'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).

As documented in the self-study, deferred maintenance at Trinity College is estimated at \$125.0 million; however, a recently published Facilities and Environmental Sustainability Committee Report puts that number closer to \$135.0 million. As Trinity candidly acknowledges, the \$5.8 million currently earmarked for plant renewal initiatives is insufficient, and we are heartened to learn through the team report that the division of Finance and Operations is drafting a deferred maintenance plan. We look forward, through the report submitted in Spring 2019, to learning of the institution's success in developing and implementing its deferred maintenance plan as evidence that Trinity College "devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources" (7.21).

We understand that, in recent years, Trinity College's primary focus has been on strengthening academic programming and building the institution's reputation, resulting in Trinity becoming "a smaller more selective institution." According to the visiting team, the College now takes a more collaborative and informed approach to setting enrollment targets that account for improving student qualifications while simultaneously achieving institutional financial needs, a key strategic initiative. According to the data forms included in the self-study, Trinity projects enrollment growth of about 2% in FY2018, and the College has hired an experienced Vice President of Enrollment and Student Success who will oversee the institution's recruitment efforts. As evidence that "the institution 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 look forward, in the Spring 2019 report, to receiving information about the institution's success in achieving its enrollment goals.

In accordance with Trinity College's recently revised credit-hour policy, undergraduate courses now comprise about 157 hours of engaged academic time. We also appreciate learning that the College is in the process of communicating the updated policy to the campus community. For example, the policy has been published on Trinity's website and in appropriate print publications, and we understand that faculty guidelines "including proposed language for specifying learning outcomes, course activities, and expectations of time commitment in syllabi" were implemented in Fall 2017. The Spring 2019 report will afford the College an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of its credit-hour policy as evidence that "[c]redit awards are consistent with Commission policy and the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning" (4.34).

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 2022, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*, *Planning and Evaluation*, *Institutional Resources*, and *The Academic Program*

According to the visiting team, changes in senior staff at Trinity College, particularly in positions responsible for the flow of communication between the Board and faculty governance, have resulted in some "logistical and information challenges." We therefore note positively that the Dean of the Faculty is working with the Faculty Secretary to enhance collaboration with the Board. We further note with favor that the Planning and Budget Council is addressing the concerns of staff members regarding participation in the governance process. We look forward, in the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2022, to receiving an update on the College's success in evaluating the effectiveness of its internal governance structures as informed by our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The institution places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.15).

Through its system of board and internal governance, the institution ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations (3.17).

We are heartened to learn that Trinity College's *Bicentennial Strategic Plan* includes a framework to align planning and budgeting, and that attracting "great" students and providing them with equitable access to the full range of learning opportunities available through the College is among the institution's top priorities. We are further gratified to learn that Trinity views the process of implementing the strategic plan as an opportunity to support "regular habits of planning and metric-driven evaluation" at the institution. Accordingly, the Spring 2022 interim report will provide Trinity an opportunity to provide evidence that "[t]he results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans" (2.3). Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources* (cited above) are also relevant here:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

It was the observation of the visiting team that there is an apparent disconnect between the Community Learning Initiative and the Office of Community Service and Civic Engagement in Student Affairs, and we concur with the team's judgment that greater coordination between these departments would allow Trinity College to leverage existing partnerships and enhance community learning opportunities in the City of Hartford. We therefore note positively that engaging with the City of Hartford in a productive and meaningful way is a priority outlined in Trinity College's *Bicentennial Strategic Plan*, and we ask that the Spring 2022 interim report include an update on this matter to demonstrate that the College "has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5).

Finally, we understand that, under the leadership of a newly appointed dean, Trinity College has established systematic evaluation protocols for all facets of its graduate-level programming and a strategic plan for Graduate Studies will be finalized "in the next few months." We are especially gratified to learn that the goals and objectives outlined in this plan will align with the College's overarching strategic initiatives. For example, the College has opted to reduce its reliance on adjunct faculty in graduate-level programs and focus more intentionally on rigor and quality; learning goals and assessment plans are under development to ensure differentiated expectations for courses cross-listed at the undergraduate and graduate levels; recordkeeping and workflow practices are being revamped to ensure they align with both ongoing planning and College

reporting requirements; and Graduate Studies will be integrated into the institution's financial plans. We look forward, in the Spring 2022 interim report, to being apprised of the College's success in implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its Graduate Studies strategic plan as further evidence that Trinity College "... undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives" (4.7).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2027 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 Trinity College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you; Tim Cresswell, Vice President of Academic Affairs; Dan Hitchell, Vice President of Finance and CFO; and A. Clayton Spencer, 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 Ms. Cornelia P. Thornburgh. 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 P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Cornelia P. Thornburgh
Visiting Team



COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

3 Burlington Woods, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Voice: (781) 425 7785 Fax: (781) 425 1001 Web: <https://cihe.neasc.org>

Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions

The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and by the Commission.

1. **Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation Following Commission Action**

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts from these materials.

While the Commission does not ordinarily release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

The Commission will release information on actions of show cause or deferral. If such information is also released by the institution in question or is otherwise made public, the Commission will respond to related inquiries and may issue revised public statement.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action publicly correcting any misleading information it may have disseminated, including but not limited to the accreditation status of the institution, the contents of evaluation reports, and the Commission actions with respect to the institution. Should it fail to do so in an immediate and timely way, the Commission, acting through its President, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information. This may include release of notification letters sent by the Commission to the institution, and/or a press release.

2. Published Statement on Accredited Status

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by Commission indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the Commission is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org

The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

_____ College (University) is accredited by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org**

Accreditation by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the Commission” or “this degree is accredited by the Commission” are incorrect and should not be used.

3. **Published Statement on Candidate Status**

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:

_____ College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. Candidacy for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with the Commission which indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation.

Inquiries regarding the status of an institution affiliated with the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the college or university. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514
(781) 425 7785
E-Mail: cihe@neasc.org**

4. **Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions by the Commission**

The Commission publishes the following information about member and candidate institutions on its website:

- Name of the institution
- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted
- Accreditation status (member or candidate)
- Address
- Phone and fax numbers
- CEO name and title
- Degree levels awarded
- Dates of initial accreditation (or candidacy), last review and next review
- Locations of off-campus instructional sites
- The basis for Commission action affecting candidacy or accreditation status
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission
- The date and nature of any show-cause for denial of candidacy or accreditation, probation, or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation status
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation
- In cases of adverse action (denial or withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on probation), the Commission's reasons for that status and, in the case of probation, its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement. The institution will also be offered the opportunity to make its official comment; if the institution does make

an official comment, the comment will be made available by the Commission

- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been withdrawn, the date of, and reasons for, withdrawal.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies and procedures of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

The Commission may also publish on its website a public statement about an action taken regarding a member or candidate institution when further information about the action and the Commission's reasons for taking the action would be helpful to members of the public.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, and withdrawal of candidacy or accreditation) are communicated when the decision becomes final (i.e., when the institution does not appeal or when the appeals process is completed and the decision is upheld). The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before the decision is final or the appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

5. Public Disclosure of Institutional Actions

Within 30 days after the action on accreditation status is taken, the Commission will notify the Secretary of Education, New England state higher education officers, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. The Commission will also make public on its website the basis for these decisions. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or withdraw the candidacy or accreditation of an institution

Place an institution on probation

Approve substantive change (e.g., moving to a higher degree level)

A decision by an accredited or candidate institution to voluntarily withdraw from affiliation with the Commission.

Per federal regulation, within 60 days of a final decision to take an adverse action (probation or withdrawal of accreditation), the Commission will submit a copy of the final decision letter to the Secretary of Education. The Secretary will make the letter public.

November 1998

September 2001

April 2010

September 2011

Editorial Changes, March 2014

April 2015

April 2017