



June 27, 2022

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

Dear President Berger-Sweeney:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 21, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Trinity College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Trinity College be accepted;

that Trinity College be granted limited approval (up to 50% of degree/credit-bearing certificate programs) for distance education;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2027 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2027 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. continuing to achieve its enrollment goals;
2. continuing to strengthen its financial position with emphasis on completing its capital campaign, implementing its five-year capital plan, increasing unrestricted resources, and addressing deferred maintenance;
3. implementing and assessing the new Trinity Plus curriculum and continuing to strengthen its assessment efforts;
4. achieving its goals for diversifying the faculty.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Trinity College (Trinity) was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of January 17, 2018, March 27, 2019, and January 15, 2021 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Trinity College for its thoughtful and detailed interim report which “documents significant developments” and “plans for improvement” at the College. The Commission takes favorable note of the “tremendous strides” Trinity has made in addressing the three goals of its strategic plan, “Summit”: designing a relevant liberal arts education, connecting to the Hartford region and building on Trinity’s historic past. We acknowledge that the Center for Hartford Engagement and Research was created to “coordinate the efforts of five community engagement programs” at the institution. The Commission further notes with approval the transformation of Trinity’s Graduate Studies Program that includes improvements in leadership and staffing, governance, student success, and budgeting and enrollment management. We appreciate the update provided by the College about its credit-hour policy and the steps taken to ensure all courses are in alignment with the policy. Lastly, we are pleased to learn of the institution’s new “Trinity Plus” curriculum which “combines the core liberal arts curriculum with experiential learning.”

The Commission is also gratified by the “noteworthy” progress made by Trinity College in the area of assessment of student learning and success. Direct assessment of quantitative literacy and writing proficiency takes place annually, and findings have led to improving the “support for students and faculty across the college” in these areas. We are pleased to learn that, following an increase in retention rates, graduation rates have also risen, from 81% for the Fall 2011 cohort to 85% for the Fall 2015 cohort. We further appreciate that, six months following commencement, 87% of the 2020 graduating class were employed full-time. The Commission notes Trinity’s commitment to “take academic assessment to a new level” and to “broaden and deepen the student success ecosystem” moving forward.

Trinity College is granted limited approval (up to 50% of degree/credit-bearing certificate programs) for distance education because the Commission finds the proposed activity to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies. We note with favor Trinity College’s efforts to ensure that “distance learning is consistent with [its] core academic mission as a liberal arts college” and understand that the institution’s emphasis in distance education courses has been on “direct instruction.” The Commission appreciates that Trinity is exploring summer and January term distance learning courses as well as “offering flipped classrooms.” Lastly, we are pleased to learn that Trinity will continue to “strengthen the infrastructure of support” for distance education, including faculty development, educational technology support, engaged learning, and assessment and evaluation.

Given Trinity College’s limited approval for distance education, we remind you that any plans to offer new programs 50% or more online need to be submitted to the Commission for approval prior to implementation, in keeping with the Commission’s Policy on Substantive Change.

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. The items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are four matters related to our standards on *Students; Institutional Resources; The Academic Program; Educational Effectiveness; and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

While the Commission understands that Trinity College has “met its enrollment and budget goals each year,” we are concerned that annual enrollment, as noted in the Data First Forms, has decreased from 2,372 in FY2020 to 2,158 in FY2022. We do appreciate

the College's "commitment to supporting recruitment and enrollment efforts" and therefore look forward to learning, in the Spring 2027 self-study, of Trinity's continued success in achieving its "goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve" (*Students*, Statement of the Standard).

The Commission notes with favor Trinity College's efforts to strengthen its financial position. We understand that, since 2016 total net assets have grown from \$667.9 million to \$949.4 million, but that only \$115.5 million (12.2%) is unrestricted. The endowment has also seen "significant growth" as it reached an "all-time high" of \$783.1 million in June 2021. We appreciate that the College is in the middle of a \$500 million fundraising campaign, with \$237 million raised to date. Trinity has also developed a five-year capital plan that includes \$134 million for capital projects. We are concerned, however, that just \$50 million will be directed towards deferred maintenance needs, a much lower allocation than the 2017 estimate of \$135 million. In keeping with our standard on *Institutional Resources*, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2027 comprehensive evaluation will provide Trinity College an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in continuing to strengthen its financial position with emphasis on completing its capital campaign, implementing a five-year capital plan, increasing the institution's unrestricted resources, and addressing deferred maintenance:

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).

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 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).

As noted above, the Commission is gratified to learn of the "Trinity Plus" curriculum, which was implemented in Fall 2021. We appreciate that this new curriculum will "be at the core of academic planning" and will "involve numerous areas of ongoing improvement." The Commission concurs with the College that, as part of its ongoing assessment efforts, it "need[s] to track measures of student achievement across majors and academic programs" and "provide more distinctive evidence" of the ways Trinity fulfills its mission. We therefore welcome further information, as part of the Spring 2027 self-study, about the institution's success in implementing and assessing the new Trinity Plus Curriculum and continuing to strengthen its assessment efforts. This section of the self-study will be guided by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

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 (8.6).

The institution uses additional quantitative measures of success, such as further education, civic participation, religious formation, and others, as appropriate to its mission, to understand the success of its recent graduates. Information from students and former students is regularly considered (8.7).

The Commission notes positively Trinity College's purposeful focus on diversifying its faculty. We appreciate learning of the institution's new Special Opportunity Hiring initiative, which began in 2020 and "commits the institution to hiring 18 faculty of color over a three-year period." A DEI Fellows program was also developed to "support faculty, departments, and programs." We anticipate being apprised, through the Spring 2027 self-study, of Trinity's success in "address[ing] its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty" (6.5).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Trinity College and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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 Lisa Bisaccia. 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 Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George Tetler".

George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

cc: Lisa Bisaccia

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions