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COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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May 2, 2017

Mr. Edward D. Klonoski
President
Charter Oak State College
55 Paul J. Manafort Drive
New Britain, CT 06053-2142

Dear President Klonoski:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on March 3, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Charter Oak State College:

that Charter Oak State College be continued in accreditation;

that the Fall 2017 evaluation to assess the M.S. in Organizational Leadership program be confirmed;

that, in addition to the matters specified in our letter of March 29, 2016, the report prepared in advance of the Fall 2017 evaluation give emphasis to the College's success in assuring the sufficiency of faculty to support the program;

that a focused evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2018 and the report prepared in advance of the evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. implementing strategies, including those involving contractual arrangements, to increase enrollment;
2. assuring adequate financial resources are available to sustain plans for growth, course development, and marketing of programs;
3. developing a long-range strategic plan;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2021;

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

1. continuing to meet its enrollment goals and enhance its financial stability;

2. implementing its long-range strategic plan;
 3. strengthening the College's culture of inquiry and its assessment efforts;
- that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2026.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

The Commission commends Charter Oak State College (COSC) for its preparation of a candid self-study that provided the campus community with an opportunity to reflect on "what it has accomplished" and that serves as a "great foundation" for its strategic planning process. Along with the visiting team, we note with favor the College's many strengths, including its clear mission and commitment to serve "diverse adult learners and alternative pathways;" its "adept" use of data to make institutional improvements and maintain affordability; its "student centered, patient and flexible" philosophy of advising; and its "nimble" cost structure. COSC offers all its courses online, and its technology infrastructure has been enhanced through initiatives undertaken by the recently established Connecticut State Colleges and University system office information division. We are gratified to learn of the success of the Health Information Major, and the B.A. in Cybersecurity program, which enrolled 64 students in May 2016. We concur with the visiting team that COSC can be "justifiably proud" of its "mature, robust, multifaceted, and effective" prior learning assessment program. With the support of "committed and competent" faculty and staff, and the leadership of a respected president and provost, Charter Oak State College is well positioned to build on its success, meet future challenges, and continue to "provide adults with access to higher education in a way that overcomes barriers of time and geography."

The Commission confirms the Fall 2017 evaluation to assess implementation of the Master of Science in Organizational Leadership (MSOL) program. In addition to the matters specified in our letter of March 29, 2016, we ask that the report prepared for the Fall 2017 evaluation give emphasis to a matter related to our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

We are pleased to learn that the program director for the MSOL began work on June 3, 2016 and that three faculty have been hired to develop the first four courses in the program. As noted in the report of the visiting team, however, COSC's challenges "associated with building an academic infrastructure to foster program continuity and greater faculty engagement at the program level" have persisted and increased as the number of academic programs has grown. The Fall 2017 evaluation will afford the College an opportunity to demonstrate that, with respect to the Master of Science in Organizational Leadership program, there are "an adequate number of faculty and academic staff ... 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).

The items the institution is asked to address in the report prepared in advance of the focused evaluation scheduled for Fall 2018 are related to our standards on *Students, Institutional Resources, and Planning and Evaluation*.

As acknowledged in both the self-study and the report of the visiting team, Charter Oak State College has been challenged in the past to achieve its enrollment goals, even as the institution recognizes that enrollment is a key to its financial viability. While we appreciate that enrollment fluctuations are often out of the College's control, we are nonetheless gratified to learn that COSC has increased its use of "analytic tools" to better predict enrollment and retention and

intends to develop a new enrollment and retention plan that will include outreach to new markets. We understand that the College has recently entered into a contractual arrangement with a partner to assist with recruitment and student advisement under COSC's direction. If successful, the partnership may lead to a "doubling" of the size of the College. We anticipate being apprised, in Fall 2018, of the College's success in implementing this contractual arrangement and other strategies intended to facilitate achievement of the institution's goals for enrollment and retention. We remind you of our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*:

Consistent with its mission, 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).

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

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 Commission shares the judgment of the visiting team that Charter Oak State College's resources are "strained," and that the institution is challenged to secure sufficient support to "sustain its long and short term plans for growth, course development, and marketing/branding of its programs." We are, therefore, gratified to learn that, in addition to the enrollment and retention initiatives noted above, the College has developed an ambitious plan to add "10 [academic] programs in 10 years" and intends to enhance fundraising with emphasis on scholarships and legacy giving. We look forward, through the Fall 2018 focused evaluation, to receiving evidence that the College "preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission" (7.4). Our standard on *Institutional Resources* (cited above and below) offers this additional guidance:

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 Commission concurs with the visiting team that Charter Oak State College would benefit from the development of a long-range strategic plan and that the College's Foundation could be "more extensively utilized" in this process. We note with approval that the institution has started work on a "five-year plan with ten-year aspirations" and has involved the Foundation in the planning process. We look forward to learning, in Fall 2018, of COSC's progress in engaging in planning "beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints" (2.3). Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* further notes:

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).

A copy of the procedures for the Fall 2018 focused evaluation are enclosed for your information and use.

Commission policy requires an 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 interim reports, the College is asked, in Spring 2021, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Students*, *Institutional Resources*, *Planning and Evaluation*, and *Educational Effectiveness*.

The College is asked, in the Spring 2021 interim report, to give emphasis to its continued success in achieving its enrollment goals and assuring financial stability. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the College's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the interim report. Our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*, cited above, will provide guidance for this section of the report.

The Commission also expects that, by the time of the interim report, Charter Oak State College will have moved from the development phase of strategic planning to the implementation phase. We look forward, in Spring 2021, to receiving evidence of the College's "demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5).

As acknowledged in both the report of the visiting team and the institution's self-study, Charter Oak State College "still has work to do" in academic assessment. We are gratified to learn that syllabi are being revised to link course and program outcomes more closely; this change is intended not only to enhance students' clarity about the relationship between course and program outcomes but also to facilitate assessment of student learning. The College is also seeking to make better use of its learning-readiness tool, SmarterMeasure, to determine how data reported through the tool can be used to inform retention initiatives. Finally, we understand that the director of institutional research, in conjunction with the Assessment Committee, is searching for a new mechanism with which to assess general education. We anticipate being apprised, through the Spring 2021 interim report, of the College's progress in implementing these and other initiatives intended to strengthen COSC's assessment efforts and deepen its culture of inquiry. We remind you of our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution provides clear public statements about what students are expected to gain from their education, academically and, as appropriate to the institution's mission, along other dimensions (e.g., civic engagement, religious formation, global awareness). Goals for students' education reflect the institution's mission, the level and range of degrees and certificates offered, and the general expectations of the larger academic community (8.2).

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 institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

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 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 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 scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2026 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 Charter Oak State College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Shirley Adams, Provost, and Dale Hamel, team representative, 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 Mr. Matt Fleury. 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

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Matt Fleury
Visiting Team