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Bradford College

Director of the Commission
CHARLES M. COOK
E-Mail: ccook@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
PEGGY L. MAKI
E-Mail: pmaki@neasc.org

Associate Director of the Commission
JUDITH B. WITTENBERG
E-Mail: jwittenberg@neasc.org

Interim Associate Director of the Commission
CHARLES E. COMBS
E-Mail: ccombs@neasc.org

March 28, 2000

Dr. John M. McCardell Jr.
President
Middlebury College
Old Chapel
Middlebury, VT 05753

Dear President McCardell:

It is my pleasure to inform you that at its meeting on March 3, 2000, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with regard to Middlebury College;

that Middlebury College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a fifth-year interim report in Fall, 2004;

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

1. making systematic use of information for the purposes of planning and evaluation;
2. developing and implementing a plan for assessing student learning outcomes in general education and using the results to effect improvements;
3. achieving the College's own goals for ethnic, racial, and gender diversity on the faculty and staff;
4. evaluating the effects of the Commons System and making appropriate changes;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall, 2009.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Continuation of Middlebury College's accreditation is based upon the Commission's finding that the institution's fulfillment of the *Standards for Accreditation* is highly commendable in virtually every respect. Moreover, we commend the College for the great seriousness with which it prepared for the comprehensive evaluation, and for the thoughtfulness and lucidity of its self-study report, which reflects a participatory and inclusive process of critical self-examination. The Commission is pleased to acknowledge the College's academic excellence, which places it in the forefront of nationally-recognized liberal arts colleges, and to recognize its continued commitment to growth and improvement, which has resulted in several impressive initiatives during the past decade. These include the ambitious "Peaks of Excellence" project, the Ten-Year Plan, and the Enhanced Commons System, which address general education, the strengthening of the intellectual community, the enhancement of professional development opportunities, the upgrading of technology, and the identification of goals for increased diversity of students, faculty, and staff. Such initiatives have visibly augmented the College's pre-eminence at the same time they have energized the campus community.

Commission policy requires a 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. The areas to be given emphasis in Middlebury College's fifth-year report, along with the information included in all interim reports, are matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Programs and Instruction, Faculty and Student Services*.

The many ambitious and worthy initiatives the College has undertaken in recent years have necessitated a significant investment of human and financial resources, and will continue to do so, and warrant further careful planning as well as rigorous evaluation that is grounded in the collection and analysis of appropriate information. Yet the 1999 visiting team reported that the institution "has not adequately evaluated its progress in planning and suffers from a lack of information and analysis to fully inform its planning activities." Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* specifies that an institution "systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness" (2.3) and that "the institution systematically applies information obtained through its evaluation activities to inform institutional planning, thereby enhancing institutional effectiveness" (2.5). Although the College has done some information-gathering, it has been sporadic and sometimes inconsistent, and efforts at evaluation have also been limited. Thus we look forward to learning, through the 2004 report, of the institution's continued efforts to approach data collection and evaluation so as to improve both the planning process and its results.

It goes without saying that one of the most important uses for information is in the assessment of student learning outcomes. We know that the College is aware that it has previously relied on anecdotal material in this regard and has now begun to make use of one widely-accepted assessment method, while exploring other possible approaches. Still, although a series of probable indicators have been identified, the assessment initiative at the institution is still in its early stages and the structure of the distribution requirement is such that students may not be exposed to the full range of what is meant by general education. We remind you of our standard on *Programs and Instruction* and its specification that "graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind" (4.19). Hence we anticipate hearing more about the College's success in developing and implementing a plan for analyzing learning outcomes and for using the results to effect improvements.

The institution has made commendable progress in recent years in identifying and attaining its goals for racial and gender diversity among students, faculty, and staff. There is justifiable pride in the fact that the graduating classes of the past three years have been comprised of ten percent American-born students of color and that there is also a substantial international presence in the undergraduate student body. With regard to the faculty and staff, the progress has been somewhat less notable, despite the recent appointment of two administrators with specific responsibility for diversity, largely because of the geographical location and the difficulties of finding spousal employment where opportunities are rather limited. Nevertheless, because our standard on *Faculty* asks that an institution “[address] its own goals for the achievement of diversity of race, gender, and ethnicity” (5.4), we look forward to being appraised, in the next report, of further steps the College has taken in this direction.

The Commission is aware that the recently-implemented Commons System is a major element in the College’s distinctive approach to developing a shared learning community. This splendidly fulfills our standard on *Student Services*, which specifies that:

The institution provides an environment which fosters the intellectual and personal development of its students consistent with its mission and purposes. It is sensitive to the non-academic needs of its students and recognizes that their educational experience consists of an academic component and interrelated developmental opportunities provided through a co-curricular program of student services. These services are guided by a philosophy, disseminated and reviewed on a regular basis, which is conducive to the development of a shared learning community and which prepares students to become responsible members of society (6.1).

Because we recognize that this is still a relatively new undertaking and one central to the College’s emphasis on co-curricular learning, and because it is not precisely clear how it will relate to the social, theme, and language houses, we are eager to hear about the manner in which it has been evaluated and subsequently altered appropriately.

Finally, the scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall, 2009, is consistent with commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive visit 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 its appreciation for the self-study prepared by Middlebury College and for the evaluation report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you as well as the team chair, Mr. Evan S. Dobelle, during its deliberations.

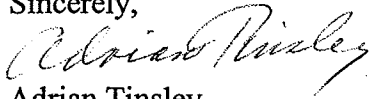
You are encouraged to share this letter and the team’s complete report with all of the College’s constituencies. It is Commission policy also to inform the chairperson of the institution’s governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Churchill G. Franklin. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

Dr. John M. McCardell Jr.
March 28, 2000
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The Commission hopes that the evaluation process 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.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Charles M. Cook, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Adrian Tinsley

AT/scf

cc: Churchill G. Franklin
Visiting Team