



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

December 7, 2017

Dr. Elaine Collins
President
Lyndon State College
Johnson State College
337 College Hill
Johnson, VT 05656-9898



Dear President Collins:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 29, 2017 the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by Johnson State College and Lyndon State College regarding their plans to merge to become Northern Vermont University and took the following action:

that the report be accepted and the plans for Johnson State College and Lyndon State College to merge to become Northern Vermont University be approved, with an effective date of September 29, 2017;

that the on-site evaluation to assess implementation of the Fine Woodworking and Furniture Design programs scheduled for Fall 2018 be confirmed;

that Johnson State College's Spring 2019 progress report be cancelled and in its place a site visit to assess initial implementation of the merger be scheduled;

that the report prepared in advance of the Spring 2019 site visit give emphasis to the institutions' success in implementing the merger with particular attention to:

1. developing an effective governance structure for Northern Vermont University that provides for the participation of constituency groups at both campuses;
2. consolidating the planning and evaluation activities of the two institutions and implementing an institution-wide approach to assessing student learning;
3. meeting enrollment goals and achieving a balanced budget that ensures sufficient staffing for Northern Vermont University's two campuses;

that, contingent on the successful completion of the merger, Johnson State College and Lyndon State College submit letters to the Commission relinquishing their accreditation as separate institutions and, upon receipt, Johnson State College's Spring 2021 interim (fifth-year) report and Fall 2025 comprehensive evaluation, and Lyndon State's Fall 2020 comprehensive evaluation be cancelled;

that Northern Vermont University undergo a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2023;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2023 evaluation give emphasis to the University's continued success in addressing the four areas specified for attention in the Spring 2019 report.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by Johnson State College and Lyndon State College was accepted and the plans for the two institutions to merge to become Northern Vermont University approved because the Commission finds the activity to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies.

As documented in its comprehensive and well-written proposal, Johnson State College and Lyndon State College have made substantial progress to identify the key issues that will need to be addressed to successfully bring the two colleges together as one institution, Northern Vermont University (NVU), with two distinct campuses – NVU-Johnson and NVU-Lyndon. We commend the institutions for their plans to develop a strategic alliance to “secure a sustainable future” by achieving administrative cost savings and increased efficiency, directing scarce resources to enhance the student experience, and strengthening the institution's competitiveness through joint marketing and recruitment. To ensure continued compliance with the Commission's standards, the Colleges established the NVU Transition Team comprised of members of both campuses that has been meeting biweekly to work on issues that need to be resolved – either before or after – NVU commences as a single institution on July 1, 2018 and enrolls its first class in Fall 2018. NVU's overall mission, approved by the Vermont State College trustees in March 2017, “build[s] on the historical strengths of each campus” and provides a guide for the transition. We appreciate the range of topics being addressed, from the adoption of a single academic calendar and pricing structure to athletics and IT infrastructure solutions, and concur that the design of a common General Education program supported by a three-year Davis Foundation Grant is “exciting.” Faculty involvement in shaping the transition is also notable as evident from the May 2017 retreat with more than 60 participants; the collaboration of the academic and administrative units of the two institutions to increase the opportunities available to NVU students is admirable.

The Commission confirms the Fall 2018 evaluation to assess Johnson State College's success in implementing its Fine Woodworking and Furniture Design programs. We refer you to our letter of March 27, 2017 that specifies matters to receive attention in the report prepared in advance of the Fall 2018 evaluation.

Given the plans of the two Colleges to merge into Northern Vermont University, Johnson State College's Spring 2019 progress report is cancelled and, in its place, a site visit to assess initial implementation of the merger is scheduled. A copy of the relevant policy and procedures is enclosed for your information.

The report prepared in advance of the Spring 2019 site visit should update the Commission to reflect actual experience in implementing the merger, with emphasis on three matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *Planning and Evaluation*; *Educational*

Effectiveness; The Academic Program; Students; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Institutional Resources.

We understand that NVU will function as a “multi-campus institution organized under a single governing board,” and recognize that continued communication and cooperation between and among the Chancellor, president, administration, and faculty will be key to the success of the proposed unification. We note with favor that the working model for faculty governance retains separate faculty assemblies at each campus and creates an “overarching” eight-member NVU faculty senate with equal representation from both NVU-Johnson and NVU-Lyndon. Designed to facilitate communication between faculty and administration, the structure was implemented in August 2017 to provide a full year to evaluate its effectiveness. As expressed in our standard on *Organization and Governance*, the Spring 2019 evaluation will enable Northern Vermont University to provide evidence that its governing structure is effective and provides for the participation of constituency groups at both campuses.

The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and sponsoring entity (if any) are clearly described in the institution’s by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution’s official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles (3.1).

The institution’s organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution’s system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

To ensure a “cohesive” approach to planning and evaluation with unified goals and initiatives, a planning model from the Society for College and University Planning that “integrates planning across all levels” has been adopted for use by Northern Vermont University. With equal participation from both campuses, development of NVU’s strategic plan is scheduled to take place during the first half of FY2018. We view positively the recommendation to dedicate resources to support institutional research by creating an NVU Office of Institutional Research, and concur that merging the separate databases that currently exist will “reap the benefits of longitudinal tracking and reporting of data.” As acknowledged by the institutions, assessment is a key area that will benefit from the collaboration and expertise of both campuses, and we are therefore pleased to learn the institutions are committed to the alignment of assessment strategies including agreement on shared learning outcomes and a common approach to the assessment of general education. We look forward to learning, through the Spring 2019 evaluation, of the successful development of consolidated planning and evaluation activities, including implementation of an institution-wide approach to assessing student learning. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Educational Effectiveness* provide this guidance:

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).

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide valid information to support institutional improvement. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods (2.6).

The institution's principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

The institution enrolling multiple student bodies, by degree level, location, modality, or other variables, develops and uses the data, evidence, and information below for each student body (8.1).

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 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).

We note with favor that the creation of Northern Vermont University is intended to "capitalize upon an improved financial situation to rebuild faculty and staff ranks." Cost savings are expected to be "imminent," including an estimated \$1.0 million from administrative consolidation. Based on modest increases in enrollment – 1.4% in Fall 2018, 2% in Fall 2019, and then no change – the consolidated budget projects a \$2.1 million deficit in FY2018 and reaching breakeven in FY2021. We are encouraged by the institutions' use of the student FTEs to faculty ratio to determine faculty needs that has resulted in the hiring of five new full-time faculty members at Johnson State College and one full-time faculty member at Lyndon State College for the coming year. The restoration of a full-time library position at Johnson State College is also notable. The Spring 2019 report will afford NVU an opportunity to report on its progress to meet its enrollment goals and achieve a balanced budget that ensures sufficient staffing at both of its campuses.

Faculty responsible for graduate programs are sufficient by credentials, experience, number, and time commitment for the successful accomplishment of program objectives and program improvement (4.22).

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).

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, 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 institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission (7.1).

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 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 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).

We understand Johnson State College and Lyndon State College expect that the "formal start of NVU operations" will be in July 2018. We ask that, when the process has been finalized and the Johnson State College and Lyndon State College are no longer separately accreditable institutions, each institution submit a letter to the Commission relinquishing its accreditation. At that time, Johnson State College's Spring 2021 interim (fifth-year) report and Fall 2025 comprehensive evaluation, and Lyndon State's Fall 2020 comprehensive evaluation will be cancelled.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation for the new institution, Northern Vermont University, in Fall 2023 is consistent with Commission policy that requires institutions granted initial accreditation to undergo a comprehensive evaluation within five years. Northern Vermont University is asked, in its Fall 2023 self-study, to give emphasis to its continued success in addressing the areas specified above for attention in the Spring 2019 report. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the University's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the self-study.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Johnson State College and Lyndon State College and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. We appreciate the cooperation of the two colleges with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

You are encouraged to share this letter with the constituencies of both institutions. 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. Martha

Dr. Elaine Collins
December 7, 2017
Page 6

O'Connor. The institutions are 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 Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Ms. Martha O'Connor