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

February 2, 2017

Dr. Joseph Bertolino
President
Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent Street
New Haven, CT 06515-0901

Dear President Bertolino:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2016, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Southern Connecticut State University, as well as the report of the visiting evaluator, and voted to take the following action:

that the interim report submitted by Southern Connecticut State University be accepted;

that the report concerning the University's off-campus instructional location in Madison, Connecticut be accepted, inclusion of the location within the institution's accreditation be confirmed, and the University's general approval for off-campus locations within the United States be confirmed;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Fall 2018 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. resolving the issues that led to the institution's being placed on provisional approval for Title IV funding by the U.S. Department of Education;

2. implementing plans to reinstate the undergraduate program review process after a planned hiatus and to address issues related to the use of faculty reassigned time;

3. achieving its goals to improve student advising and services for at-risk students;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2021 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2021 evaluation give emphasis

to the institution's continued success in addressing the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2018 report.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim report submitted by Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of June 28, 2012, May 21, 2014, and December 2, 2014 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Southern Connecticut State University for the progress it has made to address the areas of emphasis specified by the Commission, and we appreciate that this progress has been achieved during a time of significant change in senior institutional leadership. We note with favor the successful completion of the University's participatory strategic planning process and understand that implementation of the plan, *Discover Southern: A University for the 21st Century*, is underway. The effectiveness of SCSU's enrollment management functions has been enhanced through the use of new technologies, renovation of the primary student services building, restructuring of offices, hiring of new staff, and collaborative development of the University's "first comprehensive strategic enrollment management plan." We are pleased to learn of the renovations to the Buley Library, which now houses the Southern Success Center, a "centralized student success hub," and of the "many new supports for Academic Technology" that have been introduced, including increases in staff and support hours, installation of SCCM management software, and creation of a campus-wide subcommittee to determine the direction of future classroom renovations and upgrades. The Master of Library and Information Science program, which enrolled its first seven students in Fall 2016, has been granted pre-candidacy status by the American Library Association; an evaluation for candidacy is expected in AY2020. The report also provided an update on the University's Ed.D. program, which is offered jointly with Western Connecticut State University. The Commission notes with approval the steps taken by Ed.D. faculty to assure the rigor of the program and to use assessment results for program improvement, and we are gratified to learn that both direct (comprehensive examination results) and indirect (student surveys) measures indicate that students are achieving the learning outcomes specified for the program.

The reflective essay prepared by Southern Connecticut State University outlined the institution's "significant" national and international assessment initiatives as well as the "major internal assessment initiatives" undertaken to assess general education and provide support for internal program reviews and specialized accreditation reviews. We are pleased to learn that results gleaned from analyses of student work conducted as part of SCSU's participation in the Multi-State Collaborative have been used to inform the restructuring of the University's access programs, developmental math curriculum, liberal education program, and writing across the curriculum program. We are also gratified to learn of SCSU's use of the results of a longitudinal cohort study of retention rates to determine the "most important predictors of academic success and student retention" and to develop programming to foster the "habits of mind" that are predictive of success. The essay provided evidence that SCSU graduates are successful in their chosen fields, as measured by success in clinical placements, licensure passage rates, and employer evaluations and satisfaction rates.

The Commission confirmed inclusion of the instructional site at the Grove School in Madison, Connecticut within the University's accreditation and confirmed the institution's general approval for off-campus instructional locations within the United States because the materials submitted provided evidence that the University manages its off-campus instructional locations in a manner in substantial compliance with Commission standards and policies. The MS in Special Education (MSSE) program offered in the "broader catchment area" of Madison is consistent with the University's mission and enables SCSU to respond to a "significant need" for highly-qualified special education teachers. We note with approval that faculty from the main campus travel to

Madison to teach the MSSE courses and that the syllabi and assessments of student progress used are identical to those used on the main campus. We are gratified to learn that MSSE students express appreciation for the opportunity to enroll at the Madison site, as most report being unable to travel to the main campus to take courses. We concur with the evaluator that the "strong and effective leadership" SCSU exercises over the Madison site contributes to the success of the program.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2018 are related to our standards on *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure; The Academic Program; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship;* and *Students.*

The Commission appreciates the University's candid discussion of its provisional status with the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) regarding its ability to award Title IV funding. We understand that the provisional status, which will continue until March 2019, stems from the DOE's concerns with respect to SCSU's capacity to comply with federal regulations, its ability to report student non-attendance accurately, and its lack of timely reporting of compliance with gainful employment regulations. The University also discovered that a "significant number" of Educator Preparation Certification programs are not compliant with DOE regulations released in May 2016 and consequently are not eligible to participate in Title IV. As acknowledged in the report, these findings mean that the University will need to petition DOE to be able to offer new academic programs and will need to commit "major institutional resources" to revise its education certification and certificate programs. We look forward, in Fall 2018, to receiving an update on SCSU's progress in resolving the issues associated with its provisional status with DOE, as evidence that the University "observes the spirit as well as the letter of applicable legal requirements" (9.4).

We understand that Southern Connecticut State University has put its undergraduate program review process "on hiatus" for two years to enable an assessment of the results of the current review cycle and the development of an "improved, more sustainable process" that will make more effective use of University resources, including faculty reassigned time. We note that the decision to suspend the program review process was part of an overall 25% reduction in faculty reassigned time and that, in anticipation of "exceptional fiscal challenges" in the future, the University intends to "continue to explore options for consolidating and reallocating reassigned time." We anticipate being apprised, in Fall 2018, of SCSU's success in evaluating and revising its program review process and in addressing issues related to faculty reassigned time, in keeping with our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:

> 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).
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> Faculty assignments are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. They are equitably determined to allow faculty adequate time to provide effective instruction, advise and evaluate students, contribute to program and institutional assessment and improvement, continue professional growth, and participate in scholarship, research, creative activities, and service compatible with the mission and purposes of the institution. Faculty assignments and workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change (6.7).

The report submitted by Southern Connecticut State University describes its plans to continue to improve student advising and services for at-risk students. In Fall 2015, the institution launched its Advising Revitalization and Renewal project. During the project's first year, two "leadership" and

six "engagement" teams comprising faculty and staff developed four possible academic and career advising models. In AY2017, SCSU intends to choose one of those models and to develop a timetable for implementation. The Education Advisory Board's Student Success Collaborative (SSC), begun in 2013, sponsors a number of "targeted campaigns" for at-risk students, and the University plans to expand its use of the SSC-Campus platform to enhance services for those students. The report submitted for consideration in Fall 2018 will afford SCSU an opportunity to update the Commission on the success of these and other initiatives designed to ensure that the University "provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body" (5.10). Our standards on *Students* and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* provide this additional guidance:

> The institution ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success (5.7).
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> The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2021 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The University is asked, in the Fall 2021 self-study, to give emphasis to its continued success in addressing the areas specified above for attention in the Fall 2018 report. 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 self-study.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Southern Connecticut State University and hopes that its preparation 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.

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 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/jm
Enclosure

cc: Mr. Matt Fleury
Evaluator