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January 22, 2019

Dr. Howard Purcell  
President  
The New England College of Optometry  
424 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02115-1129

Dear President Purcell:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on November 15, 2018, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the report submitted by The New England College of Optometry and took the following action:

that the report submitted by The New England College of Optometry be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2022 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, as well as the matters specified in our letter of January 17, 2018, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2022 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in increasing its use of direct quantitative measures to analyze achievement of its strategic planning goals and the impact of student services on student success.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The report submitted by The New England College of Optometry was accepted because it was generally responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of January 17, 2018.

We thank The New England College of Optometry (NECO) for its informative report documenting the progress it has made to address the three areas identified by the Commission. We are pleased to learn that the current Strategic Plan 2015-2020 is being used as a "guiding document" to help with decision making and resource allocation, and that accomplishments to date include the addition of a partnership with Orbis Flying Hospital that provides access to Cybersight's online resources and virtual training, advancement of the institution's research agenda through the opening of the Myopia Control Clinic, and the expansion of clinical sites to Holyoke, Lowell, and the North End to ensure students receive a "diverse and appropriately timed set of clinical education experiences and patient encounters." We are aware that the

new president, a graduate of NECO, assumed office on July 2, 2018 and that a detailed transition plan was developed by the Board of Trustees and Senior Leadership. With respect to student services, NECO's increased use of technology is noteworthy, including the newly implemented online orientation course developed in response to student feedback that helps students prepare for their first semester, the Student Success Task Force's creation of an online case study elective course, and the use of course-specific social media channels. In addition, we note with favor that NECO is planning a Diversity Pathway program to address issues related to "academic readiness, cultural sensitivity, access and affordability."

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2022, is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. In addition to the information included in all self-studies and the items specified for attention in the Commission's letter of January 17, 2018 (developing and implementing its Strategic Plan 2021-2025; continuing to meet its enrollment goals; demonstrating student success as measured by the employability of its graduates; and ensuring sufficient funding to support faculty research), the College is asked, in Fall 2022, to report on a matter related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Students, and Educational Effectiveness*.

As demonstrated throughout the report, NECO makes extensive use of data gathered through surveys, focus groups, and post-event discussions to identify student services areas in need of improvement. Yet, we concur with the institution's conclusion that a more systematic process of evaluating the impact of these services on student success still needs to be developed. We therefore are encouraged that the Associate Dean for Student Services has been charged with creating an "effective, systematic evaluation process." In addition, we note that the extensive list of accomplishments included in the March 2018 Strategic Plan Update is primarily focused on processes rather than outcomes. For example, a list of faculty attendance at conferences from 2016-2018 was provided, but not an analysis of how this participation influenced academic productivity and/or led to meeting the institution's goal to increase faculty publications by 33%. NECO also recognizes in its Strategic Planning Update, for example, that it still needs to "determine how [the unique education experiences it offers] impact recruitment [and] career paths post-graduation," and that "developing strategies to assess the impact of IPE (Interprofessional Education) and IPP (Interprofessional Collaborative Practice)" on student learning and patient outcomes remains to be done. In the Fall 2022 self-study, we look forward to being apprised of the institution's increasing use of direct quantitative measures to analyze achievement of its strategic planning goals and the impact of the student services on student success. We are guided here by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Students, and Educational Effectiveness*.

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).

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these goals and services and improve their achievement (5.20).

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 with stated goals for students' co-curricular learning systematically assesses their achievement (8.4).

Dr. Howard Purcell  
January 22, 2019  
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The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by The New England College of Optometry and hopes that its preparation 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.

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 Pano Yeracaris. 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 Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Pano Yeracaris