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January 8, 2021

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

Dear President Purcell:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 20, 2020 the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the distance education expedited review report submitted by New England College of Optometry and took the following action:

that the report submitted by New England College of Optometry be accepted and the institution be granted approval to offer its current courses and academic programs via distance education through Spring 2023;

that the institution be reminded that any plans to offer new programs 50% or more online need to be submitted to the Commission for approval prior to implementation;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2022 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in self-studies, as well as the matters specified in our letters of January 17, 2018, and January 22, 2019, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2022 comprehensive evaluation include an update on the institution's success in delivering and assessing the outcomes of its current courses and academic programs offered via distance education.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The distance education expedited review report submitted by New England College of Optometry was accepted and the institution granted approval to offer its current courses and academic programs via distance education through Spring 2023 because the Commission finds the proposed activity to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and relevant Commission policies.

The Commission thanks New England College of Optometry (NECO) for its detailed distance education expedited review report that documents the transition of NECO courses to an online format by incorporating Zoom and Panopto recording technology into the already-used Moodle platform and

employing ExamSoft and Turning Point interactive polling tools. For instruction, NECO included virtual learning environments and live roundtable clinical discussions, and we particularly note with approval that, in addition to increasing bandwidth, NECO provided one-on-one sessions to train faculty and established a culture of faculty sharing best practices. Lastly, NECO adjusted student schedules to allow for more flexible experiences, and we are gratified to note the College's dedication to servicing its students through training sessions and additional supports including biweekly town halls and student meetings with the Dean of Academic Affairs.

Given NECO's limited experience in offering courses and programs via distance education, we remind you that any plans to offer new programs 50% or more online need to be submitted to the Commission for approval prior to implementation, in keeping with the Commission's Policy on Substantive Change.

The Commission confirms the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2022 and asks that, in addition to the matters specified in our letters of January 17, 2018, and January 22, 2019, the institution provide an update on its success in delivering and assessing the outcomes of its current courses and academic programs offered via distance education. We are guided here by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution offering programs and courses for abbreviated or concentrated time periods or via distance or correspondence learning demonstrates that students completing these programs or courses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies equivalent to those achieved in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods and modalities. Programs and courses are designed to ensure an opportunity for reflection and for analysis of the subject matter (4.45).

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 remind you that the *Standards for Accreditation* have undergone the mid-course review, and the new Standards went into effect on January 1, 2021. Therefore, all reports submitted after that date, including the self-study prepared for NECO's Fall 2022 comprehensive evaluation, should reference the 2021 Standards.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by New England College of Optometry and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. We appreciate 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 Yeracris. 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.

Dr. Howard Purcell
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Tetler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a stylized "T".

George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Pano Yeracris