January 20, 2016

Dr. J. Keith Motley
Chancellor
University of Massachusetts Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125

Dear Chancellor Motley:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 19, 2015, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Massachusetts Boston:

that University of Massachusetts Boston be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring, 2020;

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

1) implementing its strategic plan with emphasis on the development of plans for revenue generation to support the initiatives of the plan, the allocation of resources necessary to accommodate enrollment growth, and the use of data for decision-making;

2) assuring that responsibility for departmental administrative service does not fall disproportionately on some segments of the faculty;

3) achieving greater efficiency and transparency with respect to transfer credit equivalencies in admissions and advising;

4) enhancing support for graduate students;

5) addressing the resource challenges of the Healy Library, including space availability, lighting, staffing, and information technology, in light of the University’s goal to become a residential campus;
that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring, 2025.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

University of Massachusetts Boston is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation.

The Commission commends University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) for its candid self-study which documents the substantial progress made by the institution since its last decennial evaluation as well as the challenges that remain. We join the visiting team in acknowledging the University’s many strengths, including its well-developed general education program; the strong foundation for assessment that has been established; an “impressive, diverse array” of University-community partnerships; “noteworthy progress” in reducing dependence on part-time faculty and achieving the institution’s goals for faculty diversity; and an “ambitious, well-defined capital program” that has enabled attention to deferred maintenance, construction of new facilities, and more effective use of existing space. We take favorable note of the University’s success in offering distance education programs and in assuring that faculty and graduate assistants involved in online courses receive appropriate training and support. We are pleased to learn that analyses of retention and graduation rates led to the introduction of strategies, including learning communities, that have been successful in enhancing student success. UMass Boston has adopted a “more disciplined, standardized financial management structure” and has achieved positive operating results for the past several years. We note with approval the “positive perceptions” of the University’s library resources and services and the significantly improved accessibility and navigability of the institution’s website. The Commission joins the visiting team in congratulating University of Massachusetts Boston on the quality of its faculty, staff, students, and leadership and on their “collective dedication to and enthusiasm for” the institution’s mission as an urban-serving public university.

Commission policy requires an interim (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. In addition to the information included in all interim reports the University is asked, in Spring, 2020, to report on five matters related to our standards on Planning and Evaluation, Faculty, Students, and Library and Other Information Resources.

The Commission notes with favor the participatory process that led to the development of the University’s strategic plan, Fulfilling the Promise: A Blueprint for UMass Boston. We concur with the visiting team, however, that the plan is dependent on revenue growth that “may be difficult to achieve” and that the institution would benefit from the adoption of an “integrated, collaborative process” to implement the plan that involves the provost, vice chancellors for finance and enrollment management, and the office of campus master planning. In addition, we note the need for improvements to the University’s IT infrastructure and systems to support the enhanced use of data for decision-making. We are gratified to learn of UMass Boston’s intention to establish working groups to develop a strategy to better align the University’s planning efforts and to develop a plan to increase staff capacity and to acquire more sophisticated technological and organizational systems. We look forward to learning, in Spring 2020, of the institution’s success with these initiatives. Relevant here is our standard on Planning and Evaluation:

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. 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).

As noted in the report of the visiting team, administrative duties such as service as department chair seem to have fallen disproportionately on certain segments of the UMass Boston faculty, specifically, "the most junior women," and this may have an adverse impact on the ability of those faculty to engage in the level of research necessary for promotion and tenure. We understand that the Faculty Council has established a committee to study this matter, a committee of deans will work with department chairs, and the Office of Faculty Development will also take steps to address this issue. We anticipate being apprised, through the Spring 2020 report, of the University’s progress in assuring that assignments and workload for faculty 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" (5.7).

The visiting team report also notes "evidence of difficulty" with transfer credit equivalencies in admissions and advising. We are gratified to learn of the University’s "steadfast" commitment to transfer students, who represent the majority of each entering cohort, and of the institution's commitment to continued investments and improvements in the area of credit evaluation. The Spring 2020 report will afford University of Massachusetts Boston an opportunity to demonstrate its progress in this area, in keeping with our standard on Students:

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses its effectiveness in admitting and retaining students and 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 (6.21).

The Commission shares the concerns articulated in the visiting team report about the adequacy of support and services for graduate students, including stipends, travel funds, career workshops, and opportunities for interaction with other students. We look forward to learning, through the Spring 2020, of the University’s success in enhancing support for graduate students, as evidence that its “array of student services [is] appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students” (6.11).

Finally, the Spring 2020 report will provide University of Massachusetts Boston with an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in addressing the resource challenges of the Healy Library. The report of the visiting team acknowledges the high levels of satisfaction with the services provided by the library but also notes the “constraints in space, staffing, budget, and central technology support” that are currently limiting and that will make it challenging for the University in the future to serve a growing, increasingly residential student population and to fulfill its goals for greater investment in graduate and professional studies. This section of the Spring 2020 report should be informed by our standard on Library and Other Information Resources:

Institutional planning and resource allocation support the development of library, information resources and technology appropriate to the institution’s mission and academic program. The institution provides sufficient and consistent financial support for the library and the effective maintenance and improvement of the institution’s information resources and instructional and information technology (7.2).
The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2025 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation 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 appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Massachusetts Boston and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Winston E. Langley, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Ellen O’Connor, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance, and Theresa Mortimer, Assistant Chancellor, as well as Mun Choi, representing the visiting team, during its deliberations.

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. Victor Woolridge. 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.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process 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.

If you have any questions about the Commission’s action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

David P. Anger

DPA/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Victor Woolridge
    Visiting team