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October 22, 2019

Dr. Paula A. Johnson  
President  
Wellesley College  
106 Central Street  
Wellesley, MA 02481-8203

Dear President Johnson:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 20, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Wellesley College:

that Wellesley College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2024;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the College give emphasis, in the Spring 2024 report, to its success in:

1. developing comprehensive strategic plans with attention to integrating existing institutional plans related to campus renewal, re-evaluating the College's General Education requirements, and ensuring the long-term financial stability of the College;
2. evaluating the effectiveness of its academic and institutional governance structures and aligning faculty and staff resources with curricular and programmatic needs;
3. achieving its student diversity goals;
4. continuing to enhance its culture of assessment with emphasis on implementing direct assessment strategies to assess student learning outcomes;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2029.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Wellesley College is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

Along with the visiting team, we commend Wellesley College on an outstanding self-study that highlights the College's many strengths. Wellesley's distinctive mission "to provide an excellent liberal arts education for women who will make a difference in the world" is especially notable, as is its dedicated and active Board of Trustees, competent leadership team that is led by an inspirational president who has a clear vision and strong ambition for the institution, prestigious faculty, and well-qualified and dedicated staff. Wellesley's many accomplishments over the last decade are also noteworthy; namely: completing the largest fundraising campaign in the College's history, ahead of schedule and ahead of its \$500 million goal; completing campus renewal projects including renovations to residence halls, arts buildings, and teaching spaces; launching new programs in public speaking and writing; and establishing the Albright Institute for Global Affairs and the Center for Career Education. Wellesley is also to be commended for creating a strong culture of faculty engagement in governance, as well as a practice of approaching institutional challenges collectively, through standing committees or ad hoc planning processes, involving staff, faculty, and students. We are further impressed by the College's steadfast dedication to the holistic student experience. The team observed capable leadership in admissions, financial aid, and student affairs, and Wellesley's commitment to supporting the student residential experience is evident through staffing for student life, mental health, and wellness. Finally, we concur with the judgment of the visiting team that Wellesley is a remarkable institution with a compelling mission, a rich history, and an exceptionally vibrant academic culture that positions the College well to address its challenges and continue to achieve its mission.

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 College is asked, in Spring 2024, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Institutional Resources*; *Organization and Governance*; *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*; *Students*; and *Educational Effectiveness*.

As confirmed by the visiting team, Wellesley has engaged in many planning activities over the last decade, one of which is Wellesley 2025, a "blue sky" campus renewal planning exercise that identified aspirational and laudable goals, not all of which, however, were financially feasible. We therefore note positively that the College recognizes there is a "limited set of levers to achieve financial sustainability" and, in response, has developed a "more sustainable" operating budget. The self-study also documents targeted planning efforts across campus such as the evaluation of the College's General Education requirements that resulted in a plan (presented by CCAP to the Academic Council in November 2018) to change these requirements, and the comprehensive facilities condition assessment initiative implemented in FY2017 that culminated in a ten-year capital renewal plan that allocates about \$590 million for renewal projects through FY2028, inclusive of the \$215 million science center renovation. As Wellesley candidly acknowledges, and we concur, the institution "will do well with undertaking more comprehensive strategic planning that sets a path forward that is both inspirational and achievable, addresses strategic choice, and considers how we re-think the allocation of resources so as not only to 'add' to what exists." Accordingly, we look forward, through the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2024, to receiving information about Wellesley's progress in developing strategic plans that are "systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution" (2.1) as assurance that the College "plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives" (2.4). We are further guided here by our standard on *Institutional Resources*:



The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

We understand that Wellesley implemented a voluntary early retirement plan in 2017 that resulted in 34 faculty retirements. To respond to the need to distribute faculty among the disciplines impacted by those faculty members who chose to accept early retirement, an Advisory Committee on Academic Staffing was established to provide a faculty voice in the review of proposals for new tenure-track line requests. We further recognize that the College's committee model was revised in 2017 to reduce the total number of standing committees to three "major" committees with the goal of inclusion and participation by faculty, staff, and students. However, as the institution candidly acknowledges, this structure, at times, "leads to cumbersome decision making." We are therefore encouraged to learn that "the appropriate groups will begin to look at the governance structure," and these groups will carefully consider the time constraints of faculty members given the retirements noted above. As assurance that "[f]aculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise" (3.15), we look forward, in Spring 2024, to receiving an update regarding the College's continued success in evaluating the effectiveness of its academic and institutional governance structures and aligning faculty and staff resources with curricular and programmatic needs, as further informed by our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*:

The institution periodically evaluates the sufficiency of and support for academic staff and their effectiveness in teaching and advising, scholarship, service, and as appropriate to institutional mission, research and creative activity. The results of these evaluations are used to enhance fulfillment of the institution's mission (6.14).

We are gratified to learn that Wellesley has significantly increased the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of its student body over the last decade with its current population comprising about 55% students of color, 15% first-generation students, and 60% receiving need-based financial aid. We further appreciate learning that the College has increased the staffing in its Student Financial Services Office to better meet the diverse needs of its students. As affirmation of the College's commitment to "inclusive excellence" in recruitment, admission, retention, and development of students, the Spring 2024 interim report will afford Wellesley an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success in achieving "its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students" (*Students*, Statement of the Standard).

In its report, the team noted with enthusiasm the ways in which Wellesley's faculty has strengthened its culture of assessment over the last decade, notable of which include establishing the position of Business Intelligence Specialist whose role is to explicitly help other staff access data for purposes leading to institutional improvement, creating a robust data warehouse, and developing systems to use data to further institutional effectiveness and the assessment of student learning. We further understand that the College uses the results of indirect assessments (e.g., surveys) on a regular basis and it is developing "WANDA" as a tool to improve access to and the analysis of "hard" student and administrative data. We look forward, in Spring 2024, to receiving an update on the College's success in continuing to enhance its culture of assessment with emphasis on implementing direct assessment strategies as evidence that "[t]he institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students" (8.5).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2029 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 Wellesley College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Andrew Shennan, Provost, Piper Orton, Vice President Finance & Administration, and A. Clayton Spencer, team chair, 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 Ms. Debora de Hoyos. 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 Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Debora de Hoyos  
Visiting Team