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April 29, 2013

Dr. Grace Sawyer Jones
President
Three Rivers Community College
574 New London Turnpike
Norwich, CT 06360

Dear President Jones:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 8, 2013, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Three Rivers Community College:

that Three Rivers Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Fall 2015 that provides an update regarding:

1. the impact on the institution's operations of the reorganization of higher education governance and level of funding by the State of Connecticut;
2. its success in addressing the challenges related to reduced state support for developmental education;
3. use of the results of assessment activities to improve educational effectiveness;
4. efforts to address deferred maintenance;
5. the College's success in building capacity to support its use of evidence and data to make improvements throughout the institution;

that the College submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall 2017;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2022.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Three Rivers Community College (TRCC) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Three Rivers Community College for a strong self-study and for its clear sense of mission and its commitment to delivering on that mission. We note with favor that TRCC has been able to partially offset declining state appropriations with significant increases in enrollment in recent years and by ensuring that the institution has minimal debt. The Office of Institutional Research has devised a model called "The Map" designed to help all units of the College rate their performance in achieving the goals of the College's 2009-2014 Strategic Plan. We concur with the visiting team that the General Education Task Force Committee has developed a sustainable model for outcome assessment and is poised to continue the process, setting benchmark goals and providing feedback to faculty that informs change. TRCC has expanded its distance education offerings, and online education is now a well-developed mode of instruction, with 182 FTE online students and 44 out of 720 sections (6% of all course sections) offered entirely online. We share the judgment of the visiting team that Three Rivers Community College has a significant impact on the lives of its students as well as the economic and social development of the community that it serves. We take note that the College has benefitted from the strong leadership provided by President Grace Sawyer Jones who has recently announced plans for her retirement. As the College prepares for new presidential leadership, it is well positioned to build on its accomplishments and meet the challenges of the future.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall, 2015 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *Organization and Governance*, *The Academic Program*, *Students*, *Physical and Technological Resources*, and *Financial Resources*.

The recent changes to the organization of public higher education in Connecticut and the current fiscal environment of the state will continue to have a significant impact on the College. We understand that Three Rivers Community College has experienced significant declines in state appropriations, including reductions in funding of \$800,000 in FY2012 and an estimated \$500,000 in FY2013. We note with favor that the College is addressing funding reductions by expanding its donor base, increasing grant resources, and adding noncredit and workforce development activities. We also appreciate that the impact of changes in statewide governance are not yet fully known. We look forward to receiving, within the Fall 2015 report, an update on these matters. Our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *Financial Resources* are relevant here:

In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered. (3.11)

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances. (9.1)

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. The governing board reviews and approves the institution's financial plans based on multi-year analysis and financial forecasting. (9.3)

We note from the team report that the State of Connecticut plans to limit developmental education to one semester of developmental education coursework and a second semester of embedded-courses with tutoring support. We are pleased to learn that TRCC has developed contingency plans to support developmental education if it is limited in this way, including multiple measures of student readiness, intensive readiness programs, and embedding developmental instruction and support within regular college-level courses. The Fall 2015 report will provide TRCC with an opportunity to inform the Commission about the status of its efforts to support its developmental education program, as informed by our standard on *Students*:

The institution utilizes appropriate methods of evaluation to identify deficiencies and offers appropriate developmental or remedial support where necessary to prepare students for collegiate study. Such testing and remediation receive sufficient support and are adequate to serve the needs of students admitted. (6.4)

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. It 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 academic goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their academic success. (6.5)

The Commission is gratified to learn that many of TRCC's academic departments have developed assessment plans and use assessment data to inform program improvement. However, as the visiting team notes, some programs have yet to identify relevant evidence that assesses student learning. The Fall 2015 report will afford the institution an opportunity to evaluate its use of assessment results to improve educational effectiveness, including the success of the College's efforts to develop more clearly defined goals for co-curricular learning. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, and *Students* should be informative here:

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 relevant and trustworthy information to support institutional improvement, with an emphasis on the academic program. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods. (2.5)

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students. (4.49)

Institutions with stated goals for students' co-curricular learning systematically assess their achievement. (6.20)

As noted in the report of the visiting team, the deferred maintenance list for Three Rivers Community College exceeds \$3 million, and deferred maintenance has not been funded for the past three fiscal years. We appreciate TRCC's candid acknowledgment that the "current State budget provides significant challenges to the College to maintain and improve its facilities, library, and technology resources." We look forward to learning, in Fall 2015, of the institution's progress in addressing deferred maintenance. We remind you of our standard on *Physical and Technological Resources*.

The institution undertakes physical resource planning ... It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs. (8.4)

The Commission notes with approval that institutional research data are abundant at Three Rivers Community College, and the Institutional Research office has made progress in supporting faculty with an approach of "use the work that we do every day" to instill assessment as a part of the learning process. However, we concur with the visiting team that faculty, staff and administrators would benefit from additional assistance in using data for decision-making. In the Fall 2015 report, we welcome information regarding the College's success in continuing to build its capacity to provide evidence and data to support faculty, administrators, and staff in using data to make improvements. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *The Academic Program* (cited above and below) provide this guidance:

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)

The institution's approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty. (4.51)

The scheduling of a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Fall, 2017 is consistent with Commission policy requiring an interim 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.

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.

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 Three Rivers Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Kem Barfield, Director of Educational Technology, and Robert L. Pura, team chair, during its deliberations.

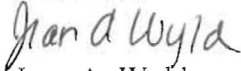
You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Lewis Robinson. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

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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, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Jean A. Wyld

JAW/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Lewis Robinson
Visiting Team