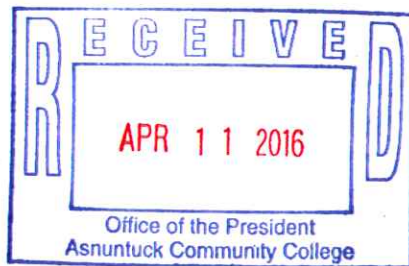




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NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.  
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

April 5, 2016



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Mr. James Lombella  
President  
Asnuntuck Community College  
170 Elm Street  
Enfield, CT 06082-3811

Dear President Lombella:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 3, 2016, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Asnuntuck Community College:

that Asnuntuck Community College be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit an interim report for consideration in Fall 2020;

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

- 1) developing and implementing plans to assess student learning and use the results for improvement;
- 2) strengthening communication among constituents at the College;
- 3) evaluating the impact of programs offered to support workforce development initiatives in the State of Connecticut on the institution's mission, with emphasis on ensuring that resources are sufficient to support programs in general studies, liberal arts, and majors outside of the technical trades;
- 4) implementing plans to use analytics and early alert software and nationally standardized assessment tools to support efforts to increase retention and graduation rates;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2025.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

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

The Commission commends Asnuntuck Community College (ACC) for its outstanding, comprehensive self-study that demonstrates the institution's many accomplishments and strengths over the last decade. We join the visiting team in its praise of the College's notable success in the systematic use of data to inform mission-centric planning, decision-making, and resource allocation – a shift in culture that has become “part of the ACC ethos.” We are gratified to learn of the College's success in securing grants and other funding to establish a state-of-the-art Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center (AMTC) to support certificate and associate degree programs in CNC machining, welding, and electronics technologies. ACC's success in implementing “intentional” high-tech/high-touch initiatives to increase retention and graduation rates is especially impressive, and we congratulate the institution for achieving the highest graduation rates in the Connecticut Community College System (58% among AMTC programs and 29% overall in AY2014) and maintaining retention rates that are well above the national average for the community college sector. Under the leadership of the Chief Academic Officer, the Curriculum and Standards Committees ensure that academic quality is consistent whether courses are offered in an online format or on campus, and faculty and staff are well-qualified and sufficient in number to support the institution's mission. It is especially heartening to learn from the visiting team that students across the campus feel as if they are the institution's top priority due, primarily, to the “deep affection” faculty and staff demonstrate towards the College, its mission, and its students. Capable staff throughout the College ensure that institutional resources are managed and used effectively. The Library's partnership with the Academic Skills Center ensures that information and technological literacy is integrated and continually reinforced at the “most essential skill levels,” and we also note favorably that data from various sources, such as the institution's Facility Master Plan Space Program and Utilization Study, are integrated into the strategic planning process to ensure that improvements to the campus are fiscally sound and thoughtfully planned. We are further pleased to note that ACC recently secured \$11.4 in bond funding to refurbish the entrance to the College and to make major upgrades to the “older part” of the building. Finally, in light of reductions in state and federal support, we appreciate the institution's focus on seeking revenue generating ideas – such as providing additional training to local businesses to help balance the budget – instead of cutting expenses. With a Board of Trustees, senior leadership team, faculty, staff, and students who are committed to furthering the mission of Asnuntuck Community College, combined with prudent resources management, the College is well-positioned for future success.

Commission policy requires 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. In addition to the information included in all interim reports the College is asked, in Fall 2020, to report on four matters related to our standards on *The Academic Program, Organization and Governance, and Students*.

As the visiting team notes in its report, ACC continues to seek ways to improve student success while at the same time preserving revenue. Accordingly, we appreciate learning through the self-study that the College is “now in a position to begin broad assessment activities [at] the course, program, and institutional level.” Currently, the College is focusing its attention on two state-initiated General Education outcomes assessment initiatives – the Transfer Articulation Program (TAP) and the Graduation Outcomes: Responsible, Expressive, Creative, Analytical, Practical (GO-RECAP) program – and we view positively the College's intent to map general education learning outcomes to the curriculum for all programs. As informed by our standard on *The Academic Program*, the interim report submitted in Fall 2020 will provide ACC an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in developing and implementing plans to assess student learning and use the results for improvement:

The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

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).

Asnuntuck Community College candidly acknowledges in its self-study that there are opportunities to strengthen communication among constituents at the College. Specifically, the results of an Institutional Effectiveness Survey administered in 2010 and again in 2014 identified several areas of concern related to communication between institutional leadership and faculty and staff, including communication related to: institutional policies and procedures, budget related matters, the institution's strategic long-range goals, and the overall flow of information among departments and offices within the institution. We are therefore gratified to learn that, to address this institutional priority, the College has implemented strategies to enhance transparency and communication. The President's cabinet has been expanded to include faculty, directors, and other administrative staff, and a review of institutional documents by the visiting team further confirmed that increasing communication is, indeed, an institutional focus. As informed by our standard on *Organization and Governance*, we seek assurance, in the interim report submitted in Fall 2020, that "[t]he institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution" (3.9).

While we commend ACC's success in implementing programs offered through the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Center, we also share the concern of the visiting team that the College allocates significantly more resources to support manufacturing programs than it allocates to support programs in general studies, liberal arts, and majors outside of the technical trades. We also note that, as mentioned above, grants received by the College from the State of Connecticut have been earmarked for the development of the AMTC in support of community workforce initiatives; however, the College has experienced a reduction in state funding for general operations. Therefore, we are gratified that the institution candidly acknowledges the need "to be open and transparent" about this issue and, since the team visit, the College has started to "cross-pollinate" various general education courses with advanced manufacturing courses, resulting in an improvement in the morale of faculty and staff. In keeping with our standard on *The Academic Program*, we ask that the Fall 2020 interim report include an update on the institution's success in evaluating the impact of programs offered to support workforce development initiatives in the State of Connecticut on the institution's mission, with emphasis on ensuring that resources are sufficient to support programs in general studies, liberal arts, and majors outside of the technical trades:

The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. The evaluation of existing programs includes an external perspective and assessment of their effectiveness. Additions and deletions of programs are consistent with institutional mission and capacity, faculty expertise, student needs, and the availability of

sufficient resources required for the development and improvement of academic programs. The institution allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives (4.10).

The recent purchase of both analytics and early alert software, along with the systematic use of national survey results to monitor trends among peer institutions, is evidence of ACC's continued commitment to increasing the institution's already impressive retention and graduation rates. We further note with favor that ACC's "first-ever enrollment and retention model" is in the pilot phase and "real-time data" have already been used to develop new practices, such as the Connect and Reach Out Early (CARE) program, and to update the College's financial aid and add/drop policies. We look forward, in the Fall 2020 interim report, to learning of the institution's continued success in using analytics and early alert software and nationally standardized assessment tools to support efforts to increase retention and graduation rates. Our standard on *Students* is relevant here:

The institution measures student success, including rates of retention and graduation and other measures of success appropriate to institutional mission (6.6).

Measures of student success, including rates of retention and graduation, are separately determined for any group that the institution specifically recruits, and those rates are used in evaluating the success of specialized recruitment and the services and opportunities provided for the recruited students (6.7)

The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (6.8).

We remind you that the *Standards for Accreditation* have been revised, and the new Standards go into effect on July 1, 2016. Therefore, the interim report prepared by Asnuntuck Community College for consideration in Fall 2020 should reference the 2016 Standards.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 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 Asnuntuck Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Mr. Michael Stefanowicz, Dean of Academic Affairs, and Dr. Richard Hopper, 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. Nicholas Donofrio. 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.

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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, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

  
Patricia Maguire Meservey

PMM/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Nicholas Donofrio  
Visiting team