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March 27, 2020

Dr. Darryl Reome
Campus Chief Executive Officer
Tunxis Community College
271 Scott Swamp Road
Farmington, CT 06032-3187

Dear President Reome:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2020, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the report submitted by Tunxis Community College, as well as the report of the visiting team, and took the following action:

that the report submitted by Tunxis Community College be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2021 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, as well as the matters specified in our letter of December 5, 2018, the institution give emphasis, in the self-study prepared for the Fall 2021 evaluation, to its continued success in addressing the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2019 report; specifically:

- 1) assuring the sufficiency of resources and personnel, including faculty, to support academic programs and student services in light of the number of shared positions and consolidation efforts;
- 2) implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of planned student success initiatives with emphasis on improving retention and graduation rates;

that the Commission notes the proposal by the President of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system regarding a possible reconfiguration of community colleges by 2023 and informs Tunxis Community College that the advancement of those plans may result in changes to the scheduled monitoring of the College.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

The report submitted by Tunxis Community College (TCC) was accepted because it was generally responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of December 5, 2018. As validated by the visiting team, the College reduced its operating expenses from \$38.5 million in FY2017 to \$36.3 million in FY2020 due to savings achieved through reductions in staff and the sharing of positions with other campuses through the “Students First” initiative. The team confirmed through interviews with members of the campus community that TCC has improved efficiencies in some areas as a result of sharing key positions (e.g., Dean of Administrative Services, Human Resources Director, Director of Institutional Research) and the implementation of service arrangements in functional areas (e.g., Enrollment Management, Institutional Research, Information Technology, Finance/Budgeting, Marketing, and Institutional Advancement). TCC also realized savings of about \$400,000 in energy expenses due, primarily, to investments in LED lighting and HVAC improvements, and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) Board of Regents allocated about \$1.0 million to TCC to offset fringe benefit costs of employees. Further, while full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment declined by 2.8% in Fall 2019, the College experienced an increase in FTE of 5.8% in the previous two-year period. The cost savings combined with an overall increase in enrollment is projected to result in an operating surplus of \$1.9 million in FY2020 of which \$1.2 million will be transferred to the CSCU system office for operating expenses. Finally, students who met with the visiting team indicated they are, most of the time, able to access services when they need them.

The team also noted that, in addition to initiatives implemented in recent years to improve retention and graduation rates – e.g., reading, writing, and math labs; an early alert referral system; a first year experience course; a comprehensive degree audit system (Degree Works); changes in the math curriculum – TCC has implemented additional strategies, including: reorganizing academic and student support departments; developing new and revised academic programs; introducing the common hour; adding student honor society and leadership programs; and updating the policies for dual enrollment, “M” grade, mid-term grade, and advanced placement credits. The College further anticipates the recently implemented Achieving the Dream initiative will have a positive impact on student success outcomes.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2021 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. In addition to the information included in all self-studies, the College is asked, in the self-study submitted for consideration in Fall 2021, to give emphasis to its continued success in addressing the two matters specified for attention in the Fall 2019 report.

We share the opinion of the visiting team that this is a time of considerable challenge and change at Tunxis Community College and across the Connecticut system of higher education. While we are gratified that the College has realized benefits, such as collaborating on best practices, from sharing positions and services with other community colleges in the CSCU system, we are deeply concerned that, as documented in the team report, TCC is also experiencing limitations and challenges such as increased, perhaps unsustainable, workloads for some staff members, and slowed response time for some service requests. We therefore seek to be assured, through the Fall 2021 comprehensive evaluation, that resources and personnel, including faculty, are sufficient to support academic programs and student services in light of the number of shared positions and consolidation efforts. We remind you here of our standards on *Students; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Institutional Resources*:

The institution offers an array of student services, including physical and mental health services, appropriate to its mission and the needs and goals of its students. It recognizes the variations in services that are appropriate for residential students, at the main campus, at off-campus locations, and for distance education programs as well as the differences in circumstances and goals of students pursuing degrees (5.9).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes. Responsibilities include instruction, accessibility to students, and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility; additional duties may include, e.g., student advisement, academic planning, and participation in policy-making, course and curricular development, research, and institutional governance (6.2).

The institution employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission (7.1).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

The institution provides access to library and information resources, services, facilities, and qualified staff sufficient to support its teaching and learning environments and its research and public service mission as appropriate (7.22).

In addition, as documented in the Data First Forms included with the College's report, graduation rates have slipped substantially from a high of 17% in FY2017 to 12% in both FY2018 and FY2019. Although, as acknowledged positively above, TCC is strengthening its retention efforts, we are concerned that reduced staffing levels combined with shared services in some areas (e.g., Enrollment Management) may, over time, have a negative impact on the institution's ability to implement and sufficiently support these planned initiatives. Further, it is too early to determine if the Achieving the Dream initiative will produce the improvements in student success the College is counting on. As informed by our standards on *Students*, *Institutional Resources*, (cited above) and *Educational Effectiveness*, the Fall 2021 self-study will afford Tunxis Community College an opportunity to report on its success in implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its planned student success initiatives with emphasis on improving retention and graduation rates:

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

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).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

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The Commission notes the proposal by the President of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system regarding a possible reconfiguration of the community colleges by 2023. We remind you that such a re-organization could result in a change in the scheduled monitoring of Tunxis Community College.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report prepared by Tunxis Community College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, James Lombella, Regional President, North-West Region, Gennaro DeAngelis, Dean of Administration, and Amy Feest, Dean of Academic Affairs, as well as Lane Glenn, 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 and the head of the state system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Matt Fleury and Mark Ojakian. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Quigley', written in a cursive style.

David Quigley

DQ/sjp

Enclosure

cc: Matt Fleury
Mark Ojakian
Visiting team