



March 27, 2024

Dr. Michael Whelan
President
Wheaton College
120 Boylston Street
Boston, MA 02116

Dear President Whelan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 1, 2024, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Wheaton College and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Wheaton College be accepted;

that the substantive change visit to assess the implementation of the B.S. in Nursing program scheduled for Spring 2025 be confirmed;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2029 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2029 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's continued success in addressing three of the matters specified for attention in the Spring 2024 interim report: 1) developing and implementing a comprehensive plan for assessing student learning, 2) achieving a balanced operating budget, and 3) addressing the College's deferred maintenance and facilities needs.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Wheaton College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of October 8, 2019 and January 25, 2022, and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Wheaton College (Wheaton) for its comprehensive, reflective interim report, developed by the Wheaton College community through a participatory process. We note with favor the implementation of the Compass Curriculum in 2020 which fosters "decision-making skills" and integrated "liberal arts habits of mind with experiential learning" as well as the creation of the Campus Assessment, Response, and Evaluation Team (CARE), which uses a holistic approach to student advising and support. The Commission is pleased to learn of the creation of a Curriculum Assessment Committee which uses data to inform decision making, and we note with favor that direct and indirect assessment of the Compass Curriculum has been conducted annually. We acknowledge the revision of Wheaton's Credit Hour Policy and the conversion of its 32-course unit system to a 4-credit course, 128-credit

system. The Commission understands that the College's five-year Financial Bridge Plan, approved in October 2022, aims to "reduce operating deficits through sustainable revenue growth, increased fundraising, and reductions in operating expenses." Lastly, we note positively Wheaton College's "robust" pace of strategic planning and implementation of new academic initiatives as it continues to provide a "transformative liberal arts education," preparing students for "purposeful, abundant lives."

The Commission further commends Wheaton College for its progress in developing a culture of assessment at the institution. In addition to the annual Compass Curriculum assessment and the reorganization of academic advising, as noted above, we appreciate that all course syllabi must now include learning outcomes. There is also a five-year program evaluation cycle which will be restarted in Fall 2024. The Commission is gratified to learn of Wheaton's continued focus on student retention and graduation rates, including the disaggregation of rates by gender and race. We note with favor that an analysis of these success data led to the establishment of five institutional goals including implementing Equity Goal Settings, increasing experiential learning, and expanding mentorship programs for minoritized student populations.

The Commission confirms the Spring 2025 substantive change visit to assess the implementation of the B.S. in Nursing program. We refer you to our letter dated May 22, 2023 which specifies matters to receive attention in the report prepared in advance of the visit.

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. The College is asked, in the Spring 2029 self-study, to give emphasis to its continued success in addressing three areas specified for attention in the Spring 2024 interim report related to our standards on *The Academic Program, Educational Effectiveness, Planning and Evaluation*, and *Institutional Resources*.

Wheaton has made considerable progress, as noted above, in developing a culture of assessment. As this work is ongoing, we appreciate the College sharing its assessment efforts which include deploying a "comprehensive assessment plan," continuing the campus-wide adoption of Canvas, and maintaining its program review schedule. As guided by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*, we look forward to learning, through the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2029 comprehensive evaluation, of Wheaton College's continued success in implementing its plans to assess student learning:

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.6).

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 uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

The Commission appreciates Wheaton's ongoing efforts to balance its operating budget, including the Financial Bridge Plan noted above and the use of a five-year pro forma financial modeling approach. We note however, that the College is projecting an operating deficit of approximately \$9.6 million in FY2024, decreasing to \$4.5 million by FY2029. While the Commission also acknowledges that Wheaton's FTE enrollment has remained relatively steady these past three years, the College's discount rate has increased from 62.7% in FY2020 to 68.07% in FY2023. As expressed by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources*, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2029 self-study will enable the institution to provide evidence of its continued success in balancing its operating budget:

The institution plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.4).

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 (7.4).

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).

The institution and its governing board regularly and systematically review the effectiveness of the institution's financial aid policy and practices in advancing the institution's mission and helping to ensure that the institution enrolls and supports the student body it seeks to serve (7.10).

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

We acknowledge that Wheaton College has "proactively addressed" its deferred maintenance and facilities needs. Over the last decade, the College has invested "approximately \$85 million" in facilities projects to support growth of its residential undergraduate model. The Commission is also gratified to learn of the College's plans to use data and assess its campus master planning needs. The plans include conducting a comprehensive building and grounds assessment and the development of capital portfolio reporting tools. The Spring 2029 self-study will provide an opportunity for the College to update the Commission on its progress in this matter. This section of the self-study will be guided by our standard on *Institutional Resources*:

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 Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Wheaton College and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

Dr. Michaele Whelan
March 27, 2024
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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. Janet L. Lebovitz. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Russell C. Carey

RCC/jm

cc: Ms. Janet L. Lebovitz

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions