



April 18, 2023

Dr. Lucille A. Jordan
President
Nashua Community College
505 Amherst Street
Nashua, NH 03063

Dear President Jordan:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 3, 2023, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Nashua Community College and voted to take the following action:

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

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2028 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2028 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) developing and implementing its new strategic plan;
- 2) continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of its comprehensive approach to assessing student learning outcomes and using the results for improvement;
- 3) achieving its goal to become a Hispanic Serving Institution with emphasis on ensuring that academic and student support services are sufficient to support the institution's growing Latino population;
- 4) assessing the effectiveness of alternative delivery formats and using the results to make improvements with emphasis on courses using a Remote and FLEX format;
- 5) ensuring there are sufficient qualified faculty and staff to support the institution's mission.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Nashua Community College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of December 5, 2018, and February 25, 2021, and addressed each of the

nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Nashua Community College (NCC) for submitting an excellent, thoughtful, and comprehensive interim report that details the many ways the College has provided “quality, academically rigorous, higher-education programs focused on the diverse needs of students and the community” over the last five years. Under the leadership of NCC’s long-serving (25-year) president, NCC is completing its 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, and the College is now implementing its well-established participatory planning process to begin the development of a new strategic plan. It is further worth noting that NCC has installed software (IMPROVE) to log plans, monitor progress, and update plans as necessary; substantially strengthened its culture of assessment; and implemented a variety of student success initiatives (e.g., the corequisite Math and English model, program maps, a standardized online course template, and Open Educational Resources to help increase access and reduce the cost of course materials). The significant enhancements the College has made to the student experience through changes to mental health services, academic supports, food insecurity initiatives, and teaching and learning modalities are commendable, and the institution’s focus on addressing issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice is noted positively.

We are gratified to learn from NCC’s reflective essay that the “continuation and expansion” of assessment is an institutional priority. The College’s commitment to devote “significant institutional resources” to this work is noteworthy, as is its use of “numerous student success metrics” that are considered when developing approaches to improve the delivery of academic programs and services to students. Evidence of NCC’s dedication to student achievement includes the adoption of Institutional Learning Outcomes that specify expected competencies for students graduating from NCC; the implementation of Guided Pathways to Success, a series of nationally affirmed best practices that over the past four years has resulted in an increase in graduation rates from 24% to 34%; and the assessment of the institution’s General Education program that resulted in changes that led to a notable improvement in civic engagement (64% in 2020 to 77% in 2022). We understand that although efforts to evaluate co-curricular learning were stalled during the pandemic, assessment in this area has resumed with early indicators that the use of pre- and post-surveys will provide useful data on the impact of co-curricular activities on critical thinking. Also noteworthy are the assessment of student learning by modality, which demonstrates the GPA of online students increased from 2.57 in Fall 2019 to 2.76 in Fall 2020, and recent graduate surveys indicating that “nearly 100%” of Nursing and Precision Manufacturing program graduates are employed in their respective fields.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2028 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The five items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*; *Educational Effectiveness*; *Students*; *The Academic Program*; *Institutional Resources*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

As noted positively above, Nashua Community College is engaged in the process of developing its next strategic plan. To date, the College has gathered members of the campus community to reflect collectively on “issues...most critical to the success of the institution...” The results of this exercise were used to prepare a draft plan, and this iterative, participatory approach will continue until a new plan is finalized. In keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, we look forward, through the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2028 comprehensive evaluation, to learning of NCC’s success in developing and implementing its new strategic plan:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that

involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

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).

As documented in the interim report and noted with favor above, NCC has made substantial progress in establishing a comprehensive approach to assessing student learning outcomes. We also recognize that it will be necessary for the College to evaluate the long-term efficacy of its various assessment instruments and appreciate that understanding the impact of strategic initiatives on student learning outcomes will require the institution's sustained attention over time. Therefore, we ask that the Spring 2028 self-study include an update on the institution's continued success in this area. We are informed here by our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*:

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. The institution ensures that information about student success is easily accessible on its website (8.6).

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

The institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its institutional and program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students (8.10).

To support its strategic plans to meet the needs of the significant Hispanic/Latino population in the Nashua area, increase the number of Hispanic and Latino students at the institution, and become recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) within the next five years, NCC is taking steps to prepare the campus to better serve this population in general and, in particular, ESOL students. Early efforts include offering Spanish in the Workplace classes for employees, employing bi-and multi-lingual speakers in front-facing offices (e.g., Admissions and Financial Aid), and translating web pages and documents into Spanish. Evidence that these efforts and other initiatives are having a positive impact is the increase in retention rates of Black and Latino students, from 68% (Fall 2020 to Spring 2021) to 73% (Fall 2021 to Spring 2022), which are now roughly comparable to the retention rates of White students (75% Fall 2021 to Spring 2022). As evidence that NCC "has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5), we ask that the Spring 2028 self-study address NCC's progress in achieving its goal to become a Hispanic Serving Institution and verify that the College "systematically identifies the characteristics and needs of its student population and then makes provision for responding to them" (5.8).

We acknowledge favorably Nashua Community College's long history of increasing student access through the delivery of online and hybrid classes, and the pandemic created an opportunity for the institution to develop "new formats that aptly combine the components of online and face-to-face courses" in support of its strategic priority to continually "improve the delivery of academic

content to learners.” For example, in Fall 2020, NCC began offering Remote classes in which off-campus students meet synchronously for live instruction through videoconferencing services such as Zoom. More recently (Summer 2022), FLEX courses were introduced in which students have the option to attend class either on campus or remotely using a video conferencing service. The Spring 2028 self-study will afford NCC an opportunity to update the Commission on the institution’s success in assessing the effectiveness of these alternative delivery formats and using the results for improvement with emphasis on courses using Remote and FLEX formats. We are informed here by our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness*:

Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered (4.5).

Courses and programs offered for credit off campus, through...distance or correspondence education...are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. Faculty and students receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs. Students have ready access to and support in using appropriate learning resources. The institution maintains direct and sole responsibility for the academic quality of all aspects of all programs and assures adequate resources to maintain quality (4.46).

The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning and student success are valid and useful to improve programs and services for students and to inform the public (8.9).

The institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its institutional and program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students (8.10).

As NCC candidly acknowledges in its report, “maintaining the highest level of instruction is challenging.” We therefore note with approval that the institution’s process for hiring instructors is “systematic and efficient,” and we further commend the College on its unwavering commitment to “hire and retain qualified and capable college personnel” and to “continually support faculty and staff in professional development pursuits.” We look forward, in the Spring 2028 self-study, to receiving assurance that Nashua Community College “employs sufficient and qualified personnel to fulfill its mission” (7.1). Our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* is also relevant here:

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 ... (6.2).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Nashua Community 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.

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 Mark Rubenstein and Kathy Bogle Shields. The institution is free to release information about

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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Carey", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Russell Carey

RC/sjp

cc: Mark Rubenstein
Kathy Bogle Shields

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions