



April 27, 2021

Ms. Patricia Moulton
President
Vermont Technical College
One Main Street, PO BOX 500
Randolph Center, VT 05061-0500

Dear President Moulton:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 5, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Vermont Technical College:

that Vermont Technical College be continued in accreditation;

that the progress report scheduled for consideration in Spring 2022 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the matters specified in our letter of February 17, 2021, the Spring 2022 report give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) enhancing the institution's financial stability with attention to achieving its enrollment goals, including for the M.S. in Software Engineering program, diversifying its revenue resources, and implementing its plans for "right-sizing" the institution;
- 2) continuing to develop a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning and using the results for improvement;
- 3) continuing to strengthen its Institutional Research function and the use of data for decision making, resource allocation, and planning;
- 4) continuing to strengthen planning initiatives and the linking of institutional plans with those of the Vermont State College System;
- 5) reviewing foundational policies and procedures to ensure the efficacy of operations and making these policies easily available to members of the campus community;

that submission of the report be followed by a visit to validate its contents;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by August 15, 2025 for consideration in Fall 2025;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2030.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Vermont Technical College (VTC) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Vermont Technical College for its thorough and candid self-study. We acknowledge the careful preparation and broad participation which were evident throughout the report. We share the view expressed in the team report regarding VTC's "dedication to clarity and consensus around the mission of the college" and are impressed by all of the measures taken by the institution to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and staff throughout the disruption and uncertainty caused by the pandemic. We note with favor the exceptional 99% job placement rate of VTC graduates, which speaks to the "strategic intent of Vermont Tech to meet the educational needs of Vermont's workforce, to educate its citizens in the industries that are relevant and needed for its society and economy." The Commission is pleased to learn that the College's Strategic Plan 2018-2023 includes a goal to add five additional programs accessible to "nontraditional" students while reducing the total number of degree programs by six. We acknowledge the negative impact the initial decision made by the Chancellor in Spring 2020 to close the Randolph campus had on recruitment and enrollment efforts, and take favorable note that, since the decision was reversed, the College has worked to restore and strengthen its standing in the community and region. We are also pleased to learn of the creation of a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Team which will submit a plan to the President by Summer 2021 resulting from "a data-informed process that recognizes the college's changing environment" With strong and dedicated College leadership, and a devoted community both within and surrounding the institution, Vermont Technical College is well positioned to continue achieving its mission and addressing its challenges well into the future.

The Commission confirms the Spring 2022 progress report and asks that, in addition to the matters specified in our letter of February 17, 2021, the report address five other matters related to our standards on *Students; Institutional Resources; Planning and Evaluation; The Academic Program; Educational Effectiveness; Organization and Governance; and Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*.

As noted in both the self-study and the visiting team report, prior to the pandemic, Vermont Technical College had made substantial progress towards rebuilding its financial stability, as evidenced by an average annual surplus of \$300,000 for four consecutive years as well as a fully funded Board Required Reserve of approximately \$1 million and approximately \$3 million in strategic reserves. Additionally, we acknowledge that, heading into the pandemic, VTC was "at a point of strong enrollment ... projecting a greater than \$1 million surplus for FY2020." However, due to the pandemic, and similar to what many schools experienced, the College had a nearly 20% drop in Fall 2021 total enrollments and a 34% drop in first-year enrollments. We therefore share the observation of the visiting team that "this enrollment decline, coupled with lack of revenue diversification, will have a significant impact for VTC to meet their financial goals set forth in the Strategic Plan." We note with favor that, as part of its "right-sizing" strategy, the College monitors enrollment and demographic patterns and "moves resources" into growth areas such as its School of Nursing & Allied Health. The institution is also considering repurposing certain buildings at the Randolph Center campus, plans to expand the Williston campus through "public/private partnerships to assure growth capacity," and has partnered with the Educational Advisory Board for support and outreach efforts. At the same time, we share the concern of the visiting team that VTC's one graduate program, its M.S. in Software Engineering, has graduated only four students since its 2017 launch. We are therefore gratified to learn that the College plans to reevaluate the program for "academic relevancy" and may explore an accelerated "4+1 path" for undergraduates interested in pursuing this master's degree. The Spring 2022 report will provide Vermont Technical College an opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in meeting enrollment goals, diversifying its revenue sources, and implementing its "right sizing" initiatives. We remind you of our standards on *Students and Institutional Resources*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve (*Students*, Statement of the Standard).

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).

Opportunities identified for new sources of revenue are reviewed by the administration and board to ensure the integrity of the institution and the quality of the academic program are maintained and enhanced. The institution planning a substantive change demonstrates the financial and administrative capacity to ensure that the new initiative meets the standards of quality of the institution and the Commission's Standards (7.15).

Prior to the pandemic, Vermont Technical College had been making "significant strides" towards a comprehensive approach to assessment that includes both general education and program outcomes. However, we understand from the visiting team report that "no system and procedure currently exists to share assessment outcomes and data" across departments or at the institutional level, and we share their concern that there is an apparent "lack of determination within individual programs" regarding program review and assessment. Therefore, we are pleased to learn that after a COVID-caused hiatus, the College plans to resume an "all-college Continuous Improvement and Assessment Morning and an Assessment Day," is considering the use of a cloud platform for "archiving, compiling and organizing assessment artifacts and rubric analysis," and is phasing in a "checklist of required content" to ensure integrity of the credit hour and student learning outcomes. Moreover, we acknowledge that VTC will expand the implementation of its assessment of learning outcome measures from the first-year and sophomore levels to upper-level and graduate-level coursework. We are also pleased to learn that the institution plans to develop a local application that can tie into the state-wide dashboard for program review and that the newly created Transformation Advisory Taskforce (TAT) has a "Comprehensive Program Review" working group. The upcoming Spring 2022 report will provide the College an opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in these areas. We are guided here by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, and *Educational Effectiveness*:

The institution's principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

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 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).

We understand that Vermont Technical College eliminated its full-time institutional research position in 2015 and has been addressing the institution's needs in this area by using the services of several individuals at the College who have many years of experience working with data. However, as noted by the visiting team, while this arrangement allows for routine data collection and reporting, "it does not appear that ad-hoc requests are systematically processed ... and it is not clear how such requests have supported efforts to enhance operations or promote academic success." Furthermore, the team noted "multiple discrepancies between the narrative and the data first forms." We are gratified to learn that VTC is "looking at potential funding mechanisms" to reestablish a full-time equivalent staff member for the institutional research function and that the TAT working group focusing on Analysis of all Business and Operational Functions is also exploring options to address this need. The Spring 2022 progress report will afford the College an opportunity to update the Commission on how it has strengthened its institutional research function and is using data for decision making, resource allocation, and planning. This section of the report should be informed by our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

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 has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation (2.8).

Vermont Technical College has undergone several different planning initiatives over the past ten years, and we note with favor that a "large portion" of faculty, students and staff have been involved in these planning processes. We understand that due to the pandemic, the College has pivoted from its strategic plan to "transformational planning" and has developed five strategic initiatives, "formal Project Charters for transformation," that incorporate work from the prior strategic plan and planning initiatives of the Vermont State Colleges System. The College acknowledges that its first planning priority is to achieve and maintain stability through the work on the five Project Charters and its second priority involves understanding how the "system transformation" will have an impact on the College. We welcome an update on these matters through the Spring 2022 report in keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

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 and include external perspectives. 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).

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).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.5).

Finally, we appreciate Vermont Technical College's candid acknowledgment that the institution "does not have a common set of procedures for the regular review of policies across the institution," and we understand that the process for the creation of new policies was "articulated differently" in meetings of the visiting team with different campus constituents and that the team found it difficult to access many system policies including conflict of interest, nondiscrimination, and Title IX. We are, therefore, pleased to learn that the College has already begun the process of updating its policies and the webpages where the policies are housed. The Spring 2022 report will provide the College an opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in reviewing foundational policies and procedures and making these policies easily available to members of the campus community in keeping with our standards on *Organization and Governance; Institutional Resources; and Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*:

The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. (3.2).

Human resources policies are readily available, consistently applied, and periodically reviewed. Policies provide for the fair redress of grievances (7.2).

The institution has established and publicizes clear policies ensuring institutional integrity. Included among them are appropriate policies and procedures for the fair resolution of grievances brought by faculty, staff, or students (9.8).

Submission of the Spring 2022 progress report will be followed by a visit to validate its contents. A copy of the procedures for the focused evaluation are enclosed for your information and use.

The request that Vermont Technical College submit an interim report in Fall 2025 is consistent with Commission policy requiring an interim (fifth-year) 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 2030 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 Vermont Technical College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, John Tyler, Dean of Administration, Ana Gaillat, Dean of Academic Affairs, and Douglas Sherman, 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 system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Ms.

Ms. Patricia Moulton
April 27, 2021
Page 6

Lynn Dickinson and Ms. Sophie Zdatny. 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.

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

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm

cc: Ms. Lynn Dickinson
Ms. Sophie Zdatny
Visiting Team

Enclosure:

Procedures for Focused Evaluation Visit
Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions