November 15, 2012

Dr. Robert L. Pura
President
Greenfield Community College
1 College Drive
Greenfield, MA 01301

Dear President Pura:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 21, 2012, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by Greenfield Community College and took the following action:

that the report on distance education submitted by Greenfield Community College be accepted, and the proposed distance education programming be included within the institution’s accreditation, with an effective date of January 1, 2013;

that approval for distance education be limited to the Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts degree and the College be reminded that plans to offer additional programs through distance education need to be submitted to the Commission for approval prior to implementation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Fall 2014 that gives emphasis to the institution’s progress in implementing the Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts degree with particular attention on program assessment.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by Greenfield Community College (GCC) was accepted and the proposed distance education programming encompassed within the institution’s accreditation because the Commission finds the activity to be substantially in compliance with the Standards for Accreditation and relevant Commission policies.

We commend GCC for a thorough and comprehensive report outlining its plans to offer the A.A. in Liberal Arts degree fully online. We are heartened to learn of the Title III grant that was used to establish a foundation for the A.A. in Liberal Arts, a program that supports the needs of the local community and aligns with GCC’s vision and mission. We are further pleased
that the grant provided funding for a full-time Coordinator of Distance Learning and Instructional Technology position that has been institutionalized. As noted in the proposed plans, sufficient resources are available, including a shared distance learning network, professional development for faculty, support for the development of online courses, and library and technological resources appropriate to meet the needs of online students. We note with favor that there are strong student support mechanisms in place including an opportunity for students to assess their level of technology proficiency before enrolling in an online course. Finally, we are pleased to learn that online courses will be financially supported by the College in the same manner as classroom-based courses.

Greenfield Community College’s approval for distance education is limited to the Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts degree because the College lacks extensive experience offering programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be earned online. It is typically the case that before granting general approval to offer programs for which 50% or more of the credits can be completed entirely online, the Commission expects to see developed capacity for this learning modality and success with the initial program(s). We remind you that any plans to offer additional online programs will need to be reviewed by the Commission, consistent with our Policy on Substantive Change.

The report submitted for consideration in Fall 2014 will afford GCC an opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in implementing the online Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts degree with particular attention to the institution’s success in establishing a strategy to assess student learning outcomes in the program. We understand that the Coordinator of Distance Learning and Instructional Technology will lead efforts to develop this assessment strategy. We look forward to learning of the institution’s success in this regard, as guided by our standards on Planning and Evaluation and The Academic Program:

Based on verifiable information, the institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and resource allocation and to inform the public about the institution (2.7).

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 Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Greenfield Community College and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. We appreciate your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

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. Robert Cohn. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.
If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Pattenaude

cc: Mr. Robert Cohn