



UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

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July 22, 2015

Dr. Barbara E. Brittingham
President of the Commission
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Dr. Brittingham:

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to the report concerning the evaluation of the University of Massachusetts Boston that took place on April 12-15, 2015.

We appreciate the care with which the team reviewed our self-study and conducted its campus visit. The team met with and solicited comments from a wide range of students, faculty, and staff while on campus, and team members shared their observations and questions with us in an open and collegial manner.

We are pleased that the team "gets" UMass Boston and that its report captures the richness and complexity of the university. The report largely confirms the main theme of our self-study: UMass Boston is undergoing a comprehensive transformation into an increasingly sophisticated research university, while also remaining true to its mission as an institution committed to teaching and public service. There are growing pains to be expected during such an ambitious transformation, and structures and processes developed to facilitate the achievement of strategic goals remain to be adjusted and institutionalized.

The overall comments the review team makes regarding our compliance with each of the Commission's eleven standards are consonant with our own analysis undertaken during the self-study process. The team's appraisals parallel the appraisal sections of our self-study with only minor exceptions. We would like to provide some additional information related to three matters the report mentions: the initial experience of transfer students; the need for integration of planning processes; and the achievement of strategic planning goals.

First, the review team comments that some transfer students experience difficulty with transfer credit equivalencies in admissions and advising. Transfer students have always been the major part of our entering new student cohort, and we pay close attention to our system of transfer student credit evaluation and course placement. It is true that, at times, transfer students who have been admitted with sufficient transcripts from previous institutions will submit additional transcripts later. Understandably, such students do experience lags in getting that additional previous work evaluated. To encourage complete and timely applications, we guarantee that admitted transfer students who submit complete documentation of previous coursework in time for review during new student orientation will receive appropriate advising on remaining degree requirements. Our commitment to transfer student success is steadfast, and we will continue to make investments and improvements in this area.

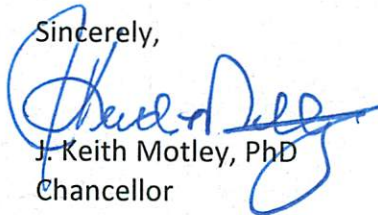
Second, the report points out the progress we have made realizing our strategic plan but mentions the need for tighter integration of academic, fiscal, enrollment, and capital planning. The team report is in line with our own assessment that as we become an increasingly complex institution we need to more closely integrate our institutional-level planning processes, and better connect strategic planning with day-to-day operational decision-making. We identified these needs in our self-study and in our projections commented on steps we are taking to achieve this integration. Two of the central projections in our self-study for Standard Two on Planning and Evaluation are that “the provost and the vice chancellor for administration and finance will convene a working group to develop a strategy to better align academic program planning and development with the master plan and fiscal planning” and the “provost and the vice chancellor for administration and finance will convene a group of representatives from Information Technology, Institutional Research and Policy Studies, and Budget and Financial Planning, among other departments, to develop a plan for increasing staff capacity and acquiring technological and organizational systems to integrate financial, human-resources, and student-related data for better-informed decision-making.” In sum, we agree with the team report and are working to create the infrastructure that is needed for the fulfillment of our strategic goals.

Third, the review team also mentions that our strategic plan has “a very aggressive set of goals” that relies on the growth of a number of revenue sources. We have, indeed, charted an aggressive enrollment, research, and service agenda. We continue to advocate along with the UMass system office for increases in state-supported assistance, while developing outside gifts, research grants, revenue-generating academic programs, and alumni giving. We are similar to other large public universities in the need to develop multiple revenue streams while demonstrating to our state legislature the critical role that we play in the economic well-being and quality of life of our state. We are cognizant that growth trajectories do not proceed linearly or smoothly. As we mentioned in the appraisal section of Standard Nine on Financial Resources, we “must continually seek out new sources of revenue in order to diversify [our] revenue base sufficiently to withstand shocks generated by temporary or permanent

reductions in revenues in any particular area.” We have been able to adjust our expenses and program initiatives to stay in line with our revenues and we will continue to adjust strategic planning targets as revenue streams become more robust or grow more slowly than expected. For example, as we commented in the appraisal section of Standard Six, delays in bringing residence halls online contributed to a slower than planned growth and an adjustment to our enrollment targets. With the help of the additional staff capacity and systems mentioned above, we will monitor and adjust the pace of our growth in light of circumstances without deviating from our commitment to institutional transformation.

We thank the Commission for its feedback and clear focus on institutional improvement, and we look forward to meeting with you and your colleagues this fall.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Keith Motley", is written over the typed name and title.

J. Keith Motley, PhD
Chancellor