



May 17, 2024

Dr. Paula A. Johnson  
President  
Wellesley College  
106 Central Street  
Wellesley, MA 02481-8203

Dear President Johnson:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 19, 2024, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Wellesley College and voted to take the following action:

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

that Wellesley College be granted general authority to offer distance education programming within the scope of its mission;

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 success in:

- 1) implementing its plans for its physical campus, particularly its multi-year residential plan;
- 2) revising its degree requirements and refining its definition of a Wellesley education;
- 3) assuring sufficient tenure- and non-tenure track faculty, with particular emphasis on recruitment and retention;
- 4) continuing its commitment to inclusive excellence for all student populations.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Wellesley College was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of October 22, 2019, and January 8, 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 Wellesley College (Wellesley) for its thoughtful, detailed interim report. We are pleased that the report provided an opportunity for the College to “pause and reflect” on its current challenges and opportunities. The Commission is gratified to learn that, since its comprehensive evaluation, Wellesley developed its first

“comprehensive” strategic plan through a process that engaged the campus community. The plan, a “visionary and inspiring document,” has four priorities – advancing a transformative education, elevating Wellesley’s role in the world, strengthening organization and governance, and building community – and informs the College’s annual budgeting process. We also note with favor that Wellesley has “streamlined” its governance structures and processes and is developing a shared governance grid to provide “added clarity and transparency” regarding decision-making authority. In addition, the Commission commends the institution for its need-blind admission policy and for implementing a “test-optional admission policy” during the pandemic which will continue through at least 2028. We further note positively Wellesley College’s efforts to cultivate a diverse and inclusive student body. Lastly, the Commission appreciates that the College completed the renovation of its Science Complex, which will enable the institution to “bring even more Wellesley students, from all backgrounds, into the culture of science.”

The Commission thanks Wellesley College for its well-written reflective essay that focuses on the College’s commitment to the “ideals of inclusive excellence.” We acknowledge the institution’s impressive 95% first-year retention rate as well as its 92% six-year graduation rate. The Commission notes with favor, therefore, Wellesley’s continued efforts to further scrutinize its “transcript-level data” and curricular and pedagogical approaches to better understand the learning experience of all students. We understand this analysis revealed variations in the academic experience by race and ethnicity and “significant discrepancies in grades received by different student populations.” The Commission commends Wellesley for its “concentrated efforts” to address these issues through several initiatives including its “STEM strategy” and its “vigorous[]” pursuit of curricular innovations. The Commission is gratified to learn that students from underrepresented groups are now majoring in STEM and economics at rates that are “on a par with” or exceed the rates of white students.

Wellesley College is granted general approval to offer distance education programming within the scope of its mission because the institution has demonstrated its capacity to offer high-quality academic programming in an online format. We understand that the College did not offer distance learning until the pandemic when it rapidly shifted to fully remote learning in Spring 2020. During AY2021, 71% of Fall courses and 75% of Spring courses were offered remotely. The Commission acknowledges that, while the College has since returned to in-person learning with Zoom being permitted “very rarely and under specific circumstances” during the academic year, Wellesley continues to offer its summer courses via distance education.

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 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*; *Institutional Resources*; *The Academic Program*; *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*; and *Educational Effectiveness*.

We understand that Wellesley College is undertaking a 10-year residence hall renovation plan and, as an initial step, has “accelerated deferred maintenance” on five of its residence halls. The Commission notes that the institution is also making “critical repairs” in several academic buildings. We anticipate being apprised, through the Spring 2029 self-study, of the College’s “success in implementing the results of its planning” (2.5) for its physical campus. We are further guided here 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 appreciates that the College’s Committee on Curriculum and Academic Policy (CCAP) began reviewing the institution’s degree requirements in Fall 2022, and we acknowledge the College’s steadfast commitment to the “traditional qualities of liberal arts education” that “prioritize[s] both a breadth and depth of study.” The Commission notes that the Committee expected to put forth a proposal for revised

degree requirements in Spring 2024 and that the College continues to work on refining its definition of a Wellesley education. As informed by our standard on *The Academic Program*, the Commission looks forward to learning, through the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2029 comprehensive evaluation, of Wellesley College's success in this matter:

The general education program is coherent and substantive. It reflects the institution's mission and values and embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.17).

The Commission understands that Wellesley College "rebalanced" its faculty FTE and reduced the overall number of tenure lines to 231 (down from a high of 258). We appreciate that the institution is "strategically" building interdisciplinary capacity via joint appointments. The Commission further acknowledges that, in January 2024, non-tenure track faculty voted to unionize and understands that contract negotiations will begin shortly. The Commission shares Wellesley's assessment that this will be a "new chapter" for the College as it continues to support its faculty and we are gratified to learn, therefore, that faculty recruitment and retention will be central goals of Wellesley's comprehensive campaign. The self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2029 comprehensive evaluation will enable the institution to provide evidence of its success in assuring sufficient tenure- and non-tenure track faculty. Our standard on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* provides this guidance:

The composition of the faculty reflects the institution's mission, programs, and student body and is periodically reviewed. The institution's use of all categories of faculty and teaching assistants to conduct instruction is regularly assessed, properly overseen, and consistent with its mission (6.1).

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. Responsibilities include instruction, accessibility to students, and the systematic understanding of effective teaching/learning processes and outcomes in courses and programs for which they share responsibility; additional duties may include, e.g., student advisement, academic planning, and participation in policy-making, course and curricular development, research, and institutional governance (6.2).

As noted above, the Commission commends Wellesley College for its commitment to inclusive excellence and notes with approval its plans to "deepen and expand" its efforts in these areas over the next few years. The College's plans include continuing to recruit a diverse student body, maintaining its need-blind admission policy, and continuing its "data-informed approach" to strengthening inclusive excellence. We anticipate being apprised, through the Spring 2029 self-study, of Wellesley's success in these matters. This section of the report will be informed by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* (cited above) and *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).

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The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Wellesley 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 of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Debora de Hoyos. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Carey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Russell Carey

RC/sjp

cc: Debora de Hoyos

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions