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Ms. Barbara E. Brittingham
Director
New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
209 Burlington Road, Suite 201
Bedford, MA 01730-1433

Dear Barbara,

We thank the Visiting Team, especially Chair Jim Wright, for the generous gift of their close attention, which was evident in their preparation, their time on campus, and their thoughtful and thorough report. We appreciate both their praise, of which we hope to prove worthy, and their critical perspectives, which we largely share.

We've made the report widely available on campus and to the public, including through the College Web site, and it provided key background material for the recent planning retreat of our Board of Trustees.

I will summarize here the ways in which the College intends to address the team's main suggestions.

Planning

The work of our strategic planning process, called the 2020 Project, has benefited from the background research conducted by a number of trustee/faculty/staff committees and has moved now to the stage in which virtually the entire College governance structure is involved in identifying concrete steps forward. This work now resides mostly within our faculty/staff/student committees.

We also recognize the need to engage in a comprehensive update of our 2002 campus master planning process. The next iteration will address shortcomings in our facilities for recreation and athletics and for the Williams College Museum of Art. We will also consider our commercial buildings, rental houses, parking and transportation, and related issues. We have begun a set of discussions with leaders of Williamstown and key developers. Our campus planning will be informed by two new databases that enable more sophisticated modeling of our renovation and replacement needs. Early indications are that we need to add, though only modestly, to our practice of putting aside two percent of our building valuations for future renovation and replacement. Campus master planning will also be driven by the overarching goals for meeting our environmental sustainability targets.

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Though we've increased modestly in recent years the level of our contingency funds for operations, we don't perceive a need to increase it significantly further. We generally live within the contingency we have, we budget at high enough levels that our need for such funds is less than it would otherwise be, and we do increase the amount of contingency funds available for years in which we believe that more may be called for, such as when new programs are launched.

The Provost and Chief Investment Officer have worked with a consulting firm to model the potential effects on our resources of downturns in financial markets, including severe ones, and are sharing the results with the Board.

We're expanding our efforts at risk assessment beyond matters of health and safety to include such areas as financial risks (investments, mismanagement, theft), cyber risks (identity or data theft), risks to business continuity, and risks to physical assets.

Faculty

We believe that our programs of support for research and professional development are more available to faculty than they appeared to the Visiting Team. Nonetheless, we expect to increase the travel, conference, and professional development allowances automatically given to regular faculty by \$250 in each of the next three years, bringing it to \$3,000 per year. We'll continue to try to expand the other sources of College funding to support faculty research and professional development, for example through the Dean of the Faculty's Office and the Science Executive Committee.

We'll continue to work actively to expand the applicant pool for faculty positions in ways that will increase the diversity of applicants and, we hope, of new appointments. In addition, we'll encourage departments and programs to define new positions in ways that will both further diversify the curriculum and increase the probability of appointments that will further diversify the faculty, while pursuing opportunities to make appointments that increase faculty diversity when they arrive either during or outside of the regular search process.

Students

We plan to undertake an external review of the organization of our Dean's Office, which, we understand, differs from those at many similar colleges. The point will be to identify what in our current structure works well and change what may be less effective. One important goal will be to build more bridges between academic affairs and student life. More immediately, we're working to streamline and clarify how student-initiated events are produced. The aim is to eliminate confusion about where the Office of Campus Life fits into a process that involves student groups, campus spaces, and a number of College offices. This spring we also will conduct a forum with student leaders as the first in a series of discussions aimed at producing a mission statement for the Office of Campus Life.

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To increase faculty engagement with our new residential life neighborhoods, we're launching in the coming academic year a program that will pay a stipend and provide a budget to one faculty member for each neighborhood to provide creative ideas for programming, including events that will encourage more faculty engagement. We also are working on ways to involve first-year students more in neighborhood activities.

We'll institute this summer a pre-orientation program for international students and those with very high financial need to help ease their transition to Williams.

We're increasing funding for diagnostic testing and support for the handful of students each year who arrive here with learning disabilities or mental health conditions that have not been diagnosed.

Our Committee on Educational Policy is preparing a series of proposals to increase the support available to students to improve their writing, and to faculty to enable them to teach writing more effectively. These proposals include the establishment of a writing center as part of an expanded academic resource center, the appointment of a faculty member to oversee a strengthened writing program, and the creation of a full-time staff position of writing coordinator.

The Provost, Dean of the College, and Librarian attended a conference on developing information literacy. They've developed and are implementing an information literacy plan that involves College committees and a faculty/staff advisory group. This effort remains a high priority for the senior administration.

Our Advisory Group on Admissions and Financial Aid continues to monitor the true costs of attending Williams, particularly for those with very high financial need. Recent changes in our financial aid policies result in more funds being available to many students, including for such items as computers.

In addition to the items listed above, we remain committed to developing the diversity of our community of students, faculty, and staff and to taking the steps necessary to make it truly welcoming and inclusive of all its members.

As stated in our Self Study, we are fortunate to be aided in our pursuit of these goals by the strength of our institutional history and current resources, both human and financial. We have now been fortunate also in the valuable guidance provided by the Visiting Team. We thank you and the Commission for your efforts in organizing that effort.

Best regards,

Morton Owen Schapiro

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