November 17, 2014

Mr. Dave Clark, Interim President
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Dr. Ken Grosz, Campus Dean
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Dr. Douglas D. Darling, President
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Dr. Gary D. Hagen, President
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Dr. Steven Shirley, President
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Dr. John Richman, President
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Dr. Margaret Dahlberg, Interim President
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Valley City, ND 57072

Dr. Raymond Nadolny, President
Williston State College
1410 University Ave.
Williston, ND 58801

Dear Presidents Clark, Coston, Darling, Hagen, Shirley, Richman, Bresciani, Kelley, Dahlberg and Nadolny, and Dean Grosz:

I am writing regarding action concerning the institutions in the North Dakota University System ("the institutions" or "the System") taken by the Higher Learning Commission Board of Trustees ("the Board"). These institutions includes Bismarck State College, Dakota College at Bottineau, Dickinson State University, Lake Region State College, Mayville State University, Minot State University, North Dakota State College of Science, North Dakota State University, University of North Dakota, Valley City State University, and Williston State College. At its meeting on October 30, 2014, the Board voted to require the institutions to submit an interim report no later than September 1, 2015 on whether the Board and system office are working to refine and strengthen their work on systematic improvement. The Board also required that the institutions host a focused evaluation on the same topics no later than November 29, 2015. The Board took action based on materials related to the Advisory Visit that took place in April 2014, including the complaints, the team report, the System’s responses to these documents, and other materials relevant to the evaluation.

The Board based its action upon the following findings made with regard to the System:
The System and its institutions are experiencing challenges related to Criterion Five, Core Component 5.D, “the institution works systematically to improve its performance,” because the System is in the process of revising and implementing strategic planning and these efforts are in the early stages of development as reflected in the following:

- the System lacks a long-term uniform systematic approach through which the Board sets goals for its Chancellor and Presidents and on a regular basis evaluates them against those goals;
- the State Higher Education Board lacks a long-term systematic approach to orienting its new members, providing documentation, outside of the North Dakota State Constitution, defining the roles and responsibilities of Board members, or engaging in analysis of its own goals, policies and procedures to determine whether it is achieving its objectives;
- the System lacks a long-term systematic approach to evaluating the performance of the institutions it governs and engaging in strategic planning that is informed by its constituent institutions as well as by relevant, objective data about their performance and that is aligned with its efforts to improve the System and its institutions; and
- the System, including the Chancellor, staff, and Board, are working to address the issues related to goal-setting, evaluation, planning, and accountability for improvement; however, the efforts of the System are nascent and have not yet demonstrated systematic long-term success.

The Board action resulted in changes to the Statement of Affiliation Status for each institution. The Statement of Affiliation Status is a summary of an institution’s ongoing relationship with the Commission. Some of the information from this document, such as the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the Commission’s website. The Organizational Profile which includes information about the educational offerings of an institution, will remain on the website. In addition, Commission Policy INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information, anticipates that the Commission will release action letters related to the outcome of an advisory visit to the public. The Commission will do so by posting this action letter on the Commission website for each institution in the System along with the Statement of Affiliation Status and Organizational Profile.

Information about notifying the public of this action is available at http://ncahlc.org/Information-for-Institutions/institutional-reporting-of-actions.html. In addition, Commission policy COMM.A.10.010, Commission Public Notices and Statements, requires that the Commission prepare a summary of actions to be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations, and published on its website. The summary will include the Commission Board action regarding the System. The institutions may choose to prepare statements to their constituencies regarding this action; I ask that you copy your staff liaison on any such communication.

This action concludes the Commission’s review of the complaint and the Advisory Visit processes. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I thank you and your associates for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Barbara Gellman-Danley
President
cc:  Dr. Larry Skogen, Interim Chancellor, North Dakota University System
Dr. Drake Carter, Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs, Bismarck State College
Dr. Ken Grosz, Campus Dean, Dakota College at Bottineau
Ms. Karen A. Nelson, Director of Special Projects, Dickinson State University
Mrs. Brandi Nelson, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Lake Region State College
Dr. Keith Stenehjem, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Mayville State University
Dr. Lenore M. Koczon, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Minot State University
Dr. Jane Vangness-Frisch, Director of Student Success, Career Services and Institutional Effectiveness, North Dakota State College of Science
Dr. Larry Richard Peterson, Director of Accreditation, Assessment, & Academic Advising, North Dakota State University
Dr. Joan Hawthorne, Director Assessment & Regional Accreditation, University of North Dakota
Dr. Margaret Dahlberg, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Valley City State University
Ms. Kaylyn Bondy, Registrar/Director, Institutional Research & Effectiveness, Williston State College
Ms. Karen Solinski, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Sunil Ahuja, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Stephanie Brzuzy, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Andrew Lootens-White, Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Eric Martin, Vice President for Accreditation Relations and Director, AQIP Pathway, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Jeffrey Rosen, Vice President for Accreditation Relations and Director, Open Pathway, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Karen Solomon, Vice President for Accreditation Relations and Director, Standard Pathway, Higher Learning Commission