March 3, 2016

Mr. Thomas H. Shortbull, President
Oglala Lakota College
P.O. Box 490
Piya Wiconi Road
Kyle, SD 57752

Dear President Shortbull:

This letter is formal notification of action taken concerning Oglala Lakota College, (“the College”) by the Higher Learning Commission (“HLC” or “the Commission”) Board of Trustees (“the Board”). At its meeting on February 25, 2016, the Board removed the sanction of Notice from the College. The Board determined that the removal of the sanction was warranted based on evidence including the Notice Report, the report of the visiting team, the staff analysis of the sanction, the College’s response to these reports and other relevant materials. In addition, the Board maintained the placement of the College on the Standard Pathway. The Board required that the College host its next comprehensive evaluation in 2017-18 and its next Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2023-24 as currently scheduled.

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the College:

The College has demonstrated that it has addressed the Commission’s concerns related to Criterion Four, Core Component 4.C, “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention and persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs,” for the following reasons:

• the College has added several positions to enhance efforts in retention, persistence, graduation, collection of and analysis of data, and assessment, including an Enrollment Management Director, Data Support Specialist, General Education Faculty Director, Retention Advisor and a dedicated secretary for the academic units;
• the Retention Committee has been engaged in regular meetings resulting in key recommendations for improving retention, persistence and completion;
• the College has collected and aggregated data from the Early Alert system through Jenzabar for Fall 2014 and Spring 2015 and the results indicate a decline in the number of early alerts issued;
• academic units are in the process of establishing retention goals for their respective departments and the College has invested in a number of targeted strategies that provide instrumental support to students, including transportation and increased hours at College centers;
• the College has secured a Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant which will fund, among other things, a summer bridge program for new students;
• the College reported its retention rate increased by 7%, from 43% in Fall 2013 to 50% in Fall 2014;
• while the College reported very low completion rates with a four-year completion rate of 1% in 2013-2014 and 2014-15, a six-year completion rate of 7% in 2013-14 and 8% in 2014-15, and an
eight-year completion rate of 4% in 2013-14 and 3% in 2014-15, the College has the organizational capacity to improve these rates;

- while the College reports its “overall completion rate” including certificates, associates, bachelors and master’s degrees for both the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years as 2%, its initiatives over time are likely to improve these outcomes; and

- the College has articulated reasonable goals within its 2012-2017 Strategic Plan related to persistence, retention and completion; each goal anticipates an annual increase of 2% for each measure with a stated overall goal of 10% for each measure by 2018.

The College has demonstrated that it has addressed the Commission’s concerns related to Criterion Five, Core Component 5.D, “the institution works systematically to improve its performance,” for the following reasons:

- the College’s comprehensive Institutional Effectiveness plan (IEP) is yielding promising results with a high level of engagement across the various constituents within the College;

- All units and departments submitted Annual Reports and IEPs in August 2015 and a review of the College’s 2012-2017 strategic plan shows that the College links budgeting to planning through the unit IEPs;

- the College has also enhanced its work in the area of Assessment, with a General Education Assessment Committee engaging in curriculum mapping and developing recommendations for improvement; and

- the College has transitioned from articulating course-level learning outcomes to program level learning outcomes through the process of program review.

The College has demonstrated that it has addressed the Commission’s concerns related to Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning,” because it has developed the infrastructure for assessment of student learning and is collecting and analyzing data to guide planning and budgeting.

The College has demonstrated that it has addressed the Commission’s concerns related to Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, “the institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission” because the College’s institution-wide assessment, planning and budgeting are well-defined and demonstrate continuous implementation.

The College has demonstrated that it has addressed the Commission’s concerns related to Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, “the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning” because its planning process has been both inclusive and comprehensive.

The Board action resulted in changes to the affiliation of the College. These changes are reflected on the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. Some of the information on that document, such as the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the HLC website.

In addition, HLC policy INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information, anticipates that HLC will release action letters related to the removal of a sanction to members of the public. HLC will do so by posting this action letter to its website. Also, HLC policy COMM.A.10.010, Commission Public Notices and Statements, requires that HLC 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 HLC Board action regarding the College.
At this time, the Commission will reassign the College from its liaison Dr. Anthea Sweeney to Dr. Mary Vanis. If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this letter, please contact Dr. Vanis. Please be assured that Dr. Vanis will work with Dr. Sweeney to create a smooth transition.

Information about notifying the public of this action is available at http://www.hlcommission.org/HLC-Institutions/institutional-reporting-of-actions.html. The College may choose to prepare a statement to its constituencies regarding this action; I ask that you copy Dr. Vanis on any such communication.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I thank you and your associates for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Oglala Lakota College
Evaluation team members
Dr. Dawn A Frank, Vice President of Instruction, ALO
Dr. Anthea Sweeney, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Dr. Mary Vanis, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Karen L. Solinski, Executive Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning Commission
Herman Bounds, Accreditation and State Liaison, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education