



March 1, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Marianne Mount, President  
Catholic Distance University  
300 S. George St.  
Charles Town, WV 25414

Dear President Mount:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Catholic Distance University (“the Institution”). This action is effective as of the date the Board acted, February 25, 2021. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent comprehensive evaluation, including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the institution submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (IAC) Hearing Committee, and the institutional responses to these reports.

**Summary of the Action:** The HLC Board of Trustees has continued the Candidacy of the Institution. The Institution remains scheduled to undergo a comprehensive evaluation for Initial Accreditation in 2021-22.

### **Board Rationale**

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the Institution as well as the entire record before the Board:

Catholic Distance University (“the Institution”) meets, but with concerns, Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning,” for the following reasons:

- The Institution has put forth much effort in developing its assessment infrastructure. For example, the Institution demonstrates aligned program learning outcomes through curriculum maps and program goals that are linked directly to institutional outcomes. Curriculum maps provide detail on course fit within each program. The Institution has created tables showing types of course assessments tied to targeted assessments that will be used for program review.
- The Institution uses a standard rubric to score a variety of course assignments without clearly identifying the learning outcome being measured. The Institution cannot demonstrate what it learned from the targeted assessments, and the lack of specificity in what is being measured makes demonstrating this difficult.

- The Institution has created charts and dashboards to track student data on student course satisfaction, average GPAs, targeted assessments, juried assessments, course completion rates, graduation rates, exit survey feedback, and alumni occupations. However, the Institution's existing assessment process and infrastructure needs improvement and maturation.
- The Institution is missing the following components in its assessment infrastructure: (1) assessment of its general education learning outcomes; (2) concrete program assessment measures to provide meaningful indicators of student outcomes relative to program goals; (3) improved articulation of results of data collected and analyzed for program-level and institutional-level outcomes; (4) confinement of the term “assessment” to those institutional actions associated with collection and analysis of student learning data; and (5) professional development opportunities for faculty and staff on assessment of student learning at the program level.

The Institution is currently in compliance with the Assumed Practices, the Eligibility Requirements, and all Federal Compliance Requirements.

The Board determined based on the preceding findings and evidence in the record that the Institution has not demonstrated that it meets the requirements for Early Initial Accreditation.

### Next Steps in the HLC Review Process

**Comprehensive Evaluation:** The Institution remains scheduled to undergo its comprehensive evaluation for Initial Accreditation in 2021-22.

### HLC Disclosure Obligations

The Board action resulted in changes that will be reflected in the institution’s Statement of Accreditation Status as well as the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. The Statement of Accreditation Status, including the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the HLC website.

HLC policy<sup>1</sup> requires that a summary of Board actions be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and accrediting associations. It also will be published on HLC’s website. The summary will include this HLC action regarding the institution.

At this time, HLC will reassign the Institution from its liaison, Dr. Gigi Fansler, to Dr. Andrew Lootens-White. Please be assured that Dr. Lootens-White will work with Dr. Fansler to create a smooth transition.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have questions about any of the information in this letter, please contact Dr. Lootens-White.

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<sup>1</sup> COMM.A.10.010, Commission Public Notices and Statements

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Gellman-Danley".

Barbara Gellman-Danley  
President

Cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Catholic Distance University  
Mary Margaret Ann, Dean of Catechetical Programs, Catholic Distance University  
Evaluation Team Chair  
IAC Hearing Committee Evaluation Team Chair  
A. Gigi Fansler, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission  
Andrew Lootens-White, Vice President of Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning  
Commission  
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President of Legal and Regulatory Affairs, Higher Learning  
Commission  
Sheree Bryant, Compliance Officer for Authorization and Proprietary School Programs,  
West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission