



November 13, 2017

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Joseph Opatz, Interm President
Ridgewater College
P.O. Box 1097
2101 15th Ave NW
Willmar, MN 56201

Dear President Opatz:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (“HLC” or “the Commission”) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Ridgewater College (“the College” or “the institution”). At its meeting on November 2-3, 2017, the Board voted to reaffirm the accreditation of the College and scheduled the institution for monitoring. This action is effective as of the date action was taken. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the College’s most recent comprehensive evaluation, including but not limited to: the Quality Highlights Report the College submitted, the report from the Comprehensive Quality Review team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council Hearing Committee, the institution’s responses to these reports, and other materials relevant to the evaluation.

The Board required that the College submit an Interim Report no later than September 1, 2019, on the following topics:

- Evidence of faculty, staff, and administration collaboration;
- Evidence that the Board of Trustees is trained regarding the HLC Criteria for Accreditation and related accreditation processes; and
- Evidence of a selection process to identify the next President of the College. This process should demonstrate involvement of the College’s constituents.

The Board determined that the University is eligible to choose its Pathway (AQIP, Open, or Standard) and required that it host its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation no later than 2027-28.

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

The College meets 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,” but with concerns because:

- The College culture, as confirmed by faculty, did not encourage a climate of shared governance where faculty and administration work within their given roles to help the College fulfill its mission;

- The former College President announced his dismissal just four days prior to the visit, which put even more stress on already strained relations between faculty and leadership;
- The current Interim President is new to his role and will only be employed until permanent leadership is put in place;
- The state university system is currently functioning under temporary leadership with an Interim Chancellor, a role that will help select the new president for the College; and
- The College's Board of Trustees were not prepared for the visit, as evidenced by the sending of a representative that had never been to the campus and was unable to answer questions regarding faculty governance or the College's leadership, despite the representative having approved the dismissal of the College President only a few days before the site visit.

The College has demonstrated that it is otherwise in compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation, Assumed Practices, and Federal Compliance requirements.

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.

Commission 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.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I thank you and your associates for your cooperation. Please contact your HLC Staff Liaison, Dr. Thomas Bordenkircher, if you have questions about any of the information in this letter and to provide your Pathway declaration.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Ridgewater College
Betty Strehlow, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Services, Ridgewater College
Evaluation team chair
Institutional Actions Council Hearing Committee chair
Larry Pogemiller, Director, Minnesota Office of Higher Education
Thomas Bordenkircher, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
Karen Peterson Solinski, Executive Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning Commission