



March 6, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Ann Bolman, President  
Western Dakota Technical Institute  
800 Mickelson Dr.  
Rapid City, SD 57703

Dear President Bolman:

This letter is formal notification of action taken by the Higher Learning Commission (“HLC” or “the Commission”) Board of Trustees (“the Board”) concerning Western Dakota Technical Institute (“the Institute” or “the institution”). At its meeting on February 22, 2018, the Board voted to remove the sanction of Probation from the Institute. This action is effective as of the date action was taken. The Board determined that removal of the sanction was warranted based on materials from the Institute’s most recent comprehensive evaluation including, but not limited to: the Assurance Filing the Institute submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council (“IAC”) Hearing Committee, the institution’s responses to these reports, and other materials relevant to the evaluation.

The Board placed the Institute on the Standard Pathway and required that it host its next comprehensive evaluation for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2021-22.

The Board based its action on the following findings made in regard to the Institute:

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Two, Core Component 2.A, “the institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of its governing board, administration, faculty and staff,” because the Institute has developed robust processes to encourage and monitor adherence to and accountability for its established policies, including annual financial audits, a faculty-driven Curriculum Committee, and a “Meet and Confer” process that engages all employee work groups in discussions of issues related to their employment.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Two, Core Component 2.C, “the governing board of the institution is sufficiently autonomous to make decisions in the best interest of the institution and to assure its

integrity,” because Board members possess access to multiple channels of communication that provide them with key information necessary to make informed decisions in the best interest of the Institute, such as regular reports by the Institute President and service by several Board members on Institute Committees, and the Board pays careful attention to conflicts of interests and the Institute’s culture of shared governance.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Two, Core Component 2.D, “the institution is committed to freedom of expression and the pursuit of truth in teaching and learning,” because, in addition to the Institute updating its Academic Freedom and Faculty Responsibilities Policy, it has worked actively during the probationary period to demonstrate support for forthright expression of differing views, as espoused in its Code of Ethics for Faculty, Staff and Administrators.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Three, Core Component 3.B, “the institution demonstrates that the exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs,” because the Institute has demonstrated that its established General Education Outcomes (GEOs) and Core Abilities engage students in every degree program in collecting, analyzing and communicating information, as well as developing basic skills the Institute has determined every graduate should possess.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services,” because recent changes have led to more ownership of the academic programs by faculty, more resources dedicated to assessment of student learning outcomes, and increased professional development geared toward institutional effectiveness, all of which increase the likelihood of high quality programs.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Four, Core Component 4.A, “the institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs,” because the Institute provided evidence of completed program reviews that resulted in meaningful changes to programs informed by data analysis and supported by adequate resources.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets 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 Institute has stated goals for student learning, which are identified as Core Abilities, Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), which are outcomes at the course level linked to the PLOs;
- PLOs are developed by program directors in collaboration with faculty, and are derived from current industry competencies and standards, as well as any program certification or licensure requirements. PLOs are approved by the Curriculum Committee;
- Each program assesses PLOs; embedded with those assessments, Core Abilities are also assessed (PLOs are linked and mapped to the Core Abilities);
- General education outcomes (GEOs) are identified and are measured in the general education courses; and
- To date, the Institute has successfully conducted three assessment cycles.

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

- The Institute’s Strategic Plan, a five-year institutional plan that identifies targets to be achieved by 2021, includes long-term targets on retention, graduation and in-field career placement rates;
- Benchmarks are developed from the targets and are intended to make the targets more realistic in the short term;
- A Persistence and Completion Committee examines the retention of students per cohort and uses the analyzed data to make changes in enrollment processes; it also analyzes cohort data specific to each program, including number of students, number of graduates, and time for completion;
- These data are shared with faculty so they can develop strategies to increase retention rates in their programs; and
- Campus constituencies have access to this information in Strategic Planning Online (SPOL) for future planning purposes.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns 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 increased inclusion of all employee groups in the Institute’s new Committee structure promotes full participation in shared governance and produces synergies necessary to improve the campus climate.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets without concerns Criterion Five, Core Component 5.C, “the institution engages in systematic and integrated planning,” because the Institute’s strategic planning software includes integrated modules for budgeting, assessment, and personnel, and the Institute has developed

Key Performance Indicators to measure progress across all programs, which are communicated on an institutional dashboard available to all employees.

The Institute has demonstrated that it now meets Criterion Five, Core Component 5.D, “the institution works systematically to improve its performance,” for the following reasons:

- The updated strategic plan, approved by the Rapid City Area Board of Education in March 2016, includes seven institutional effectiveness measures (KPIs) to be addressed over the next five years: Enrollment, Retention, Graduation Rate, Career Placement, Effective Assessment, Employee Retention, and Starting Salary for Graduates;
- Every employee had the opportunity for input into the KPIs and the approval of the plan followed the new shared governance model;
- The Institute conducted an annual review of the KPIs, including targets and goals;
- The Institute is addressing operational activity in areas such as library services, information technology, and bookstore operations with the goal of improving quality for faculty, staff and the community; and
- Departments set measurable, annual goals that contribute to the Institute’s institutional effectiveness measures.

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

At this time, the Commission will reassign the Institute from its liaison Dr. Anthea Sweeney to Dr. Gigi Fansler, Vice President for Accreditation Relations. Please be assured that Dr. Sweeney will work with Dr. Fansler to create a smooth transition.

The Board action resulted in changes to the affiliation of the Institute. 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.

Information is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. Commission policy INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information, anticipates that HLC will release action letters to members of the public. The Commission will do so by posting this action letter to its website. Also, the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice will be posted to HLC’s website not more than 24 hours after this letter is sent to you.

In addition, 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 the HLC Board’s action regarding the Institute.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I thank you and your associates for your cooperation. Please contact Dr. Fansler if you have questions about any of the information in this letter.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley  
President

Enclosure: Public Disclosure Notice

cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Western Dakota Technical Institute  
Kelly Oehlerking, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success,  
Western Dakota Technical Institute  
Paul Turman, Vice President for Academic Affairs, South Dakota Board of Regents  
Evaluation team chair  
Institutional Actions Council Hearing Committee chair  
Gigi Fansler, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission  
Anthea Sweeney, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning  
Commission