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April 3, 2019

Dr. Ronald D. Liebowitz  
President  
Brandeis University  
415 South Street, MS 100  
Waltham, MA 02453

Dear President Liebowitz:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on February 28, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Brandeis University:

that Brandeis University be continued in accreditation;

that inclusion of the Babson Executive Conference Center off-campus location within the institution's accreditation be confirmed;

that the University submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Fall 2022;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University give emphasis to its success in:

1. enhancing the effectiveness of its governing board;
2. implementing the University's Framework for Our Future planning document;
3. addressing challenges in the current budget, financial, and operational structure of the University;
4. achieving its goals with respect to the diversity of the faculty and student body and continuing to implement initiatives related to campus culture and climate;
5. implementing its new General Education program and assessing student learning of the outcomes specified for the program;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2026.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Brandeis University is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

We commend Brandeis for its well-written, candid self-study that describes a time of significant transition for the University, including major changes in leadership and senior administration. We join the visiting team in congratulating the institution for its many strengths, including the high ethical and cultural values that flow from its unique mission and history, a “signature focus” on undergraduate education, graduate programs that produce “strong scholars and successful professionals,” and its exceptionally qualified and dedicated faculty and staff. We note with favor the institution’s commitment to student learning and assessment, its high retention and graduation rates – 93-94% and 90-91%, respectively, over the past five years – and the success of its graduates; as indicated in the First Destination Survey, 64% of recent graduates are employed and another 27% are attending graduate school. We commend the University for its forthright acknowledgment of the “challenges and opportunities” it confronts and for the engagement of the campus community in discussion about how best to address those challenges and take advantage of those opportunities. We share the team’s confidence that the institution will find creative and effective ways to fulfill its ambition to “ensure the enduring institutional well-being and academic excellence of Brandeis University.”

The Commission confirmed inclusion of the Babson Executive Conference Center (BECC) off-campus location within the University’s accreditation because the self-study and team report provided evidence that the institution is implementing the MBA for Physicians program offered at the site in a manner consistent with the *Standards for Accreditation*. We are gratified to learn from the visiting team that the BECC is an “ideal facility” for the program. We further note with favor that the four-semester program, which involves distance education courses as well as four ten-day residencies at the BECC, is accredited by AACSB and is well-integrated into the academic governance and program review processes of the University.

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution’s current status in keeping with the Policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University is asked, in Fall 2022, to report on five matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *Planning and Evaluation*; *Institutional Resources*; *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*; *Students*; *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*; *The Academic Program*; and *Educational Effectiveness*.

The Commission concurs with the visiting team that the Board of Trustees of Brandeis University would benefit from investigating the “best practices and functioning of the boards of the leading research universities to which Brandeis compares itself” to determine practices that could enhance its effectiveness, including with respect to matters such as the appointment of an Executive Committee and enforced term limits. We understand the institution has already begun to discuss the recommendations of the team, and we are gratified to learn of the University’s commitment to this process. We look forward to learning, in Fall 2022, of Brandeis’ success in ensuring that its governing board “systematically develops, ensures, and enhances its own effectiveness” (3.8) and to receiving evidence that the “effectiveness of the institution’s organizational structure and system of governance is improved through periodic and systematic review” (3.19).

The Commission understands that, shortly before the arrival of the visiting team, the president of Brandeis University announced a “visionary strategic framework” for the University entitled Framework for Our Future. The framework encompasses three strategic areas, and 90 members of the campus community have been appointed to task forces to develop recommendations that will be submitted to a strategy and planning committee. The Fall 2022 interim report will afford

Brandeis University the opportunity to update the Commission on its progress in implementing its Framework for Our Future, as evidence of its “demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning” (2.5).

As acknowledged in both the self-study and the report of the visiting team, Brandeis University faces several challenges with respect to its current budget, financial, and operational structure. These include a self-identified \$30 million structural deficit, a higher-than-desired endowment draw, unfunded deferred maintenance, and faculty salaries that lag behind peer institutions. We note with favor the commitment of the University to address these challenges through its strategic planning process, detailed financial analyses, and a “university-wide process of reflection on our academic activities and ambitions.” We concur with the visiting team that the University has established a strong foundation for “transparency, participation, buy-in and shared decision-making with faculty and other key constituencies” that will help to ensure the successful implementation of its plans, and we look forward, in Fall 2022, to learning of the institution’s progress in this regard. We remind you of our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* (cited above) and *Institutional Resources*:

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution’s multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The Commission appreciates Brandeis University’s affirmation that it “must actively seek and support students of diverse backgrounds, even as it continues to be a pre-eminent center of Jewish scholarship and teaching,” and we understand the campus is “grappling” with the question of how to ensure it remains “a welcoming campus where all can feel equally included, equally valued.” We note that two of the task forces convened as part of the Framework for Our Future are exploring these issues. We are also pleased to learn of the appointment of a vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion to provide leadership for the University’s efforts to diversify its faculty, staff, and student body and for its initiatives to address campus culture and climate. We welcome an update in the Fall 2022 interim report on the institution’s success in fostering “an inclusive atmosphere within the institutional community that respects and supports people of diverse characteristics and backgrounds” (9.5). Our standards on *Students and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* provide this additional guidance:

The institution addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its students ... (*Students*, Statement of the Standard).

The institution ... addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff (6.5).

Finally, the Commission understands that Brandeis University recently updated its general education curriculum, the Brandeis Core, to “reflect contemporary societal concerns and the changing needs of students.” The new 40-credit curriculum, which will be implemented in Fall 2019, is centered around three themes – Foundational Literacies, Schools of Thought, and Global Engagement – each of which has explicit learning outcomes. The revised curriculum also links the first-year writing course to a Critical Conversation in which faculty members “model informed and civil debate on important issues.” At the time of the team’s visit, discussions about assessing student learning in the Brandeis Core were in the early stages. We look forward to



learning, in Fall 2022, of the University's success in implementing its new general education program and assessing student learning of the outcomes specified for the program. Our standards on *The Academic Program* and *Educational Effectiveness* are relevant here:

The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.17).

Assessment of learning is based on verifiable statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The process of understanding what and how students are learning focuses on the course, competency, program, and institutional level. Assessment has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty and appropriate staff (8.3).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2026 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. Because the University delayed its comprehensive evaluation for two years, scheduling the next visit in Fall 2026 returns the institution to its original evaluation cycle.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Brandeis University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Lisa Lynch, Provost, and Julie Love Dolan, team representative, during its deliberations.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Meyer Koplow. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

Dr. Ronald D. Liebowitz  
April 3, 2019  
Page 5

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,  
President of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Quigley".

David Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Meyer Koplow  
Visiting Team