



April 30, 2021

Dr. Kymberly Pinder
Acting President
Massachusetts College of Art and Design
621 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115

Dear President Pinder:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on March 5, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts College of Art and Design and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts College of Art and Design be accepted;

that the progress reports scheduled for consideration in Spring 2022 and Spring 2023 be confirmed;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2025 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2025 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's continued success in addressing the three matters specified for attention in the interim report.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Massachusetts College of Art and Design was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of December 7, 2017 and May 20, 2019 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) for its thorough and candid interim (fifth-year) report. Of particular note is the College's success in completing its report during a time of unprecedented disruption caused by the global pandemic and of institutional leadership transition. We note with favor that MassArt has made significant progress in the three areas

of emphasis identified for inclusion in this report. The College has strengthened connections between liberal arts coursework and the majors in multiple ways including a common assignment shared by all writing sections that encourages students “through research ... [to] develop their ideas and relate their work to the larger continuum of art;” an Interdisciplinary Core Curriculum “pilot” that pairs a first-year seminar with an art elective wherein instructors share a number of readings and assignments; and the summative elective upper-level capstone course that represents the “culmination of three to four years of integrating and synthesizing liberal arts and studio classes at MassArt.” In addition, in 2016 the College implemented a “LA Liaison Initiative” that assigns a Liberal Arts faculty member to each department to engage with students and faculty on matters related to curriculum and extra-curricular activities. We are also pleased to learn MassArt has made significant progress in increasing diversity among faculty and staff. Since 2015, the number of underrepresented faculty has increased by 45% (from 11 to 20) and over the same time period, underrepresented staff diversity has increased 20% (from 93 to 116). The Commission acknowledges that these gains have been a result of collaborations among the Human Resources department, area vice-presidents, and search committees. We understand that priority areas for FY2021 include training sessions on various topics in collaboration with the Office of Justice, Equity and Transformation (JET), creating a Supplier Diversity Plan, and addressing issues of campus climate. In addition, the College implemented a formal five-year program review schedule in 2018. As of the time the interim report was submitted, MassArt had completed eight academic program reviews, with the remaining departments scheduled for completion prior to the Spring 2025 comprehensive evaluation. We note with favor that the program review process, which is data driven and involves both student input and written feedback from two external field experts, is managed by each department’s curriculum committee and results in “updated program and course goal curricular maps to position graduates for industry success.” Once all academic program reviews have been completed in 2024, the College plans to refresh its institutional learning goals to reflect the updated curriculum goals across all MassArt programs. MassArt’s 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, approved in 2018, exemplifies a “new way of working” at the institution by adopting the “ARCI” framework (accountable, responsible, consulted, and informed) and connects the Strategic Plan with “master plans, area plans, ... ad hoc working group and cross-functional team plans” all integrated within an accountability management system. Finally, MassArt has further strengthened its financial position, increasing its endowment to \$13 million and maintaining “ample” reserves of over \$19 million.

MassArt’s thoughtful reflective essay detailed a clear focus on student learning outcomes, outlining expectations for achievement, demonstration, knowledge, and understanding. The College uses its learning management system to collect data on students’ achievement at the course level as well as their progress over time. This information is used to inform the curriculum planning process at the department and institutional levels. As noted in the interim report, while the overall graduation rate of 73% is higher than the national average, there are gaps in graduation rates between BIPOC and white students. We commend the College for steps taken to address these gaps, including the creation of the Retention Committee within the Strategic Enrollment Management team structure and conducting a “Sophomore experience” study to examine “factors contributing to student attrition.” We note with favor that the College received a Lumina Grant which is being used to fund, among other projects, a mentoring project to support BIPOC Sophomore students in Communication Design, Illustration, and Photography. The goals of this grant include fostering “connections for students with faculty mentors” and “a more culturally responsive curriculum in these programs.”

The Commission confirms the two previously scheduled progress reports. The first report, scheduled for consideration in Spring 2022 and detailed in the letter dated January 26, 2021, requests the institution provide an update on its success in offering its current courses and academic programs via distance education. The second report, scheduled for consideration in Spring 2023 and detailed in the letter dated October 7, 2020, requests an update on the Graphic Design

certificate program.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring, 2025 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. In addition to the information included in all self-studies, Massachusetts College of Art and Design is asked, in the Spring, 2025 self-study, to give emphasis to its continued success in addressing the three areas specified for attention in the Spring 2021 interim report: namely, strengthening programming by connecting liberal arts curriculum to coursework in the majors; addressing its goals for diversity among faculty and staff; and implementing its program review process. The Commission recognizes that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the College's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the self-study.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Massachusetts College of Art and Design and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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 and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Jan Saragoni and Carlos Santiago. 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.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

Enclosure: Policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated

cc: Jan Saragoni
Carlos Santiago