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- President of the Commission**  
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM  
bbrittingham@neasc.org
- Senior Vice President of the Commission**  
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND  
pobrien@neasc.org
- Vice President of the Commission**  
CAROL L. ANDERSON  
canderson@neasc.org
- Vice President of the Commission**  
PAULA A. HARBECKE  
pharbecke@neasc.org
- Vice President of the Commission**  
TALA KHUDAINI  
tkhudaini@neasc.org

December 7, 2017

**Dr. David P. Nelson  
President  
Massachusetts College of Art and Design  
621 Huntington Avenue, Tower 1101  
Boston, MA 02115**

Dear President Nelson:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 28, 2017, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Massachusetts College of Art and Design:

that Massachusetts College of Art and Design be continued in accreditation;

that the College submit a report for consideration in Spring 2019 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. developing and implementing its long-term strategic plans;
2. developing a systematic and comprehensive approach to reviewing its programs with emphasis on assessing student learning outcomes and using the results for improvement;
3. addressing its deferred maintenance and facilities issues to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff;

that the College submit an interim (fifth-year) report for consideration in Spring 2021;

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

1. strengthening its programming by connecting its liberal arts curriculum to coursework in the majors;
2. addressing its goals for diversity among faculty and staff;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2025.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Massachusetts College of Art and Design is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) for its preparation of a well-written and comprehensive self-study that documents the institution's accomplishments as well as its plans for ongoing improvement. For example, under the leadership of a new and enthusiastic president, MassArt is now focused on examining its mission statement, vision, and institutional priorities; developing long-term strategic plans; establishing protocols to review programs on a regular basis and use the results for continuous improvement; and evaluating the efficacy of its programs, policies, and procedures. We note positively that the evaluation process used by the Board serves as a useful tool to identify and address issues involving its effectiveness, and the team confirmed the quality of the College's undergraduate and graduate programs through meetings with campus constituencies and the review of course syllabi and related institutional documents. The College demonstrates transparency about the types of students it recruits and intends to serve by providing current and accurate data on its website about student demographics, support services, and success rates. According to the team, the College mainly uses retention and graduation rates to understand the success of its students; IPEDS retention rates over the last three years averaged about 90% for undergraduate students and above 90% for graduate students. During that same period, graduation rates averaged about 72% for undergraduate students and from 74% (Masters in Architecture) to 100% (Masters in Arts-Teaching/Art Education) for graduate students. It is also noteworthy that 84% of MassArt graduates who responded to alumni surveys from the classes of AY2014 and AY2015 were employed full- or part-time. The team further verified that the faculty and staff are demonstrably qualified for their positions and unified in their commitment to the mission of the College and to MassArt students, and that the institution's finances are sufficient to support its academic programs. With the continued support of its Board, a strong leadership team, and a campus community that is dedicated to "preparing students to participate in creative economy as artists, designers, and educators; and preparing students to engage in the well-being of their society," Massachusetts College of Art and Design is well positioned to develop the plans and strategies required to address its challenges and achieve its mission well into the future.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2019 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, *Educational Effectiveness*, and *Institutional Resources*.

We acknowledge that, while MassArt employs planning at various levels to achieve its mission and support the academic enterprise, the strategic planning process that began in 2012 was delayed for a variety of reasons, including the recent appointment of a new president. We also share the concern of the visiting team that, although the state Board of Higher Education qualifies MassArt's Partnership Renewal Plan as a sufficient strategic document, the College lacks a "consensually developed and forward-looking" strategic plan. We therefore appreciate the College's candid recognition that an updated strategic plan is needed, and that the process of developing the plan will provide "real value to a new president." We also note positively that the institution kicked off its strategic planning process on September 1, 2017, and it is "off to a good start." In tandem with developing a strategic plan, MassArt is revising its budget process to ensure that financial allocations support strategic initiatives. We are further pleased to learn that once institutional priorities have been established and the strategic plan has been approved, the College will develop a Campus Plan and a Master Plan. Consistent with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, we look forward, in the report submitted for consideration in Spring 2019, to an update on the College's success in developing and implementing its long-term strategic plans:

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

As noted in the report of the visiting team, and as MassArt candidly acknowledges, the College has not made the desired progress in developing a systematic process of program review, and the institution will benefit from creating periodic program assessments and developing systems to collect and analyze data on a consistent basis. We note with approval that MassArt is in the process of establishing a foundation on which it will build a “robust culture of assessment.” For example, reviewing curriculum is “already the practice of artists” and, starting in AY2018, external evaluators will review three to four academic programs a year as part of a five-year program review cycle. In addition, the College has established a process to assess its General Education learning outcomes and is currently “monitoring institutional student learning outcomes related to math and science.” In keeping with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, The Academic Program*, and *Educational Effectiveness*, the report submitted for consideration in Fall 2019 will afford the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success in developing a systematic and comprehensive approach to reviewing its programs with emphasis on assessing student learning outcomes and using the results for improvement:

The institution’s principal evaluation focus is the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of its academic programs. Evaluation endeavors and systematic assessment are demonstrably effective in the improvement of academic offerings, student learning, and the student experience. Systematic feedback from students, former students, and other relevant constituencies is a demonstrable factor in institutional improvement (2.7).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.6).

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 institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).

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).

We join the visiting team in commending MassArt for the progress it has made in addressing its deferred maintenance, improving its facilities, and increasing its "curb appeal." We recognize, however, that there is still much work to be done, and the College will need to continue to focus its attention on issues related to space, facilities, and equipment to meet legal, programmatic, and health and safety standards. Accordingly, we are gratified to learn that since the time of the visit, the state has approved funding for a new roof and a group has been appointed to examine ADA and public space issues. In addition, we note with favor that the College has raised \$9.5 million of its \$12 million campaign goal, and the Board has given MassArt the "go ahead" to use some of that funding to install an elevator, expand galleries, and address pressing deferred maintenance issues. We look forward, in the Spring 2019 report, to being apprised of the institution's continued success in addressing this matter as evidence that "[f]acilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements to ensure access, safety, security, and a healthy environment with consideration for environmental and ecological concerns" (7.23).

Commission policy requires an interim 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 College is asked, in Spring 2021, to report on two matters related to our standards on *The Academic Program and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

We understand that, through conversations with students, the visiting team learned that there is confusion about how the liberal arts curriculum "fits" with the program majors. In addition, while students may plan their liberal arts electives in a systematic manner to develop skills that will be utilized in their capstone course, there seems to be no clear mechanism to ensure they do so. We further recognize that MassArt is cognizant of this matter and note positively that several initiatives have recently been implemented to create stronger connections between the Liberal Arts department and the major departments. For example, in 2016 MassArt created the Liberal Arts Liaison Initiative connecting a faculty member in the Liberal Arts Department to each major department to foster inter-department communication, and Liberal Arts faculty have also begun a series of "pizza socials" with students to better connect with and help them understand the value of the liberal arts program. Through the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2021, we look forward to learning of the College's success in strengthening its programming by connecting its liberal arts curriculum to coursework in the majors, as informed by our standard on *The Academic Program*:

Undergraduate degree programs are designed to give students a substantial and coherent introduction to the broad areas of human knowledge, their theories and methods of inquiry, plus in-depth mastery of at least one disciplinary or interdisciplinary area. Programs have an appropriate rationale; their clarity and order are visible in stated requirements in official publications and in student records (4.13).

Each undergraduate program includes a general education requirement and a major or concentration requirement. At the baccalaureate level, curricula include substantial requirements at the advanced undergraduate level, with appropriate prerequisites. The institution also affords undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue knowledge and understanding through unrestricted electives (4.14).

Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing

learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind (4.15).

The team further observed a lack of diversity among the faculty while on campus, and we concur with the assessment of the team that offering students a range of thought and perspectives that comes with a diverse faculty is an integral aspect of higher education. Therefore, we appreciate learning that MassArt has identified increasing diversity and inclusiveness in its faculty, staff, and student body as an institutional priority. We look forward, in the Spring 2021 interim report, to receiving information about the institution's success in addressing "its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff" (6.5).

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. Since Massachusetts College of Art and Design delayed its comprehensive by two years, scheduling the comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2025 returns the College to its original evaluation schedule.

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 Massachusetts College of Art and Design and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you; Lyssa Palu-ay, Interim Provost and Senior Vice President Academic Affairs; Dan Serig, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs; and Dr. Kathryn Foster, team chair, 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 Ms. Pamela Parisi. 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.

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

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm  
Enclosure

cc: Ms. Pamela Parisi  
Visiting Team