



Founded in 1885

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID P. ANGEL, Chair (2018)
Clark University

DAVID QUIGLEY, Vice Chair (2018)
Boston College

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2017)
Trustee Member, Concord, NH

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2017)
Thomas College

THOMAS CHRISTOPHER GREENE (2017)
Vermont College of Fine Arts

MARY ELLEN JUKOSKI (2017)
Three Rivers Community College

PETER J. LANGER (2017)
University of Massachusetts Boston

DAVID L. LEVINSON (2017)
Norwalk Community College

PATRICIA MAGUIRE MESERVEY (2017)
Salem State University

G. TIMOTHY BOWMAN (2018)
Harvard University

THOMAS L. G. DWYER (2018)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2018)
Haydenville, MA

CATHRAEL KAZIN (2018)
Southern New Hampshire University

KAREN L. MUNCASTER (2018)
Brandeis University

CHRISTINE ORTIZ (2018)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JON S. OXMAN (2018)
Auburn, ME

JACQUELINE D. PETERSON (2018)
College of the Holy Cross

ROBERT L. PURA (2018)
Greenfield Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2018)
Lebanese American University

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2018)
Providence College

HARRY EMMANUEL DUMAY (2019)
Saint Anselm College

JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)
Groton, CT

STEPHEN JOHN HODGES (2019)
Hult International Business School

COLEEN C. PANTALONE (2019)
Northeastern University

MARIKO SILVER (2019)
Bennington College

GEORGE W. TETLER (2019)
Worcester, MA

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 KHUDAIRI
tkhudairi@neasc.org

February 2, 2017

Ms. Rosanne Somerson
President
Rhode Island School of Design
Two College Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear President Somerson:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 18, 2016, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Rhode Island School of Design:

that Rhode Island School of Design be continued in accreditation;

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

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

- 1) assuring the effectiveness of its governance systems, with particular attention to the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Trustees;
- 2) developing and implementing a strategic plan that integrates campus master planning, including efforts to address issues related to deferred maintenance, space, and safety;
- 3) addressing issues related to student debt and the discount rate;
- 4) achieving its goals for faculty diversity and to improve advising;
- 5) implementing a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, including in general education, and using the results for improvement;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring, 2026.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Rhode Island School of 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 congratulating Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) on its many strengths, including its excellent academic programs that enable students to produce high-quality work, a talented, dedicated faculty, a shared commitment to the value of art practice, and state-of-the-art facilities that include a library that, as noted by the team, is a “flagship for the marriage of liberal arts and making practices.” We concur with the team that the recent “extended period of reflection” on the School’s mission will result in enhanced institutional effectiveness, and we commend the School on its commitment to the use of data to enhance planning and decision-making. Graduation and job placement rates, most recently at 87% and 96% respectively, are impressive, as is the finding that 98% of seniors participated in at least one of the “high-impact practices” identified in the National Survey of Student Engagement; 87% of students report that they engaged in two or more of these practices. The institution’s long-standing Continuing Education program provides evening and weekend courses, 12 certificate programs, and a pre-College program for high school students. We commend RISD on its achievement of “healthy” operating surpluses in each of the last three years that have enabled the School to invest in building purchases and capital projects, and on its success in building its endowment which, in FY2015, was valued at \$325 million. The Commission concurs with the visiting team that, under the capable leadership of a new president and a committed Board of Trustees, the talented and dedicated community of faculty, administrators, staff, and students at RISD will enable the institution to continue to be a “leading school in the teaching of art and design worldwide.”

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 Rhode Island School of Design is asked, in Spring, 2021, to report on five matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *Institutional Resources*; *Planning and Evaluation*; *Students*; *Teaching, Learning and Scholarship*; and *Educational Effectiveness*.

As candidly acknowledged in the self-study and the report of the visiting team, Rhode Island School of Design has, in the past, experienced a “very deep culture” of faculty distrust for administration that has had a negative impact on the School’s governance. In addition, there has been some “blurring of the lines” between the governing board and administration with respect to oversight and management of the institution. We concur with the team that RISD would benefit from a review of its governance documents to ensure clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities of trustees, faculty, and administration. We are gratified to learn of the optimism on the RISD campus that trust can be rebuilt and that “things will improve” under the current leadership. We understand that four new trustees were recently appointed and that the Board will work with a consultant next year to conduct a “thorough assessment.” We look forward to learning, in Spring 2021, of the School’s success in assuring the effectiveness of its governance systems, in keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, staff, and sponsoring entity (if any) are clearly described in the institution’s by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution’s official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles (3.1).

The board systematically develops, ensures, and enhances its own effectiveness through orientation, professional development, and periodic evaluation. Its role and functions are effectively carried out through appropriate committees and meetings (3.8).

The board delegates to the chief executive officer and, as appropriate, to others the requisite authority and autonomy to manage the institution compatible with the board's intentions and the institution's mission. In exercising its fiduciary responsibility, the governing board assures that senior officers identify, assess, and manage risks and ensure regulatory compliance (3.11).

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The Commission understands that Rhode Island School of Design has initiated a strategic planning process that is focused on 3-5 key themes. The process, which is being led by a "core group" of administrators, faculty, and students, will involve widespread participation of the campus community. Development of the plan will include metrics to measure progress and integration with financial planning. The Commission also shares the concerns articulated in the report of the visiting team related to deferred maintenance, space, and safety, and we concur that the School would benefit from greater integration of facilities planning into the institution's overall planning and resource allocation processes. Therefore, we are pleased to learn that RIDS's senior leadership is reviewing the recommendations of the School's Space Use Task Force with the intent of aligning the next phase of the campus master planning process with its strategic planning efforts. We further note with favor the exploration of short- and long-term solutions to the issues of space and safety associated with the Sculpture area and understand that the Metcalf Building, which houses Sculpture and several other programs, is the School's "highest priority for deferred maintenance." The Spring 2021 interim report will afford Rhode Island School of Design an opportunity to update the Commission on the success of these and other initiatives that demonstrate the institution "devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources" (7.21) as well as its progress with strategic planning. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources* provide additional guidance for this section of the report:

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).

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).

The institution plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.4).

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning (2.5).

Facilities 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).

We are gratified to learn of steps taken by Rhode Island School of Design to address the high level of student indebtedness; as reported in the self-study, average debt among undergraduates is \$32,000 and among graduate students, \$90,000. We commend the School for allocating an additional \$520,000 to institutional financial aid for graduate students in FY2017 and understand that further increases are anticipated for FY2018. We also note that the School has established a goal to “grow” the discount rate – 17% at the time of the team’s visit – in the future and is committed to the “strategic use” of scholarships to assist students. Through the Spring 2021 report, we welcome further information about RISD’s success in achieving its goals for student debt and the discount rate. We remind you of our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*:

Student financial aid is provided through a well-organized program. Awards are based on the equitable application of clear and publicized criteria (5.13).

Through a systematic program, the institution regularly provides students before borrowing with clear and timely information about cost, debt, and repayment (5.14).

The institution and its governing board regularly and systematically review the effectiveness of the institution’s financial aid policy and practices in advancing the institution’s mission and helping to ensure that the institution enrolls and supports the student body it seeks to serve (7.10).

As acknowledged in the self-study and the team report, RISD has been challenged to meet its goals for faculty diversity. We are encouraged to learn that the School has started to see the impact of the changes it has made to its faculty hiring procedures and that strategies such as the diversity fellows program and the development of an inclusive teaching guide have been effective in promoting social equity on the campus. We also note with favor the “multiple initiatives” that have been implemented to address the quality of advising, including efforts centered on faculty development and the creation of new planning tools for faculty. We look forward, in Spring 2021, to receiving evidence of RISD’s continued progress in these matters, in keeping with our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* and *Students*:

The institution ensures equal employment opportunity consistent with legal requirements and any other dimensions of its choosing; compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity among its faculty and academic staff. (6.5).

The institution's system of academic advising meets student needs for information and advice compatible with its educational objectives. The quality of advising is assured regardless of the location of instruction or the mode of delivery (6.19).

The institution provides advising and academic support services appropriate to the student body. The institution's faculty and professional staff collectively have sufficient interaction with students outside of class to promote students' academic achievement and provide academic and career guidance (5.10).

The Commission shares the judgment of the visiting team that RISD's success in assessing student learning in the major "has not yet been matched" in the assessment of general education outcomes. We appreciate that the School is taking a "methodical approach" to the articulation and assessment of outcomes in general education and are pleased to learn that RISD's liberal arts departments are developing a schedule for outcomes assessment and determining which "signature assignments" to use. We also note with favor that the development of institutional learning outcomes and a "consistent and comprehensive institutional assessment framework" is a key objective of the strategic planning process. The Spring 2021 interim report will enable Rhode Island School of Design to present evidence that it "regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives" (2.6). Our standard on *Educational Effectiveness* is also relevant here:

The institution provides clear public statements about what students are expected to gain from their education, academically and, as appropriate to the institution's mission, along other dimensions (e.g., civic engagement, religious formation, global awareness). Goals for students' education reflect the institution's mission, the level and range of degrees and certificates offered, and the general expectations of the larger academic community (8.2)

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 uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons (8.5).

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 Spring, 2026 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

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.

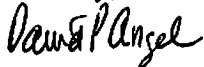
The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Rhode Island School of Design and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Tracie Constantino, Associate Provost and Dean of Faculty, Mara Hermano, Vice President, Integrated Planning, and Michael S. Roth, 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 Mr. Michael Spalter. 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/sjp

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Michael Spalter
Visiting team