



January 20, 2022

Dr. Kelli J. Armstrong
President
Salve Regina University
100 Ochre Point Avenue
Newport, RI 02840-4192

Dear President Armstrong:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 19, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Salve Regina University:

that Salve Regina University be continued in accreditation;

that the institution be asked to submit a report by August 15, 2023, for consideration in Fall 2023 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its Strategic Compass Plan with emphasis on strengthening data-driven decision-making practices and ensuring that resources are sufficient to support key institutional initiatives;
2. revising its external program review process and strengthening its approach to assessing institution-wide learning outcomes and using assessment results for improvement;
3. strengthening its graduate-level programs with attention to evaluating faculty staffing levels and resources to assure they are sufficient and ensuring that its credit-hour policies for graduate-level online programs are consistent with the Commission's Policy on Credits and Degrees;
4. evaluating the effectiveness of the Board with attention to setting term limits that are consistent with the by-laws, expanding the donor base, and strengthening the diversity and skill sets of the Board members;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by January 15, 2026, for consideration in Spring 2026;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the institution give emphasis to its success in continuing to address the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2023 progress report as well as the institution's success in:

1. achieving its diversity goals across the campus community;
2. assessing full-time faculty staffing plans and workloads;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2031.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

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

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending Salve Regina University (Salve or SRU) on its exemplary self-study that documents the many ways in which it is achieving its mission “to work for a world that is harmonious, just and merciful.” A strong culture of planning and evaluation is characterized by the regular review of challenges and opportunities in the context of the University’s mission. We are particularly gratified to learn that under the leadership of its recently appointed (2019) President – the first lay president in the institution’s 75-year history – SRU is engaging in broad-based planning efforts and has established a Data Governance Committee to oversee the creation of University-wide data policies and definitions with the goal of developing a data warehouse. The University’s endowment has grown from \$36 million to \$67 million over the last decade, and the implementation of sound fiscal policies and practices contributes to Salve’s strong financial health. The team also confirmed that control over non-student expenses has enabled support for instructional and student services to increase commensurate with enrollment growth in both on-ground and online programs. We are further impressed by SRU’s longstanding heritage of high-quality liberal arts undergraduate programs, as well as pre-professional education, which the community has nurtured and preserved since the institution’s founding. Faculty and staff alike are deeply committed to the intellectual, personal, and spiritual growth and development of their students, and they take seriously their roles as educators and mentors. Salve is to be further commended for achieving enrollment goals in its recently implemented Doctor of Nursing Practice and Ph.D. in International Relations programs. The team confirmed that these programs are appropriately staffed with well-qualified faculty, and we are pleased to learn that students expressed satisfaction with the programs. The Commission congratulates SRU on achieving 75 years of academic excellence, and we share the team’s confidence that, with the support of its Board of Trustees and the dedication of its leadership, faculty, and staff, Salve Regina University is well prepared to preserve its history as it continues to evolve through innovating, planning, and envisioning the future.

The four items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2023 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation; Institutional Resources; Educational Effectiveness; The Academic Program; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Organization and Governance*.

Salve Regina University’s dedication to institutional planning is exemplified by the implementation of an institution-wide strategic planning process, undertaken in collaboration with an external consulting firm, that resulted in the development of a “Strategic Compass,” a plan that will “chart the course for coming years by articulating shared institutional values and utilizing those to develop curricular and co-curricular programming that will strengthen and enhance the academic experience.” In addition, as noted positively above, SRU’s commitment to strengthening its culture of data-driven decision making is commendable, and we concur with the institution’s assessment that this approach will benefit the University in significant ways, notable of which will be to ensure that the allocation of resources aligns with key institutional initiatives. We look forward, in the report submitted for consideration in Fall 2023, to learning of Salve’s success in implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its Strategic Compass Plan and strengthening its culture of data-driven decision making as evidence that the institution “has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning” (2.5), and that its “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 recent hiring of a new full-time position focused on assessment in the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness is evidence of the University’s commitment to addressing the “need

for designated resources to work with faculty on developing a thorough and systematic form of assessment,” and the focused attention Salve is devoting to renewing its external academic program review process, an initiative that is under the purview of the Provost’s office, is noteworthy. We are also encouraged to learn that SRU expects to complete a “fully defined” set of learning outcomes measures, a dashboard of program metrics, and a “well-defined” external academic program review process by the end of this academic year. We look forward, in Fall 2023, to receiving an update on the institution’s success in accomplishing these goals as evidence that it “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). We are further informed here by our standards on *The Academic Program and Educational Effectiveness*:

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).

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

During its visit, the team confirmed that Salve Regina University is implementing its Doctor of Nurse Practitioner and Ph.D. in International Relations programs in a manner that is consistent with the Commission’s standards and policies; however, we concur with the team’s assessment that it is incumbent upon the University to ensure that graduate programs are provided with the resources for success that the campus community provides so well for its undergraduate programs. We also support the team’s observation that as SRU continues to grow its online graduate programs, the University will benefit from reviewing its credit-hour policies to ensure academic integrity in both its online and on-ground programs. Accordingly, we are encouraged to learn that the University is restructuring its graduate and professional development office and that funding for a Vice Provost of Graduate and Professional Studies position is in the AY2022 budget. Through this restructuring, faculty staffing levels will be aligned to “bring better balance between full-time faculty and practitioner-oriented adjuncts.” In addition, the closing of the Warwick center will allow the University to increase financial resources for the marketing and development of graduate programs, and Salve will allocate a percentage of graduate tuition revenue for reinvestment in graduate professional studies. The Fall 2023 report will afford SRU an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in strengthening its graduate-level programs with attention to evaluating faculty staffing levels and resources to assure they are sufficient and to ensuring that “[c]redit awards are consistent with Commission policy and the course content, appropriate to the field of study, and reflect the level and amount of student learning” (4.38). Also relevant here are our standards on *The Academic Program; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and Institutional Resources*:

Graduate programs are not offered unless resources and expectations exceed those required for an undergraduate program in a similar field (4.21).

There are an adequate number of faculty and academic staff, including librarians, advisors, and instructional designers, whose time commitment to the institution is sufficient to assure the accomplishment of class and out-of-class responsibilities essential for the fulfillment of institutional mission and purposes … (6.2).

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).

Finally, we understand that a review of the Trustee by-laws indicated some inconsistency in the length of terms for service. To ensure the University “will be in compliance with [its] by-laws within the next fiscal year,” the Executive Committee has been discussing “expectations surrounding term limits;” at a recent retreat, a consultant articulated how term limits “can serve as a catalyst to bring diverse talent and expertise to Board membership;” and the Board Chair has engaged in conversations with individual members about honoring their term limits. We further appreciate learning that the Board is working to improve its effectiveness in other ways, including expanding the institution’s donor base and strengthening the diversity of the Board. In keeping with our standard on *Organization and Governance*, we ask that the report submitted in Fall 2023 include an update on the University’s success in evaluating the effectiveness of its Board with attention to setting term limits that are consistent with the by-laws, expanding the donor base, and strengthening the diversity and skill sets of the Board members:

The board systematically develops, ensures, and enhances its own effectiveness through orientation, professional development, effective self-assessment, and regular evaluation including an external perspective. The board addresses its goals for diversity within its membership. Its role and functions are effectively carried out through appropriate committees and meetings (3.8).

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. We recognize that the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2023 progress report do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the institution’s sustained attention; hence, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University is asked, in the Spring 2026 interim report, to include an update on its continued success in addressing these areas of emphasis as well as two additional matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance*; *Students*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

We appreciate learning that achieving diversity goals across the campus community, including the Board of Trustees as noted above, is one of the “Five Critical Concerns of Mercy.” The recent establishment of the President’s Commission on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, a permanent structure comprising elected staff, faculty, and students and chaired by the President, is evidence that this is a strategic priority for the University. We look forward, in the interim report submitted for consideration in Spring 2026, to receiving an update on the institution’s success in achieving its goals for diversity, equity, and inclusion “within its [Board] membership” (3.8), “among its students” (*Students*, Statement of the Standard), and “among its faculty and academic staff” (6.5).

As the University candidly acknowledges, “the perennial issue of course overloads for Salve faculty has only increased over time.” We therefore note positively that a recently established (Summer 2021) task force consisting of full-time faculty and academic staff will conduct an “in-depth assessment” of teaching and workload data, and we understand the institution “is optimistic that recommended improvements will be implemented by Fall 2022.” The Spring 2026 interim report will provide Salve Regina University an opportunity to update the Commission on this matter, as evidence that “[f]aculty assignments and workloads are reappraised periodically and adjusted as institutional conditions change” (6.7).

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The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2031 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 Salve Regina University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Dr. Jim Ludes, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Interim Vice President for Student Affairs, and Dr. Paula Russo, 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 Ms. Cheryl Mrozowski. 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.

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

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm

cc: Ms. Cheryl Mrozowski
Visiting Team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions