



July 8, 2015

BY CERTIFIED MAIL

Dr. Daniel Taylor, Executive Director
Future Generations Graduate School
390 Road Less Traveled
Franklin, WV 26807

Dear Dr. Taylor:

This letter is formal notification of action concerning Future Generations Graduate School (“the School”) by the Higher Learning Commission (“the Commission”) Board of Trustees (“the Board”). At its meeting on June 25, 2015, the Board continued the accreditation of the School and placed the School on Notice because the School is at risk of being out of compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components identified in the Board’s findings as outlined below. This action is effective as of the date the action was taken. In taking this action, the Board considered materials from the most recent comprehensive evaluation, including but not limited to the self-study the School submitted, the report from the comprehensive evaluation team, the report of the Institutional Actions Council Hearing Committee, institutional responses to these reports, and other materials relevant to the evaluation.

The Board required that the School file a Notice Report no later than September 1, 2016 providing evidence that the School is no longer at risk for non-compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components identified in this action and that it has ameliorated the issues that led to the Notice sanction and including the following specific documentation demonstrating evidence of the following:

- 1) Shared Governance and Faculty (Core Component 5.B and 3.C)
 - A broad-based shared governance process that engages faculty in all curriculum matters
 - A faculty performance evaluation process that informs faculty development and the quality of instruction
 - A systematic faculty development process
 - A faculty model that details faculty expectations
- 2) Stability of Leadership (Core Component 5.B)
 - Documentation of policy and procedures for systematic search processes for leadership positions
 - Plan for transition from founding leadership to future leadership
 - A process for ensuring stabilization of future leadership
- 3) Academic Review Planning Processes (Core Component 4.A and 4.B)
 - An academic program review model and processes that are systemic and systematic, documented in policy and procedure
 - Incorporation of varying measures of student assessment into the academic program review model

- Evidence of usage of the results of program review
- 4) Assessment of Student Learning (Core Component 4.B)
- Evidence of institutional, program, and course student learning outcomes and their correlation. This includes evidence of learning outcomes for practicum experiences and other experiential learning.
 - The development and implementation of an assessment plan that fits the institution's innovative pedagogy
 - Results of a process incorporating assessment of student learning into continuous improvement processes
- 5) Rigor (Core Component 3.A)
- Evidence that matriculating students are capable of graduate-level work
 - Evidence that coursework is at the level of master's degree work commonly found at other institutions

The School is also required to host a Notice visit in fall 2016 to validate the contents of the Notice Report.

The Board will review the Notice Report and related documents at its June 2017 meeting to determine whether the institution has demonstrated that it is no longer at risk for non-compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and Core Components identified in this action and whether Notice can be removed, or if the School has not demonstrated compliance, whether accreditation should be withdrawn or other action taken.

The Board placed the School on the Standard Pathway and required that it host its next comprehensive evaluation (Year Four) in 2018-19 and its evaluation for Reaffirmation of Accreditation in 2024-25.

The Board based its action on the following findings made with regard to the School:

The School is at risk of being out of compliance with Criterion Three, Core Component 3.A, "the institution's degree programs are appropriate to higher education," for the following reasons:

- A review by the visiting team of course materials, syllabi, student assignments, and related curricular materials, along with conversations with students, indicated that courses constituting the Master of Applied Community Change were not sufficiently rigorous at the graduate level and failed to distinguish sufficiently expected mastery in this graduate program from what would be expected at the baccalaureate level;
- Although applied research is a significant part of the curriculum, the team found unevenness in the depth and quality of applied research reflected in practicum projects;
- While the School leadership indicated that the Lumina Degree Qualification Profile underpins the degree program, they could not demonstrate exactly how the profile influenced curricular decisions,¹ and the School has not presented evidence of established academic standards for practicum experiences; and
- While the School has been working on improvements related to the rigor of the degree and to the uneven preparation at the baccalaureate level of students matriculating into the program, it has not demonstrated that improvements have been fully implemented and that they have been effective in assuring the rigor of the program.

¹ The Commission does not intend to endorse the Lumina Degree Qualifications Profile or require that institutions use it to develop curriculum but indicates here that the School's underlying rationale for curricular decisions was not apparent.

The School is at risk of being out of compliance with Criterion Three, Core Component 3.C, “the institution has the faculty and staff needed for effective, high-quality programs and student services,” for the following reasons:

- The School lacks a defined faculty governance process whereby the faculty assure the coherence, content and rigor of the curriculum:
 - The School uses a lean staffing model, and its faculty resources are not adequate to support an intended expansion of enrollment given that no individuals are engaged on a full-time basis as core faculty but instead serve dual roles as faculty and administrators or work on a part-time basis;
 - During a review of syllabi, course outcomes, class schedules, and key policies as reported on syllabi, the team found information was inconsistent and lacked clear descriptions of expected assignments;
 - The team learned during interviews with faculty members that faculty has limited responsibility for curricular development outside of teaching their own courses, and faculty members could not articulate an institutional process for faculty approval of curriculum including syllabi, classroom setup, courses content, and related elements of curricular review.
- The School lacks a defined and consistently-applied formal process for performance evaluation and development of faculty members, and such evaluations have often consisted of the Chief Academic Officer providing comments to instructors based on course observation; and
- The School has started to address issues identified by the team through such steps as a planned faculty governing body, a curriculum committee, a faculty development plan, and a faculty evaluation system, but has not yet implemented or tested these plans to demonstrate that they are effective in assuring a robust and sufficient faculty that assures the institution provides effective, high-quality programs.

The School is at risk of being out of compliance with Criterion Four, Core Component 4.A, “the institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs,” for the following reasons:

- As acknowledged by the School at the Institutional Actions Council hearing, the School lacks mechanisms to ensure periodic, systematic comprehensive external reviews of the graduate program, which are essential to ensure that the curriculum maintains rigor in all its components and reflects high expectations for student learning;
- Minutes of advisory board, council, and faculty meetings provided limited information about internal review processes and the School’s use of such processes in improving its programs and processes; and
- School officials have indicated their commitment to regularize such processes and have put forward plans to initiate a systematic academic program review process, but they have not yet demonstrated that the plans have been fully implemented or that they have been effective in assuring the quality of the educational programs at the School.

The School is at risk of being out of compliance with Criterion Four, Core Component 4.B, “the institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning,” for the following reasons:

- The School presented limited evidence of an organized process of assessment of student learning;

- Course learning outcomes have not been consistently set for or embedded in each course syllabus, and have not been set for experiential learning opportunities;
- The School does not appear to be using information technology to collect assessment data from different sources at different points in time, to conduct systematic analysis, to provide feedback, and to maintain records; while informal methods of data collection and analysis may have functioned in the past, the School must regularize these processes as it plans to increase academic programming;
- The School does not have a record of faculty designing and implementing an evaluation plan to make improvements based on data arising from the assessment of student learning, which is a particularly important task as the School begins to use direct assessment approaches;
- The School lacks explicit criteria to ensure student learning is occurring at an appropriately rigorous level; and
- While the School has developed plans for an assessment program, it has not demonstrated that assessment is ongoing, systematic and effective at assuring the quality of the academic programs.

The School is at risk of being out of compliance with Criterion Five, Core Component 5.B, “the institution’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the institution to fulfill its mission,” for the following reasons:

- the School lacks broad-based, shared academic governance, and faculty are not engaged in the academic strategic planning processes;
- faculty lack a governance structure to ensure a regularized role in oversight of the curriculum;
- faculty oversee their own courses, but the team found limited evidence of faculty participation in the planning and approval of the curriculum and instead found that external constituents and advisory committees and administrators, rather than faculty, often review and recommend curricular changes;
- annual leadership turnover for the last four years has further challenged the School and its capacity for stability and growth, and future development of a robust system of shared governance of assessment and planning; and
- while the School has recently hired a new chief academic officer and initiated a more defined program of faculty governance, it has not yet demonstrated the efficacy of these structures in providing effective leadership of the School.

The School is out of compliance with Assumed Practice B.2.c.a, “Faculty participates substantially in oversight of the curriculum—its development and implementation, academic substance, currency, and relevance for internal and external constituencies.”

The Board action resulted in changes to the affiliation of the School. These changes are reflected on the Institutional Status and Requirements Report. Some of the information on that document, such as the dates of the last and next comprehensive evaluation visits, will be posted to the Commission’s website.

Information about the sanction is provided to members of the public and to other constituents in several ways. Commission policy INST.G.10.010, Management of Commission Information, anticipates that the Commission will release action letters related to the imposition of a sanction to members of the public. The Commission will do so by posting this action letter to its website. Also, the enclosed Public Disclosure Notice will be posted to the Commission’s website not more than 24 hours after this letter is sent to you.

In addition, Commission policy COMM.A.10.010, Commission Public Notices and Statements, requires that the Commission prepare a summary of actions to be sent to appropriate state and federal agencies and

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accrediting associations and published on its website. The summary will include the Commission Board action regarding the School. The Commission will simultaneously inform the U.S. Department of Education of the sanction by copy of this letter.

At this time, the Commission will reassign the School from its liaison Dr. Karen Solomon to Dr. Anthea Sweeney. If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this letter, please contact Dr. Sweeney. Please be assured that Dr. Sweeney will work with Dr. Solomon to create a smooth transition.

Commission policy INST.E.10.010, Notice, subsection Disclosure of Notice Actions, requires that an institution inform its constituencies, including Board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, prospective students, and any other constituencies about the sanction and how to contact the Commission for further information. The policy also requires that an institution on Notice disclose this status whenever it refers to its Commission accreditation. The Commission will monitor these disclosures to ensure they are accurate and in keeping with Commission policy. I ask that you copy Dr. Sweeney on emails or other communications regarding the sanction and provide her with a link to information on your website and samples of related disclosures.

If you have questions about any of the information in this letter, please contact Dr. Sweeney. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I thank you and your associates for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Barbara Gellman-Danley
President

Enclosure: Public Disclosure Notice

cc: Chair of the Board of Trustees, Future Generations Graduate School
 Mrs. Stephanie Hartman, Chief Operating Officer, Future Generations Graduate School
 Dr. Karen J. Solomon, Vice President for Accreditation Relations and Director, Standard Pathway,
 Higher Learning Commission
 Dr. Anthea M. Sweeney, Vice President for Accreditation Relations, Higher Learning Commission
 Ms. Karen L. Solinski, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning
 Commission
 Mr. Herman Bounds, Accreditation and State Liaison, Office of Postsecondary Education, U.S.
 Department of Education