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Elizabeth H. Sibolski
President
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Sibolski,

As one of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's first approved institutions in 1921, the growth and prestige of The Pennsylvania State University is a testament to the strength of the voluntary system of accreditation that is the foundation of American higher education. Both the recommendations and suggestions of our respected peers carry great weight in our institutional planning and decision-making processes. We gratefully acknowledge the many significant accomplishments noted by the evaluation team that reflect the hard work of our faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees, as well as the excellence of our students and the commitment of our alumni and friends. We accept the evaluation team's eight recommendations and have no objections to their findings. In fact, in the two months since the team's visit, we have already taken substantive preliminary steps to address the recommendations. Permit me to briefly summarize those steps.

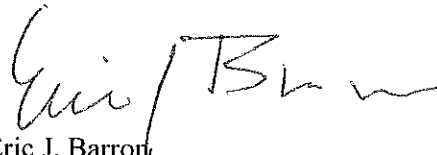
- In response to the recommendation that Penn State provide evidence that the evaluation processes for the Board, President, and senior officers are completed and in place (**Standard 4, Leadership and Governance**), Penn State has already launched an assessment process for executives and is asking its vice presidents and others to establish a similar process for management-level employees. The Board of Trustees is working toward improving and codifying its assessment process, beginning with exit interviews for outgoing trustees this summer. A new assessment instrument will be used at the January Board retreat.
- In regard to the recommendation that the University institute an administrative evaluation process/policy that would apply to non-academic departments and administrators (**Standard 5, Administration**), Penn State's Office of Human Resources has introduced a new evaluation process for non-academic administrators in 2014-15. This process includes a supervisor evaluation and employee self-assessment. Each year, the evaluation will focus on the organizational role and goals for the non-academic administrators and in alternate years the evaluation will also focus on leadership competencies and the support of diversity, ethics and compliance, and stewardship of University resources. A 360 degree feedback tool will be introduced in the future. Data from the initial implementation will be used to refine this process moving forward.

- In regard to the recommendation that the University place a high priority on the development of new strategies and initiatives to expand and enhance the enrollment and graduation of diverse students (**Standard 8, Student Admission and Retention**), including most especially African American students, the University is currently searching for a Vice Provost for Educational Equity who will lead this effort by working closely with key administrators and offices. Further, I have identified diversity, in the context of the continuously changing demographics of our constituencies, as one of my imperatives for the University; this will be one of the foundational principles integrated fully in our new strategic plan.

- In response to the three recommendations related to assessment, the University is implementing significant structural changes. We have already initiated a search for a newly created Vice Provost for Planning and Assessment position. This Vice Provost will report to the Executive Vice President and Provost and be a member of the University's Academic Leadership Council. The existing Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment (OPIA) will report to the Vice Provost. Also, a new Office for Learning Assessment (OLA) will be created to facilitate and oversee assessment of student learning for all programs at all levels. Both OLA and OPIA will be led by newly-established associate vice provost positions. Also, in response to the team's recommendations, the newly created OLA will:
 - work collaboratively with the University Faculty Senate and the Office for Undergraduate Education to establish and implement a systematic assessment plan for the new general education (**Standard 12, General Education**) curriculum that was approved on April 28;
 - oversee the assessment of certificate programs (**Standard 13, Related Educational Activities**); and
 - be responsible for articulating statements and means of assessment for learning outcomes for all programs and at all levels (**Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning**), undergraduate and graduate, certificate, and non-credit and will work closely with Student Affairs Research and Assessment on the assessment of co-curricular learning outcomes.

Clearly, we have much work ahead of us. I assure you Penn State is fully committed to that work and is already taking thoughtful and decisive action to ensure that we continue to meet and exceed the high standards of the Commission and our peers. While this letter does not address the evaluation team's suggestions, please be assured that they will also be given the attention and consideration they deserve as we move forward. We thank both the team and the Commission staff for their commitment to excellence that is reflected in the report and the recommendations.

Sincerely,



Eric J. Barron

cc: Blannie E. Bowen
Betty J. Harper
Nicholas P. Jones