



January 11, 2024

Dr. Darron Collins
President
College of the Atlantic
105 Eden Street
Bar Harbor, ME 04609

Dear President Collins:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on November 16, 2023, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by College of the Atlantic and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by College of the Atlantic be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2027 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's continued success in addressing three of the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2023 interim report and two additional matters, namely:

1. achieving its enrollment goals;
2. achieving its persistence and graduation rate goals, particularly for first generation and BIPOC students;
3. continuing to develop a comprehensive approach to assessment;
4. achieving its goals for its residential housing model as well as its newly created director of residence life and student experience position;
5. using data to assess its distance education offerings.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by College of the Atlantic was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of March 1, 2018, and June 4, 2020 and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends College of the Atlantic (COA) for its thoughtful and candid interim report that was the result of a "robust and inclusive planning and reporting process." We appreciate that COA is a "place-based, ecologically focused,

experiential, small institution” and is centrally focused on its unique mission to “enrich the liberal arts tradition through the study and practice of human ecology.” The Commission is gratified to learn that the College is making progress towards maintaining a steady state of approximately 350 FTE each year; COA enrolled 348 FTE in FY2022, 349 FTE in FY2023, and projects just under 340 FTE in FY2024. The Commission notes with favor that the institution’s *Broad Reach* capital campaign exceeded its \$50 million goal, with \$55 million raised “a full year ahead of schedule,” and the COA Annual Fund has also increased from approximately \$1.38 million in FY2021 to approximately \$1.6 million in FY2023. In addition, we are pleased to learn of the College’s integration of data collection and analysis across the institution as well as the creation of a part-time institutional research position. The Commission appreciates College of the Atlantic’s disaggregation of and attention to persistence and retention rates, and we also note positively its College Opportunity and Access Program and its efforts to “accommodate both increasing physical and mental health needs” of its students. Lastly, we are pleased to learn that COA faculty are engaged in a process to develop “more systematic, institution-wide, skills-based assessment of COA’s stated educational effectiveness.”

The Commission thanks College of the Atlantic for detailing its assessment and improvement efforts in its Reflective Essay on Educational Effectiveness. We appreciate the College’s “What You Should Learn at COA” curricular learning goals: metacognition, creativity, critical thinking, community engagement, communication, integrative thinking, and interdisciplinarity. These goals are measured through “a variety of data,” and analysis of those data has led to changes in several areas including enhanced support for students with learning differences and improvement in quantitative reasoning courses and support. We are also gratified that faculty are “eager” to make assessment of the College’s institutional learning goals “meaningful, reliable, and manageable.” Lastly, COA’s “strong connections” with industry experts who provide “valuable feedback about the competencies and contributions of COA alumni” are particularly noteworthy.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2027 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. We ask that within the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 evaluation, the institution give emphasis to its continued success in addressing three of the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2023 interim report: 1) achieving its enrollment goals, 2) achieving its persistence and graduation rate goals, particularly for first generation and BIPOC students, and 3) continuing to develop a comprehensive approach to assessment. While the Commission appreciates the progress in each of these areas, as noted above, we recognize that these matters do not lend themselves to rapid resolution and will require the College’s sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the self-study.

The additional two items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the Fall 2027 comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Students, and Institutional Resources*.

We understand that College of the Atlantic has been working to “both build and acquire a significant amount of student housing.” COA purchased six townhome units adjacent to campus, built student housing in the Town of Mount Desert, and began construction of a 46-bed, on-campus residence hall. The Commission appreciates that, to support this residential program, the College created a director of residence life and student experience position. We look forward to learning, through the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 comprehensive evaluation, of College of the Atlantic’s success in “implementing the results of its planning” (2.5) in this matter. We are further guided here by our standards on *Students and Institutional Resources*:

The institution ensures that individuals responsible for student services are qualified by formal training and work experience and organizationally placed to represent and address

the needs of students effectively. Personnel, facilities, technology, and funding are adequate to implement the institution's student services policies and procedures (5.17).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

The Fall 2023 interim report submitted by College of the Atlantic did not address its success in using data to assess its distance education offerings, as requested in our letter of January 26, 2023. We therefore ask that College of the Atlantic provide an update on this matter as part of the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2027 comprehensive evaluation and refer you to the January 26, 2023 letter for additional information regarding this matter.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by College of the Atlantic and hopes its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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. Beth Gardiner. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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

Sincerely,



Russell C. Carey

RCC/jm

cc: Ms. Beth Gardiner

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions