November 17, 2011

Dr. Frederick M. Lawrence
President
Brandeis University
415 South Street, MS 100
Waltham, MA 02453

Dear President Lawrence:

I write am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 23, 2011, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the fifth-year interim report submitted by Brandeis University and voted to take the following action:

that the fifth-year interim report submitted by Brandeis University be accepted;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2016 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2016 comprehensive evaluation give emphasis to the institution’s success in:

1. implementing plans to assess Brandeis University’s general education program, and to conduct reviews of courses, academic programs, and graduate study;

2. making planned restorations to funding and staffing levels for the library;

3. addressing deferred maintenance;

4. rebuilding financial reserves.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The fifth-year interim report submitted by Brandeis University was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of April 10, 2007, and it also addressed each of the eleven standards.

The Commission is gratified to learn that, after having to suspend efforts with its “Integrated Plan” in response to the global financial crisis, Brandeis
University has developed a strategy to increase revenues to resume implementation of this plan by increasing undergraduate enrollment to 3,600 students, reducing the size of the faculty in Arts and Sciences by 35 FTE, and reducing inefficiencies and staffing levels in its operations. The University has also developed a five-year financial plan to ensure that by 2015 it will no longer need to tap its unrestricted endowment to balance the operating budget.

The report submitted by Brandeis University provides a detailed presentation of how the institution has addressed each of the eleven standards. We are pleased to learn that the transition to a new president has been "smooth," and we understand that the trustees have established a process for the review of board governance and its effectiveness. The University has convened a Curricular and Academic Restructuring Steering Committee that will make recommendations on revisions to the general education program. We also note that the University has increased the number of international students in its student body and plans to expand its international focus where opportunities are available. With regard to completion of the Student Achievement and Success data forms, the institution chose the option that asks the institution to state claims for student achievement and success and to provide supporting evidence. While the publication of these claims has been completed, information regarding interpretation of the outcomes data and revisions to programs and services based on this assessment was not provided.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2016 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on Planning and Evaluation, The Academic Program, Library and Other Information Resources, Physical and Technological Resources, and Financial Resources.

We note with favor that a comprehensive student learning assessment process is now in place and that learning goals have been articulated at the program level. However, assessment of student achievement of these learning goals is still under development in many programs. Additionally, external review committees for undergraduate programs were temporarily suspended during the financial crisis. We are heartened to hear that funding for two or three external reviews annually has been restored. The self-study prepared for the Fall 2016 comprehensive evaluation will provide the institution an opportunity to take stock of its progress with assessment and program review at the undergraduate and graduate program levels, as guided by our standards on Planning and Evaluation and The Academic Program:

The institution has a system of periodic review of academic and other programs that includes the use of external perspectives (2.6).

The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

The institution's system of periodic review of academic programs includes a focus on understanding what and how students learn as a result of the program (4.52).
We are pleased to learn that the University plans to increase financial support to Library and Technology Services, after having determined that the 15% reductions in staffing and budgets since 2009 were excessive and prevented a number of important projects from being launched. The institution plans to upgrade its computer networks and course management system and to expand access to its archival materials and special collections. In the longer term the institution hopes to expand its high-performance computing cluster for scholars and researchers. Within the self-study prepared for Fall 2016, we look forward to understanding the progress the University has made in strengthening Library and Technology Services, informed by our standards on Library and Other Information Resources and Physical and Technological Resources:

Institutional planning and resource allocation support the development of library, information resources and technology appropriate to the institution's mission and academic program. The institution provides sufficient and consistent financial support for the library and the effective maintenance and improvement of the institution's information resources and instructional and information technology (7.2).

The institution uses instructional technology appropriate to its academic mission and the modes of delivery of its academic program (7.3).

Professionally qualified and numerically adequate staff administer the institution's library, information resources and services, and instructional and information technology support functions (7.4).

Through ownership or guaranteed access, the institution makes available the library and information resources necessary for the fulfillment of its mission and purposes. These resources are sufficient in quality, level, diversity, quantity, and currency to support and enrich the institution's academic offerings. They support the academic and research program and the intellectual and cultural development of students, faculty, and staff (7.5).

The Commission notes that Brandeis University plans to increase the level of facilities investments by $10-15 million per year and to increase its annual expenditure for addressing deferred maintenance. However, deferred maintenance remains a challenge, and it is not certain that the goal set for facilities investment will be met in the near-term. We look forward to learning, in Fall 2016, of the institution's success in reducing deferred maintenance as guided by our standard on Physical and Technological Resources:

The institution undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning. It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs. Space planning occurs on a regular basis as part of physical resource evaluation and planning, and is consistent with the mission and purposes of the institution (8.4).

Brandeis University's financial reserves are low and are projected to increase only slightly in the years ahead. In contrast to its peers, Brandeis has a smaller reserve as a percent of total expenses. We are gratified to learn that the institution has placed a high priority on increasing reserves in part by saving rather than spending discretionary funds. We look forward to hearing about the institution's success here as part of the next self-study. Our standard on Financial Resources should be informative:

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as
necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (9.9).

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

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. Malcolm Sherman. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

If you have any questions about the Commission’s action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Maydew

MJM/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Malcolm Sherman