



December 5, 2022

Dr. Ronald D. Liebowitz
President
Brandeis University
415 South Street, MS 100
Waltham, MA 02453

Dear President Liebowitz:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 22, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Brandeis University and voted to take the following action:

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

that the institution be asked to submit a report by August 15, 2024, for consideration in Fall 2024 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) continuing to address the matters specified for attention in the Fall 2022 interim report, specifically:
 - a. enhancing the effectiveness of its governing board;
 - b. implementing the University's Framework for Our Future planning document;
 - c. addressing challenges in the current budget, financial, and operational structure of the University;
 - d. achieving its goals with respect to the diversity of the faculty and student body and continuing to implement initiatives related to campus culture and climate;
 - e. implementing its new General Education program and assessing student learning of the outcomes specified for the program;
- 2) achieving the intended outcomes of its academic and student life restructuring initiatives;
- 3) funding deferred maintenance projects;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2026 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2026 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) continuing to address the five matters specified for attention in the Fall 2022 interim report;
- 2) completing and evaluating the effectiveness of its strategic and institutional plans, with attention to capital planning and enrollment planning;
- 3) continuing to close the deferred maintenance gap.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by Brandeis University was accepted because it responded to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of April 3, 2019, and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends Brandeis University (Brandeis) for its detailed and informative report that documents the University's many accomplishments over the last five years. We are particularly gratified to learn of the significant progress Brandeis has made in strengthening its governing board through efforts that include clarifying the role and responsibilities of Board members, establishing "real term limits for trustees," and implementing practices that will allow the Board to "focus more clearly on strategic matters rather than the operating procedures of the institution." We also appreciate learning that the 2018 Framework for Our Future planning document was used to establish ten institutional priorities and, although the Framework is "not a true strategic plan, [it] set the stage" for the strategic planning work that is now underway at the University. Maintaining a balanced budget for five consecutive years is commendable, and we are further encouraged to note that Brandeis "persisted with strong management through the pandemic." The expansion of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is noted positively, as is the enhancement of resources and support for BIPOC students, faculty, and staff. The report assures that the rigor and content of the University's online coursework is consistent with coursework delivered in a face-to-face or hybrid format, and an array of student and academic support services is accessible to students across all modalities of instruction. Finally, we support the University's judgment that the degree of success Brandeis has achieved since it was founded almost 75 years ago is "inspiring." With the continued engagement of its Board, strong leadership, and excellent faculty, staff, and students, the institution is well positioned to realize its goals and address its challenges well into the future.

We further commend Brandeis for its comprehensive reflective essay that documents the advancements the University has made to strengthen its culture of assessment. The success of the World Language and Culture Committee in implementing language proficiency assessments and the assessment of student work in the University Writing Seminar that led to the "full implementation and continued revisions of the Comparative Genre Curriculum" are both noteworthy examples. We are further gratified to learn that in Summer 2022 the University initiated the first of three cycles of assessment of its newly developed General Education Core requirement, and the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee is scheduled to review the results of that assessment in 2024. First-to-second year retention rates ranging from 90% to 92% and six-year graduation rates ranging from 87% to 90% for "the majority of the population" are impressive; however, as Brandeis candidly acknowledges, it "is lagging behind its peers by about two percentage points." We therefore note positively that the institution is committed to making improvements in its student success rates, and efforts are underway to "investigate which populations are more likely to be retained and which ones are more likely to leave the institution."

The three matters the institution is asked to address in Fall 2024 relate to our standards on *Institutional Resources; Planning and Evaluation; Organization and Governance; Students; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; and The Academic Program.*

As noted positively above, we acknowledge the significant progress Brandeis University has made to address the five areas of emphasis specified for attention in its interim report. We also understand that these initiatives will require the institution's sustained attention over time; hence, we will welcome, in the report submitted for consideration in Fall 2024, an update to confirm the University's continued progress in assuring that it is "financially stable" (7.5); that it "has a demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5); that "[t]he board systematically develops, ensures, and enhances its own effectiveness through orientation, professional development, effective self-assessment, and regular evaluation including an external perspective" (3.8); that it "addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its students" (*Students*, Statement of the Standard) and its "faculty and academic staff and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals" (6.5); and that "the general education program is coherent and substantive" (4.16).

According to the University's interim report, much of the work that was interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic has resumed. For instance, a task force that had started to assess the "learning/living experience" of Brandeis students prior to the pandemic is now continuing to support the institution's goal to ensure that the "personal and emotional development [of students] are considered alongside intellectual growth." In addition, the Division of Student Affairs is "moving from a College Ready Model to a Student Ready Model of service delivery with initial steps beginning in Fall 2022." The Fall 2024 report will provide the University an opportunity to update the Commission on its success in achieving the intended outcomes of its academic and student life restructuring initiatives as evidence that it "ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals, [and that t]he institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their educational success" (5.7).

As the University candidly acknowledges in its interim report, "there is a significant backlog (about \$500 million) of repairs needed across the Brandeis campus," and the institution's Facilities Condition Index of .30 in FY2022 is in the "poor" range per industry standards. We therefore note with approval that Brandeis University plans to allocate \$60 million to deferred maintenance over the next five years, and we look forward, in Fall 2024, to receiving an update on the institution's initial "success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5) in this regard. We are further guided here by our standard on *Institutional Resources*:

Facilities are constructed and maintained in accordance with legal requirements to ensure access, safety, security, and a healthy environment with consideration for environmental and ecological concerns (7.23).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2026 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 *Institutional Resources; Planning and Evaluation; Organization and Governance; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Students; and The Academic Program.*

As affirmation that Brandeis University is continuing to make progress in implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its plans, we ask that the self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2026 comprehensive evaluation include an update on the institution's continued success in

addressing the five matters specified for attention in the Fall 2022 interim report and noted above. We remind you of our standards on *Institutional Resources; Planning and Evaluation; Organization and Governance; Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship; Students; and The Academic Program* (cited above).

The interim report documents the various planning activities that are taking place across the University. We are particularly gratified to learn that, for the first time ever, Brandeis has developed a five-year capital plan that “reflects project prioritization across units, serves as a guide for capital spending in upcoming years, and identifies opportunities to achieve multiple goals through collaborative project planning.” We note, also, that this University-wide plan will be “updated on an annual basis.” In addition, the institution candidly reports that a dip in enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on tuition revenue that dropped from 60% of the University’s total revenue in FY2020 to 53% in FY2021. We therefore understand that “sustaining student enrollment and affordability” is among the University’s “highest priorities for the next five years.” We look forward, through the Fall 2026 self-study, to receiving an update on the University’s success in implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of its strategic institutional plans, with attention to capital planning and enrollment planning, as evidence that Brandeis “has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation” (2.8) and that it “sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve” (*Students, Statement of the Standard*).

Finally, as noted above, we are encouraged to learn that Brandeis University will dedicate \$60 million over the next five years to address matters related to deferred maintenance. In keeping with our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Institutional Resources* (both cited above), we look forward, in the Fall 2026 self-study, to receiving an update on the institution’s continued success in closing its deferred maintenance gap.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by Brandeis University and hopes the evaluation process 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. Lisa Kranc. 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. Lisa Kranc

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions