



May 19, 2025

Dr. Bill Pieczynski
President
Nichols College
P.O. Box 5000
Dudley, MA 01571-5000

Dear President Pieczynski:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 24, 2025, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Nichols College:

that Nichols College be continued in accreditation;

that the institution submit an Annual Report on Finance and Enrollment (ARFE) by December 1, 2025 for consideration in Spring 2026;

that the institution undergo a focused evaluation in Spring 2027 and that the report prepared in advance of the visit give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. achieving its enrollment and financial goals to ensure the College's financial viability and liquidity;
2. assessing the College's governance structure to foster an inclusive campus environment;
3. developing and implementing a strategic plan that aligns institutional and programmatic strategies;
4. continuing to develop a comprehensive data-driven approach for decision-making and continuous improvement;
5. implementing changes to the College's general education core curriculum;
6. completing the redesign and launch of the College website;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by August 15, 2029 for consideration in Fall 2029;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2034.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

Nichols College is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Nichols College (Nichols) for its thorough and well-written self-study. We are pleased to learn that a new president has been successfully installed after a difficult period of transition accentuated by “two years of financial deficits and declining enrollment.” We note with favor that the College’s business degree programs recently obtained AACSB accreditation and that across the College faculty scholarship has increased from 10 peer reviewed journals and equivalent publications in 2019 to averaging over 15 comparable publications each year thereafter. At the same time, we view positively that faculty are “continuously showing students they are available by having an open-door policy” as well as advising student clubs, attending campus events, and providing academic, professional, and career guidance. The Commission also appreciates that Nichols has increased its competitiveness over the past few years with the acceptance rate decreasing from “92% three years ago to about 82% each year for the past two years” while retention has been fairly stable at 72%. In addition, we understand that the College is currently revising its general education curriculum to increase flexibility, emphasize technology and analytics, and formalize experiential learning. The Commission shares the view of the visiting team that Nichols College’s “community of students, faculty, staff, alumni and trustees is remarkably close-knit in ways that positively support the student experience” along with the institution’s “career-focused, professional, and experiential” approach to education designed to “transform today’s students into tomorrow’s leaders.”

So that the Commission can continue to monitor the institution’s progress to improve its financial position, we ask that Nichols College submit an Annual Report on Finance and Enrollment by December 1, 2025 for consideration in Spring 2026. The purpose of the ARFE report is to help the Commission determine whether the College continues to meet its standard on *Institutional Resources*. As per the ARFE report guidelines attached for your review and use, the report narrative should include an explanation of the institution’s enrollment history and its future projections; assessment of the institution’s cash flow and liquidity position; and analysis of its operating results (surplus or deficit) to include trends in net tuition. This request is in keeping with our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*:

Consistent with its mission, the institution 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).

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).

The institution’s multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

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 (7.14).

The items the institution is asked to address in the report prepared in advance of the focused evaluation scheduled for Spring 2027 are related to our standards on *Students; Institutional Resources; Organization and Governance; Planning and Evaluation; The Academic Program; and Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*.

The Commission understands that undergraduate FTE at Nichols College dropped from 1,220 in FY2021 to 1,114 in FY2024 and, over this same period, graduate FTE fell from 178 to 157. At the same time, we note with favor that “[e]arly FY25 financial results are extremely encouraging” due to an uptick in Fall 2024 both undergraduate and graduate FTE. For example, tuition revenue is anticipated to increase 10% and the College reports that it is on target to halve its operating deficit from \$4 million to around \$2 million. The Spring 2027 report will provide the institution another opportunity to update the Commission on its continued success in achieving its enrollment and financial goals to ensure Nichols remains financially viable and has sufficient liquidity to support operations. We are guided here by our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources* (both cited above).

The Commission is aware that “Campus Culture” was added as a strategic priority in 2024 “to address areas of concern in order to foster a more inclusive and supportive campus environment.” We therefore note with favor that Nichols College is conducting a campus climate survey that, along with recommendations from the Campus Culture Task Force, will help to guide work in this area. In addition, addressing the concern raised by the visiting team that the College’s internal committee structures for faculty and staff “may be overly cumbersome and some clarification of committee charges, process, and decision rights could also enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of internal governance” could further promote a more positive campus culture. The Spring 2027 report will enable Nichols College to provide evidence of its progress in assessing its governance structure to foster an inclusive campus environment. Relevant here is our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

The institution’s organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution’s system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.2).

In accordance with established institutional mechanisms and procedures, the chief executive officer and senior administrators consult with faculty, students, other administrators, and staff, and are appropriately responsive to their concerns, needs, and initiatives. The institution’s internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution (3.13).

The effectiveness of the institution’s organizational structure and system of governance is improved through regular and systematic review (3.19).

The Commission understands that the current Nichols College strategic plan, Embracing Greatness, is designed to “guide the College at least through AY2025-2026 or until a new strategic plan is developed.” We also are aware that each of the College’s three distinct schools – School of Business, School for Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Graduate School – has been “charged to develop [its] own mission statements, goals, and objectives.” Additionally, the campus master planning initiative, which began in 2022 but paused during the presidential transition, is expected to be revisited in the near future. We ask that the Spring 2027 report give emphasis to the institution’s success in developing and implementing a strategic plan that aligns institutional and programmatic strategies. Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* provides guidance here:

The institution plans beyond a short-term horizon, including strategic planning that involves realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The results of strategic planning are implemented in all units of the institution through financial, academic, enrollment, and other supporting plans (2.3).

The institution 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).

We are gratified to learn from the visiting team that it is “clear that the College recognizes the importance of using data to inform decision-making” and that its systematic evaluation of academic programs is “well-established.” Even so, the Commission shares the team’s judgment that while there is a culture of planning and evaluation at the leadership level, “there is less evidence of systematic and robust planning and evaluation practices across the institution, including evaluation mechanisms, a culture of data-informed decision-making, and communications about the results of planning efforts.” We therefore seek assurance, through the Spring 2027 report, that Nichols College is continuing to develop a comprehensive data-driven approach for decision-making and continuous improvement. This request is in keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* (cited above and below):

Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes and include external perspectives. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts (2.1).

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, the quality of its academic programs, and the effectiveness of its operational and administrative activities, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide valid information to support institutional improvement. The institution’s evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods (2.6).

The Commission notes with favor that Nichols has formed a General Education Core Curriculum Review Committee charged with “spearheading the revisions” to general education to ensure that, while providing flexibility, the general education core is “impactful, distinctive, and transformative.” In addition, we are aware that a goal is to integrate technology, experiential learning, and innovation throughout the curriculum. As expressed in our standard on *The Academic Program*, the Spring 2027 report will enable Nichols College to demonstrate its success in implementing changes to its general education core curriculum:

The general education program is coherent and substantive. It reflects the institution’s mission and values and embodies the institution’s definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn (4.16).

The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another (4.17).

Finally, the Commission recognizes the College's acknowledgement that its website is "out of date and has not been significantly updated since 2018." In response, the institution is currently conducting a full audit with the goal of securing a vendor by June 2025 and launching the new website by January 2026. In keeping with our standards on *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*, we look forward to learning, as part of the Spring 2027 report, of Nichols' success in completing the redesign and launch of its website.

The information published by the institution on its website is readily accessible and sufficient to allow students and prospective students to make informed decisions about their education (9.11).

Through a systematic process of periodic review, the institution ensures that its print and digital publications are complete, accurate, available, readily accessible, and current. The results of the review are used for improvement (9.16).

The submission of the report in Spring 2027 will be validated by a focused evaluation. The Procedures for the Focused Evaluation Visit are attached for your information and use.

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. The purpose of the Fall 2029 report is to provide the Commission with an opportunity to appraise the institution's current status in keeping with the Policy on the Periodic Review of Accredited Institutions.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2034 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Nichols College and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Mauri Pelto, Associate Provost and Special Assistant to the President for Accreditation and Assessment, during its deliberations.

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 Randy Becker. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the attached policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

Dr. Bill Pieczynski
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The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Whelan".

Michael Whelan

MW/sjp

cc: Randy Becker
Visiting Team

Attachments: Guidelines for Preparing the Annual Report on Finance and Enrollment (ARFE)
Procedures for the Focused Evaluation Visit
Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions