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**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

May 4, 2016

Dr. Elizabeth H. Sibolski, President  
Middle States Commission on Higher Education  
3624 Market Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-2680

Dear Dr. Elizabeth H. Sibolski,

Please accept this letter as Teachers College's response to the final Evaluation Team Report (ETR) for the site visit conducted on March 8—March 11, 2016.

First, we would like to thank the Commission and, especially, our institutional liaison, Dr. Ellie A. Fogarty, for putting together highly qualified, professional, and courteous teams both for the site visit and for the generalist review. We are particularly pleased with the leadership provided by the team chairs, Dr. Alan D. Mathios and Dr. Mary M. Brabeck, who helped us frame the visit as a collegial review and feedback to advance our institutional mission and strategic priorities.

The Selected Topics model that we chose for the Self-Study allowed us to focus on the issues that are priorities for us: institutional renewal and innovation. The work of the broadly representative Steering Committee and its four working groups over two years resulted in a series of recommendations pertaining to (1) collecting, analyzing, and reporting of institutional assessment data (primarily surveys); (2) developing a process model for reinventing programs of study informed by data derived from graduates' career paths and their perceptions of the quality and professional relevance of their academic programs; and (3) promoting innovative academic programming in response to changing environments. The institutional recommendations along with the 19 suggestions articulated by the evaluation team will be invaluable for the annual

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institutional goal setting for the next several years. For example, in agreement with one of the ETR suggestions, a set of recommendations and suggestions will be included in the annual plans and reports in the 2016-2017 planning cycle, which begins in July. Toward that end, the Office of Institutional Studies has already begun redesigning key institutional surveys and working with other administrative offices and academic programs to clarify and prioritize data needs.

The main purpose of our Self-Study was to develop a process model for systematically using feedback from alumni for program improvement and redesign. As opposed to our prior practice of analyzing and reporting only College-wide data that rarely resulted in curricular or other programmatic changes, we created program-specific data sets and organized guided faculty discussions of these data, which resulted in a variety of big and small changes across the participating programs. The detailed program data summaries, comparisons with the College-wide results, faculty discussions of data, and implemented or planned changes are all documented in the 18 Program Self-Study Reports, which are available in the online Roadmap Document. In response to the ETR suggestions (#1 and #17), we would like to clarify the main reasons for not publicly ranking or identifying the best and worst performing programs in the Self-Study Report and not including institutional benchmarks or cut-off scores beyond the 4-point Likert-type scales used in the survey questionnaire.

- Firstly, as justly noted in suggestion 17, across participating programs, the individual program data differed in several ways (e.g., numbers of respondents, response rates, and other statistical characteristics) that can make comparisons between the programs non-definitive or erroneous. As we continue to refine our survey instruments, analysis, and reporting, we will work toward improving the interpretability and usefulness of the results. For example, we are planning to search for the ways to triangulate the findings from the alumni survey with the feedback provided by other constituents (suggestion #6), data derived from direct assessment of student learning, or formal review of program curricula by the faculty.

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- Secondly, from the very beginning, the success of our Self-Study process depended on our ability to build trust between the participating programs and the Design and Program Review Working Group. We were concerned that open and candid discussions of program data would have been more challenging and less productive if the process had been designed to include cross-program comparisons and rankings. Moving forward, we will look for ways as a community to share data and learn from other programs' successes and failures.
  
- Finally, Teachers College is a microcosm of different programmatic foci, philosophies, training models, methods, and contexts. The comparison of different types of programs can make the public draw rash or erroneous conclusions without considerations of important program background information.

Again, while the individual programs were encouraged to compare their results with the College-wide results and the Steering Committee and senior administration had access to the program-specific data, we believe that public identification of best and worst performing programs is premature in terms of data quality, counter-productive for establishing the culture of inquiry and trust, and may be not possible beyond a few common metrics. We will be working on identifying these common metrics over the next 5 years as documented in our 2016-2020 Institutional Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes.

Finally, as Teachers College continues to innovate and develop new academic offerings, we are aware of the potential changes in the faculty composition (suggestion #12) and workload (suggestion #8), and the need to discontinue non-performing or outdated programs (suggestion #7). We appreciate the team's focus on faculty needs, priorities, and development (suggestion #14) as well as the recognition of those who are involved in entrepreneurial work (suggestion #13). We will continue monitoring how digital and non-credit programming fits with the College's mission and goals, meets student needs, and preserves the College's reputation and brand (suggestion #15 and #16).

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In concluding our response to ETR, we would like to again thank the team for making the site visit collegial, constructive, and forward-looking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Fuhrman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Susan Fuhrman, President  
Teachers College, Columbia University