



June 7, 2022

Dr. Joseph Bertolino
President
Southern Connecticut State University
501 Crescent Street
New Haven, CT 06515-0901

Dear President Bertolino:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on April 22, 2022, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Southern Connecticut State University:

that Southern Connecticut State University be continued in accreditation;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by August 15, 2026 for consideration in Fall 2026;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the institution give emphasis to its success in:

1. stabilizing its enrollment and achieving its retention and graduation goals;
2. addressing the structural deficit and managing the costs of its new buildings;
3. implementing its programs and initiatives, specifically the StAR assessment processes, Academic Advising Centers, distance education programs, and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee;
4. implementing its strategic plan, particularly its short- and mid-range plans;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2031.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Southern Connecticut State University (Southern or SCSU) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends Southern Connecticut State University for its well-written, reflective, and aspirational self-study that was developed through an inclusive, participatory process. Southern's commitment to social justice is commendable; we appreciate that the institution "aspire[s] to be the social justice and anti-racism public university of Connecticut." We understand that the University, which is at the mid-point of its 2015-2025 strategic plan, has "made headway" in achieving its four goals

and concur with the visiting team that the plan is “data-driven.” The Commission is pleased to learn of the “physical transformation” of the University which includes a new Academic Science and Laboratory building, library renovations, and plans for a new School of Business building. We also note with favor that SCSU has made considerable progress in “creating a culture of assessment” across its curriculum and co-curricular activities. We appreciate that a new program review process – Standards, Assessment and Review Program (StAR – was developed and that data collected from program self-studies has been used to establish new degrees and additional modalities for existing programs. It is evident that with its capable leadership team and committed faculty and staff, Southern Connecticut State University is well-positioned to fulfill its mission and commitment to “academic excellence, social justice, and service for the public good” well into the future.

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution’s current status in keeping with the Policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all interim reports the University is asked, in Fall 2026, to report on four matters related to our standards on *Students; Institutional Resources; Planning and Evaluation; and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship.*

We understand from the report of the visiting team that SCSU has “shown a loss of 1-2% enrollment each year” since its 2016 interim report. The Commission is gratified, therefore, to learn that the President’s Leadership Team is “discussing what Southern’s composition of students will be in the next decade” and that the University has several action items related to its “enrollment priority,” including examining barriers to access and identifying and promoting nationally competitive degree programs. We also note SCSU’s detailed analysis of its retention and graduation rates as well as its focused efforts on student success, including the use of Navigate and its Center for Academic Success and Accessibility Services. The Fall 2026 interim report will provide an opportunity for Southern Connecticut State University to update the Commission on its success in stabilizing its enrollment and achieving its retention and graduation goals. We are guided here by our standard on *Students*:

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 demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution’s academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The institution’s goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (5.6).

The Commission shares the concern of the visiting team that “the University exists in a structural deficit without a concrete plan to address it,” and we note that SCSU is projecting deficits in each of the next three fiscal years. The maintenance of the new facilities noted above will also “place additional burdens on the annual budget.” The Commission understands that there will be a “modest tuition increase” this year and that a “growing external grant portfolio” sustains a number of key initiatives. We appreciate Southern’s candid acknowledgment that “there are issues that the university must address through careful planning and strategic investment over the course of the next few years.” As guided by our standard on *Institutional Resources*, we anticipate being appraised, in Fall 2026, of the institution’s progress in addressing the structural deficit and managing the costs associated with its new buildings:

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 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).

Southern Connecticut State University has developed several new programs and initiatives in support of its mission. While the StAR program, noted above, shows "considerable promise," we share the concern of the visiting team about the time and resource demands of the program. We appreciate learning that SCSU will conduct a "review for the StAR process itself" to ensure it is sustainable and make changes as needed. The University also developed an Academic Advising Center model which teams faculty and professional advisors to provide "short-term, intensive advising to subgroups of students." Given that the model is in the early stages of implementation, SCSU has yet to assess its impact on student success. The University also has several current academic programs "transitioning to hybrid/blended or online modalities" as well as new online graduate programs. The Commission notes with favor that the University has created a new Executive Director of Online and Continuing Education to provide "consistent support for online instruction." Lastly, a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Council was established to "increase and retain representation of faculty and staff of color." As these efforts are still in the early stages of implementation, we welcome further information, as part of the Fall 2026 interim report, on Southern's success in implementing each of these programs and initiatives. Our standards on *Planning and Evaluation; Students; and Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* provide guidance here:

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).

Through a program of regular and systematic evaluation, the institution assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve an equitable educational experience for all of its students and the appropriateness and effectiveness of its student services to advance institutional purposes. Information obtained through this evaluation is used to revise these efforts and services and improve their achievement (5.20).

Compatible with its mission and purposes, it addresses its own goals for the achievement of diversity, equity, and inclusion among its faculty and academic staff and assesses the effectiveness of its efforts to achieve those goals (6.5).

The institution endeavors to enhance the quality of teaching and learning wherever and however courses and programs are offered. It encourages experimentation to improve instruction. The effectiveness of instruction is regularly and systematically assessed using valid procedures; the results are used to improve instruction. Faculty and academic staff

accept their responsibility to improve instructional effectiveness. Adequate support is provided to accomplish this task (6.17).

As noted above, Southern Connecticut State University is at the mid-point of its ten-year strategic plan. The Commission appreciates that President Bertolino “put into place annual plans to supplement the 10-year strategic plan” and notes that a strategic planning group is also working to “shape the issues that will need to be included in the next strategic plan.” We welcome further information, as part of the Fall 2026 interim report, of Southern Connecticut State University’s success in “implementing the results of its planning” (2.5).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2031 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 Southern Connecticut State University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Diana Woolfolk, ACE Fellow and observer, and Glenn Cummings, team chair, 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 and the head of the system of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Matt Fleury and Mr. Terrence Cheng. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission’s action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm

cc: Mr. Matt Fleury
Mr. Terrence Cheng
Visiting Team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions