

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 19-20

COMMITTEE DATE: March 5, 2019

BOARD DATE: March 12, 2019

REVOCATION OF THE DEGREE GRANTING AUTHORITY OF MOUNT IDA COLLEGE

Moved: The Board hereby revokes the legal authority of **Mount Ida College** to operate and grant degrees in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts retroactive to January 31, 2019.

Voted: Motion approved by AAC 03/05/2019; Motion adopted by the BHE 03/12/2019

Authority: Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 69, Section 30 et seq.

Contact: Patricia A. Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success
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Background

Mount Ida College (“Mount Ida”) was a private, non-profit college with a primary location in Newton, MA. Mount Ida was founded in 1899 as a private high school for women called the Newton School. It was renamed Mount Ida in 1939 and became Mount Ida Junior College in 1961. The first associate degrees were awarded in 1967. The institution was renamed Mount Ida College and was given the authority to award bachelor’s degrees in 1982 and master’s degrees in 2009.

In early April 2018, Mount Ida’s administration suddenly announced that it would be closing at the end of that semester, by mid-May 2018. No prior notice was given to the Department before the closure was announced to the Mount Ida community and reports appeared in the media. BHE staff immediately reached out to Mount Ida to provide guidance on closure procedures and requirements, and given the unexpected nature of the announcement, the administration’s unfamiliarity with closure requirements, and the short timeframe for closure, Department staff worked very closely with Mount Ida employees and representatives of the Attorney General’s Office to ensure the smoothest possible transition for students.

Mount Ida had worked over the previous few years to build a sustainable financial model, but its enrollment, retention, facilities, and financial deficits were too significant to overcome. It ended the previous three years with operating deficits, including an approximately \$6 million decrease in net assets in FY17. In order to stave off closure, Mount Ida explored several options, including strategic refinancing with lenders, the sale of highly desirable land parcels, and possible merger with a similar institution. Unfortunately, all three of these avenues for sustainable growth simultaneously ended in spring 2018: lenders were unwilling to extend lines of credit, a potential merger collapsed, and permitting for a sale of land was extended too long to allow the sale to close. As a result, Mount Ida was left with insufficient cash flow to continue operations into fall 2018, and it did not have a significant endowment from which it could draw.

Mount Ida decided to sell its Newton campus to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; as part of the sale agreement, Mount Ida arranged for many of its students to be able to transfer to the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth (“UMD”). Pursuant to the agreement with UMD, automatic offers of enrollment were extended to all Mount Ida students in good standing. However, because many Mount Ida students’ programs did not align sufficiently with UMD offerings, and because of the geographic distance between the Mount Ida and UMD campuses (and the reality that many Mount Ida students were commuters or reliant upon public transportation), Mount Ida entered into nearly 50 other transfer agreements with public and private institutions to provide its students with transfer options in substantially all of its programs. With the assistance of Department staff, Mount Ida also arranged for certain program adoptions by other institutions, ensuring that its specialized programs would continue educating students. Since its closure, Mount Ida has attempted to track where its students ended up; as can best be determined by the limited data available, 87% of Mount Ida students were able to enroll at another institution by November 2018, and Mount Ida students transferred to approximately 140 institutions.

At the time of its closure, Mount Ida offered over 40 degree programs and enrolled more than 1100 students (after May 2018 graduation).

Throughout the closure process, Mount Ida worked closely with BHE staff to ensure compliance with state requirements related to the closure of the College to the extent possible. The Mount Ida Board of Trustees voted to sell the Newton campus and as a result close the institution on April 5, 2018, and the required Letter of Intent was submitted on April 10, 2018. The final and complete Notice of Closure documentation was submitted to BHE staff on May 16, 2018; BHE staff had been working with Mount Ida to finalize the closure plan since the submission of a first draft on April 18, 2018. All submissions have been deemed thorough and as complete as possible given the truncated timeframe for closure. Even after Mount Ida's official closure on May 22, 2018, Department staff continued to work with Mount Ida staff into July 2018 to ensure transfer pathways for as many Mount Ida students as possible.

In compliance with M.G.L., c. 69, §30A and 610 CMR 2.10, a public hearing regarding the closure of Mount Ida was held on June 7, 2018 at the Department of Higher Education, Room 1401, One Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board revoke the authority of Mount Ida College to operate and grant degrees in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts retroactive to January 31, 2019.