

Strategic Direction 3

Second Report

Strategic Direction 3 - Create a comprehensive, state -of-the-art System-wide Distance Education program, leveraging current technological strengths, and further coordinating program offerings and development.

I. Executive Summary

The charge to this committee, as stated in the UMS Strategic Plan, is to “Create a comprehensive, state-of-the-art, System-wide distance education program, leveraging current technological strengths and further coordinating program offerings and development.”

In fulfilling this charge, we chose to adopt a student-centered approach. We began by asking ourselves what our students have the right to expect from a distance education program offered by Maine’s public universities. In answering that question, we agreed on the following six principles, which we believe will have profound and far-reaching benefits for the State of Maine and its citizens.

- A. Students should find a distance education program that has a national reputation for two things: quality programs and superb customer service.
- B. Students should find a robust slate of complete undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs that are fully available through distance education and can be completed within a reasonable timeframe.
- C. Students should have easy access to a complete listing of distance education courses and programs, including general education requirements, through individual campus Web sites and a single comprehensive UMS portal.
- D. Students should have easy access to instructor and advisory support, as well as a comprehensive array of support services provided collaboratively through University College and their home UMS institution.
- E. Students should not be hindered or disadvantaged by academic policies and procedures that were designed for students in traditional, campus-based programs, and are not responsive to the realities of learning at a distance.
- F. Students should be charged distance education tuition rates that are fair, competitive, and based on a stable, accountable financial framework.

NEASC defines distance education as “a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place.”¹ The work of this committee expands NEASC’s definition to include instruction offered live at University College centers and sites.

¹ NEASC, CIHE, Policy for the Accreditation of Academic Degree and Certificate Programs Offered through Distance Education, 1998.

We must emphasize that we do not consider this report to be a complete draft of the final report, since the committee has yet to address some points of its charge. Neither have we had sufficient time to fully discuss and agree on implementation strategies for several of the recommendations presented in this document.

II. Short Background on the Process

A. Membership

Midway through the fall 2005 semester, the significant overlap between the Distance Education Committee (SD #3) and the Outreach Centers Committee (SD #8) became obvious. The Outreach Centers Committee was charged to devise a plan for administrative responsibility for operating the centers and sites, so that “better synchronization of academic program offerings will be accomplished as centers and universities collaborate to reduce duplication and enhance program development.” At the same time, one of the Distance Education Committee’s tasks was to “administratively connect each University College Center to a UMS university to enable greater access and responsiveness to student needs.” Neither committee could complete their work without heavily referencing the work being done in parallel by the other committee, and their membership also had significant overlap. It was decided to dissolve the Outreach Centers Committee and fold their work into the Distance Education Committee. Several members of the SD #8 committee agreed to join the SD #3 committee, which is now sufficiently robust and representative to adequately address all of the issues of both of the original groups.

The leadership of the Distance Education Committee also changed as we transitioned into the fall 2005 semester. Following the retirement of both Gerry Dube and Charlie Lyons, who had served as co-chairs of SD #3 during the previous year, Cynthia Huggins took over as committee chair. Jim Breece was replaced by Chris LeGore as staff person to the committee, and Ralph Caruso, the new Chief Information Officer for the University of Maine System, also joined the committee.

B. Meetings

In early September, this committee set up an ambitious schedule of meetings—every three to four weeks—for the 2005-2006 academic year. The committee met on September 28, October 20, and November 7, being joined by the former SD #8 committee members for the October and November meetings.

Spring 2006 meetings are planned for January 20, February 16, March 14, April 14, and May 8. Full committee meetings are held on the University of Maine campus from 9:00 a.m. to noon, in Neville Hall, and typically three or four committee members join by Polycom.

C. Subcommittees

At the November 7 meeting, we divided into five subcommittees, which each met two or three times during November and early December. These subcommittees were charged with working on (1) a distance learning council, (2) technology, (3) finances, (4) student support services, and (5) a program request process to encourage the development of new distance programs.

III. Recommendations and Strategies for Implementation²

A. The University of Maine System will develop a national reputation for distance education based on quality programs and superb customer service.

1. University College will retain administrative management of all sites and centers. After much discussion and thoughtful consideration, committee members agreed that decentralizing the centers and sites was not the best long-term approach to achieving the committee's objectives. We can achieve greater access and responsiveness to student needs, while also reaching greater efficiency, by keeping the sites and centers centralized. University College sites and centers employ a campus-neutral set of UMS employees who represent all seven institutions equitably, with the resources and expertise necessary to provide a high level of specialized student support services throughout the UMS distance education program.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

2. The UMS will address the benefits, limitations and cost effectiveness of ITV and various other current technologies compared to other technologies and modalities, while also pushing to evolve to new and better technologies such as expanded use of video streaming.

No recommendation yet: The technology subcommittee is in the process of conducting a cost/benefit analysis of ITV that will explore the cost of delivering ITV courses over a variety of signal transmission options, as compared to the revenues and other benefits received from ITV. They plan to have that analysis complete by February 2006. We will then be able to move ahead with more specific recommendations regarding technology.

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

3. Distance education faculty, programs, and courses will be subject to the same processes of evaluation and review as those on campus. However, campuses will also recognize the special nature and considerations of distance education.

No recommendation yet: We will be consulting with the SD #1 committee concerning program review, and with SD #2 regarding faculty evaluation. Specific recommendations will be included in the May 2006 report.

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

4. Faculty who plan to teach an online course for the first time will be required to first take University College's online mini-course (or an equivalent) in instructional design. The experience of learning as part of a cohort in an online environment must be a prerequisite for anyone choosing to teach online.

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

5. Centers and sites will continue to meet regularly to share and explore best practices in student support services, and will institute an ongoing evaluation process that measures students' satisfaction with support services.

² These recommendations are not presented here in order of priority, since the committee has not yet had sufficient time to fully discuss implementation issues, including costs associated with various strategies.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

6. The University of Maine System will establish a Distance Learning Council to foster greater communication, collaboration, efficiency, and effectiveness in the development and delivery of distance education by fall 2006. The committee's membership will be composed of faculty, student, and administrative representatives of the seven universities. The committee will serve in an advisory capacity to the Director of Distance Education for the University of Maine System, Chief Academic Officers, and Chief Student Affairs Officers via the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs.

It is further recommended that the Distance Learning Council:

- a. Meet at least six times each year.
- b. Be chaired by the UMS Director of Distance Education.
- c. Include the following persons, to be selected by the Presidents in consultation with the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs and the Director of Distance Education.
 - 1) Administrative representation from the seven universities, including one or two CAO's, with some degree of oversight for distance learning.
 - 2) Faculty representation from three universities, to include UM or USM, UMA, and one of the consortium universities.
 - 3) Two students, one graduate and one undergraduate, whose primary mode of learning is at a distance.
 - 4) The Associate Director of UNET Technology.
 - 5) One University College Center Director.
 - 6) CFO for University College
- d. Include non-voting ex-officio representatives of K-12 and the Maine Community College System to serve as information conduits, as appropriate, and to attend meetings when their involvement is desired.
- e. Advocate for new distance programs, and participate in a process to set System priorities and distribute funds in support of those programs and priorities.
- f. Serve as a sounding board for the University College Outreach Centers.
- g. Advocate for a statewide council to include representatives from K-12, MCCS, Maine Maritime Academy, and the NEASC-accredited private universities and college in Maine for the development and advancement of a unified approach to distance education that will best serve Maine citizens. Act as the System's interface to any statewide council that may arise from its efforts.

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

7. University College will adopt a new name, perhaps with a usable acronym, that can more accurately and effectively be used for marketing and advertising. Preferably the new name will emphasize distance learning, quality, and customer service. UMS's distance education unit of operation will continue to report directly to the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

8. *The Governor's Task Force to Plan for Higher Education in the Kennebec Valley released a report on December 1, 2005, which included the following recommendation: "In conjunction with the University of Maine System Strategic Plan regarding distance education, the*

Alliance shall explore establishing a Center for Teaching Excellence for Distance Education at the University of Maine at Augusta with a focus on faculty and program development.” The SD #3 committee has not yet had an opportunity to discuss this recommendation, which will be addressed in our May 2006 report.

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

B. The University of Maine System will provide a robust slate of complete undergraduate, graduate, and certificate programs that are fully available through distance education and can be completed within a reasonable timeframe.

1. A University College base budget line of not less than \$100,000 will be established to provide soft money incentives to the campuses to increase the number of degree programs, or certificate programs delivered entirely at a distance. Preference will be given to both graduate level and unique and/or high-demand undergraduate programs. New programs, as well as revised existing programs that are not currently delivered at a distance are eligible for funding.

These funds will be tied to the Intent-to-Plan process, with the UMS Distance Learning Council reviewing and recommending to the CAOs and VCAA those programs that best satisfy the following priorities:

- a. meet a demonstrated need in Maine;
- b. can be delivered entirely at a distance (some on-site, intensive workshops or lab experiences may be required);
- c. demonstrate fiscal responsibility by building on, rather than competing with or duplicating, existing academic and student service resources (multi-institution collaborative efforts will receive priority);
- d. attract new students to the university; and
- e. leverage existing technologies.

Cohort models will be given consideration in addition to ongoing program models, depending upon anticipated needs of target markets.

Programs are expected to be self-supporting within three to five years, allowing funds to be reallocated to other initiatives. Ideally, budgets for these initiatives will show a diminishing need for System funds over the life of the grant. (Sample budgets for an undergraduate core of ten courses and a ten-course master’s degree program are included in the appendix.)

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

2. A strategically selected slate of degree programs will be available via distance education. Graduate programs should include education, social work, and business. Undergraduate “staple” programs, perhaps offered in a multi-campus environment to avoid duplication and encourage collaboration, should include such areas as business, liberal studies, humanities, psychology (behavioral science), nursing, teacher education (elementary and secondary), tourism and recreation, criminal justice (justice studies), and computer science (information systems). “Niche” programs, which should be mission based and may be available exclusively through a single campus, might include such areas as Interdisciplinary Fine Arts, Women’s Studies, or Native-American Studies. Foreign language programs should also be made available, given the shortage of foreign language teachers in Maine. (The System already offers baccalaureate degrees in business, library information services, mental health

and human services, nursing [RN to BSN], applied science [AAS/AAA to BAS], and liberal studies in a distance education format.)

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

3. The UMS will encourage and support the use of higher education partners, whether from Maine or out of state, where appropriate to meet market needs, for effective construction and delivery of distance education programs. The Distance Learning Council will work closely with the CAO's and Vice Chancellor for this purpose.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

4. The UMS will explore ways to expand Early College offerings using technologies that are accessible to Maine high school students.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

C. The University of Maine System will provide easy access to a complete listing of distance education courses and programs, including general education requirements, through individual campus Web sites and a single comprehensive UMS portal.

1. A complete general education curriculum will be available via distance education and coordinated by University College.

No recommendation yet: We will be consulting with SD #1 about this recommendation, and will have specific details ready for our May 2006 report.

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

2. Students will be able to easily register for all distance education classes at any UMS institution.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

3. Home campuses will be able to easily access and manage their students' complete record, including distance and other-campus courses, to ensure accurate advisement.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

4. University College will continue to maintain and improve the www.learn.maine.edu Web site and coordinate with the individual universities' distance learning Web pages to promote accuracy and efficiency.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

D. The University of Maine System will provide distance education students with easy access to instructor and advisory support, as well as a comprehensive array of support services provided collaboratively through University College and their home UMS institution.

1. Technical training and support necessary for navigation of course management systems should be readily available, as well as training for any specialized software necessary for successful completion of specific courses and/or degree programs.

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

2. The UMS should move as quickly as possible toward adopting a single course management system to simplify UMS students' learning at a distance.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

3. The Distance Learning Council will be asked to identify a sub-committee to evaluate current faculty training initiatives and suggest further training opportunities.

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

4. The Distance Learning Council will be asked to convene a sub-committee to evaluate current student training facilities and suggest improvement opportunities.

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

5. A full slate of support services will be available to multi-campus, distance education students. *Details will be included in the May 2006 report.*

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

6. Achieving the vision and goals of Strategic Direction #4, in collaboration with University College's Off-Campus Library Services, will enhance educational success for distance education students. These students will have access to quality services, including electronic and telephonic reference services, electronic course reserves, circulation support, and information literacy training. Access to digital collections and full-text articles enable students to conduct research without needing to be physically at a library. Flexible interlibrary loan services combined with the courier services make possible the delivery of non-digitized materials. The University College Assistant Dean of Off-Campus Library Services supports the faculty with copyright and other issues. Collaborative efforts of the UMS libraries, the State Library, and Maine Info Net to deliver an expanded digital library to all citizens of Maine will support increased distance programming.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

7. UMS will encourage and help facilitate efforts to expand student access to broadband connectivity, statewide, to support student access to distance education programs.

Implementation Timeline — Ongoing

E. Students should not be hindered or disadvantaged by academic policies and procedures that were designed for students in traditional, campus-based programs, and are not responsive to the realities of learning at a distance.

1. The grade for any course taken from any UMS institution will transfer to a student's home UMS institution, as long as the student has earned a grade of C- or better.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

2. Distance education courses taken from any UMS institution will typically fulfill appropriate degree and residency requirements at a student's home UMS institution.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

3. Distance programs will have residency requirements that are responsive to student learning in a collaborative, multi-campus environment.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

4. UMS shall maintain a fully updated, comprehensive course equivalency grid. Universities offering new courses for distance delivery need to provide information about equivalent courses at other UMS campuses to the System before these courses will be scheduled.

Implementation Timeline — Spring 2007

F. Distance education tuition rates will be fair, competitive, and based on a stable, accountable financial framework.

1. A differentiated tuition and/or fee rate for distance education courses and/or programs should be considered, and is being researched. *One or two models will be presented to and discussed with the University CFO's at their February 1 meeting.*

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

2. Five standard, consistent rubrics will be assessed on an annual basis to evaluate the long-term viability of each center and site:
 - a. Revenue versus expense for each site and center, including enrollment breakdowns by campus, by level (graduate versus undergraduate).
 - b. Population growth or decline, by age group, for the area served.
 - c. Community demand for programs not currently offered, and projected potential revenue.
 - d. Financial support from partnerships and collaborations with local educational providers (K-12, community civic/business, community college, etc.).
 - e. UMS campus support – course offerings, services, financial support, etc.

Implementation Timeline — Fall 2006

3. *Current mechanisms for funding the centers and sites (base budgeting plus 80/20 charges to campuses) will be evaluated by the committee before May 2006.*

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

4. *Current faculty compensation models for distance education courses will be evaluated by the committee before May 2006.*

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

5. The UMS will consider revising its policies to make distance courses eligible for campus tuition waivers under the High School Aspirations Program guidelines. The UMS will work with the Maine Department of Education to appraise and assess early college programs in Maine, to determine whether current policies and practices adequately serve “at risk” students in remote portions of the state.

Implementation Timeline — Not yet decided

IV. Budget

A budget has not been determined because of a lack of time, the complexity of estimates, and the sensitive nature of some recommendations that have not yet been fully developed. A budget will be formulated by May 2006.

V. Decision-Making Matrix³

	Low Cost	Medium Cost	High Cost
High Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Distance Learning Council (DLC) to foster communications and more collaborative programming. • Identify a DLC sub-committee to evaluate current faculty training initiatives and suggest further training opportunities. • Identify a DLC sub-committee to evaluate current student training facilities. • Review Centers and Sites annually, based on a standard set of rubrics. • Assign responsibility to the ERP Steering Committee and/or CAO's of ensuring that PeopleSoft student services processes, as well as software, accommodate multi-campus and distance learners as effectively as on-campus students. • Maintain current centralized organizational model for the administration of University College Centers and sites. • Require all first-time online faculty to enroll and participate in an online mini-course on course development. • Continue peer meetings of center staff to support and encourage best practices. • CAO's address academic policies that hinder collaborative distance efforts, including transfer of GPA and flexible residency requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a single course management system for ease of use by students and faculty. • Require all program and course submissions to University College to include a list of equivalent UMS courses to facilitate enrollment growth and high quality advising. • Ensure that course equivalency grid is inclusive, accurate and up to date. • Design modifications to PeopleSoft programs to ensure multi-campus student views and registration processes that support collaborative program efforts. • Evaluate student satisfaction regularly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicate \$100,000 to a Program Request Process to stimulate delivery of a full slate of programs to students throughout Maine.

³ The committee classifies none of its recommendations as low priority.

<p style="text-align: center;">Medium Priority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to expand Early College offerings using technologies accessible to Maine high school students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study the pros and cons of a differentiated tuition and/or fee rate for distance education courses and/or programs. • Consider re-naming University College to better reflect its mission. • Encourage and support higher ed partnerships, as appropriate, to meet program demand. • Revise UMS policies to make distance courses eligible for campus tuition waivers under the High School Aspirations Program guidelines. 	
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