Strategic Direction 8 – University of Maine at Farmington
Second Report

Strategic Direction 8 - Evolve the System organization and structure, clearly defining
the missions, niches, and interrelationships of institutions to ensure that the System
serves the higher education needs of the State of Maine while moving toward a
financially sustainable future.

1. Executive Summary: With the Strategic Plan commitment to support a single-campus,
public liberal arts college in Farmington, the UMF faculty, staff, and administration have
proceeded to develop and implement plans that will align the University’s curriculum and
residential college experience with those at other Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges and at
quality private liberal arts colleges. The foundation for this work is the development of a new
curriculum based on four-credit courses that will reduce the fragmentation that both students and
faculty have experienced, expand opportunities for collaboration between students and faculty,
and lead to higher academic standards. New visions and goals for student learning have been
articulated in every academic program. This ambitious curricular change, which has been
supported by the UMS via a budgetary allocation that will permit hiring ten new tenure-track
faculty for 2006-07, has stimulated other changes including: a) a revised class scheduling grid
that will alter the rhythms of campus life in a manner suitable to a largely residential campus; b)
important general education reforms; and c) planned improvements in academic advising and
first-year support services. Meanwhile planning is actively underway for TWO campus “one-
stops”: the first, inspired by Strategic Direction #7 (THESIS), will bring together “front-desk”
services in the Registrar, Bursar, and Financial Aid offices, thereby improving the overall quality
of service to students; the second, made possible by the start of construction on UMF’s
Education Center, will bring all academic support services together under one roof in a renovated
Franklin Hall. In addition, UMF has taken steps to reorganize and improve efforts in the area of
marketing. We have also increased our enrollment goal for out-of-state students to 25%.

Other initiatives that are part of planning discussions but not likely to be implemented until
further into the future include: a) a shift to a plateau tuition system; b) extension of the EXCEL
program to include a laptop requirement for all students; c) the development of new Centers and
Institutes; and d) improvements to the appearance of the campus so that aesthetically UMF is
competitive with other residential, four-year colleges.

As we look ahead, UMF faces a number of serious financial challenges that provide a sober
context for strategic planning. Although some efficiencies may be gained through the two
campus one-stops and participation in the envisioned UMS Back Office Processing Center, there
are no obvious or substantial savings elsewhere that do not begin to radically change UMF’s
mission or program mix. The institution already is the most efficient (as measured by percent of
overall budget dedicated to instruction) in the UMS. Meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly
critical to invest in faculty and staff salaries, which lag behind UMS, COPLAC, and national
averages, and in Student Life. Investments in the latter area are critical if we aspire to offer a
quality residential experience to students, which in turn is essential if we are to recruit and retain
higher numbers of out-of-state and “financially gifted” students (an essential component of UMF’s plans to enhance tuition revenue). UMF is committed to maintaining its enrollment cap, believing that the cap is appropriate to our mission and vital to our reputation for quality. Nonetheless, we will continue to explore options to manage our enrollment in ways that may enhance revenue. In addition, we will develop and cautiously explore outreach endeavors that are needed by the State of Maine, match our faculty’s areas of expertise, and do not detract from our core, undergraduate, residential mission.

2. **Short Background on the Process:** Discussions about a possible four-credit curriculum at UMF antedated the UMS strategic plan. However, the plan provided a needed and valuable context for bringing these discussions to a final resolution. Early in 2005, the faculty at UMF voted (83% in favor, with majority support in nine of ten academic departments) to adopt the four-credit model and to embark on a total curricular redesign, provided that the UMS and UMF were able to negotiate budgetary adjustments identified in a campus-wide feasibility study as needed for four-credits. Once a UMS-UMF agreement was concluded in late spring, the faculty began in earnest the needed work to reorganize the entire UMF curriculum. Program-specific groups met across the summer and into the fall. Meanwhile the Academic Planning and Assessment (APA) Committee, the Curriculum and Academic Policies (CAP) Committee, and the Faculty Senate, working collaboratively with UMF administration, organized to insure appropriate oversight. Final approval of all curriculum changes for 2006-07 is expected by early in the spring semester of 2005-06.

Consistent with this effort, UMF organized broadly participatory processes to undertake planning in other arenas. These have included:

a. focus groups, all-campus forums, and meetings with student leadership and academic leadership to seek input and identify priorities for a new class scheduling grid that accommodates longer class meeting times and opportunities to build richer co-curricular and extra-curricular programs;

b. pilot projects, forums, and meetings sponsored by the General Education Committee and Director of General Education to seek consensus for general education reforms that will improve the quality of the first-year experience and allow UMF to develop a curriculum that is more intellectually coherent and intentionally developmental;

c. the creation of a First-Year Experience Council with broad representation to provide leadership to MELMAC-funded retention initiatives, to educate the campus community about retention issues, to assess the overall quality of the first-year experience, and to foster consensus about needed reforms, improvements, and investments in the area of academic advising;

d. the purchase of 200 copies of the book, *The Learning Paradigm College* by John Tagg, along with a request that the entire faculty and staff read this book and participate in an all-day campus retreat in January 2006, which has been organized by a Planning Committee chaired by the President, and which will include a visit to UMF by the author (a goal of this retreat is to develop broad consensus around strategies to maximize gains from the switch to a four-credit curriculum);

e. the creation of teams that are inclusive of staff from all affected areas to plan the development of a Merrill Hall One-Stop (registrar, bursar, financial aid) and a Franklin
Hall One-Stop (Writing Center, Math Clinic, Center for Human Development, Learning Assistance Center, Upward Bound, Bridge Program, Off-Campus Programs, and Advising);

f. reorganized job descriptions and the creation of a Marketing Team involving personnel from computer operations and web design, publications, public relations, alumni, and admissions to improve overall marketing and communications.

All of these planning initiatives have been overseen and coordinated by the President’s Council, which has also taken on the responsibility of providing a realistic financial context for all planning endeavors. The President’s Council over the last several months has also considered the implications for strategic planning of the financial aid and pricing analyses done by Scannell and Kurz, an assessment of the registrar’s office completed by consultants from the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), and a plateau tuition feasibility study completed by former CFO Roger Spear. Other data have come from the National Survey of Student Engagement, the shared IR endeavors of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges, and internal assessment initiatives.

3. Strategies and Recommendations for Implementation (including non-budgetary obstacles and steps for addressing them). UMF has identified the following strategic priorities:

a. Implement a four-credit per course standard, a 128-credit hour graduation requirement (for a full-time student, four courses per semester for eight semesters), commitments to enhanced academic rigor, and new goals for student learning. (Potential non-budgetary obstacles include custom, the overall complexity of the project, and the extraordinary level of communication needed to coordinate all of the curricular changes. These are being addressed through the formal governance structure of the university and extensive, ongoing informal conversations and discussions, with ad hoc taskforces being created whenever and wherever necessary).

b. Implement a new class scheduling grid that accommodates 180-200 minute classes (plus assorted labs, studios, courses taught in a “block”, etc.), creates convenient common times for meetings, speakers, and convocations, and limits the frequency of scheduling conflicts between classes and programming in Athletics and Student Affairs. (Potential non-budgetary obstacles include custom and limited classroom space, especially pending completion of the Education Center. The former is being addressed through ongoing communication and discussion; the latter through the creative use of non-traditional spaces).

c. Implement meaningful general education reform. The success of a pilot first-year seminar program has led to faculty endorsement of an FYS requirement. Beginning in fall 2006, the FYS and ENG 100 will be linked in a developmental, two-semester, first-year experience. Meanwhile faculty discussions are ongoing related to other general education reforms that will strengthen integration across gen ed components and introduce more sequential, developmental elements. (Potential non-budgetary obstacles include custom, inertia, and the challenge of developing consensus across academic departments. In addition, with little or no likelihood of new investments in faculty positions to enhance general education, departments must plan creatively to insure that they can contribute to gen ed initiatives while maintaining strong majors.)
Changes in governance have strengthened the General Education Committee; in addition, the Faculty Senate has supported the creation of a new Director of General Education position. As a result, UMF is positioned to meet these obstacles).

   d. Implement planned MELMAC retention grant initiatives and hire a Coordinator of Academic Advising Services. The former effort has us focusing on at-risk students, developing supplemental instruction strategies, and improving advising. The latter, which will lead to overall coordination of advising initiatives and a program to develop faculty as advisors, is made possible by internal reorganization. (Potential non-budgetary obstacles include the possibility of an unsuccessful search and the typical challenges associated with gaining legitimacy for and institutionalizing new initiatives. These are being addressed by starting early and requesting input from all imaginable constituencies).

   e. Design and implement a student-service One-Stop that brings together the “front-desk” services of the Registrar, Bursar, and Financial Aid Offices. A campus team that is coordinated by the Executive Assistant to the President and includes staff from all three affected offices has been meeting to discuss organizational and facilities planning. Transition to a One-Stop will begin in summer 2006. (Potential non-budgetary obstacles include custom, inertia, challenges related to training, and the extraordinary complexity of the anticipated organizational change. These are being addressed through a collaborative planning model and consultation with other UMS campuses and the UMS consultant for THESIS).

   f. Design and implement an academic support services One-Stop in Franklin Hall that brings together under one roof the operations of UMF’s Writing Center, Math Clinic, Center for Human Development, Learning Assistance Center, Upward Bound Program, Bridge Program, Off-Campus Programs, and Advising. This project, which will require extensive renovations to Franklin Hall once it is vacated by the College of Education, is targeted for fall semester 2007 or spring 2008. (The obstacles are primarily financial, i.e., securing adequate funding for building renovation. Potential non-budgetary obstacles are minimal, since all the affected operations have helped shape the vision for this project. Potential reorganization of staff to gain some efficiencies may introduce some elements of controversy).

   g. Reorganize personnel to create a cohesive Marketing Team and focus institutional efforts on the challenge and need to effectively communicate to all relevant constituencies messages about quality and about what differentiates UMF as Maine’s public liberal arts college (yet with strong ongoing commitments to teacher education and human services) from other institutions in the state and region. This project was begun in the summer of 2005. Benefits include improved external communications and substantial savings from not needing to contract externally for needed projects. (Non-budgetary obstacles have included the challenge of melding personnel from different offices with different styles and cultures into new operational, planning, and supervisory teams. All are being addressed via ongoing conversation and administrative oversight).

   h. Plan for a potential shift to plateau tuition (i.e., a flat tuition for full-time students—e.g., 12-18 credit hours). Such a shift would arguably enhance four-year graduation rates, be consistent with institutional mission (it is already the standard at most COPLAC
schools), and contribute to the creation of a stronger residential campus culture. At this stage UMF leadership has undertaken a preliminary feasibility study and discussed the timing of a possible implementation. No decision has been made to move in this direction, and Board approval would need to be sought. With a plateau tuition system in place, it is possible that UMF would consider a four-year graduation guarantee for students who declare a major by the end of their first year, regularly meet with an academic advisor, consistently take a full load of courses, and meet minimum academic standards. (Potential non-budgetary obstacles include the limitations of current information systems [likely to be solved with PeopleSoft], the challenge of insuring that a new tuition policy would not unfairly disadvantage some groups, and the need to secure external support).

i. Implement a laptop/portable computing requirement for all students. This is the logical next step for UMF’s EXCEL (Excellence through Connected and Engaged Learning) program. Already a leader in wireless networking and the application of digital technologies to enhance student learning in face-to-face classes, UMF has been unable to move beyond an attractive laptop “buy-in” program for students to a full-fledged laptop requirement because of an inability to support such a program with adequate financial aid. This remains a high institutional priority. There are no non-budgetary obstacles.

j. Develop new Centers and Institutes. UMF benefits financially and academically from the presence on campus of the Maine Health Research Institute and the Archeology Research Center. Two smaller operations—the Institute on Rural Poverty and the Maine Center for Meaningful Engaged Learning—have made occasional contributions whenever external funding has been available. UMF’s leadership is committed to growing our existing Centers and Institutes and exploring additional Centers and Institutes wherever the following factors coincide: 1) faculty expertise; 2) regional or state need; and 3) opportunities for external funding. Such entrepreneurial initiatives will allow us to develop new revenue sources, enhance research and service opportunities for faculty and students, improve faculty salaries, and become more competitive in faculty recruitment. All such initiatives would need UMS approval via the established policies for Centers and Institutes. (The largest non-budgetary obstacle is faculty time. Release time grants from the administration may be needed to support proposals that appear to have the most potential).

k. Improve the appearance of the campus so that aesthetically UMF is competitive with other residential, four-year colleges. (The only obstacles are financial. UMF’s initial request for a strategic investment that would address System-wide inequities in campus allocations and allow us to launch the four-credit curriculum change included this line item).

l. Invest in Student Life, Athletics, faculty and staff salaries, science labs, faculty development, library, and marketing. There is no need in this context to explicate in detail the challenges UMF faces because of woeful under-funding in all of these areas (complicated by the recent defeat of the higher education bond issue) or the initiatives that the campus would undertake were additional funding available. Suffice it to say that every discretionary dollar, after rising health and energy costs are paid and the costs of upkeep for new construction are planned, will go in these directions.
m. Explore new enrollment cap options. Without changing the number of students on campus in any given semester, UMF may be able to enhance tuition revenue by emphasizing the value of graduating in four years, increasing the average credit-hour load of students (four-credits will likely have this effect), and encouraging or requiring relevant off-campus experiences (internships, study abroad, etc.). In addition, UMF will enhance tuition revenue via outreach and professional development programs for teachers and others in the community to the extent that there is both a market and a match between community needs and faculty expertise and we can develop these initiatives without detracting from our core, undergraduate, residential mission.

4. Budget:

The following items listed in the previous section are being accommodated through current funding (inclusive of the base-budget strategic investment of $700,000 that the UMS committed in spring 2005) and through reallocations within the current budget:

a. Implementation of the four-credit curriculum;

b. Implementation of a new class scheduling grid;

c. Implementation of general education reforms;

d. Retention and academic advising projects;

e. One-stop planning for both Merrill Hall and Franklin Hall;

f. Reorganization and improvements in institutional marketing;

g. Plateau tuition planning;

h. Enrollment cap planning.

UMF is just beginning to plan for the renovations that will be necessary for the campus One-Stops. Renovations to Merrill Hall will likely cost in the neighborhood of $250,000; to Franklin Hall $1,000,000. The efficiencies and savings that are likely to be possible through one-stop reorganization and a shift of some functions to a back-office central processing center have not yet been estimated with any precision.

We anticipate that there will be one-time costs for marketing and communications should UMF switch to a plateau tuition system. On the other hand, we are committed to structuring charges in a new tuition system in such a way that any change would be revenue neutral or revenue enhancing.

Implementation of a laptop requirement would likely require a base-budget investment of $150,000 in financial aid.

Estimates of total costs in other areas are more difficult. We will likely never fund what is truly needed in the areas of campus appearance, faculty and staff salaries, student life, athletics, science labs, faculty development, library, and marketing. Sources of funds to make incremental improvements will come from:

a. Indirect costs charged to grants and contracts via growth of current Centers and Institutes and development of new Centers and Institutes;

b. Enhanced tuition revenues;

c. Aggressive and smart fundraising;
d. Changes toward equity and mission-sensitive funding in UMS allocations;
e. Efficiencies that are engineered via business process redesign;

Note: As is the case with a major research and land grant university or a comprehensive urban university, a public liberal arts college is not an inexpensive endeavor. Yet, as the UMS Strategic Plan has recognized, it is an essential complement to these other institutional types—like them serving a statewide mission but offering a qualitatively different and for some students a better and a preferred educational experience. Given the UMS commitment to maintaining this array of choices for Maine students, especially those who do not have the opportunity to attend more expensive private institutions, UMF looks forward to participating with the System and with state government in financial planning partnerships to insure that choice and educational quality can be maintained while access is not sacrificed via a continued shift of financial burdens to needy Maine students and their families.

5. Decision-Making Matrix

Note: the letter designations in the chart below refer to the items listed in Part 3 of this report. Items that can be accomplished within the context of current base budget commitments are categorized as “low” in cost.

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<th>Priority (urgency, benefits)</th>
<th>Cost (financial and effort)</th>
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6. Implementation Timeline

January 2006 – August 2006
- Completion of preparation for four-credit curriculum
- Implementation of new class scheduling grid
- Implementation of first-stage general education reforms
- Follow through on retention initiatives
- Personnel Search and hiring of new Coordinator of Academic Advising Services
- Planning for Merrill Hall One-Stop
Renovation of Merrill Hall for One-Stop
Implementation of marketing team initiatives
Development of plans for possible growth of current Centers and Institutes

Academic Year 2006-07
Initial assessment of four-credit and FYS reforms and new scheduling grid
Continued work on general education reforms
Implementation of MELMAC-funded retention projects and new advising initiatives
Implementation of Merrill Hall One-Stop
Initiation of renovations of Franklin Hall (January)
Assessment of new marketing efforts; development of appropriate new initiatives
Final decision about plateau tuition; proposal to Board of Trustees
Development of Intents to Plan for one or more new Centers and Institutes
Exploration of new enrollment cap options

Academic Year 2007-08
Continued assessment of four-credit, FYS, scheduling grid
Implementation of second-stage general education reforms
Assessment and needed modification of retention and advising initiatives
Assessment and improvement of Merrill Hall One-Stop student services
Implementation of Franklin Hall One-Stop
Implementation of plateau tuition marketing and communications plan

Note: Several items do not appear in this timeline, principally needed investments in laptop initiatives, student life, athletics, faculty and staff salaries, science labs, faculty development, library, and marketing. These are top priorities for the annual budgeting process, with the expectation that incremental investments will be made as finances allow.