Strategic Direction 1 - Strive for quality across the System and support institutions in achieving their potential through rigorous academic program planning, program realignment throughout the System, and strengthened student services and support.

I. OVERVIEW

Strategic Direction #1 deals with ensuring both quality in academic programs and access to University of Maine System programs for students of diverse academic backgrounds and experiences. The Committee’s charge is to develop recommendations regarding systematic and inclusive academic program review and planning processes that emphasize quality and collaboration. These processes must recognize Maine students’ needs for access based on highly variable academic experiences and for support services, including financial aid, that ensure these students a credible opportunity to achieve their academic potential. Put another way, the charge is to provide for the greatest possible success for Maine students, thereby raising Maine’s baccalaureate achievement rate. By offering an appropriate array of degree programs of the highest quality and ensuring students academic and financial access to those programs, we enhance our ability to attain the goal.

The Strategic Plan Implementation Planning Process document directs the Strategic Direction #1 Committee to address goals of clear and appropriate numeric criteria, indices and ratios, and targets relative to program capacity and viability, as well as measures of academic program quality, while still accommodating unique missions and niches. The Committee is further to address appropriate pathways to admission, including articulation among System programs and with the Maine Community College System, and appropriate means for supporting student achievement regardless of path of entry to the System. (See Addendum #1 for alignment of the Committee’s preliminary recommendation with specific goals articulated in the Planning Process document.)

Committee Organization and Work. The Committee, comprised of faculty members, staff members, and students drawn from each of the seven institutions in the University of Maine System, met in session five times over a period of almost four months during the Spring of 2005. The group discussed the charge, considered characteristics of UMS students and their needs, debated merits of various approaches to the charge, and formulated a set of preliminary recommendations to present to the Board of Trustees in June, 2005. The Committee Coordinating Chair requested support from the System Office of Planning and Policy analysis with respect to quantitative measures (Carnegie classifications, faculty ratios, retention and graduation rates, etc.), but staffing was unavailable. Between meetings Committee members interacted as necessary via e-mail.
and compressed video. Not all members could participate in every facet of the work, but all were given a chance to respond to meeting agendas and notes. The Committee broke initially into subcommittees that reported findings back to the full Committee, which then worked to prepare the preliminary recommendations reported below. Continued faculty engagement will be crucial to success of implementation of final recommendations.

**Discussion.** It is impossible to capture fully the richness and depth of the Committee’s discussions or the surprising unanimity of purpose and conviction in its deliberations. That is not to say that everyone agreed to every point of discussion, or that every recommendation below has equal support. It is to say that the Committee’s work was serious and productive.

As Committee members shared thoughts and concerns, the charge and its stated goals became clearer. The Committee re-articulated the charge as addressing academic program review (including planning new programs and eliminating unnecessary ones), issues of academic access (including academic experience and financial wherewithal, but not distance education), and issues of student success (including both financial aid and student services support functions). These three aspects of the Committee’s re-articulated charge became the foci of the work and the bases for establishing subcommittees. As work progressed the Access and Student Success subcommittees were merged.

Among significant points of discussion and agreement that framed the Committee’s preliminary recommendations, the following deserve mention:

**Quality/Access.** Much of the Committee’s discussion addressed directly or indirectly the tension within public higher education, both nationally and in Maine, between providing high quality and rigorous academic programs and providing a full range of pathways to access those programs. This matter, resulting from the democratization of higher education, is particularly acute in Maine where the State is working to increase baccalaureate achievement within its population without a common State-wide approach to achieving both quality and access. In particular, the Committee feels that the missions and expectations of the State’s K-12 Education System (and Maine Learning Results), the Adult Education System, the Maine Community College System, and the University of Maine System are not well aligned, especially with respect to what students must know to succeed in post-secondary education. The University of Maine System can encourage improved alignment among these otherwise interdependent organizations, but true alignment is a public policy question of the highest order and requires a State-wide response.

A related concern is Financial Aid, a topic the Committee has postponed for the moment as the System awaits the report of Scanell and Kurz Consultants.

**The Nature of Our Students.** The Committee gave much discussion to understanding the nature of students in the University of Maine System. Not all, even few, of the students who attend System institutions have the preparation of the students with whom many members of the Committee went to college or university. This situation is in part a consequence of the democratization of higher education—a larger proportion
of high school students is graduating, and a larger proportion of high school graduates is attempting post-secondary education, than a decade or two ago. Importantly, evidence suggests that for conventional age students, there is inadequate alignment between student preparation for higher education and the System’s expectations of these students. At the same time, an increasing proportion of students is older than traditional students, come from a diverse set of ethnic backgrounds and experiences, and female—up to 80% at some institutions. Many students also work full time, have significant family responsibilities, or experience significant physical, emotional, or mental health issues. Finally, an increasing proportion also attends more than one institution, even simultaneously, before completing a degree. As a result, and consistent with higher education trends nationally, some System institutions serve and graduate more degree completion students who have transferred in than initial access students.

In short, we must educate the students we have, not the ones we wish to have. On the one hand, students bring extraordinary mixes of backgrounds and life experiences to the classroom. On the other, their preparation and motivation are mixed at best. As a consequence, we must deal responsibly with them with respect to access. That requires us to determine how to respond to their degree of motivation and preparedness, or not admit those who are simply unmotivated or unprepared. Indeed, we must acknowledge that we do not have the capacity to serve some prospective students and then ensure that those students who are admitted seek out and respond to advising and other mechanisms of student success.

Student Success. System institutions have a responsibility to work to ensure student success. Committee members have concluded that the most important goal and measure of quality in academic programs is student success. Student success should be measured in terms of the value added by education—outcomes—relative to student goals, not just input measures (e.g. faculty/student ratios) or progression through higher education (retention and graduation rates). But student success requires significant scaffolding of students due to their varying degrees of motivation and preparedness. It requires not only that we celebrate the educational value of diversity among our students but also accept the educational challenge of that diversity. It requires, as well, attention to such matters as assistive technologies. Given the nature of System students and the policy decision in Maine to delegate developmental work to the UMS, System institutions must attend to remediation where preparation is inadequate. Remediation alone, however, is not sufficient. System institutions must continue to bolster students throughout their educational careers, including financially, or resign themselves and their students to failure.

Focus on Outcomes. Most national rankings of higher education institutions focus on inputs (e.g., faculty/student ratios) to gauge the quality of an institution and its programs, or they focus on a few easily measured outcomes (e.g., retention and graduation rates), which are highly correlated with the preparation of incoming students. Central to assessment of quality is articulation of outcomes and respective measures that address the mission and capacity of System institutions to respond to the nature of our students. Focus on outcomes will effect long-term student success in the K-12 education
system, as System students complete the loop by returning to the K-12 system as teachers to prepare University students of the future.

**Duplication/Uniqueness.** Committee members strongly subscribe to the notion that program alignment within the System must expand beyond the simple, historical “avoidance of duplication.” It must acknowledge uniqueness and niches and support goals of complementarity and collaboration in instructional programming and delivery.

**Review and Planning.** Central to the charge of ensuring quality and access are evaluative program review and planning processes. The System provides a context within which review and planning unfold, but processes must be institution-based and reflect institutions’ missions and capacities. Processes must focus on substance of programs and must address the mission and capacity of programs to respond to the nature of our students. They must demonstrate how programs balance quality with access and work to ensure student success, regardless how that success is defined.

**Faculty Engagement.** Faculty members have responsibility to provide effective instruction and advising. System institutions must value and reward the quality of that instruction and advising, and instruction and advising must be evaluated as a part of program review. Finally, with respect to the question of access, it is clear that faculty members need not lower standards to accommodate the changing nature of students, but work harder, or differently, to ensure that students achieve those standards.

**Fiscal Reality.** Fiscal realities require the System to place the cost of delivering student success programs on students themselves through tuition for remediation and fees to sustain support programs. Fiscal reality also requires us to acknowledge that an important contributor toward student failure is the comparatively high debt burden of Maine students, thus necessitating the development of a coherent and effective financial aid strategy for the System’s institutions.

The Committee’s recommendations follow from the substance of this discussion.

**II. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee offers the following preliminary recommendations for System-wide review and comment before the Committee returns to work in Academic Year 2005-2006. (See Addendum #1 for alignment of these recommendations with the goals articulated in the Implement Planning Process document.)

1. **Take program planning and review seriously and ensure its effectiveness.** In particular:

   *(a) Undertake program review within five years for new programs and at least every seven years for continuing programs, unless a shorter interval is deemed necessary for*
specified conditions resulting from a review. Undertake campus-level processes for programs less than degree-level.

*(b) Ensure broad institutional and community representation in the process of academic program review and planning, including but not limited to community college system faculty and staff, or program alumni. Encourage structures and mechanisms that blend academic affairs and student affairs in a constructive fashion.

*(c) Address complementarity within and collaboration across the System, standards to be met, when and where programs are offered, and mechanisms to provide program access. Review should address explicitly need for continuance or elimination of programs.

*(d) Ensure that institutions and the System fully vet program reviews and provide responses and feedback to programs.

2. **Develop a program review process that addresses explicitly student learning outcomes as the bases for program quality and educational value.** In particular:

*(a) Assess alignment of student learning outcomes with the nature of students in the program and teaching effectiveness with respect to the student learning outcomes.

*(b) Assess a program’s contribution to general education, as appropriate. Assess general education’s contribution to the program.

*(c) Ensure that program review and planning address program goals for student preparation, access, engagement (such as defined by the National Survey of Student Engagement), and success.

*(d) Evaluate faculty development and instructional improvement/pedagogy that take into account the nature of students and their learning capacities. Ensure that program review and planning address program goals for faculty contributions to student learning.

*(e) Relate information about students, including transfer students, to their experiences and goals. Align evaluation of student progress and retention and graduation rates with the nature of students and their needs. Track students to determine effective retention and graduation rates.

3. **Develop and implement a common System-wide set of fundamental general education outcomes upon which each institution build its own approach to general education.**

*(a) Develop for general education a program review and planning processes at the System level, and assess the effectiveness of each institution’s general education as related to student learning outcomes.
*(b) Align evaluation of student progress and retention and graduation rates by institution to reflect the nature of students and their needs.

4. Extend program review to include the student learning outcomes associated with appropriate developmental, support, and co-curricular programs, such as advising services, placement tests, first-year programs, leadership development, etc.

5. Coordinate at the System level to develop cooperative and collaborative means to deliver programs and courses that any one institution may be unable to offer (e.g. “2 plus 2” programs; foreign language instruction).

6. Work at the State policy level to align expectations of and for students at the University of Maine System, the Maine Community College System, Adult Education, and the K-12 System.

*(a) Build on exemplary work already underway at System institutions to develop effective programs for Early College, common placement exams, and remedial instruction, and report student performance back to originating K-2 systems and the Maine Community College System.

III. KEY AREAS OF OVERLAP

The Committee’s work intersects significantly with that of each of the other strategic directions:

2. Faculty Development, with respect to instructional improvement, for instance.

3. Distance Education, especially with respect to access and development of “2 plus 2” programs.

4. Libraries and instructional support.

5. Scholarship and its important link to enhancing what faculty members teach relative to learning outcomes and effective instruction.

6. Accountability as an outcome of program review.

7. Centralization (and THESIS) with respect, for instance, to shared fundamentals of general education or common placement exams.

8. Restructuring with respect to balancing access with quality.

9. Advancement with respect to programs to support financial access for students.
Linkage with these other strategic planning committees has to occur primarily through the Chief Academic Officers and Chief Student Affairs Officers.

**IV. GOALS FOR NEXT STEPS**

The Committee will assess responses to its report beginning in the Fall Semester, 2005. From these responses, The Committee will refine the program planning and review processes and provide strategies for System and institutional implementation of recommendations. The Committee must address the quantitative measures indicated as goals in the Strategic Plan as well as “2 plus 2” programs. Outcomes and assessment also require attention. Minimally, specific steps and actions include:

*Learn from and build upon work on alignment and remediation undertaken by Lynn Miller and her committee.

*Convene interested parties to discuss policies related to student expectations, Learning Results, alignment, and remediation. Invite representatives of the System, the Maine Community College System, the Department of Education, the Compact for Higher Education, the Mitchell Institute, and MELMAC.

*Given the nature of students in the System, address development and deployment of “2 plus 2” programs to ensure widespread access to System programs.

*Work with the System Planning and Policy Analysis Office to determine efficacy and utility of various quantitative measures of input and progression relative to an outcomes approach to program assessment.

*Ensure widespread involvement of faculty in on-going discussions leading to final recommendations to the Board of Trustees in March, 2006.
Addendum: Alignment of Strategic Direction # 1 Goals with the Committee’s Preliminary Recommendations.

Goal 1. Develop criteria for an Academic Program Planning process that emphasizes quality, is campus-based, and led by faculty, with collaboration between and among campuses as needed. See Preliminary Recommendations 1 (how to undertake program planning and review) and 2 (how to address quality and educational value).

Goal 2. Establish appropriate student/faculty ratios as well as faculty/staff ratios, consistent with the Carnegie classification of each university and its mission.

Goal 3. Set and achieve specific enrollment targets.

Goal 4. Set State-wide minimum standards for retention rates, consistent with the Carnegie classification of each university and its mission.

Goal 5. Set State-wide minimum standards for graduation rates, consistent with the Carnegie classification of each university and its mission.

The Committee has made no recommendations related to these goals as stated. In part, the Committee does not have sufficient information with work with. More important, the goals, in effect, are contrary to concerns the Committee has expressed with respect to the nature of the System’s students. Goal 2 measures a resource input variable, not student learning outcomes. Goals 4 and 5 measure progression for first-time, full-time students, thus ignoring or discounting the nature of the System’s students. However, Preliminary Recommendations 2(e), 3, 4, 5, and 6 address through an outcomes approach the issues that these goals otherwise highlight. (Tracking students through the System and across the Maine post-secondary education landscape, as noted in Recommendation 2(e) could prove valuable, if it captured transfer information.) Relative to Program Planning and Review, Goal 3 should address programs, and the Committee needs to engage the System Planning and Policy Analysis Office regarding how to establish and evaluate enrollment relative to programs before making a recommendation.

Goal 6. Provide student support by requesting additional funding for financial aid. The Committee has postponed discussion related to this goal until the Scanell and Kurz Consulting report on Financial Aid is available for review.

Goal 7. Develop and improve academic support services, which will enhance the ability of traditional and non-traditional student to achieve their academic potential. Preliminary Recommendations 3, 4, 5, and 6 address this goal.

Goal 8. Continue to provide access to non-traditional students by developing and sustaining academically enriched “two plus two” programs. See Preliminary Recommendation 5 and 6.

Goal 9. Work cooperatively with the Maine Community College System to address the need for Associate Degree Programs. See Preliminary Recommendations 5 and 6.