

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM  
Board of Trustees Meeting

Held at University of Maine at Farmington  
November 16-17, 2025

Present: Trustees: Trish Riley, Chair; Lisa Eames, Vice Chair; Barbara Alexander, Patrick Flood, Emily Cain (Zoom), David MacMahon, Kelly Martin (Zoom), Elise Baldacci, William Kemler, Riley Worth, John Moore, Michael Michaud. Chancellor: Dannel Malloy. University Presidents: Leigh Saufley, Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Ray Rice, Jenifer Cushman, Joseph McDonnell, Deborah Hedeon and Jacqueline Edmondson. Faculty Representatives: Tim Surrette, Clyde Mitchell, William Otto, Libin Thaikkattil Louis, Lisa Leduc, Heather Nunez-Olmstead and Joe Staples. Student Representatives: Camille Alipalo, Isabella Bouchard. System Staff: Ryan Low, Jeff St. John, Robert Placido, Tracy Elliott, Sam Warren, Gretchen Catlin, Amon Purinton, Carolyn Dorsey, Amie Parker, Miriam White, Gabe Paquette, and Elizabeth Stickler

**Sunday, November 16, 2025**

Trustee Riley, Chair, welcomed everyone and called the Executive Session to order.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

On a motion by Trustee Michaud which was seconded by Trustee Alexander, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees meeting went into Executive Session under the following provisions:

- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-A to discuss the evaluation of personnel and the consideration and discussion of appointments, evaluations, employment and duties. •
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-C to discuss the condition, acquisition or disposition of real property or economic development if premature disclosure of the information would prejudice the competitive or bargaining position of the UMS.
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-D to discuss planning for negotiations and communications with AFUM, UMPSA, ACSUM, Police, PATFA, and Service and Maintenance Units.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Alexander, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees concluded the Executive Session.

**Monday, November 17, 2025**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Eames, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees meeting went into Executive Session under the following provisions:

- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-A to discuss the evaluation of personnel and the consideration and discussion of appointments, evaluations, employment and duties. •

- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-C to discuss the condition, acquisition or disposition of real property or economic development if premature disclosure of the information would prejudice the competitive or bargaining position of the UMS.
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-D to discuss planning for negotiations and communications with AFUM, UMPSA, ACSUM, Police, PATFA, and Service and Maintenance Units.
- 1 MRSA Section 405 6-E to consult with its attorney concerning legal rights and duties of the university.

On a motion by Trustee Eames, which was seconded by Trustee Worth, and approved by all Trustees present, the Board of Trustees concluded the Executive Session.

### PUBLIC MEETING

Trustee Riley, Chair, called the public meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

### Citizen Comment

Public Comment is a time regularly set aside for comments from the public. The following individuals spoke during the Public Comment period:

**Michael Cauvel** – USM Faculty, Recreation Therapy Program – USM Program Elimination  
**Lydia Savage** – Professor, USM; President, Associated Faculties of the University of Maine - USM Program Elimination  
**Paul Johnson** – Professor of Social Work, - USM Program Elimination  
**Vaishali Maimgain** - USM Program Elimination  
**Cordana Dingley** – Alumni, UMF and USM – Divestment from Israel  
**Kae McCarty** – Faculty Member, USM - USM Program Elimination  
**Tom Poling** – Graduate Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Melissa Clawson** – Professor of Early Childhood Education, UMF - USM Program Elimination  
**Trinity Firestone** – Student, University of Maine – Use of Power/Bullying  
**Gabe Santoriello** – Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Jamila Levasseur** – Community Member – Divestment  
**Ruth Anne Kester** – UMaine Alumni V– Divestment  
**Gracie Gebel** – Undergraduate Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Mo Drummond** – Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Meredith Bruskin** – Alumnae, University of Maine– Divestment  
**Talia Cullum** – Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Katie Fletcher** – Undergraduate Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Christian Calville** – Student, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Leslie Norton** – Alum, UMF; Community Member – Divestment  
**Tamara Benson** – Graduate, University of Maine – Divestment  
**Melissa Clawson** – Financial Constraints

### UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT FARMINGTON CAMPUS PRESENTATION

President McDonnell welcomed everyone and introduced the University of Maine at Farmington's Special Education program presentation. He noted that UMF has four superb faculty members in special

education who are cutting-edge researchers, strong teachers at both undergraduate and graduate levels, and thought leaders influencing special education policy in Maine and beyond.

The state of Maine faces many challenges in relation to PK-12 teacher workforce and educational outcomes for students PK-postsecondary, especially for students with disabilities. The Special Education Faculty at the University of Maine at Farmington is committed to our role in helping to address these challenges through leadership, collaboration, and innovation across all levels of the educational system. In this presentation, we highlight our:

- Leadership of a multi-faceted project in collaboration with Maine Department of Education to support inclusive systems change and build leadership and educator capacity in schools
- Leadership to strengthen and align collaboration between the state, school districts, and university
- Development of unique undergraduate and graduate programs, certificates, and micro credentials

Trustees asked several questions about sustainability, collaboration with other universities, data collection for measuring outcomes, and board support for the initiative. Dr. Mcleod confirmed that the model is designed for scalability through capacity building, with regional support coaches and facilitators trained to expand the work. Data collection includes achievement metrics, time in general education, attendance, disciplinary actions, and outcomes for various student subgroups. The team expressed commitment to providing ongoing updates to the Board.

Following Dr. Kate Mcleod's comprehensive presentation on UMF's special education program and Maine's Inclusive Education Project, trustees engaged in substantive discussion about the work, its sustainability, and board support.

Trustees asked whether UMF has the tools needed to sustain and expand this work, and whether there are ways for the Board to be helpful, with specific nod to the challenge of longitudinal data around inclusivity, explaining that such data is difficult to obtain but critical for demonstrating that "this absolutely works so we should fund it." Trustees emphasized the value of longitudinal data not just for special education students but also for general education students, noting the data might extend beyond test scores to other factors.

Dr. Mcleod responded affirmatively regarding the tools needed. She explained that UMF's logic model identifies key priorities aligned with the three main challenges highlighted: achievement data, time spent in general education, and teacher vacancy data. The team will be able to provide substantial data already in year one and year two, with year five being when systems change at school level typically shows the most robust data changes and sustainability measures.

Vice Chancellor Low noted that the Department of Education struggles with this type of data collection on an ongoing basis. He wanted to ensure that two years from now, UMF would be able to answer these key questions and not face data limitations.

Building on a previous question regarding general education student impact, it was noted that data showing the impact on general education students would be particularly helpful from the Boards perspective.

Dr. Mcleod confirmed they have already been collecting data on all student learning, including students with and without disabilities in general education settings. She explained they'll have both classroom assessment data and standardized assessment data (which assesses everybody), allowing them to track outcomes for all students. Dr. Mcleod elaborated: "Another thing that we can always provide you not only our model schools but with that 50 plus years of research that really evidences what that looks like and how it changes over time."

Dr. Mcleod detailed additional data points they collect beyond the three main challenges: attendance data (typically goes up), disciplinary action (typically decreases), and various measures across the whole school connected to students with disabilities and additional subgroups. She emphasized: "It also impacts when we do this work in meaningful and sustainable ways. It's going to impact students of color. It's going to impact on our multilingual learners. It's going to impact on students who are living in poverty because we start to teach and support all learners in new and better ways. So, we see achievement go up for all of the subgroups when we do this work."

Another Trustee question inquired about interactions with other universities that have education programs. The board asked about UMF's experience with other teacher preparation programs and asked what the Board can do to identify and promote best practices in this area. It was suggested the Board might discuss or expect replication of successful approaches throughout the UMS teacher education programs scattered across the system.

Dr. Jessica Upgar responded by describing the Inclusive Higher Education Summit taking place that Friday. The summit brings together faculty members from general and special education programs across the UMS system to examine the framework and discuss ways to use it to guide conversations, although it was noted that general faculty attendance was categorically low at this summit. Dr. Upgar emphasized the importance of helping general education faculty understand "the imperative to create more inclusivity in their programs." The summit provides an opportunity to show priorities from the Maine Department of Education, demonstrate what partnerships can look like, and show how this work will improve programs across the board for teacher preparation, teacher retention, and other benefits for all institutions.

Dr. Mcleod added additional context about the Cedar Center work (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development Accountability and Reform Center out of University of Florida). UMF has been part of a state leadership team that sets four key goals supporting teacher preparation work in the University of Maine System. This work brings together people from USM, UMaine, Augusta, and various organizations including the Department of Education to work across the aisle. She explained: "It could be interesting for us at Cedar to create something that would be informative for the board of trustees to sort of take a look at what our goals are, how it is aligning, what are those collaborations across the university system doing."

She gave an example of collaboration with USM's Walter Kimball on apprenticeship work, where education technicians get paid while doing their job and apprenticing to become special education educators.

Dr. Katherine Sheridan added information about collaboration with UMaine Orono campus on planning for an Inclusive Post-Secondary Education (IPSE) program. She provided national context: there are over 300 programs serving students with intellectual disabilities across the nation, but only one program currently exists in Maine at a private university.

She explained: "Our collaboration in developing a grant with the Orono campus would allow our state to really build programming out at public institutions. And if we're thinking about supporting our aging population and making sure as many young people as possible are able to enter the workforce with the skills they need, we have a really unique and wonderful opportunity as a system to build that out."

Regarding concrete actions for board support, she noted collaboration needs to be maintained "across the systems but also with you all." She referenced four key components of inclusive education from research: Time, Instructional effectiveness, Engagement, and Support (though she momentarily forgot the acronym). She emphasized: "Keeping that collaboration open kind of across the systems but also with you all will be really valuable."

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Chair Riley thanked President McDonnell and the University of Maine at Farmington staff for hosting the Board meeting.

Chair Riley provided an update on the Board retreat held earlier in the fall. The retreat brought together Board leadership, system leadership, and university presidents to discuss the future direction of the University of Maine System.

Given demographic headwinds, budget challenges, and federal and state changes, the group worked to clarify a vision and establish a "North Star" for guiding system goals.

The preliminary thinking from the retreat identified a desired future state: An excellent, financially sustainable, innovative system aligned with Maine's workforce and community needs, consisting of distinctive universities with unique strengths and a growth mindset, unified by a strong system and recognized as a national leader in access, affordability, research, and workforce preparation. These discussions will guide future work to establish criteria for measuring proposals from universities. The retreat also addressed advancing the system's online presence. Chair Riley emphasized that while important discussions occurred during the retreat, no decisions are made until they are brought forward publicly at Board meetings.

Chair Riley also reported on recent campus visits, including attending a pluralism initiative discussion at USM with Trustee Katz, a ceremony at UMA celebrating new aviation programs with articulate student speakers, and a budget forum at UMF with engaged staff members. She noted the tremendous amount of positive work occurring across all campuses.

### **PRESIDENT'S ROUND-ROBIN**

#### **President Ferrini-Mundy (University of Maine/University of Maine at Machias):**

- Announced two significant senior administration appointments: Dr. Giovanna Guidoboni as Interim Vice President for Research (also serving as Dean of the Maine College of Engineering and Computing) and Mr. Scott Delcourt as Dean of the Graduate School
- Thanked Dr. Kody Varahramyan for his eight years of service as Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School
- Highlighted groundbreaking research by Dr. Mauricio Pereira da Cunha's team on micro-electronic sensors that can withstand extreme temperatures and radiation levels in advanced nuclear reactors
- Announced new faculty seed funding program (19 faculty awarded grants) to stimulate research proposal development

- Reported athletics achievements: Women's soccer won America East Conference Championship for third consecutive year; Women's cross country achieved first-ever America East championship
- UMaine Machias opened new on-campus food pantry in Student Success Center
- Announced \$1.3 million in congressionally directed spending through Senator Collins for Forest Health Lab and Early College Student Support Center

**President Edmondson (University of Southern Maine):**

- Released first economic impact report showing USM generated \$384.5 million in total economic activity across Maine during the last fiscal year
- USM supported over 2,500 jobs across Maine and produced \$56.4 million in tax revenues at local, state, and federal levels
- Career and Employment Hub coordinated over 3,200 placements at 183 businesses and 148 public and nonprofit agencies
- Received \$100,000 grant from Abbagadasset Foundation to expand paid internship opportunities in arts and humanities
- 86% of USM graduates remain in Maine after completing degrees; 36% of out-of-state students choose to stay in Maine
- Women's soccer team won four consecutive LEC championships and advanced to first round of NCAA tournament
- Held second USM Forum on American Democracy on November 5th with speakers Eboo Patel and Raj Vinnakota.
- Announced Osher School of Music Gala scheduled for December 5th at 5:00 PM in the new Crewe Center for the Arts

**President Hedeon (University of Maine at Fort Kent):**

- Celebrated first annual "Poutine Fest" on October 22nd with creative variations prepared by dining services
- Launched fundraising campaign with American Friends of Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa devastation in Jamaica (UMFK has 31 Jamaican students)
- Provided support for Jamaican students including free residence hall access during break and two meals daily
- Hosted open house for 125 high school students from Aroostook County on November 7th
- Hired new esports coach Austin Clous and softball coach Louise Perez
- Men's soccer team placed second in USCAA national tournament; Women's soccer team took third place; Coach Germaine West named Coach of the Year
- Hosting author Dennis Ledoux on Thursday, November 21st to discuss his book "Here to Stay: Lives in 17th Century Canada"

**President Cushman (University of Maine at Augusta):**

- Celebrated launch of Aircraft Maintenance Technician School (AMTS) on November 12th with recognition from Senator Collins' office
- Program includes potential future offers in air traffic control and airport management
- Demonstrated partnership capabilities with virtual reality tools, drones, flight simulators, and Cirrus SR20 G6 fleet
- Completed successful site visits from three external accreditors (AVMA, Maine Department of Education, and Council for Standards in Human Service Education) in October
- Pursuing accreditation for early college program through NACEP with positive preliminary feedback

- Launched partnership with University of Maine Police Department on August 28th providing dedicated officers for Augusta and Bangor campuses
- Spring 2026 registration up more than 4% as of November; fall enrollment grew nearly 3% over previous fall
- Summer 2025 credit hours 9% over budget
- Leveraging retention tools including EAB's Navigate platform and EdSights conversational text-based chatbot

**President Rice (University of Maine at Presque Isle):**

- Thanked President Ferrini-Mundy and her team for opportunity to speak at Don and Linda Zillman remembrance
- Highlighted Dr. Jason Johnston's research profiled in Bangor Daily News on November 14th about Maine's climate change and warming winters, with Aroostook County identified as epicenter for most significant climate change in the state
- Announced seventh annual holiday gift fund drive in partnership with UMFK and Northern Maine Community College serving hundreds of wards of the state
- Master of Science in Business program launched with over 200 students in fall semester, demonstrating strong demand for competency-based graduate programming
- International enrollments recovered in second fall session after initial drop, exceeding previous levels and bucking national trend of 17% decline
- Celebrated Dickinson College Red Devils men's soccer team advancing to Sweet 16 for nationals

**President McDonnell (University of Maine at Farmington):**

- Men's and women's cross-country teams won North Atlantic Conference Championship (men's team achieved three-peat)
- Received \$4,000 grant from Swipe Out Hunger for food bank
- New Teacher Academy is now supporting 145 new teachers and mentors in nine rural districts
- Enrollment profile change: 28% graduate students, 12% transfer students, 19% part-time students through adult completion program
- Conducting brainstorming sessions with faculty, staff, and students on addressing changing higher education needs
- Recommendations falling into categories of residential experience, cost containment, curricular reform, career preparation, and improving teaching
- Working to identify feasible ideas and create working groups for implementation

**President Saufley (Maine Law):**

- Reinstated annual fall 5K run
- Applications were up over 90% compared to last year (following 60% increase previous year)
- Seated largest 1L class in 20 years (105 students) in 2024
- Approaching enrollment goal of 300-310 students from previous level of 260
- Attributes success to improved facility, geographic location in center of courts and law firms, connection to blue economy, and competitive value proposition (lowest tuition in New England)
- Professor Anthony Moffa returned from COP30 conference in Brazil with four students bringing information on environmental programs
- Business and Law Clinic officially opening in January
- Professor Anna Welsh, Director of Refugee and Human Rights Clinic, received Lewis Scolnik Award for civil rights from ACLU

### **REDLINED BOARD POLICIES**

At the direction of Chair Riley and agreement of the Board at the January 2023 meeting, the Bylaws Working Group has completed its review of the current Bylaws and recommended the changes noted in the redline format included in meeting materials. It has been the intent of the Working Group throughout this process to clarify the current wording of the Bylaws, add necessary details to reflect ongoing Board practice, and to include content in the Bylaws derived from our Charter and other operating principles where it was determined that language was important to include.

These initial provisions and redlined changes were presented as an information item at the September 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting for consideration and further recommendations. The proposed Bylaw changes are presented at the November 2025 Board of Trustees for final approval.

Trustee Alexander presented proposed amendments to several board policies for final approval.

The changes include:

- Board Policy 202: Formalized procedures for Zoom/online public comment and input
- Board Policies 303, 303.1, 304, 305, 305.1, and 305.2: Updated to use plain language, proper terminology referring to all units as universities and the law school, and eliminated the Farmington exemption to maximum credit hours for degrees

Trustee Alexander noted no comments or questions had been received from outside the Board.

On a motion by Trustee Alexander, which was seconded by Trustee Michaud, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the final version of the edited Board Policies 202, 303, 303.1, 304, 305, 305.1, 305.2 as initially presented in redlined form at the September 2025 Board Meeting and provided at the November 2025 Board Meeting materials in final form.

### **NEW PROPOSED BOARD POLICY**

At the direction of Chair Riley and agreement of the Board at the July 2025 meeting, the Bylaws Working Group has developed a new policy. This policy, Enrollment Safeguards for 90-Credit Hour Programs, implements the resolution adopting the definition of Enrollment Safeguards at the July 2025 Board Meeting.

These initial provisions were presented as an information item at the September 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting for consideration and further recommendations. The proposed Policy is presented at the November 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting for final approval.

Trustee Alexander presented a new Board Policy 316 for approval. This policy reflects a decision previously made by the Board regarding safeguards for 90-credit applied bachelor's degree programs. The policy establishes the framework and requirements for these programs at the appropriate level in the Board's policy manual.

On a motion by Trustee Alexander, which was seconded by Trustee Michaud, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved Board Policy 316.



### **CONFIRMATION OF FACULTY REPRESENTATIVE TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

To create an environment for interaction between Faculty and Student Representatives, the Trustees and System administration, the Trustees have provided opportunities for participation in the meetings of the committees of the Board.

One faculty member and one undergraduate student from each of the seven universities and one graduate student from the University of Southern Maine, one graduate student from the University of Maine, and one graduate student from the Maine Law School will be appointed by the Board as non-voting representatives to the Board of Trustees and invited to participate as non-voting members on the standing committees.

Normally, the representative is expected to complete a two-year term; therefore, it is expected that the minimum term of service by Faculty and Student Representatives to the Board be two years. The nominations will be forwarded through the Presidents or Dean of the Law School to the Chancellor for submission to the Board for Trustee approval.

The following nomination is recommended by the campus:

#### **Faculty Representative**

Heather Nunez-Olmstead, UMPI - Appointed for a 2-year term – November 2025 to November 2027

President Rice thanked Professor Lisa Leduc for her years of service as faculty representative to the Board of Trustees for the University of Maine at Presque Isle. He noted that Professor Leduc has been an active and wonderful representative, supporting the university through numerous Board meetings, challenges, and opportunities. She will continue in leadership roles at UMPI, including as chair of the College of Professional Programs.

President Rice introduced Assistant Professor of Fine Art and Art Education Heather Nunez-Olmstead as Professor Leduc's successor. Professor Nunez-Olmstead received her BA in Art Education from UMPI in 2009, her master's in education and Curriculum and Instructional Strategies from the University of New England and is currently pursuing a PhD in Education focused on the landscape of creativity in rural settings. She has extensive experience within the system, having served as an instructional designer at UMA, adjunct faculty at UMPI, Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning at UMPI, and is now in a tenure-track position teaching art education and fine arts. President Rice noted he is pleased to have some of her artwork in both the university and his personal possession.

On a motion by Trustee Flood, which was seconded by Trustee Michaud, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees approved the appointment of the Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees as presented.

### **CHANCELLOR'S REPORT**

Chancellor Malloy began by thanking the presidents for their outstanding work on their campuses and within their universities, which is a critical part of the system's success. He noted that presidents are working collaboratively to institute programs across campuses to bring more value and depth to higher education in Maine.

### Campus Visits

Chancellor Malloy reported that he completed all campus visits before the first snow. This semester's visits were notably different from earlier years, characterized by supportive, happy environments and sharing of good ideas. Faculty, staff, and students offered constructive suggestions during question-and-answer sessions. The Chancellor expressed appreciation to the presidents for their work in organizing these productive campus visits and reaffirmed the commitment to visit each university during both primary semesters.

### Health Insurance Transition

Chancellor Malloy acknowledged that transitioning from one insurance company to another is difficult for employees, particularly when all answers cannot be provided on day one. However, he emphasized the significant financial benefit of the change: the new insurance arrangement will save millions of dollars per year over the three-year contract period compared to what costs would otherwise have been.

The Chancellor thanked several individuals for their work on this transition: Amy Brackett for ensuring employees understood what was at stake and why the change would be beneficial, Vice Chancellor Carolyn Dorsey for her leadership, and Vice Chancellor Ryan Low for his contributions. Chancellor Malloy noted he made approximately 67 calls per day working with both the insurance company and Northern Light Health to successfully complete the transition. The insurance change is being well accepted and, in some cases, celebrated by employees. The savings achieved through this change will help offset what Vice Chancellor Low referenced earlier regarding benefit cost increases.

### Enrollment Update

Chancellor Malloy reported that he checks enrollment numbers on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times per day. The numbers are looking good, with the system slightly ahead of where it was last year. He cautioned that every calendar has its own adjustments that must be monitored on a day-to-day, week-to-week, and month-to-month basis.

The Chancellor praised the work of staff at each university for reaching out to students. He highlighted success in attracting students to return to UMS universities to finish degrees they may have started with the system or at another university and never completed. This returning student population is helping push enrollment numbers in a positive direction.

As of November 14th, the last published numbers showed the system slightly ahead of where it was at this time last year. Last year was a very good year for enrollment, making the current year's performance particularly encouraging.

## **VICE CHANCELLOR FOR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES REPORT**

Vice Chancellor Dorsey invited Trustee Cain, chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, to provide an update on strategic plan implementation.

Trustee Cain reported that the Strategic Planning Committee held a bonus meeting in anticipation of reaching the halfway point of the strategic plan implementation period next month. She presented progress on goal achievement across key areas:

- Finance and Infrastructure: 100% of goals achieved
- Teaching, Research, and Service: 65% complete
- Being a Destination for Education and Work: 56% complete
- Respectful and Welcoming Environment: 67% complete
- Unified Accreditation: 92% complete (not at 100% due to ongoing NECHE process)

At the October 29th meeting, the committee focused on factors that have affected implementation ability, including:

- Artificial intelligence
- Federal government shutdown (now over)
- Academic innovations (YourPace expansion, 90-credit programs, micro credentialing)
- Federal executive orders and actions
- Evolving Board priorities around adult learners, online education, infrastructure, and deferred maintenance
- Three Plus RLE success and participation retention efforts
- Leadership transition planning
- State economic priorities
- Need for greater connection and alignment with employers
- Demographic cliff
- Shifting value proposition of higher education in the public's mind
- K-12 pipeline impacts
- Labor flexibility

The committee tasked system leadership and those leading plan implementation to conduct a full review of outstanding items and bring back recommendations in three categories:

1. Delay or do later based on specific factors
2. Fund or do if funding can be identified as a priority
3. Mothball or set aside items no longer relevant

The committee wants to assess whether goals continue to be priorities and whether new priorities should be reflected in second-half implementation. Trustee Cain characterized it as a robust discussion and good meeting, with continued conversation planned for spring.

### **Marketing and Communications Update**

Vice Chancellor Dorsey provided an update on marketing work with Blaze Partners to update the system brand. The project focuses on three primary areas:

1. Updating the brand
2. Creating a new or refreshing website
3. Developing campaign messaging about ROI, value of higher education, value proposition, and benefits of engaging with a public university system.
- 4.

Vice Chancellor Dorsey presented a mockup of the new website, noting it is not yet complete and has not been fully vetted. She displayed the current website for comparison to help the Board appreciate the improvements.

### Logo Update

The new logo maintains the circle with the state of Maine but with updated, more vibrant colors. "Maine's Public Universities" is prominently featured, with "University of Maine System" playing a smaller role. Vice Chancellor Dorsey noted that despite exploring various design options, stakeholders consistently returned to using the state image as the most appropriate representation of Maine's public universities.

### Website Redesign

The new website will prominently display all universities, allowing visitors to easily access individual university sites. The redesign recognizes that many people find the UMS website by accident while searching for specific universities or programs. The new design will be:

- Icons for each university at the top of pages
- Individual sections for each university with information vetted and approved by university contacts
- Improved access for external partners (employers, internship coordinators, funders)
- Streamlined pathways to reach appropriate contacts
- Maintained administrative functions for Board and system needs
- Better showcasing of universities and Maine Law

Director of Strategic Initiatives Jen O'Leary noted the project is on track for an early 2026 launch, characterized as a soft launch with a full rebranding of seven to eight pages and overall branded templates. The more comprehensive campaign rollout would follow.

#### Project Status

Vice Chancellor Dorsey reported the project is under budget and within the expected timeline for completion. She thanked Jen O'Leary for serving as the system's point of contact and keeping the project moving, CIO Robert Placido and his team for technical support, and university leads for their collaboration.

#### Budget and Next Steps

In response to trustee questions, Vice Chancellor Dorsey clarified that \$500,000 was allocated this year for the project, which has not been fully spent. An additional \$750,000 is budgeted for next year, which includes all sponsorship and system-wide marketing activities. The specific amount to be allocated to the new campaign will be determined once the campaign plan is developed. Some marketing could begin before July 1, 2026, as a small portion is built into the current year's budget.

Trustees discussed the need for a comprehensive rollout and announcement plan, suggesting the new brand could be positioned as part of the system's refreshed mission around sustainability, efficiency, and strategic priorities. Vice Chancellor Dorsey confirmed that developing the announcement plan is part of the next stage of work.

Following Vice Chancellor Dorsey's presentation of the new website mockup and brand refresh, trustees engaged in detailed discussion about the marketing initiative.

Trustees inquired about the launch date and whether there would be a formal public campaign to announce the rebrand. The Director of Strategic Initiatives indicated the team is targeting early 2026 for launch, characterizing it as potentially a soft launch since the project involves updating seven to eight pages with overall branded templates rather than a complete overhaul. The more comprehensive campaign and priority messaging would follow the initial website launch rather than leading with a logo and website announcement. The team expressed openness to input on the rollout strategy.

A trustee emphasized the importance of having a concrete plan for the rollout and announcement, stressing the need for a clear strategy. The suggestion was made that the rebrand could be positioned as part of discussing the Board's priorities around sustainability and efficiency, characterizing it as refreshing the system's mission. The request was made that the Board be informed about timing and approach before

any public rollout. Vice Chancellor Dorsey confirmed that developing the announcement plan is part of the next stage of campaign work and committed to ensuring the Board has that information.

Questions were raised about improved functionalities in the new website compared to the current version. The Director of Strategic Initiatives explained that the new site will be much more visually appealing with improved user experience. Key improvements include new dropdown functionality identifying user type to streamline navigation, with dropdowns directing users to relevant areas based on their interests rather than primarily to administrative areas and staff bios. The site will integrate with the unified catalog work and feature authentic images representing every university in the system rather than stock photos, providing collective representation where people can see themselves reflected.

Vice Chancellor Dorsey initially explained that five hundred thousand dollars was set aside for the Blaze project from the total annual amount, with unused funds available. When pressed for specifics about remaining marketing budget after Blaze expenses and timing of marketing expenditures, she indicated some marketing budget is built into the current allocation, with additional funds already allocated for the next fiscal year. She offered to provide a detailed financial summary later with a clearer breakdown of expenditures and timeline, which was accepted.

A trustee noted that creating a comprehensive brand is a significant undertaking and emphasized the importance of understanding the approach to target audiences, particularly for higher education both inside and outside Maine. The request was made for more information about how the team is approaching different audience segments beyond just detailed plan specifics.

Vice Chancellor Dorsey agreed this would be valuable and clarified that the system-level work is not focused on very specific enrollment marketing, which is the universities' work, but rather on broader campaign messaging about return on investment, benefits of education in general, and building the brand. The approach uses university stories and examples to tell that broader story. She acknowledged the team has just barely started the campaign work and committed to providing updates as the work develops, including potentially in written packet materials.

One president thanked the team for displaying the current website, noting the contrast with the new design. The observation was made that the current website's focus on accreditation and strategic plan would not speak to anybody interested in enrolling in classes, as prospective students would immediately migrate away from such administrative content. The new design addresses this fundamental problem. A question was raised about why the website displays a specific number of students that will constantly change and need updating, with the suggestion that it might be better to display number of courses instead or to question the value of having any specific enrollment number. The response indicated the team is balancing expertise from consultants with practical considerations. While acknowledging the text and images aren't finalized, the explanation was provided that for audiences like employers and those interested in workforce development outreach, the number of students conveys the scale and impact of the system. When prospective students enter the system, knowing they're accessing a large network of students can be attractive, though this element is still being refined.

Additional context was provided about the difficulty of maintaining static content when users come to the website by accident looking for universities or programs rather than seeking system information. The new design prominently features all universities with authentic images representing the entire system, allowing people to see themselves reflected in the collective imagery, which represents one of the most exciting elements of the redesign.

Questions arose about future plans for incorporating a unified online piece into the website, specifically about integrating online education initiatives into the main website. Vice Chancellor Dorsey acknowledged this hasn't been explicitly discussed yet but noted the website will be changed frequently, so as online initiatives develop, there is certainly a place for them, though the specific approach hasn't been determined.

## **VICE CHANCELLOR FOR FINANCE AND STRATEGIC AI INTERGRATION REPORT**

### **Investment Results**

The Managed Investment Pool (MIP) had a market value of \$405 million through September, with a gain of 1.7% for the month and 3.2% fiscal year to date. Estimated October gain was 1.6%.

The Pension Fund had a September market value of \$16 million, with a 1% gain for September and 1.8% fiscal year to date. Estimated October gain was 1.1%.

The Operating Fund had a September market value of \$280 million, with a 0.9% gain for September and 2.3% fiscal year to date. The net return of \$5.4 million fiscal year to date exceeds the \$2.8 million annual budget by \$2.6 million. Estimated October return was 6%.

### **FY26 Budget Forecast**

Vice Chancellor Low explained the budget forecast format, noting it shows each institution's Education and General (E&G) and Auxiliary budgets compared to current projections. He emphasized that variances are common given that enrollment projections are made nearly 10 months in advance.

#### **University of Maine:**

- Originally projected \$2 million E&G deficit to be closed with reserve transfer
- Now projecting \$7.1 million deficit, approximately \$5 million increase
- Driven almost entirely by enrollment changes (approximately 3,500 fewer credit hours)
- Variance of 3,500 credit hours represents 1.3% variance at UM's scale
- \$7 million deficit represents 2.4% variance from expense base
- In-state and out-of-state mix also different than budgeted

#### **University of Maine at Augusta:**

- Minor overall adjustments
- Netting to positive \$24,000 change
- Originally forecasting modest E&G surplus, now slightly larger
- Opposite trend on auxiliary side with slight gap

#### **University of Maine at Farmington:**

- \$656,000 gap emerged (was previously in unassigned line as "TBD")
- Still working to address this gap
- Modest increased projection on auxiliary side

#### **University of Maine at Fort Kent:**

- Minimal changes (\$3,900 change on E&G and auxiliary that balance out)
- Very stable performance

#### **University of Maine at Presque Isle:**

- Originally forecasted \$3.9 million E&G surplus
- Still in same ballpark with slight increase
- Auxiliary side showing fewer residents than budgeted, increasing gap by approximately \$500,000

**University of Southern Maine:**

- No net change overall
- E&G performing much better than originally budgeted, dropping gap by more than \$900,000
- Auxiliary side showing opposite trend with \$900,000 change
- It is important to note auxiliary still in surplus mode, not showing a gap

**Maine Law:**

- Forecasting strong \$275,000 surplus reflecting enrollment growth

Vice Chancellor Low noted that system governance, university services allocated, and unallocated lines will always be balanced. The unallocated line was intentionally underfunded to allow use of reserves saved from the previous year to offset campus costs.

Multi-Year Financial Analysis (MYFA)

Vice Chancellor Low explained that the MYFA is a projection of fiscal performance over multiple years, but it is NOT a budget-balancing exercise. The exercise has been conducted at the system level since 2008, adapted from state government practice. If a large deficit or surplus exists at the end of a fiscal year and hasn't been resolved, that number rolls forward into the next year.

**Key Points about MYFA:**

- If a campus starts FY27 budget planning with an \$18 million hole, that \$18 million rolls forward in the forecast
- The same circumstances remain until budgets and enrollment levels change
- Three typical scenarios emerge:
  1. Large gap rolls forward and grows (because same circumstances persist)
  2. Status quo with relatively flat enrollment (expenses typically outpace revenue)
  3. Generating surplus that grows (like Presque Isle's YourPace growth)
  - 4.

Vice Chancellor Low noted the MYFA helps identify key trends when layered with budget forecasts and actual budgets.

Major Revenue and Expense Categories

Seven major categories drive fiscal performance:

- Enrollments (determined by campus)
- Tuition (assumed 4% increases)
- Appropriation (assumed roughly 3.5% increases, though state revenue picture unclear)
- Benefit rate (assumed to stay stable at 48.6-49% initially, then jump to 53-53.5% in later years)

Vice Chancellor Low emphasized that benefit rate changes represent anywhere between \$1-2 million impact at some campuses and an eight-figure increase at University of Maine over the life of the forecast. He sits on the state's consensus economic forecasting committee and noted the outlook for future years is "really foggy."

Enrollment Assumptions

Vice Chancellor Low presented enrollment assumptions by campus. Over the five-year forecast period, enrollment is generally flat, down approximately 3,000 credit hours system wide. Most decline occurs at University of Maine. Several other campuses show modest 1% annual increases.

Subscription-based enrollments (YourPace, CBE) show significant growth:

- UMPI: from 8,750 to more than 20,000
- UMF: from 288 to 1,000
- UMFK: from 72 to doubling in second year

### Results by Institution

**University of Maine/UMaine Machias:**

- Combined 6% reduction in credit hours over forecast
- Benefit rate impact: \$14.6 million over forecast
- Changing federal landscape (particularly FAFSA): projected \$12 million difference between previous projections (bringing in \$30 million) versus current projections (bringing in \$18 million in five years)
- Critical investments in energy infrastructure driving up debt service

**University of Maine at Augusta:**

- Pretty stable numbers across forecast
- Gap grows substantially in FY29 and FY30 due to benefit rate and compensation changes (adding approximately \$1 million per year)
- Housing changes in FY28 show revenue loss as students move from hotels to new space, then find housing off campus

**University of Maine at Farmington:**

- Bouncing around zero, balanced on E&G side
- Generating slight surplus on auxiliary side
- Credit hours projected to increase from 40,000 to slightly less than 42,000 (1.1% increase)
- YourPace subscriptions growing from approximately 300 to 1,000
- IF current year gap rolls forward: changes numbers to \$230,000 gap to \$800,000 gap in FY27, then \$929,300 and \$424,000 in subsequent years
- Resolving FY27 deficits takes care of approximately 90% of forecast issues

**University of Maine at Fort Kent:**

- Excellent budget management across all five fiscal years on E&G side
- Challenge on auxiliary side with substantial operating losses projected

**University of Maine at Presque Isle:**

- E&G surplus as much as \$10 million in current fiscal year before reallocation
- Growing to \$21 million by final year of forecast
- Never had any campus forecast surpluses of this magnitude
- Auxiliary side shows same issue as Fort Kent with operating challenges

**University of Southern Maine:**

- E&G gaps between \$1.3 and \$2.2 million
- Even \$2.2 million represents only 1.4% of expense base
- Strong auxiliary surplus across all four years driven by strong housing demand

**Maine Law:**

- Modest deficit in FY27 grew in FY28, 29, and 30



- \$2 million increase in salary and benefits from FY27 through FY30
- Revenues growing by \$1 million over same period
- \$1 million delta driven by benefit rate changes

#### System-wide Consolidated View:

Vice Chancellor Low presented consolidated E&G gaps and auxiliary performance. If FY27 gap of \$10.4 million is resolved, the FY28 gap is \$8 million on a \$780 million expense base. Resolving FY27 gap takes care of significant challenges in out years.

#### Scenarios

Vice Chancellor Low presented scenarios showing impact of different state appropriation levels:

Current assumption: 4% for FY27, then 3% in our years

Alternative scenarios showed cumulative impacts:

- Flat funding for three consecutive years: approximately \$10 million, \$20 million, \$30 million cumulative impact
- 2% increases: modest savings
- 3% increases: better outcomes

He noted that 1% increase in tuition equals 3.2% revenue increase. If state government flat-funds in FY28, making up \$9 million would require 7% tuition increase (3% on top of 4% assumption).

He also ran scenarios on benefit rate changes:

- Keeping rate at 49%, 51%, and 53%: cumulative savings in \$5 million range
- More aggressive improvement (49%, 50%, 51%): significant benefits, especially in FY29 and FY30, equivalent to 2.5-3% increase in state government funding

Vice Chancellor Low noted the MYFA will return to FFT Committee at December 17th meeting for deeper dive, providing trustees opportunity to review materials and ask questions.

Trustees asked clarifying questions about YourPace subscription pricing (undergraduate \$1,800 rising to \$2,200 by FY30; graduate \$2,450 rising to \$2,850), appropriation versus tuition impacts, enrollment decline impacts, comparison to peer institutions, and tuition increase strategies. Vice Chancellor Low confirmed the system will always advocate aggressively but realistically for largest possible appropriation increases, and that tuition conversations are held fresh at beginning of every budget cycle. He noted that by every standard, UMS has the lowest flagship tuition, lowest law school tuition, and overall tuition well below peers. The system regularly benchmarks against peers to ensure competitiveness.

Following Vice Chancellor Low's comprehensive presentation of the five-year financial forecast, trustees engaged in detailed discussion about the projections, assumptions, and implications.

The Chair commended Vice Chancellor Low on his presentation quality despite being ill, noting that his presentations continue to improve over time. An important clarification was made about the MYFA: it is a projection assuming status quo, functioning as an early warning system. If the system doesn't take action now, the MYFA shows what will happen. However, the system doesn't work that way as it addresses issues as they arise, but the MYFA is a critical tool for understanding potential futures.

Questions were raised about the sustainability and growth of YourPace subscriptions, specifically whether pricing assumptions remain flat or include inflation over the forecast period. Vice Chancellor Low clarified that undergraduate YourPace subscription currently costs eighteen hundred dollars and increases

to twenty-two hundred dollars by fiscal year 2030, representing approximately one hundred dollars per year increase. Graduate YourPace subscription currently costs twenty-four hundred fifty dollars and increases to twenty-eight hundred fifty dollars by fiscal year 2030.

Additional context was provided that the increase represents a gradual, consistent growth in subscription rates to remain competitive, particularly within the competency-based education environment. The conservative enrollment estimates rely on maintaining a consistent subscription rate with gradual increases while growing the portfolio of programs offered. It was noted this represents a significant percentage increase relative to the base price.

A broader question was raised about measuring success and failure. When looking at enrollment growth of just over two percent year-over-year, concern was expressed about whether this means the University of Maine System is truly growing or simply keeping pace with peers. The question was posed whether similar-sized universities in New England saw comparable upticks, questioning whether UMS is ahead of the curve or just treading water at the same pace as competitors.

Vice Chancellor Low responded that UMS is doing better than other New England publics when accounting for all considerations. Maine's enrollment cliff is more severe than in other New England states, and the drop in high school graduates over the last ten years has been more precipitous in Maine than other New England states looking at the rate of change. This makes UMS's positive performance more impressive in context. Additional information was provided that national numbers show spring undergraduate enrollment up three and a half percent according to the National Student Clearinghouse, though this represents a different comparison methodology.

Questions arose about the assumed tuition increases of four percent consistently and whether maintaining this rate would keep UMS in the same competitive category relative to peer institutions or if UMS is doing something competitors are not. Vice Chancellor Low explained that the system conducts regular deep dives on peer institution tuition to see what others are proposing. His budget presentations always include slides comparing UMS tuition to peers over the last four to five years and to inflation. When he first started producing these charts in the early two thousand teens, UMS was practically the only institution in the country with tuition levels below inflation. Now nearly everyone has caught up to that same approach.

He emphasized that UMS remains the lowest flagship university for tuition, the lowest law school, and generally the lowest across all comparisons. The system regularly uses peers as benchmarks. While UMS makes decisions about tuition increases, the system must remain aware of what peers are doing even though UMS rates are very low in comparison.

Concerns were raised about transfer student projections given decisions around ending or making murky the free community college program. With over eight hundred transfer students in Fall 2025 against a student base of twenty-five thousand, this represents a significant number. Questions arose about how the system is thinking about potential decline in this transfer pipeline.

The response acknowledged this as an important question. The system is examining multiple factors including likely first-year enrollment in community college system for future years, first-to-second-year retention rates in community colleges, and the total population of gettable students. It was noted that UMS now has a global agreement between the two systems providing warm handoffs in advising and student information for wherever students want to go in the UMS system. The system is looking at both

the total number of gettable students and whether UMS is growing the percentage captured through the Transfer Maine agreement. Additionally, the system tracks retention of transfer students from year two and beyond in their programs. The acknowledgment was made that uncertainty exists but there is a plan to do as well as possible.

An important intervention was made about budget options. Emphasis was placed on the fact that when discussing where to get income to fund the system from state government, taxpayers, and tuition, cutting expenses must also be on the table. If the system cannot get sufficient funding from other sources or if it's not feasible to get funding while retaining the competitive nature of offerings, tough choices will need to be made about what the system doesn't do. This needs to be understood as part of the budget process. Vice Chancellor Low agreed this is an important point, noting that expense cutting happens in every budget exercise and will continue as the system rolls forward. Even in the best-case MYFA scenario with four percent from state government, four percent tuition increase, and achieved enrollment numbers, at best campuses were at zero-ish range other than Presque Isle, with some still in negative positions. This is before starting the budget cycle and asking what needs to be done differently or what requires investment. Almost inevitably in the budget build process, the problem gets worse before it gets better, so the system will always be in cutting mode.

Questions were asked about implications of the one-time benefit rate reduction mentioned during the budget forecast presentation, specifically regarding potential future impacts. Vice Chancellor Low explained that while there would be short-term benefits from the health insurance change, long-term strategies need to be developed to ensure sustainable benefit rates going forward. The current contract provides some relief in early years with rates staying relatively stable initially, but projections show rates jumping to fifty-three percent and higher in later years of the forecast, representing million-dollar to multi-million-dollar impacts depending on campus size.

Vice Chancellor Low reminded trustees that the MYFA will return to the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee at their December 17th meeting for a deeper dive. This provides trustees with additional time to review the extensive materials and prepare more detailed questions. He acknowledged it's a lot of information to absorb in a 20-minute presentation.

#### **AUTHORIZATION TO EXERCISE PURCHASE OPTION, 300 FORE STREET, PORTLAND**

The University of Maine System (UMS) requests the Board of Trustees' authorization to exercise its fixed purchase option to acquire 300 Fore Street, Portland, Maine, currently leased and occupied by the Maine Center, Maine Law, GSB and other related UMS programs.

In May 2021, the Board of Trustees reviewed the long-term facilities strategy for Maine Law, with the original plan to lease 300 Fore Street until a new "Maine Center" building was constructed on the University of Southern Maine Portland campus. During that discussion, the Board was informed that the lease for 300 Fore Street contained a future purchase option. However, the purchase option was not incorporated into the formal Board resolution text.

This current request is intended to correct that gap by explicitly requesting Board authorization for UMS to exercise the purchase option at 300 Fore Street. Subsequent financial and market analysis has shown that purchasing 300 Fore Street at the fixed price of \$17 million is significantly less expensive than new construction, while also securing a recently renovated facility.

UMS may initially use an internal loan to fund the purchase and could subsequently issue revenue bonds to reimburse itself. Therefore, UMS requests the Board to adopt the attached Resolution for Reimbursement of Project Expenditures to preserve flexibility to issue debt and reimburse for the costs of acquisition of 300 Fore Street, Portland, Maine, with proceeds of future debt. The resolutions do not authorize the issuance of UMS revenue bonds for this purpose. If and to the extent it is determined that revenue bonds should be issued for this purpose, UMS will seek additional approval for such issuance at a future Board meeting.

Seth Goodall, CEO of Maine Center Ventures and Executive Director of The Maine Center, presented the resolution for authorization to exercise the purchase option for 300 Fore Street in Portland.

Mr. Goodall reminded the Board that over a year ago, the Maine Center presented an informational item on the plan for the Maine Center, including renovations. The plan consistently included intent to purchase both 300 Fore Street and 7 Custom House Street. The Board previously authorized leasing 300 Fore Street, and leadership negotiated a purchase option exercisable between October 1 and December 31 of this calendar year with actual purchase in September 2026.

**Purchase Details:**

- Purchase price: \$17 million
- Recent appraisal: over \$23 million
- Will use internal borrowing or other proceeds, leveraging Harold Alfond Foundation funds
- Alfond Foundation has set aside \$40 million of the \$55 million gift specifically to purchase both buildings
- Working with owners of 7 Custom House Street to exercise in near future
- Upon completion, UMS will own both buildings and the ground underneath both buildings

Mr. Goodall noted significant benefits already realized at 300 Fore Street, evidenced by Maine Law's enrollment growth, overall ranking improvements, and interest in the building. The Maine Center is now bringing to light true opportunities for programs across business, law, policy, engineering, computing, and information sciences. The building also houses the Maine MBA and other programs.

Trustee Katz, as FFT Chair, noted the matter received substantial review in the FFT Committee. One concern was the internal loan funding and repayment schedule from the Alfond Foundation. He confirmed the repayment schedule matches the loan terms perfectly, with essentially no exposure. Although funded with an internal loan, the Alfond Foundation is paying for it, and it represents an excellent deal given the \$23 million appraisal for a \$17 million purchase price.

Chancellor Malloy added that this was a specific target in negotiations with the Alfond's to ensure the system could purchase the buildings. The Alfond Foundation approved the approach before the system had finalized agreements with property owners. He also clarified that the purchase includes the building AND the ground, eliminating concerns about future ground lease payments. While acknowledging this is a big investment, he noted the success of Maine Law demonstrates the wisdom of the investment, with gratitude to the Alfond Foundation while accepting the ongoing obligation for future boards to continue payment and upkeep.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Worth, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee, and authorized the University of Maine System to exercise its purchase option for 300 Fore Street, Portland, Maine, at the contract price of

\$17,000,000, with all final terms subject to review and approval of the University of Maine System Treasurer and General Counsel.

Additionally, the Board accepted the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and authorized the University of Maine System to issue an internal loan for an amount up to the contract price plus relevant closing costs.

Further, the Board accepted the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and approves the Reimbursement of Project Expenditures resolution.

### **ART BUILDING CONSTRUCTION, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE**

The University of Maine System, acting through the University of Southern Maine (USM), requests authorization to expend up to fifteen million, one hundred thousand dollars (\$15,100,000) for a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) agreement with Great Falls Construction (Great Falls or Developer) for the construction of a new art building on the Gorham campus. One hundred thousand of this agreement is for the installation of a highly visible, ground-level solar array funded by gift funds specifically donated for the installation of solar equipment at the university. The art building will allow USM to relocate the Art Programs located in Robie Andrews residence hall and consolidate the department from various locations on the Gorham campus.

President Edmondson presented the request for authorization to spend up to \$15 million for a guaranteed maximum price with Great Falls Construction to build a new art building on the Gorham campus. Currently, the art department is located primarily in the basement of Robie Andrews Hall. The space is inadequate for the department's needs. The new building will be:

- Heavy arts (ceramics, sculpture including wood, metal, and plaster)
- Photography (dark room and classroom)
- Digital arts lab and classroom
- 2D design classroom (also housing art and entrepreneurship classes)
- Drawing classroom
- Faculty offices
- Student exhibition space
- Two to three painting classrooms (painting and drawing is the most enrolled studio concentration)

President Edmondson reported that the art department has experienced enrollment growth, with an 8% larger class than three years ago. According to the accepted student questionnaire, 29.5% of respondents said a new visual arts building would positively influence their decision to attend USM.

She also noted that USM has convened an Arts and Humanities in Action committee with the goal of expanding access to arts and humanities for all students. As one example, 133 students last year who were not music majors and did not count courses toward their degrees took music classes. The expectation is similar expansion in arts enrollment, helping to increase student credit hour generation and quality of education.

Trustees asked whether this project would affect plans for renovating Robie Andrews Hall, noting as a former resident of Robie Andrews he could attest to the need. President Edmondson confirmed it would make it easier to begin that project when the art department no longer occupies the basement space. Trustee Worth also inquired about the payback period and return on investment given student growth. President Edmondson indicated detailed projections could be worked out, though she didn't have specific numbers available.

Vice Chancellor Low noted that ROI questions are always fair, though the answer depends on circumstances. In this case, the art department couldn't stay where it is located.

On a motion by Trustee Worth, which was seconded by Trustee Michaud, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote, the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee, and authorized The University of Maine System acting through the University of Southern Maine (USM) to expend up to fifteen million and one hundred thousand dollars (\$15,100,000) for a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) agreement with Great Falls Construction for the construction of a new Art Building on the Gorham campus.

Additionally, the Board accepts the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and authorizes the University of Maine System to issue an internal loan for up to \$15,000,000.

Further, the Board accepted the recommendation of the Finance, Facilities, and Technology Committee and approved the Finance, Project and Reimbursement of Project Expenditures resolutions to authorize the University of Maine System, acting through the University of Southern Maine, to fund the construction of a new Art Building on the Gorham campus with a project total of up to \$15,000,000, using financing with a maximum principal amount of debt of \$15,000,000.

### **CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER REPORT**

The Unified Course Search is a key delivery of the Unified Catalog Initiative, which directly supports unified accreditation by enabling seamless academic experience across all University of Maine System institutions. The system-wide search tool allows students to view and register for courses at any UMS university through a single interface. This integration of academic resources, technologies, and policies fulfills unified accreditation commitments to improve accessibility, streamline academic operations, and promote collaboration among campuses.

Dr. Robert Placido, Chief Information Officer, presented a demonstration of the unified catalog, noting the significant multi-year effort required to bring this project to completion.

Dr. Placido set the context by explaining that when Chancellor Malloy arrived four years ago and directed the system to operate as a unified system, everyone responsible for various operations had to determine how to make that work. The project faced significant challenges: separate processes, separate physical systems, and different philosophies, cultures, and approaches that had been cobbled together over 80 years at some institutions.

#### **Study Away Form**

Dr. Placido demonstrated the first element: the study away form. The system had to guarantee university admission processes were honored while making the process easier. What was previously an annual paper process is now online, allowing students to submit requests to study at a different university seamlessly. The system includes video training and guides on a dedicated website.

#### **Usage Statistics**

Since launching quietly in fall 2025 with some on-campus announcements:

- 14,000 internal students used the system

- 3,000 students who were NOT UMS students used the system

Dr. Placido emphasized this fulfilled the long-standing vision from the Board: having the same system for prospective students to see offerings across the state without logging into multiple websites.

### System Access

Dr. Placido demonstrated accessing the system from the UMS website student page. There are two buttons distinguishing between future students (guest access) and current students (login required). As a guest, anyone can search all courses offered across the system, view capacities, check textbook information, and see availability.

### Search Functionality

The search interface includes parameters for:

- University selection (can select all or specific campuses)
- Undergraduate/graduate level
- Subject area (demonstrated with "math")
- Meeting times
- Open/closed status
- Number of seats available

Search results display courses from all selected universities with detailed information including syllabi, textbooks, meeting times, and campus-specific deadlines.

### Enrolled Student Features

For logged-in students, additional functionality includes:

- My Enrollment
- My Finances
- Schedule building
- Course details with personal deadlines
- Add to cart or direct enrollment capabilities
- Cross-registration between campuses (after completing study away form and being accepted)
- Reserved seats displayed with icons
- Single bill with automatic financial aid processing

Dr. Placido thanked Tiffany Maiuri, his team leader, for being responsible for most of the technical lift. He emphasized that while the interface appears simple and elegant, complex business logic underneath honors each campus's rules about course sequences, prerequisites, residency requirements, and other policies.

### Degree Planning Integration

Vice Chancellor St. John noted that when courses are selected, the system integrates with the degree planning system (also released this year) to show whether courses apply to a student's degree. What previously required manual work with advisors is now automated, showing transfer credits, past experience, CBE, and various mixes of credits.

### Transfer Credit Recognition

In response to trustee questions, Dr. Placido confirmed that prerequisites transfer between campuses based on transfer equivalency setup. For example, taking Calculus 1 at Fort Kent allows enrollment in Calculus 2 at Farmington, assuming transfer equivalencies are properly configured.

### Community College Integration

Trustees asked about community college student access. Dr. Placido confirmed community college students can use the system as guests to search and plan, though they cannot enroll until they are accepted as UMS students. The degree planning tool is available for guests to build potential schedules.

### Board Response

Trustees responded enthusiastically to the demonstration. Chair Riley noted that Dr. Placido remains the only person in her history with the Board to receive a standing ovation, and this presentation reinforced why. Trustees praised the intuitive design, the minimal help desk calls, the comprehensive functionality, and the successful completion of this long-standing Board priority.

Following Dr. Robert Placido's demonstration of the unified catalog system, trustees engaged enthusiastically with questions about functionality, integration, and implications.

Additional questions were asked about the study away form process, specifically whether students can immediately cross-register or if they must first fill out the study away form and be admitted to other institutions.

Dr. Placido clarified that students cannot immediately enroll across campuses. They still must be admitted to institutions where they want to take courses, but the system made this "super easy by just going to that one form, hitting the study away form, and then it gets processed for you." The admission requirement is maintained, but the process is streamlined from what was previously a manual paper process.

A question concerning limits on cross-registration were asked to which Dr Placido responded that this as "a very nuanced question" and provided a tiered answer:

First, there is still a residency requirement as mandated by accreditors. Students must take a certain number of credits for their degree at their home institution to graduate from that institution. This applies both to a full degree program and within individual semesters.

Second, the system provides one bill for students, with all financial aid processed automatically behind the scenes when students enroll in classes across campuses. He thanked team lead Tiffany Maiuri (in the back of the room) for being responsible for most of the technical lift, noting this was a significant undertaking he hadn't properly acknowledged before.

Third, while these high-level policies exist, there are also "a lot of rules at each campus about what courses you can take in what order and so forth, and all of those are also honored as well and that's built into the business logic of the system." He emphasized: "So again you don't see that underneath the... it's just a search interface but all of that's in there."

He explained two ways universities manage this:

1. Reserved seats in classes (he pointed to an icon on the screen showing reserved seats with information displayed)
2. The study away process where students meet with their advisor to ensure they're taking what they need



Vice Chancellor St. John confirmed no additional nuance was missed in the explanation.

Another clarifying point regarding the creditable application to a particular university was poised, to which Dr. Placido answered in two parts:

First, all courses are transferable because all UMS institutions are accredited by the same accreditor.

Second, whether courses count toward a student's specific degree is why the system "really put such an effort and push last year to come up with the degree system." He noted this is "a totally other thing" that he had demoed somewhat the previous year and was released in part during the current year.

He explained: "When you go to your advisor, you now have a systematic way to build your whole degree plan and what courses count for everything."

### **VICE CHANCELLOR FOR ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS REPORT**

Vice Chancellor St. John provided a short report on UMS fall 2025 census enrollment.

#### **Overall Results**

Headcount and credit hours are both up for the third consecutive year:

- Headcount: up 2.3%
- Credit hours: up 2.8% over Fall 2024

Vice Chancellor St. John reminded trustees that Fall 2021 was a high-water mark but also reflected COVID deferrals from the previous fall, making it an inflated year. Accounting for that inflation, Fall 2025 represents the system at the top of its performance relative to the last decade of enrollment and credit hour generation.

#### **Residency Shifts**

Vice Chancellor St. John emphasized this as the most important slide. Tuition residency is the billing bucket for students and does not reflect one-to-one on credit hours or other student status facets. The system is growing in:

- Online students taking classes/programs entirely online
- Adult degree completion students
- Older students
- Women
- YourPace enrollments

The system is seeing more even split between male and female students in YourPace compared to other modalities. The team is exploring why this is occurring to potentially reproduce successful strategies in other program areas.

#### **Distance Education**

Distance education in all sub-modalities now accounts for 42.3% of all credit hours generated in the system, up 2.3% over Fall 2024. The demand is especially strong among returning adult learners and increasingly out-of-state adult learners interested in programs.

#### **Transfer Students**

Internal transfer (transfer between system universities) is down, indicating improved retention and student success. Students are less likely to transfer if they're happy with their program and supports.

Community college system transfers are up, with significant success at USM. Farmington has been a leader in transfers relative to size. Sources are broadening beyond just geographic proximity to nearest community college.

### Canadian Enrollment

Canadian enrollment is growing:

- Modest but growing at Fort Kent
- Grown significantly at Orono (almost 100 Canadian students in Fall 2025)
- Growing massively through YourPace
- Expected to grow with YourPace expansion to Fort Kent and Farmington

### YourPace

The enrollment chart shows undergraduate (purple), graduate (orange), and a very thin line at top representing law credit hours. All three areas show growth.

### Future Reports

In response to Trustee Katz's request, Vice Chancellor St. John confirmed that all future enrollment reports will include role-level data for YourPace, 90-credit pilot programs, and other categories, allowing trustees to see comprehensive system data plus each special category separately.

### AI Analysis

Vice Chancellor St. John noted that two different sources of AI were used for analysis of the report, which will be a norm going forward. Vice Chancellor Low also provided unsolicited AI results. These AI resources help parse data and provide increasingly refined answers to trustee questions.

## **NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM PROPOSAL: BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT, UMFK**

The Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management at the University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) is designed to educate professionals for careers in fisheries, conservation, law, and policy. UMFK's location in northern Maine, surrounded by diverse ecosystems like the North Maine Woods and Allagash Wilderness Waterway, provides a natural laboratory for hands-on training and research for domestic and Canadian students.

- The program is designed to leverage UMFK's existing strengths. The curriculum intersects with and complements established programs in Forestry, Environmental Studies, and Conservation Law Enforcement. Cross-disciplinary coursework will boost enrollment in existing classes across these units.
- As one of the most requested programs by prospective UMFK students, the B.S. in Wildlife Management aligns with a strong job market. Positions in wildlife management and related industries are projected to grow at an above-average rate in the U.S. and Canada.
- As documented in the program proposal, UMFK has engaged in conversations with the University of Maine to explore future research and coursework collaborations. No formal collaborations have been established to date.

### Projected expenses and revenue:

The B.S. in Wildlife Management will largely rely on existing courses and faculty, requiring the development of only four new courses to support the degree. No new faculty are needed, though adjunct

teaching staff may be added to accommodate program growth. The program is expected to break even in year one.

Vice Chancellor St. John noted that for trustees who didn't attend the last ASA meeting, President Hedeon has brought forward a small but strategic complement of new program proposals over the last year, with two more in the pipeline for 2026. This program is complementary to the forestry program the Board approved earlier in 2025 and was subject to good discussion and questions from trustees during ASA, with strong support from President Hedeon.

President Hedeon presented the proposal. The University of Maine at Fort Kent is proposing a BS in Wildlife Management. This degree will build on the university's existing strengths in natural resource management and conservation programs while enhancing experiential education that defines UMFK. The program will take advantage of Northern Maine's diverse natural resources and wildlife habitat.

UMFK's admissions team receives frequent requests from prospective students for animal science degree programming. Approximately 10% of requests are in this area. Within the University of Maine System, UMaine houses a BS in Wildlife Ecology that emphasizes study of wildlife populations and ecosystems. UMFK's BS in Wildlife Management differentiates itself by emphasizing practical application of science to manage wildlife populations, habitats, and resources.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Worth, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendation of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee and approved of the Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Management at the University of Maine at Fort Kent.

#### **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE PROGRAM ELIMINATION**

Pursuant to the Administrative Practice Letter X-P.5, and as directed by the Board of Trustees, an academic program can be assessed for possible program elimination as the result of the program review process as indicated in policy, and at any time at the initiative of the campus offering the program or at any time upon the recommendation of the Chancellor based on enrollments and the centrality of the program to the campus mission.

In supplemental materials were the campus Chief Academic Officers' recommendation to the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, who in turn has made his recommendation concerning the Program Elimination Proposal to the Chancellor. The Chancellor's recommendation for the Program Elimination Proposal to the Board of Trustees for its review and final approval was attached.

President Edmondson presented the resolution to eliminate the Bachelor of Science degree in Therapeutic Recreation and the Minor in Recreational Leadership at USM.

This program was slated for closure in 2014. Over the past decade, faculty have worked very hard to reinvent the program and ensure enrollments. Despite best efforts, students are not choosing the program. Currently there are eight students enrolled: one new student this year, no new students last year, and six students in upper division classes.

The Exercise, Health, and Sports Sciences faculty voted unanimously last spring to suspend admissions into therapeutic recreation. Their plan was to create a track or concentration within a larger major.

President Edmondson characterized this as a noble attempt to extend the program's life, but noted the system is "kicking the can down the road" as there is no possibility for the program to gain new enrollments.

There are two impacted faculty. Per the collective bargaining agreement, they were notified of the plan to initiate program elimination by the end of October. President Edmondson emphasized it was important to notify them before broader university conversation out of respect for the faculty. The retrenchment, if approved, is effective January 1st.

Faculty have the right to bargain rights: 18-month severance or placement on a recall list with priority to be rehired within the system. This could include the new therapeutic recreation major being developed or elsewhere within the system. Resources from this program will be allocated to programs that are growing. USM currently has 14 active faculty searches underway.

### Process Timeline

President Edmondson provided detailed timeline of the APL and CBA process followed:

- October 6: Intent to eliminate program sent to AFUM leadership and Vice Chancellor St. John
- October 15: First meeting with AFUM
- October 20: UMS Director of Labor Relations Ryan Whitlock notified AFUM statewide President Lydia Savage
- October 22: Second meeting with AFUM (President Edmondson, Provost Tashinsky, Vice President Jones)
- October 30: Faculty Senate convened special meetings on intent to eliminate program
- October 31: President Edmondson met with Faculty Senate leadership
- November 7: President Edmondson and Provost Tashinsky met with Faculty Senate Executive Committee and full Faculty Senate
- November 13: Faculty Senate convened second special meeting to respond
- November 15 (Friday): President Edmondson received Faculty Senate document (distributed to Board that morning)

President Edmondson noted the Faculty Senate document is silent on the academic matter at hand (elimination of degree program and minor). Instead, the document focuses on process (where there are differences of opinion) and personnel (which is not the Faculty Senate's role but rather AFUM's and administration's role with system-level labor relations).

Faculty Senate leadership received written response from President Edmondson and Provost Tashinsky on November 17th.

### Context

President Edmondson provided broader context:

- University of New Hampshire is also closing this program
- Lightcast data indicates only two new job openings (two new jobs) in therapeutic recreation in Maine
- It is not a growing field

The dean has been working with impacted students. Many were initially concerned, but feelings were relieved after individual meetings. Most, if not all, students will be taught out within the academic calendar year. All students will be able to complete their degrees and professional certification. Student

plans and records will not be widely shared (despite requests) due to FERPA requirements, as they are only available to those with educational need to know.

### Commitment to Shared Governance

President Edmondson stated she remains committed to following policies and rules and to shared governance. She has demonstrated this commitment over more than three years as president at USM and will continue to do so. She respects people who hold different perspectives on this decision and understands this is a difficult moment that can lead to better mutual understanding as the hard work of shared governance continues.

Following President Edmondson's presentation on the elimination of the Bachelor of Science in Therapeutic Recreation and Minor in Recreational Leadership, trustees engaged in discussion about the process and decision.

A faculty representative spoke first, noting no questions but wanting to provide context. Acknowledgment was made that faculty were surprised when receiving notice of retrenchment and that every campus in the system is currently engaged in hard work about balancing budgets. The observation was made that multiple faculty at USM were concerned about the shared governance process and early communication, though the representative wasn't involved in specific discussions. General faculty disappointment was conveyed with how the situation unfolded.

Commentary was offered that much criticism from earlier public testimony seemed focused not on whether the program should continue, acknowledging it wouldn't grow and be successful, but rather on the process itself. Reference was made to documents provided that morning summarizing actions, raising questions about process. Specific inquiry was made about one item: consulting the faculty senate at the earliest stage of intent to plan. While the timeline provided was heard and appreciated, clarification was sought about what constitutes consulting the faculty senate at the intent to plan stage and whether this differs substantially policy-wise from the timeline presented regarding when different groups are notified and receive official proposals.

Thanks were expressed for the question, with detailed explanation provided. The first concern was for impacted faculty, who needed to be notified that the process was starting as soon as possible, and it was felt they should know in advance of the faculty senate. The governance document language was then addressed, noting that the faculty senate governance document says intent to plan should be initiated with or consulted with stakeholders. The governance document places program creation and program elimination in the same sentence and same process even though they're not the same thing. The University of Maine system governance document states stakeholders should be notified at the earliest possible moment given all consideration, and the administration felt this standard was met.

A broader observation was made that cut to the heart of the matter. The point was stated clearly that the program has had severe difficulties being successful for many years, and the actual decision should not have been surprising. Expression of confusion was made about how anybody could be shocked this was coming. Emphasis was placed on the fact that it's the responsibility of the university system and its presidents to make employment decisions based on their good faith effort regarding budget and program success.

Regarding the collective bargaining agreement, the observation was made that while not being an expert on AFUM agreement details, it seems highly unlikely that key people who needed to know didn't know

for a long time. These comments effectively summarized a perspective that the program's difficulties were long-standing and well-known, the decision should not have been surprising, presidents have authority and responsibility to make employment decisions based on budget and program viability, and appropriate parties were likely informed within reasonable timeframes given the circumstances.

On a motion by Trustee Michaud, which was seconded by Trustee Alexander, and approved by all Trustees present and by roll call vote with one abstention, the Board of Trustees accepted the recommendation of the Chancellor, and approved the elimination of the Bachelor of Science in Therapeutic Recreation and the Minor in Recreational Leadership at the University of Southern Maine, effective at the conclusion of the Fall 2025 semester.

## **VICE CHANCELLOR FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION REPORT**

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy thanked Chair Riley for the opportunity to bring research and innovation to the foreground. She noted that while the system appropriately focuses on its teaching mission, financial challenges, and many other important areas, it's important to discuss the tripartite mission including research.

### **Federal Situation**

The federal situation has been dynamic over the last nine to ten months. The system continues to monitor very closely what's happening with current externally funded projects. Key points:

- 96 projects have been restored during the past nine months through amazing work involving many partners and key leaders within the university system and congressional delegation
- Four projects remain paused
- 32 projects have been terminated (some full, some partial)

The most important point is that the system continues to monitor and work with faculty who are in positions to seek external funding.

### **System-wide Research Coordination**

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy highlighted efforts to advance research and innovation activity statewide through coordinated approaches across all campuses, not only within University of Maine:

- Office of Research Development stepping up services and opening opportunities across system
- Speaker series bringing in people from across systems to discuss research
- System-wide principal investigator meetings
- Studying federal guidance about future research and funding
- Maine Innovation Economy Action Plan committee (chaired by Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy) updating plan out of sequence due to concerns about Maine's economy

### **Strategic Plan Research Actions**

The strategic plan includes five research actions and 15 research goals. Written several years ago in very different climate, the system has learned what to focus on and how to do it well. Two actions drive the work:

- Action 1: Establishing and investing in system-wide infrastructure to grow entire enterprise
- Action 4: Being an engine for innovation for Maine businesses

These two actions drive the other steps, with many goals falling underneath the business of expanding what the system can do system-wide and being an engine for the state.

### **Research Leaders Group**

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy presented the system-wide research leaders' group, which meets regularly to think about how to represent individual universities and what each wants to do relative to research while characterizing the overall portfolio in meaningful ways inside and outside the state. The group is working on an update for the R&D plan required by the strategic plan with great progress.

### Campus Research Identities

The system asked every campus to characterize what Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy called the "research identities" of each campus. Only by understanding campus-by-campus or university-by-university what each institution sees as its place and role in the overall research ecosystem can the system do a better job advancing what's needed to help research thrive.

### University of Maine at Farmington Research Profile

President McDonnell presented UMF's research strengths, noting that as a teaching institution with faculty carrying 4-4 teaching loads, research still occurs in three main categories:

#### *Education Research:*

- Special education research presented by Dr. Kate Mcleod
- Teacher mentorship research
- Apprenticeship program for early childhood teachers (certification through on-job work plus coursework)

#### *Science Research:*

- Professor Tim Breton: \$500,000 National Science Foundation grant studying hormone systems in fish with 19 students, yielding biomedical information with implications for schizophrenia and diabetes

#### *Outdoor Recreation Research:*

- \$475,000 grant from Northern Border Regional Commission
- Created Western Maine Outdoor Recreation Hub
- Developing internships for recreation industry
- Working with industry partners and high school students
- Part-time staff hired to work with CTE programs around New England
- Digital marketing campaign
- Addressing workforce needs as tourism programs took significant decline during COVID and haven't bounced back

### Common Themes Across Campuses

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy noted themes emerging from campus research identity presentations:

- Much work is applied, translational, and experimental development (using research base to try interventions and learn from them)
- Networks: people connecting internally within system, with private sector partners, with state government, and with other universities
- Place-based scholarship: work happening near sites that afford opportunities for data collection and implementation
- Engagement of students consistently across system
- Scholarship of practice

Vice Chancellor Ferrini-Mundy emphasized the need to infuse this language more fully into system discussions. While "research" is used as shorthand, there's a strong array of work focused on challenges

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for Maine, workforce development for Maine, and problem-solving specific to the state. This represents significant value that should be better packaged and connected to website and communications efforts.

### **CONSENT AGENDA**

On a motion by Trustee Eames, which was seconded by Trustee Michaud, and approved by all Trustees present, the items on the Consent Agenda were approved by the Board of Trustees as follows:

*Acceptance of Minutes*

*Awarding of Academic Degrees*

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees will be held at the University of Maine on January 25-26, 2026.

Additional information about the meeting can be found on the Board of Trustees website:

<https://www.maine.edu/board-of-trustees/meeting-agendas-materials/board-of-trustees/>

Adjournment

Elizabeth Stickler, Clerk