

Week of December 16, 2019

Trustees,

As I previewed for you in my weekend update last Sunday, with this past Friday's close of final exams, we publicly announced the UMS *Make the Grade Student Success initiative*, in which each of our UMS universities will participate. I'm including for your reference here my System-wide announcement of our program, as well as the UMS news release that followed it, an example of how one of our universities is implementing the program, and two examples of media coverage the *Make the Grade* initiative's announcement generated.

<https://www.uma.edu/makethegrade/>

Maine Public Radio Story: <https://www.mainepublic.org/post/umaine-system-launches-effort-retain-students-academic-trouble>

Bangor Daily News: <https://bangordailynews.com/2019/12/21/news/state/um-system-to-offer-free-course-to-first-year-students-that-failed-a-class-the-semester-prior/>

I continue to be struck by the outsized impact that one failing grade can have on a student's aspirations to continue on track to a degree. While students leave and don't return for a variety of reasons, some beyond our control, it is striking that only 44 percent of students who receive a failing grade this fall can be expected to return next year (compared to the nearly three-quarters of students who can be expected to return after their first year overall). With each UMS university experimenting with how to make the *Make the Grade* initiative successful, we'll carefully monitor the outcomes to determine how to achieve the greatest success with helping our students get back on track to a life-changing degree.

A different but related note: We took another action this week to make it easier for our students to stay with us. Old UMS policy barred our students from registering for a new semester's classes if they had an unpaid account balance as low as \$100-\$200. The irony, of course, is that not being registered for classes denies the student access to the next semester's financial aid. Ryan Low and our university CBOs have agreed to raise the registration restriction threshold to \$1,000, which will immediately provide relief to a number of our students and permit them to continue.

Keeping our focus on attracting and retaining our students, we can report that, as of December 10th, first-year student applications were up 9.7% across the System since the September 1st start of the admissions cycle. That's more than 1,400 more apps compared to the same period last year, and nearly 60% of these additional applications have come in since the launch of UMS's *Maine Values You* student outreach program in October. These numbers include in- and out-of-state students applying for first-year admission and count applications from students applying to multiple institutions. To be sure, an application is not an enrolled student, so we will continue all of the important work our universities do to admit and enroll more students.

Because we have data showing that 6.5% of our applications in the 2018-2019 admissions cycle came in over the two-week school vacation period (December 21st to January 6th), we are stepping up our efforts with digital and social media [call-to-action advertisements](#) over the next two weeks to reach high school seniors and their families and link them to our [Maine Values You](#) landing page.

Turning from our students to our university infrastructure itself, you'll recall that, with the realization that our historic \$99 million in bond and debt service infrastructure investments authorized in recent legislative sessions could be followed with several years of no or limited additional State investment, a task force was formed to study and report and make recommendations about how to provide adequate supplemental, stable, and predictable funding to sustain Maine's public higher education infrastructure without burdening students with unreasonable tuition and fee increases. I'm proud of the work that Ryan Low, Samantha Warren, and Chip Gavin have thus far done with leading and staffing the Task Force, which includes representatives from the Maine Community College System, Maine Maritime Academy, the Finance Authority of Maine, and State of Maine's Bureau of General Services and Department of Education's Division of School Facilities. A draft report is ready for our review and will be submitted by year's end. I'll provide a copy for you and summarize its findings in my next update.

Our unified accreditation work remains a top priority too. Earlier this week I completed my 44th and final meeting of this semester on that topic in the three months since you authorized me to seek university stakeholder input on how we might successfully pursue unified accreditation. Our planning continues too, and I've invited our UMS faculty senate and assembly presidents to an initial meeting to charge them with planning the necessary System-wide academic governance policies that would apply to multi-university academic programs made possible by unified accreditation. Their work will be a key to our efforts. I would call your attention as well to the January 6, 2020 Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting materials that were released on Friday afternoon, as they contain a proposal to update Board Policy 308 should the Board authorize unified accreditation at its January 27-28, 2020 meeting.

I closed my week with very enjoyable work. I participated in labor contract signing ceremonies for our Service & Maintenance and Police bargaining units with their labor representatives from Teamsters Union Local #340 and the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #100, respectively. And on Friday morning, I visited the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan. As a long-time public servant myself, I fully appreciate Margaret Chase Smith inspirational story -- the first woman to serve in both houses of the United States Congress, the first woman to represent Maine in either, and the first woman to be placed in nomination for the presidency at a major party's convention (in 1964). Her life and career provide worthy role models for us all.

With many across our System taking a well-deserved break over the coming days, I will not be sending my weekend update next Sunday. And with the blessings of Hanukkah and Christmas

upon us beginning today and through the coming week, my best wishes to you and yours as we close this year and look forward to the next.

Regards,
Dan