

Week of December 9, 2019

Trustees -

Greetings on a morning I suspect we're all drying out from yesterday's deluge of rain!

Let me initially address a communication I suspect you all received via email from UMaine Professor and AFUM President Dr. Jim McClymer on Wednesday afternoon (with subject line "Thoughts on course transfer and single accreditation"). Be assured we've already responded, which you can see attached and on our public Unified Accreditation website here (<https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/unified-accreditation/feedback-and-faqs>).

And rest assured that we've provided Dr. McClymer and faculty ample opportunity for input in our unified accreditation work to date. Of the 43 unified accreditation outreach meetings I've led on all of our campuses thus far, 15 of them have been exclusively with faculty, in small groups of 6-10 and with every university's faculty senate or assembly. That number includes our Board Academic and Student Affairs committee meeting discussion on October 28 with the Board's faculty representatives about their statement of questions and concerns (also available with our "FAQ" response through the unified accreditation link above), as well as my November 26 meeting with labor leaders from all of our collective bargaining units (including Dr. McClymer and AFUM, of course). In addition, Jim Thelen arranged for Dr. McClymer and Dr. Lisa LeDuc, an AFUM leader herself and UMPI's Board faculty representative, to have a discussion about AFUM questions and concerns with NECHE President Barbara Brittingham on November 22.

The transparency I started this work with continues, and I'll be inviting faculty governance leaders early this coming week to further discussions with me in the unified accreditation planning work you've authorized.

Finally on unified accreditation for now, we've already made progress with the unified accreditation planning committees I wrote about in my message to you last week. I led our monthly Presidents' Council meeting last Monday, which included robust discussion on what initial matters can be addressed from a planning standpoint so we are ready to begin work on a unified accreditation substantive change to NECHE if you authorize the effort in late January. Later this week, much of our academic leadership -- most of my team and I, along with our Presidents and their chief academic and accreditation officers -- gathered in Boston for NECHE's annual conference. We continued a recent tradition there of having lunch with Barbara Brittingham and our Presidents, and our discussion, not surprisingly, was about both the timing and content of a unified accreditation substantive change application, including how moving forward on the timeline we've been discussing will alleviate the need for NECHE and our universities to address upcoming accreditation matters in isolation. In parallel to our discussions with Barbara Brittingham, I met several of NECHE's Commissioners during the conference. To a person, they all expressed awareness and interest in our unified accreditation work.

My usual optimism continues to be merited, I believe, for our unified accreditation effort. Having discussions all across the System and beginning our planning work is already paying dividends, as our university leaders are challenged to find the opportunities that unified accreditation will provide for collaboration and better student outcomes and experiences. And as Trustee Collins has said of this work, *it has to be about our students*.

Keeping the focus on our students, you'll recall the December 3 System-wide message I sent on retention, which I shared with you last week. From that, I've issued a challenge to our Presidents to participate in my first targeted retention initiative following that message. Doing so will require prompt, bold action on their parts. With the initiative I describe below, I want to publicly demonstrate that we are willing to invest in helping our students stay with us even after they stumble, because doing so will help them stay with us. I think it's the right thing to do, and particularly now so that it can make a difference yet this year.

In sum, I've asked our universities if they can find the funds, and develop an appropriate process, to offer students who fail a class from this fall semester the chance to retake the course or another in its place *without cost*. Every university will have the chance to participate, and I hope they all do. And to be clear, we will not be investing in failure or lack of effort. Our early discussions are that this offer would be limited to first-year, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students who have passed other classes but received at least one failing grade during the term about to end.

There's a clear link to retention here. One data set we've already analyzed from the University of Maine shows that *42 percent* of students who receive an "F" in certain courses in their first year do not return for their second year. We want to send a clear message to our students that failure in one course, notwithstanding that they've made an appropriate effort, does not mean they cannot be successful if they try again. That's what I want our universities to invest in. That's how we help our students feel like they belong here. That's how we inspire them to return.

To give you a sense of perspective, Fall 2018 data shows that 772 first-year, full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students received an "F" grade but passed other courses in their first term. Assuming similar numbers for this fall, and extrapolating the UMaine retention data mentioned above, we're at risk of losing more than 40 percent of them. Investing in one course now to boost their aspirations will more than pay for itself for any of these students who instead return and persist to a degree. I can think of no better message to send our students as they complete this semester.

Our Presidents and Chief Academic Officers will be working this week to finalize plans for how they each might participate, and we would publicly announce the investment after final exams conclude this coming Friday. I'll report more on the effort in my message to you next weekend.

Lastly, I wanted you to know that we'll likely make an announcement this week about employee time off over the upcoming holidays. We provided time off on the afternoon before Thanksgiving last month, which matched time off that Governor Mills provided for executive branch state

employees then. While there's no requirement that we follow the State's pronouncements with holiday time off -- or they ours -- we do talk with the Governor's office in advance of our announcements to be sure that office is aware of our plans (and vice versa).

Best wishes for a productive week ahead for us all.

Dan