

Week of June 1

Trustees,

On July 15, 2019, at my first Board meeting, just two weeks on the job as Chancellor, Chair Erwin stated the Board's determination that, in order for UMS to advance the Board's [December 2018 Strategic Declaration](#), the System's universities needed to be able to deliver significantly more collaborative, multi-university programming. For that reason, and recognizing too that UMS's historic model of separate university accreditations made it impractical to efficiently develop and deliver such programming at the scope and scale UMS students needed, where and when they needed it, Chair Erwin asked me to do an initial review of what would be involved in pursuing other accreditation options to enable UMS to better achieve the Trustees' strategic goals.

From that charge came a set of [Guiding Principles](#) for my recommendation, at your September 2019 Board meeting, that UMS should unify our universities' separate NECHE accreditations in the University of Maine System. Perhaps my most important consideration early on was that transparency would be a hallmark of our effort, so we created a [unified accreditation website](#) and posted [five years of records and correspondence](#) regarding all previous consideration of accreditation issues and the potential for statewide accreditation. Then, based on what I heard thereafter from faculty, staff, students, university leaders, and BOV members all around the state, as well as through an online survey that elicited more than 300 comments and suggestions, I came back to you in November with further recommendations for how we might successfully pursue unified accreditation. By the time the matter was before you for a vote in January, I had held more than 50 listening sessions with hundreds of stakeholders, connected our presidents, faculty union leaders, and faculty senate and assembly leaders with NECHE President Barbara Brittingham to answer questions, and brought faculty senate and assembly presidents together for the first time in System history to discuss how the faculty could meet their shared governance responsibilities across the System in a unified accreditation environment.

Your unanimous vote on January 27, 2020 directed us to pursue unified accreditation in a way that would honor the UMS Charter, our Guiding Principles, faculty academic freedom and shared governance, and our current labor agreements. You further asked that we pursue unified accreditation in such ways as to maintain progress on the Board's Declaration of Strategic Priorities and Key Performance Indicators, and work to ensure that the outcomes of unified accreditation would indeed advance the Board's strategic goals.

Why do I recount this recent history in such detail?

Because this coming week, on Wednesday, we will submit the official Substantive Change Request for Unified Accreditation of the University of Maine System. The work to produce the advance near-final copy of our application, which I attach here for your confidential preview, has

engaged our entire System, with faculty leaders, university leaders, and System staff all pitching in to advance the effort. The final draft incorporates two rounds of comments from NECHE President Brittingham's reviews and further reflects consideration of more than 450 comments contributed from the UMS community through an online survey. While there are too many individuals to thank here this morning, I do want to specifically call out several, including my Chief of Staff and UMS General Counsel Jim Thelen, who led the day-to-day effort from the beginning; Presidents Joan Ferrini-Mundy (UMaine), Ray Rice (UMPI), Becky Wyke (UMA), and Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low, who together co-chaired the two primary drafting committees; faculty senate/assembly leaders Professors Carolyn Dorsey (UMPI) and Dave Townsend (UMaine), who, along with UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido, developed the initial multi-university faculty shared governance process described in our application; AFUM President Jim McClymer, who helped us understand the faculty union's efforts to craft policies for faculty who contribute to another university's academic programs; and Director of Organizational Effectiveness Kim Jenkins, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment Rosa Redonnett, and Director of Community and Government Relations Samantha Warren, who together edited and compiled all of the separate pieces into the visually impressive document attached. (A final and special thanks to Val Ireland, Manager of Creative Services and Director of Licensing in UMaine's Division of Marketing and Communications; she's done the lion's share of work to format and produce the graphic layout you'll see.)

As important as achieving unified accreditation will be, it is equally important, if not more so, that we have so far done this work transparently -- with our presidents, with our faculty assembly and union leaders, and all other stakeholders who wish to help us shape the outcome. That high level of transparency and engagement and more will be crucial to the success of the coming two-year Self Study and Comprehensive Evaluation period we will begin with NECHE's approval of unified accreditation, which we expect to follow shortly after our virtual presentation of the application to NECHE on June 23.

Since I've spent the bulk of my update this morning on unified accreditation, I'll only briefly summarize a few other items from the past week that would otherwise merit more attention here.

You likely saw [our announcement](#) on Wednesday of the release of a statewide higher education framework for safely reopening in the fall. These recommendations were the product of a several-week effort that I led with Joan Ferrini-Mundy and Jim Thelen, with significant contributions from Jim Dlugos, President of Saint Joseph's College of Maine (and the Maine Independent Colleges Association); Dave Daigler, President of the Maine Community College System; Clayton Spencer, President of Bates College; and Joshua Hamilton, Provost of the University of New England. This was an important effort not only to summarize the key factors that every college or university in Maine, public or private, will consider to determine how to safely resume in-person instruction and operations this fall, but also to demonstrate higher education's impact and importance to the state as a whole. As we noted in the framework

document (and with thanks to the UMaine economists who quickly pulled the economic impact model for it together), Maine's institutions of higher education collectively enroll more than 72,600 students and employ more than 20,000 full- and part-time faculty, staff, and student employees, having a \$4.5 billion impact on Maine's economic and civic health.

There is strong consensus that Maine needs our institutions to get back to our campuses this fall, and to do so as safely as possible. We continue our own work to review plans to do so, and a critical element of our planning is the extent to which we will be able to test for the virus. To that end, President Ferrini-Mundy and I led a team from UMaine and the System, including several members of our Science Advisory Board, in discussions Friday morning with The Jackson Laboratory's President and CEO, Edison Liu, Dr. Charles Lee (Scientific Director of The Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine), and LuAnn Ballesteros (Vice President of External & Governmental Affairs) about the possibility of partnering to increase our testing capacity. We continue other conversations with other potential partners as well, all to best understand as soon as possible what our options and resources might be come fall.

We have no more important work than what is summarized above. I'm grateful for your support and the contributions of so many around the System and our universities to keep it all moving.

Regards,
Dan