

Week of May 31

Trustees -

Even if the calendar hasn't yet caught up, it feels like summer is here. I hope you're finding relaxation and enjoyment this weekend among the many places and activities that make a Maine summer special.

We use the phrase "unified accreditation" often in our work and communications with Trustees, but it's admittedly not a simple concept to define. In its ideal state, unified accreditation eliminates traditional university boundaries when it comes to academic program collaboration and resource-sharing, but does so without losing our universities' local identities, culture, and missions. But what does that look like in application? I thought I'd take an opportunity with this message to offer some examples of work that realizes the potential of unified accreditation in service to our students and state.

The Maine Geospatial Institute is a 7-campus academic collaborative that brings together faculty from every System university to advance geospatial technology initiatives and applied academic programming and certificate and degree opportunities. The Maine Geospatial Institute unites the geospatial technologies community – scientists, researchers, students, educators, industry leaders, and other key partners – to work together in recognition that economic growth, workforce development, education, and research can all be strengthened through collaboration. It represents, in my judgment, the highest and best use of unified accreditation, and it's [led by our faculty](#) across university boundaries.

MGI, as it's called, is guided by working groups charged with assisting a faculty executive committee in meeting the goals and functions of the Institute. An education working group coordinates academic programming initiatives, such as identifying currently available courses across the System, evaluating course sequencing, compiling and coordinating course schedules among universities, identifying content gaps, and outlining a plan to add new courses, including course options for K-12 teacher training, in service, and continuing education. To the latter point, a K-12 Education subgroup is working with the Maine Geographic Alliance to establish and enhance statewide initiatives to train K-12 teachers to introduce GIS in the classroom.

Other MGI working groups focus on collaboration governance, infrastructure, and campus-based MGI Project Centers, where collaborations among scientists, researchers, students, educators, industry leaders and other key partners can be planned and facilitated, including with the opportunity for "seed grant" funding for promising projects and initiatives.

Real work is being done across campus boundaries. A new Geographic Information Systems minor has been implemented. While it has an academic administrative "home" at the University of Maine at Farmington, the minor draws upon classes system-wide, setting the program up to be the System's first full-fledged System-wide minor. Work is underway as well for a new

System-wide professional masters in applied geographic information systems (market analysis, competitive analysis, gap analysis).

The work happening with MGI is among the best work we do. You can read more about it on [MGI's website](#).

The closest relationship between any two universities in our System exists between the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias, which were united by the Board's [March 2017 Primary Partnership resolution](#) that made Machias a regional campus of the University of Maine. While [Maine state law](#) requires UMS to maintain the University of Maine at Machias in Machias with that name, it does not specify how each university is governed in relation to any other, except that all universities must retain their names and locations and be led by a campus head who is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the campus and development of its academic program within any limits set by the Board of Trustees and Chancellor. That's all in Board record, as well as in Maine law and the UMS [legal charter](#).

What's more important now is the work happening between Machias and Orono, led by a large task force with key academic, administrative, and faculty representatives from both campuses pursuant to a [March 2021 charge](#) from UMaine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy. It's work that's both aspirational and necessary, bringing closer coordination between UMaine and Machias as its regional campus in the areas of tuition and financial aid, academic program alignment (including through a single academic catalog), admissions and enrollment management, and UMaine/UMM faculty and staff interactions. As President Ferrini-Mundy notes in her charge, challenges in student enrollment at UMM require that we bring renewed focus and intention to this work. In the past decade, student credit hour production at UMM has declined by more than one third, with corresponding declines in faculty and staff numbers. Although federal COVID relief has been and will be critical to UMM through the pandemic, financial reserves are low and BOT KPI ratios are trending downward, with expenses exceeding revenues.

And yet, there are strengths and resources at UMaine and within the System writ large that can and should be used to stabilize and rebuild UMM to be a thriving coastal campus. UMM's key assets and local identity include its beautiful coastal location; traditions of partnership to support the greater Machias community and solve community problems; a thriving partnership with the Downeast Institute; and unique expertise in such areas as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), psychology and community health, small business and nonprofit entrepreneurship, multigenerational access to higher education, as well as specialty areas in K–12 education, outdoor recreation, marine biology, and more. While the University of Maine at Machias remains a campus of the University of Maine System as required by Maine law, as a full regional campus of the University of Maine, it can be positioned to grow revenue, enrollment, and retention via strategic alignment of administration and programs through proactive and creative partnerships at the program level with UMaine. There will be data-driven proposals for unique and distinct contributions for the Machias regional campus, and agreed-upon standards for quality and accountability.

What's more, it's a mutually beneficial relationship. While UMM benefits from the stabilizing effect of UMaine's resources and leadership, UMaine students and faculty benefit from interactions with UMM's signature programs in psychology and community studies, GIS, coastal ecology, outdoor recreation, and others. Indeed, work is underway to launch the Coastal Year pilot at UMM. Through such a program, a cohort of up to 40 students who have been admitted to certain UMaine majors will be given the opportunity to spend their first year at UMM, starting their academic program on the Bold Coast. With UMM's small class sizes, lots of hands-on learning, and one-on-one attention from instructors, first-year students have a chance to get out into the field from their first day, and students in UMaine's Biology, Wildlife Ecology, Botany, Zoology, Marine Science and Ecology and Environmental Studies programs will have new options to immerse themselves in the UMM small-campus coastal experience.

I'd like to thank not only President Ferrini-Mundy for leading this charge, but also particularly Emily Haddad, Dean of the UMaine College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Professor of English, who is leading the working group, and UMM working group members Heather Ball (UMM Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and Associate Professor of Special Education), Tora Johnson (UMM Associate Professor of GIS and Director of Geographic Information Systems), and Jamie Moreira (UMM Associate Professor of Community Studies and Faculty President). Many others not named here are contributing to this important work too, but the engagement of these academic and faculty leaders on both campuses is particularly important to the work's success, and they have my gratitude for doing it.

So much more work is ongoing, of course.

Through the week just past we've been working to align several strategic and capital projects with \$35 million in new funding proposed by Governor Mills in the form of ARP \$35M projects, plus CDS projects

You may recall that Governor Mills is directing \$35 million to UMS as part of her administration's [Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan](#) distribution of federal American Rescue Plan funds. Over the past month we've been discussing with our Presidents possible project ideas, and we've found funding possibilities for all campuses in rough proportion to the allocations used for the System's annual MEIF funding. President Ferrini-Mundy, working as well in her complementary role as Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, submitted a proposed list of projects to Maine Department of Community and Economic Development Commissioner Heather Johnson this week, which you'll see attached. We expect to learn more soon how these funds will become available to us to put to these strategic uses.

I've been engaged with our Presidents and Maine Law Dean Saufley as well over the past week, and will be into the next, for annual evaluation discussions. I'm focusing on our work together to take advantage of unified accreditation and plan for scaling the Harold Alfond Foundation-funded UMS TRANSFORMS projects, among our other important strategic priorities. Working with Jim Thelen in these discussions as well, I enjoy these dialogues with our

senior leaders and use them as an opportunity to look ahead and, quite simply, think beyond the status quo that's too often been good enough.

I'll close with a note of congratulations. Though it ended too soon, USM's baseball team [wrapped up a fine season Monday afternoon](#) in a final loss to Wheaton College in Game 11 of the 2021 NCAA Division III Baseball Hartford Regional Tournament at DiBenedetto Stadium on the campus of Trinity College. Division III baseball success has been a legacy at USM under long-time head coach Ed Flaherty, who has firmly established USM among the nation's elite NCAA Division III programs on his way to compiling more than 1,000 victories on the diamond for USM. Congratulations to the Huskies and Coach Flaherty for giving us all a tremendous measure of pride in our student-athletes and their accomplishments.

I look forward to seeing many of you tomorrow in our virtual Board of Trustees/Board of Visitors Summit meeting.

Regards,

Dan