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ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE  
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

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**One University:**  
**Build Futures – Strengthen Maine**

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*ELLEN-EARLE CHAFFEE, PH.D.*

*JANUARY 24, 2016*

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## FOREWORD

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It has been my privilege to participate in the academic transformation of the University of Maine System (UMS) throughout 2015. As far as I know, this is the most comprehensive change initiative ever attempted in state higher education, encompassing all aspects of all UMS functions at the campus and system levels over the course of about five to ten years. Much was already in place or underway in 2015, and much remains to be done in 2016 and beyond. Conditions in Maine and the UMS have made such change not only warranted, but essential.

The Board, Chancellor, presidents, provosts, and nearly 300 faculty and staff members statewide have stepped up to the academic challenges with energy and integrity. Major administrative changes are already in place and ongoing. Progress to date is impressive, given that higher education is an extraordinarily complex, regulated, interdependent enterprise.

Note, too, that faculty, staff, and administrators are taking on the change initiatives while also providing the services to students and the state for which they were hired, rather like changing the tires during a road race with no pit stop. In addition, it takes venture capital to support the expected costs of change, now estimated well into the millions of dollars. These and other incontrovertible realities mean that academic transformation takes years of disciplined hard work. One of the benefits of time is the opportunity to learn and recalibrate along the way.

Everyone I have worked with or observed during the year is talented, committed, creative, and incredibly resilient. The path is rocky. The state and its leaders can be confident that their university system is working diligently to improve quality, access, and fiscal sustainability in difficult and rapidly changing times. I have deep admiration for the campus and system leaders and the faculty members with whom I have worked. Thank you for showing us all what “stepping up to the plate” looks like. Difficult and even painful as it can be, this transformation has high potential to be well worthwhile.

Ellen Chaffee, Ph.D., 2015 Executive Director  
Academic Portfolio Review and Integration Process

## I. INTRODUCTION

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**Vision:** One University

**Purpose:** Build Futures – Strengthen Maine

As the 2015 Executive Director of Academic Portfolio Review and Integration Process, my contractual assignment includes establishing “an effective, ongoing process for system-wide academic program alignment.” My activities focused on a single initiative called APRIP or Program Integration, but success with academic program alignment depends heavily on nearly all aspects of the university system. Therefore this document focuses on both academics and the systemic capabilities that academic alignment requires, encompassing nearly all of what remains to be done to create One University.

Briefly put, I recommend celebrating and advancing the academic and non-academic accomplishments to date while shifting into a new stage of the transformation process that extends the academic trajectory while placing primary emphasis on generating revenue, financing and implementing essential infrastructure, and ensuring sufficient leadership for successful initiatives and a successful organizational culture.

The UMS transformation process can be seen in stages, the first three of which are already well established:

Stage 1: Issue identification and vision development

Stage 2: Major administrative changes

Stage 3: Academic Transformation – program development, pilot, assessment

***Stage 4, beginning in 2016: Develop and implement essential major resource and capability requirements***

Stage 5: Academic Transformation – Implementation stage. Continue to build futures and strengthen Maine by driving academic changes that improve quality, access, and fiscal sustainability

Work on the academic side during 2015 has revealed the extent to which the full potential of academic alignment depends upon non-academic changes, primarily through an array of infrastructure that creates essential capabilities. During the next stage, while the infrastructure is put in place, academic leaders should continue to develop existing and voluntary collaborative academic programs/recommendations and engage faculty in planning and preparing themselves for further academic transformation once the necessary systems are running.

## II. PERSPECTIVE ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAGE 4

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The Board has options in deciding on the road ahead for the University of Maine System. This report supports an option that is profoundly challenging – so much so that it may seem unwise or impossible to some. The term “insurmountable opportunity” comes to mind. It represents a BHAG – Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal. But it’s not new – it’s the goal you already have.

By facing up relatively early to its demographic and enrollment challenges with a vision and hard work, Maine has created an opportunity to set a new standard of quality, access, and sustainability for public higher education systems in the dramatically different conditions of today and tomorrow. The recommendations at the end of this report aim to support and supplement existing plans to seize and achieve that opportunity.

Upon hearing about the work underway in Maine, one prominent expert on academic innovation commented, “Oh, great! They are going to jump from the year 2000 to 2025 without making all the mistakes the rest of us have been making.” This is an image of Maine’s opportunity. Understandably, it’s not easy. Whether it is insurmountable depends on many variables. I have recommended this road because the leadership, faculty, and staff are up to the challenge and because I agree that it is the right thing to do.

Very substantial financial investments are required for a successful transformation – far more than may have been evident at the beginning of this journey. Recent plans call for nearly \$60 million in essential academic and academic-related infrastructure. My recommendation is based on the expected long-term strategic value of the transformation and my confidence in the people who are here to lead and participate in it along with additional required key personnel. The crucial question is whether sufficient financial resources can be secured. It is up to the Board of Trustees and the Chancellor to assess the financial feasibility of continuing down this path.

This report recommends a new stage in the transformation that focuses heavily on the investments that are essential to a successful transformation – that is, generating revenue through a combination of fund-raising, financial planning, and enrollment/retention development. This should be no surprise to those in the private sector - venture capital is always part of the plan for new business or major change. While efforts to reduce cost marginally must continue, they must not be allowed to eat further into the system’s capacity to deliver its mission. No organization can cut its way to success.

On the campuses, the recommended next stage shifts gears fully into tuition revenues through enrollment and retention with system support as needed, including restoration of a sensible pattern of tuition rate increases. At the system level, the recommended next stage is all about recognizing that the front line people have delivered all the major contributions they can make to the transformation process without additional resources.

The Board and Chancellor need to anticipate at least three major challenges as they consider these recommendations. The obvious first one is securing sufficient funding. Second, people at

all levels within the system are over-extended and struggling to trust. It will be very hard for many to accept that new revenues will go to anything other than their own immediate needs. Leadership is required to provide at least baseline support for their work – especially those who are on board with the transformation - and very effective information, communication, and decision-making throughout the process.

Third, nearly everyone both within and outside the system has evolved into a mindset of impoverishment that can impede the aspirations and investments that success requires. Instead, the system needs to recognize that the transformation depends entirely on supporting and securing people who not only know what to do and how to do it, but also have the legitimacy and will power to get it done the right way. Implementing MaineStreet in campus silos years ago is the kind of thing that can happen without such people. Doing it right then would have saved untold thousands and potentially millions in both opportunity costs along the way and renovations now. Whether it relates to people, hardware, software, or other essentials, if the mindset of impoverishment leads to lowest-cost decisions with significant compromises, the transformation will fail.

Courage is required. Persistence is essential. None of this works without strong, effective academic leadership at the system level.

First and foremost, I recommend that the Board and the Chancellor make an explicit commitment not later than June 2016 either to financing the transformation as projected, expecting to provide an estimated \$60 million in transformation investment funding by 2020, or require the Chancellor to develop an affordable alternative pathway.

By continuing down the challenging road the system has chosen, this report:

- Honors and extends the transformative vision and work of the last several years
- Builds on hard-won advances toward a collaborative, service-oriented culture
- Posits that long-term success requires both cutting costs and increasing revenue and that the time has come to place more emphasis on the latter
- Recognizes that the system has learned many important lessons about transformative change and must continue to be flexible enough to act on what it learns
- Consistent with the best current thinking on organizational strategy, aims the system squarely toward its most fundamental purposes, **Build Futures – Strengthen Maine**, and the changes in organizational capabilities, focus, activities, and culture required to fully achieve those purposes

Regardless of what happens in other areas, academic transformation needs to shift into a different gear. **Program Integration** is in the process of implementing all that can reasonably be done within existing constraints. **Portfolio Review** is stalled. It needs to be redefined to include only growth-oriented work, using recent data to identify and develop new or revised academic programs with high enrollment potential. **Pruning academic programs** that are not mission-critical, needed by the state, or fiscally sustainable, which is the other part of what is now called Portfolio Review, must be done. It should be ongoing as an administrative function; it is not transformative. **Mission Differentiation** at the system level is also stalled. Despite a series of discussions, the Presidents Council has not yet provided the Board and Chancellor with a recommendation.

### III. TRANSITION FROM STAGE 3 TO 4: RECOGNIZE PROGRESS; RECOMMIT OR REVISE PLANS

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- A. Celebrate stages 1-3 of the transformation process, appreciate those who made them possible, and inform both external and internal audiences of progress and plans for the transformation of Maine's university system.

Recognize and celebrate the many achievements of stages 1, 2, and 3, and thank change leaders and participants. For example, regularly publish and disseminate a compendium that celebrates specific results and lessons learned. Review the results and lessons at a Board of Trustees meeting. Produce the first such compendium or an alternative major recognition initiative not later than May 15, 2016, accompanied by a major internal and external communications initiative. Specifically recognize those whose contributions extended well beyond their job description.

- B. Make an explicit commitment not later than June 2016 either to financing the transformation as projected and expecting to provide an estimated \$60 million in transformation investment funding by 2020, or require the Chancellor to develop a more affordable alternative pathway. The core question is whether the Board and the Chancellor are willing and believe that they are able to lead to this level of funding over about a four-year period.

The commitment involves three major questions: (1) will achieving One University yield a sustainable business model, (2) how much transformational investment is required over time, and (3) is it feasible to secure funding at that level in timely fashion.

To address the first question, whether One University represents a viable business model, I suggest that the Chancellor immediately commission a comprehensive report with scenarios showing one or more examples of how functioning as One University can make the system overall fiscally sustainable while maintaining or improving quality and access. Such a report can provide a sensitivity analysis that will assist decision-making throughout the process by making the critical variables more clear. Detailed modeling requires considerable time and expense, neither of which is available. Ideally, a report sufficient for "go/no go" decision-making could be produced by April making use of existing data and reasonable assumptions.

The second question is how much investment capital is required and in what timeframe. The work of the Capital Investment Sub Committee is central to these deliberations. The technology plan and Unified Online plan together anticipate requiring nearly \$60 million, much of it for one-time investments. This report recommends additional investments in change leadership and information for rational decision-making that are not yet defined or budgeted.

The third question is whether the Board and Chancellor can envision developing funding sources for both transformation investments and closing the structural budget gap.<sup>1</sup> Emphasizing enrollment and tuition development in stage 4 will help with but not solve the budget gap. An estimated \$30 million has been tentatively identified for transformational investment, leaving a balance of about \$30 million needed over four years.

In any case, the system has passed the point of no return on the journey to transformational change – the question is not whether, but how. Progress on initiatives that are currently underway must not be allowed to lose either commitment or momentum. The Board needs to decide to either stay or modify the course as soon as possible and not later than June 2016.

## IV. STAGE 4, THE ACADEMIC ROAD TO ONE UNIVERSITY

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During stage 4, focus on developing and implementing major resource and capability requirements. Some of the most promising academic collaboration opportunities cannot be achieved until considerable infrastructure development and changes in academic governance have occurred. Many good ideas are already on the table awaiting such developments. Therefore, implementation of existing options will continue, but no new initiatives to develop academic collaborations are proposed in stage 4.

The focus for stage 4 is on (a) building essential capabilities and revenues, (b) implementing existing collaborative programs and proposals, and (c) generating the leadership, revenues, and activities required for further transformation in stage 5.

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### A. INCREASE REVENUES AND CAPABILITIES; DECREASE COSTS

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Strategic pursuit of evidence-based initiatives to build capabilities and revenues on several fronts is a key priority for stage 4. First, developments for unified online, technology, and change leadership require innovative, proactive financial plans. Second, now that essential program and market data are available, the system is in a position to grow enrollment aggressively by identifying and leveraging evidence-based opportunities to attract and retain more students. Third, use newly available data and academic judgment to streamline academic programs and

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<sup>1</sup> This report relates to transformation investment funding. In addition, the system aims to close the existing budget gap by 2019, currently estimated at \$25-50 million.



staffing. Finally, continue to implement the unified budget, administrative reviews, and mission differentiation.

### **Make and fund financial plans, implement essential physical and human infrastructure**

- Fund and implement the Unified Online plan
- Fund and implement the technology plan, including integrated MaineStreet, system-wide data governance, and institutional research.
- Plan for and fund the human infrastructure required to strengthen the culture for continual change through stages 4 and 5, including academic executive leadership, internal communication, professional development, process improvement, institutional research, and collaboration.
- Make financing these activities the Chancellor's top priority. Consider a blue-ribbon advisory team of business, political, and finance leaders to assist with planning and executing a funding strategy. Board of Visitors members could provide important support both on and beyond the advisory team. Ensure access to top quality expertise in strategic financial planning. To allow the Chancellor to provide this high level of external and financial leadership, have him delegate responsibility and accountability for the internal transformational changes outlined here to one or two people at the Vice Chancellor level.

### **Increase tuition revenues**

- Pursue evidence-based enrollment and retention initiatives; leverage existing academic programs with high short-term enrollment potential; implement modest annual tuition increases. Provide a comprehensive report to the Board reviewing existing initiatives, recommended additional options with near-term impact, their funding requirements, and their anticipated enrollment impact over the next three years.
- Working from a statewide, collaborative perspective, develop business plans for new academic programs with strong market potential; implement those that promise net revenue soon enough to justify any up-front costs. Selecting, allocating, and recommending these programs is the responsibility of the VCAA and CAOs, recognizing that the VCAA reserves the right to make independent recommendations to the Chancellor and the Board.

### **Prune academic costs based on data and judgment**

- Terminate academic programs based on financial sustainability, mission centrality, and state need. Use newly available program costing data as one component of the decision process, recognizing its inherent limitations. This is a responsibility of the VCAA and CAOs, recognizing that the VCAA reserves the right to make independent recommendations to the Chancellor and the Board. Reserve the term "portfolio review" for the more visible, positive process of identifying and developing new market-based, purpose-driven programs as above.

- Analyze faculty workload on all campuses, recognizing differences in mission-based expectations. Adjust any significant variations that are not sufficiently justifiable. This is a responsibility of the VCAA and CAOs, recognizing that the VCAA reserves the right to make independent recommendations to the Chancellor and the Board

**Implement the unified budget, complete the administrative reviews, and bring the mission differentiation process to a successful conclusion**

- The unified budget is a critical component of One University. While much has been accomplished through administrative reviews, additional efforts will help ensure their long-term success.
- The Presidents Council has analyzed and discussed mission differentiation but has not come to conclusions that are ready for Board review. Other academic decisions related to mission differentiation (especially portfolio review and academic program streamlining) need to proceed. The proposed new Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs may be able to provide expert impartial guidance to ensure that the recommendations truly differentiate the campuses while also leaving each with meaning opportunities for growth. Achieving that end is important, but essential academic decisions should not be delayed in its absence.

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**B. ADVANCE EXISTING COLLABORATIVE OPPORTUNITIES; REVISE OR SUPPLEMENT ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE AS NEEDED.**

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Academic collaboration requires additional work, both to follow up on stage 3 and to prepare for stage 5, primarily (a) following up to realize the benefits of existing investments in collaborative programs and (b) developing an altered or supplemental academic governance model to accommodate collaborative programs.

**Follow up on existing and planned collaborations**

- Canvass all 16 Program Integration programs/disciplines and pre-existing collaborations for information about status, results, and needs.
- Wherever needs are identified, assign them to appropriate leaders for follow-up, identify/assist in securing essential resources, or work with the program/discipline to reshape as needed to achieve desired results within constraints.
- Give the resource and capability requirements of collaborating programs and disciplines priority consideration in budgeting, systems development, and technology development processes
- Do not conduct a third round of APRIP/Program Integration during stage 4.

**Encourage and support voluntary campus-based initiatives** to improve quality, access, and fiscal sustainability, especially those that involve collaboration and innovation.

**Develop new academic governance capabilities** and faculty personnel options for phase 5 and beyond that enable and support collaborative academic programs. Ensure compliance with accreditation requirements and, if appropriate and helpful, recommend a system-level approach to accreditation. Plan for other academic support areas such the need to fund broader access to library resources, especially for collaborative and online programs.

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### C. ENSURE STRONG, EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP, ROLE DEFINITION, AND CULTURE

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The context for all American higher education institutions is dramatically different than it was only a few years ago, and there is no going back. Organizations that understand how to change continually are much more likely to succeed in the long term than those that do not. That means they must shift their culture from organizational survival to fulfilling the organization's most fundamental purposes. The Presidents Council has proposed this purpose statement for UMS: "Build Futures – Strengthen Maine."

Few (if any) universities have fully made that shift. With leadership and conscious commitment, Maine has the potential to be among the first.

The decision-making culture among system and campus leaders is a concern, however. Relative to other systems, UMS leaders are unusually deferential to consensus, especially consensus among the presidents. Admirable in many respects, this culture needs reconsideration during a major transformation process with many interacting parts. The arrival of several new presidents has the potential to compound the problem while they get up to speed.

#### **Revise and clarify the top-level academic decision culture**

- Ambiguity about roles among the Presidents Council, Chief Academic Officers, Chancellor, and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (or interim) is creating unnecessary barriers to timely system progress.
- Leaders must maintain the existing mutual respect among campus and system leaders, engage in significant consensus-seeking discussions with candor, and reach consensus if they are able. However, consensus does not mean 100% agreement, and reaching an impasse cannot be allowed to prevent timely decisions. Consultation is essential; consensus is not. Shift the presumption of final decision authority on Presidents Council matters from consensus to the Chancellor and on Chief Academic Officers from consensus to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. If necessary, revise policies or job descriptions accordingly. Both the presidents and the provosts should expect

that the final authority for system-level decisions belongs with their respective system-level executive officers.

- Create an expectation within the Presidents Council that the chief academic officers' work does not require secondary review by the Presidents Council except on a case-by-case basis as specifically determined. Effective offline communication between presidents and provosts and mutual understanding of the academic decision domain parameters should replace the back-and-forth that sometimes happens now.

### **Hire academic executive leadership**

The system needs a full-time Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs as well as a full-time Assistant or Associate Vice Chancellor For Academic Affairs

- Consider making the UMS Chief Student Affairs Officer an Associate Vice Chancellor reporting to the VCAA. Through coordinated efforts, these three leaders can provide the integrated, confident, forward-focused leadership required in academic and student affairs.
- Commit to having provosts continue to report to campus presidents unless and until the Presidents Council recommends otherwise or the strong collaborative and transformational leadership of the provosts erodes to the point of threatening essential progress.

Responsibilities of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs could include:

- Chair the Chief Academic Officers group.
- Lead an ongoing multi-year large-scale academic transformation initiative involving multiple strategies to achieve ambitious mission-critical goals: to increase quality, access, and financial sustainability.
- Orchestrate across all functions that are required to define and support academic transformation, such as priority setting, resource allocation, engagement, communication, policy development, and substantive progress. Participate in decisions on all other major components of the One University transformation.
- Lead development and implementation of statewide academic governance, policy and procedures in partnership with the campus chief academic officers.

### **Build a positive, purpose-directed culture of service and collaboration**

Make “Build Futures – Strengthen Maine” (or a successor purpose statement if desired) a highly visible driver for all decisions and cornerstone for agendas, events, publications, goals, and performance reviews ... make it the core of all UMS activities and transformations. It should become the answer to “why we do X and “whether we will do Y.”

Feelings of uncertainty among system and campus personnel are inevitable in these times, and especially with significant personnel cuts, resource constraints, and transformational change. Information, communication, and transparency must continue and increase within the system. Identify and address or resolve major causes of uncertainty among campus personnel, whether by making a decision, committing to certain criteria by which a decision will be made, formally postponing a decision until an identifiable time, making the dynamics and dilemmas of the situation perfectly clear to those who may be affected, or by other means. Absent an unpredictable catastrophe, uphold a previous commitment. Send clear, consistent messages.

Increase both internal and external communication in accordance with a proactive plan for transparency, advocacy, and focus. Engage partners such as Boards of Visitors members.

#### **Assign Stage 4 leadership responsibilities**

As noted above, engage the Chancellor to secure funding for major initiatives, while also focusing his attention on external relationships and high-level direction setting and monitoring of strategic direction.

Expect the Chancellor to delegate responsibility and accountability for internal strategic execution to one or more other system leaders as outlined above.

Expect the Presidents Council to accept significant responsibility and accountability for general oversight of internal strategy execution

Expect the VCAA and Chief Academic Officers group to accept significant responsibility and accountability for academic transformation.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Board, Chancellor, and other system and campus leaders have launched a visionary process that holds great promise to put Maine at the forefront of public higher education quality, access, and fiscal sustainability in order to “Build Futures, Strengthen Maine.” To move that process into its next stage, I recommend:

1. Recognizing progress to date, thanking participants, and regularly reviewing transformational achievements.
2. That the Board and Chancellor make a clear public commitment not later than June 2016 to securing the human and financial resources to complete the transition by 2020 or to an alternate plan if this is not feasible.
3. Funding and implementing initiatives for which plans are in already place, including Unified Online, Information Technology, Unified Budget, and Mission Differentiation.
4. Developing and funding a human resource plan that addresses the need for change leadership and rational management functions including data and information for management decisions, communications, organizational effectiveness, collaboration support, recognition, and other functions that are critical to transformation.
5. Giving high visibility and priority to initiatives that will increase enrollment and tuition revenues, starting with a comprehensive report to the Board to review existing initiatives, recommended options with near-term impact, their funding requirements, and their anticipated enrollment impact over the next three years.
6. Following through on the academic transformation work plan with leadership from existing and new personnel, including a Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.
7. That the Chancellor, with Board support, set strategic goals and lead external relations and finance/fund-raising for transformation initiatives and delegate to one or two Vice Chancellors responsibility for implementing internal transformation initiatives.
  - a. The Vice Chancellor(s) should confer extensively and work collaboratively with councils and staff. They and the Chancellor should be members of the Presidents Council. The Presidents Council should review and revise its roles and operations to ensure it is positioned to oversee the transformation at a high level and help support the change process while delegating the work of implementation to other academic and administrative leaders.
  - b. I recommend that the Chancellor increase the schedule of regular meetings with the Vice Chancellors and selected other system-level leaders to monitor overall progress and address major concerns that may arise across functional areas and require intervention.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this extraordinary process, and all best wishes.