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July 10, 2015

Dr. James H. Page
Chancellor
University of Maine System
16 Central Street
Bangor, ME 04401-5106

Dear Chancellor Page:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on June 2, 2015, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the information submitted by the University of Maine System and voted the following:

that the Commission is open in principle to accrediting what are now the seven Universities in the University of Maine System as a single institution if the institution meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*;

that the Commission understands that the single institution may operate with a tiered system of admissions, programs, and research focus;

that in considering the accreditation for a single institution, the Commission will also want to understand its relationship to the University of Maine System;

that the schedule of reports and visits to the seven University of Maine institutions previously established through Commission action will continue, with each to include, in addition to matters previously specified, an update on the progress toward integration from the point of view of the institution reporting;

that the University of Maine System and the seven Universities be asked to submit a report for consideration in Spring 2016 regarding progress toward integrating the seven universities into one institution that will meet the Commission's Standards, along with the anticipated timeline going forward;

that the Commission will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the single institution once it has been established and asks that at least a year's notice be given so that all arrangements for comprehensive evaluation can be made by the institution and the Commission;

that in the intervening time the Commission may ask for additional reports or schedule an advisory visit regarding progress toward integration; and that the System, with the institutions, may also initiate reports to the Commission or request an advisory visit or an additional meeting with the Commission.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The information submitted by the University of Maine System was clear and helpful in outlining the economic, demographic, and financial conditions facing the System and the seven Universities. We understand that Maine is facing a nearly 20% decrease in high school graduates in the current decade, expects that state appropriations and tuition increases will not significantly exceed inflation, and projects a structural budget gap of \$75M by FY2019. With Maine's population base of 1.3 million, the System and its Universities have concluded that operating seven separate institutions plus a system office, is unsustainably expensive. We also understand the System's general intentions going forward to develop a One University model, maintaining the "multi-campus, mission-differentiated" approach, and to seek a single accreditation. The Commission applauds the University of Maine System and the seven Universities for your willingness to take on these difficult challenges, and the creativity and good will being brought to the work as established by the report submitted in advance of the June meeting and the interaction at the meeting. The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with you and is grateful for your candor in the discussion.

The Commission is open in principle to accrediting what are now the seven Universities in the University of Maine System as a single institution, as it takes no position on the organization of public higher education in a state as long as each institution seeking accreditation – or to continue in accreditation – meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*. The Commission realizes there are many elements to be decided or developed in order to have the integration appropriate for a single accreditation. Therefore, the Commission wants to make sure that its feedback and advice here is not characterized as "pre-approval."

The Commission understands that the single institution may operate with a tiered system of admissions, programs, and research focus, maintaining the research intensity of the Orono campus. To the extent the system is tiered, the Commission wishes to be kept informed and asks that the single institution address these and potentially other dimensions in its self-study for accreditation. The Commission wishes to be assured that the University is clear internally and externally in these matters. One aspect of a tiered system is whether, for example, a B.A. in mathematics would be the same at any campus at which it could be earned, and if not, how the various degrees would be represented.

Because the Commission accredits institutions not systems, in considering accreditation for a single institution for what are now seven University of Maine institutions, the Commission will want to understand the relationship between the institution and the surviving System. In the Commission's experience, system offices are established to coordinate, promote, lead, serve, and ensure the quality of separately accredited institutions. The Commission appreciates that the movement toward a single accreditation for public institutions can only realistically be coordinated and led by a system office; at the same time it looks forward to understanding the relationship between a 'single accreditation' and any surviving System.

The schedule of reports and visit to the seven University of Maine institutions, sent to you earlier will remain in place so that the Commission can continue to monitor its separately accredited institutions for as long as that structure continues. We ask that, in addition to matters previously specified, each report include an update on the progress toward integration from the perspective of the institution, including any significant anticipated changes, so that the Commission can fulfill its responsibilities with respect to each of the separately accredited Universities.

In order to promote communication between the System and the Universities and the Commission, we ask that the University of Maine and the seven Universities submit a report in Spring 2016

providing an update on progress toward integrating the Universities into one institution that will meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*. The Commission reminds the System and the Universities that the *Standards for Accreditation* are currently being revised and encourages your participation and the participation of the Universities in the revision process. The Commission anticipates approving the revised Standards in early 2016 and having a final draft available late in 2015. We also ask that the Spring 2016 report include a timeline of the integration process going forward.

The Commission will schedule a comprehensive evaluation of the single institution once it has been established. We ask that you notify the Commission at least one year in advance of when you anticipate the integration will be complete. This request will allow Commission staff sufficient time to work with the institution on the self-study and to compose an evaluation team to undertake the visit that will be part of the comprehensive evaluation. Normally the Commission's decision occurs one semester after the visit. The Commission understands that, even assuming integration to a single institution with a single accreditation, the further process of integration will continue for the foreseeable future.

We understand you anticipate that the process will take two years and acknowledge that a different schedule may develop. To further promote communication, either the Commission or the System and its Universities may request an advisory visit or additional reports or another meeting with the Commission.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the information submitted by the University of Maine System and hopes that its preparation has contributed to your planning process. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

The Commission appreciated the opportunity to meet with you; Samuel Collins, Board Chair; Susan Hunter, President, University of Maine; Kathryn Foster, President, University of Maine at Farmington; and Rebecca Wyke, Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the System and Universities' constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the governing board chairperson of action on the accreditation status of affiliated institutions. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Samuel Collins. The System and Universities are free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Patricia Maguire Meservey

PMM/sjp
Enclosures

cc: Mr. Samuel Collins
President Glenn Cummings
President Kathryn Foster
President Joyce Hedlund
President Susan Hunter
President John Murphy
President Linda Schott
President Rebecca Wyke