



NECHE

New England Commission
of Higher Education

September 14, 2018

Mr. James Erwin
University of Maine System
251 Estabrooke Hall
15 Estabrooke Drive
Orono, ME 04469

Dear Mr. Erwin:

Enclosed for you is a copy of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education's letter of August 8, 2018 to Presidents Rice and Short notifying them of the action taken by the Commission at its April, 2018 meeting. It is being sent to you in keeping with the Commission's policy to routinely inform board chairs of such actions.

Sincerely,


Barbara E. Brittingham

BEB/sjp

Enclosure

cc: President Rice
President Short

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Providence, RI

JOHN M. SWEENEY (2021)
Providence College

President of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neasc.org

Sr. Vice President of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrien@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
CAROL L. ANDERSON
canderson@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
LAURA M. GAMBINO
lgambino@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
PAULA A. HARBECKE
pharbecke@neasc.org



NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Worcester Polytechnic Institute

President or the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neasc.org

Senior Vice President of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrilon@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
CAROL L. ANDERSON
canderson@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
PAULA A. HARBECKE
pharbecke@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
TALA KHUDAIRI
tkhudairi@neasc.org

August 8, 2018

Dr. Raymond Joseph Rice
President
University of Maine at Presque Isle
181 Main Street
Presque Isle, ME 04769

Dr. John Short
President
University of Maine at Fort Kent
23 University Drive
Fort Kent, ME 04742

Dear President Rice :

I write to inform you that at its meeting on April 20, 2018, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the request submitted by University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) and University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) for an advisory opinion concerning its "Collaboration Proposal." Because there is no formal proposal, there is no Commission decision at this time, but rather, as requested by the Universities, an advisory opinion that we hope will be helpful to the institutions.

The Commission commends University of Maine at Presque Isle and University of Maine at Fort Kent for cooperatively developing their "Collaboration Proposal." Through prior interaction with the University of Maine System, the Commission has become aware of the compelling economic, demographic, and financial conditions facing Maine, the System, and its Universities. Indeed, in 2015, the System approached the Commission seeking an advisory opinion regarding combining the then seven separately accredited institutions into a single institution, to which the Commission responded positively.

The Commission found the rationale for the proposal submitted to be thorough and compelling, and observed that it appears to be consistent with the goal of the System's "One University" initiative. The proposed collaboration between UMPI and UMFK – some of which has been initiated – describes the intention, plans, and the beginning details for a deep partnership between the two institutions to better serve the needs of students and the sparsely populated region of northern Maine. The stated goal of the collaboration is to ensure that both institutions remain healthy and independent, and that they flourish by collaborating and sharing resources in a strategically planned manner.

Clearly, there are challenges. A thoughtful program "examination" process initiated by the System, designed to identify programs with few faculty resources, students, and/or graduates, found that 60% and 50% of the programs offered at UMFK and UMPI, respectively, met the criteria for "examination," a clear indicator that significant change is needed. Ideally, the

proposed model will allow for appropriate restructuring, resource sharing, and cost savings, and, at the same time, encourage each institution to develop and retain its signature programs and accreditation with the Commission.

We understand a Collaboration Committee has been formed to identify key opportunities, a process, and a way to ensure a seamless experience for UMPI and UMFK students. Key elements of the plan include cross-listed or share courses, strategic joint faculty appointments, enhanced student support, and some shared use of technology. Existing or planned shared positions include a Director of Financial Aid and a Director of Enrollment Management; in addition, the collaboration envisions a close working relationship between the institutions' registrars. Critical issues that still require attention include: the development of a strategic implementation plan that details revenue sharing between the two institutions; setting expectations and processes for faculty review; working out a seamless accounting system for awarding credit and satisfying course requirements; and establishing common curricular expectations to support student success.

The Collaboration Proposal recognizes that cross-listed courses will be a significant component of the partnership and outlines models for ensuring program continuation on either or both the campuses. We take favorable note that, to ensure the quality, integrity, and effectiveness of collaborative programs, a new Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Collaboration and Strategic Alliance has been established on a pilot basis.

We also understand that discussions of the approaches to and implications of the proposed cross-campus collaborations through the lens of the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* has begun. To ensure continued compliance, these implications will need to be further defined as the collaboration develops and expands. For example, maintaining consistency in learning outcomes and academic standards, as well as program delivery systems for students, staff, and faculty, will need to be carefully considered. The Commission expresses its concern that courses cross-listed among multiple institutions may reach the point where the Commission can no longer hold the accredited institution accountable for the quality of its academic program. You are encouraged to work with Commission staff on this matter in particular.

As full implementation of cross-listed courses, joint positions, and delivery of the shared programs across UMFK and UMPI is realized, it would appear that the two institutions may be evolving toward a single institution with two campuses rather than two separately accredited institutions. The Commission also welcomes dialogue about this evolving collaboration and is open to considering the implications for accreditation.

Finally, because this review is preliminary and advisory, the Commission reserves the right to request additional clarification or assurances at the time the University submits its formal proposal for a substantive change. As you develop your plans and as you prepare your substantive change proposal, we encourage you to work closely with Commission staff who are available to help you understand the Commission's expectations with regard to the arrangements you are contemplating.

The schedule of reports and visits of the two Universities will remain in place so that the Commission can continue to monitor its separately accredited institutions. We ask that, in addition to matters previously specified, each report include an update on the Collaboration Proposal outlined in the current report, plus any new collaborations that may develop from the perspective of the institutions, including any significant anticipated changes, so that the Commission can fulfill its responsibilities with respect to each of the separately accredited Universities.

Dr. Raymond Joseph Rice
August 8, 2018
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The Commission expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review the materials submitted by University of Maine at Presque Isle and University of Maine at Fort Kent and hopes this advisory process has been useful to the institution. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

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

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/sjp

Enclosure

cc: James Erwin