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May 10, 2019

Dr. James H. Page  
Chancellor  
University of Maine System  
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Orono, ME 04469

Dear Chancellor Page:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on April 12, 2019, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the report submitted by the University of Maine System and voted the following:

that the University of Maine System provide a report for consideration in Spring 2020 regarding its progress with respect to offering multi-institutional academic degree and certificate programs in a manner consistent with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*;

that the System be reminded of the requirement that students complete at least one-fourth of their undergraduate credits, including substantial advanced work in the major or concentration, at the institution awarding the degree.

The report submitted by the University of Maine System (UMS) was accepted because it was generally responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letter of May 18, 2018. The Commission commends the University of Maine System for its commitment to serve the people of Maine while diligently pursuing ways to bring all of its resources into focused support for an aging and declining population. The Commission recognizes the particular challenges facing the Maine System and looks forward to continue working together in the future.

We appreciate the response to the issue of reporting relationships for the Chief Business Officer of each University in the System, now resolved by the joint reporting relationship to the respective University President and to the System's Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, effective July 1, 2018. We are gratified to learn of the benefits of the new structure reported by University Presidents as well as System officials, with the Chief Business Officers now having greater opportunity to participate in discussions regarding issues such as health insurance or benefit changes that affect employees at their institutions.

The issue of developing collaborative academic programs remains more complex, and potentially more problematic. The System, in concert with its accredited institutions, has made progress on a pilot cross-listing of a single course in meteorology and is working on a Memorandum of Understanding among the campuses regarding cross-listing of geospatial courses. The UMS Board of Trustees has adopted revisions to its policy on Intra-system Student Exchange to provide governance-level support for these cross-listing efforts. We also note the System-wide Multi-Campus Program Task Force that is working to develop a more comprehensive approach to cross-listing, consistent with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*.

The work to date on multi-campus collaborations has highlighted the challenges, including governance; tuition, resources, and revenue-sharing; and academic and student policies and procedures. We understand from the report that the greatest challenge within the System for multi-campus programs under the current accreditation arrangement is academic governance. Currently, the models identified include a lead campus model, a model of distributed oversight among participating campuses, and the possibility of creating a separate accredited academic entity for the System. We understand that the lead campus model has not been embraced by most faculty and that this may hamper or stall future collaboration under this model. We further note that the distributed oversight model brings its own challenges for implementation and potentially for accreditation.

Given the above and the Commission's letter of March 13, 2019 regarding possible accreditation of the University of Maine System, unless the Commission and the System have an agreed-upon timeline for System accreditation, the System is asked to report its progress on multi-campus academic collaboration for Commission consideration in Spring 2020. This matter is addressed by these portions of our standards on *The Academic Program, Organization and Governance*, and *Educational Effectiveness* (cited in the following paragraph) as well as:

Through its system of academic administration and faculty participation, the institution demonstrates an effective system of academic oversight, assuring the quality of the academic program wherever and however it is offered (4.5).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its academic programs under institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Review of academic programs includes evidence of student success and program effectiveness and incorporates an external perspective. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.6).

The institution demonstrates its clear and ongoing authority and administrative oversight for the academic elements of all courses for which it awards institutional credit or credentials (4.32).

We remind the System that the Commission's standard on *The Academic Program* specifies that "[s]tudents complete at least one-fourth of their undergraduate credits, including substantial advanced work in the major or concentration, at the institution awarding the degree" (4.36). While this portion of the standard was cited correctly in the body of the report, we draw attention to it here because Attachment 5, outlining the Governance and Academic Policies, said, in part, "UG students must complete one fourth of their requirements (approx[imately] 30 credits for undergraduate [degrees] ... UMS has some campuses that consider this the last 30 credits completed while others consider any 30 credits ...." The Commission's requirement is consistent with our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*: "Based on verifiable information, the institution understands what its students have gained as a result of their education and has useful evidence about the success of its recent graduates. This information is used for planning and improvement, resource allocation, and to inform the public about the institution. Student achievement is at a level appropriate for the degree awarded" (*Educational Effectiveness*, Statement of the Standard).

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The requirement is also consistent with our standard on *Organization and Governance*: "[t]he institution's chief academic officer ... in concert with the faculty and other academic administrators, is responsible for the quality of the academic program. The institution's organization and governance structure assure the integrity and quality of academic programming however and wherever offered" (3.14).

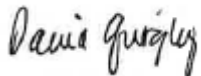
The Commission asks that University of Maine System submit the requested information by March 1, 2020. Please send four paper copies and one electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) to the NECHE offices.

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 Mr. James R. Erwin. 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.

Finally, Chancellor Page, on behalf of the Commission, thank you for all you have done to help the Commission deepen its understanding and appreciation of public systems of higher education, not only in Maine, but throughout New England, particularly in these times of challenging demographics and workforce needs of states.

Sincerely,



David Quigley

DQ/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. James R. Erwin  
Dr. Eric Brown, University of Maine at Farmington  
Dr. Glenn A. Cummings, University of Southern Maine  
Dr. Joan Ferrini-Mundy, University of Maine  
Dr. Raymond Joseph Rice, University of Maine at Presque Isle  
Dr. John Short, University of Maine at Fort Kent  
Dr. Rebecca Wyke, University of Maine at Augusta