

# UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

## UNIFIED ACCREDITATION RECOMMENDATION

*“An Excellent Opportunity to Pioneer in the Pursuit of Excellence”*



---

*[It] shall be [a] fundamental polic[y] adhered to in the state's public higher educational planning ... to develop, maintain and support a structure of public higher education in the State which will assure the most cohesive system possible for planning, action and service in providing higher educational opportunities.*

20-A Maine Rev Stat § 10902(3)

---



**Chancellor Dannel P. Malloy**  
**Chief of Staff and General Counsel James B. Thelen**  
**September 2019**

## INTRODUCTION

At the July 2019 meeting, University of Maine System Board Chair James Erwin stated that it was the Board's sense that, in order for UMS to move forward with and attain the strategic goals established in the December 2018 *Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs*,<sup>1</sup> UMS needs to be able to deliver significantly more collaborative, market-relevant cross-campus programming. In recent years, however, there have been significant challenges to developing, delivering, and managing such programs at the scope, scale, and pace the Board determines to be necessary to meet Maine's higher education attainment needs, some of which stem from the fact that each UMS university is accredited separately from its sister campuses in the System.

Except for the University of Maine at Machias, which is accredited as a regional campus of the University of Maine, the University of Maine and other five UMS universities are currently separately accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), one of seven regional accreditors in the country recognized by the United States Department of Education to assess higher education institutional quality. While it is necessary that UMS universities be accredited, the fact of their separate accreditations requires that they each govern their own academic programs, which does not readily provide for, and for all practical purposes does not even permit, efficient governance, administration, and assessment at the System level of academic programs offered jointly by two or more universities. Yet both the UMS legal charter, a state law which establishes the System's organizational structure, and higher education public policy in Maine provide that this is one of the System's primary purposes – indeed, coordinated academic programming to serve the entire State of Maine was one of the core expectations the System's formation was meant to realize more than 50 years ago.

Recognizing these challenges, Chair Erwin asked UMS Chancellor Dannel Malloy to review UMS's accreditation status and provide recommendations for what accreditation structure is most likely to permit UMS to achieve its strategic goals and best serve the higher education needs of its students and the State of Maine.

This report reviews relevant UMS history and accreditation generally as well as within UMS. Based on this history, the Board's strategic priorities and interest in increasing collaborative cross-campus programs, the imperative to improve the UMS higher educational experience overall, and the State's interest in preserving all UMS universities where they currently exist, it is the Chancellor's recommendation that UMS universities begin a process to unify their accreditations to a statewide accreditation within the University of Maine System. The process should be undertaken based on the Guiding Principles set forth below, which were developed by the Chancellor, the UMS Presidents, and Senior System Staff.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs," December 2018 (UMS Board of Trustees Office).

## RELEVANT UMS HISTORY

At its formation in 1968, the University of Maine System united the University of Maine (with campuses under the University of Maine Board's jurisdiction at that time in Orono, Bangor, Lewiston-Auburn, Augusta, and Portland) with five then-existing state colleges governed by the State Board of Education – Gorham State College, Farmington State College, Aroostook State College, Washington State College and Fort Kent State College.<sup>2</sup> The System was formed in response to public recommendations that higher education in Maine be coordinated under a single governing board to avoid unnecessary duplication of academic programs and maximize the transferability of credits within and between the State's separate colleges and the University of Maine. Further goals of the System's creation were to develop arrangements for sharing the responsibility between the System's various campuses to offer and provide for specialized graduate and professional programs and university-based research, and even to share facilities – libraries, laboratories, and other resources – where feasible to do so. Since the System was to be a single State of Maine-chartered entity, it was expected that all faculty at the several campuses making up the System would be considered one faculty for the whole of the System.<sup>3</sup>

*An intended benefit of the System's formation was to ensure that its campuses planned and coordinated the academic programs available between them, even offering them cooperatively and jointly.* The Commission whose recommendations were behind the formation of the System described the matter as follows:

*While duplication of programs has been a serious shortcoming of higher education in the state of Maine, another shortcoming of equal or greater proportions (from which duplication often results) has been the absence of cooperative efforts among the public institutions ...*

*There are no reasons, legal or other, to prevent higher-education institutions in the state of Maine from doing things together; in fact there is increasingly ample evidence nationally to show that institutions working together, especially small ones (of which there are so many in Maine) can carry on more educational programs and conduct them better if joint efforts are involved. But in the past there has been no voluntary arrangement to foster such cooperation, nor sufficient coordination to achieve it, nor funds to support significant cooperative arrangements.<sup>4</sup>*

---

<sup>2</sup> In 1970 Gorham State College merged with the Portland campus, which itself separated from the University of Maine at the same time, to become the University of Maine at Portland-Gorham; in 1978 the name changed to the University of Southern Maine. As discussed in the text below, the System's Board renamed Farmington State College, Aroostook State College, Washington State College and Fort Kent State College as the University of Maine at Farmington, Presque Isle, Machias, and Fort Kent, respectively, in April 1970.

<sup>3</sup> See generally "The First Business of Our Times: A Report to the Advisory Commission for the Higher Education Study—State of Maine," (Academy for Educational Development, September 1966).

<sup>4</sup> "First Business," at 37-38.

To foster and even ensure such cooperation, coordination, and planning, the Commission recommended, among other things, that the System head (Chancellor) convene a council of the administrative heads of the System's campuses for the purpose of ensuring regular and close coordination of all programs, activities, and planning between the campuses.<sup>5</sup>

Soon after the System was formed, then-Chancellor Donald R. McNeil proposed, and the UMS Board adopted, the current naming convention for the universities making up the System:

- Aroostook State College became the *University of Maine at Presque Isle*;
- Farmington State College became the *University of Maine at Farmington*;
- Fort Kent State College became the *University of Maine at Fort Kent*;
- Washington State College became the *University of Maine at Machias*; and
- Gorham State College, joining with the University of Maine at Portland, became the *University of Maine at Portland-Gorham*.

Chancellor McNeil's expressed intent in having this uniformity in naming the System's campuses was to "*enhance the concept [of the System operating as] a single university.*"<sup>6</sup>

But a state-wide task force reviewing higher education in Maine a decade-and-a-half into the System's operation judged that the System had not then yet developed a comprehensive assessment of Maine's needs for higher education opportunity, including particularly any analysis of how its program offerings and coordination between the campuses to provide them met those needs.<sup>7</sup> The task force commended each System campus's attainment of regional accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (now NECHE)<sup>8</sup> as having contributed to academic quality, but also presciently observed that *the process of separate campus accreditation failed to address how any one or more of the campuses*

---

<sup>5</sup> "First Business," at 21. The recommendation for a campus-heads council convened by the System head finds manifestation today in the UMS Presidents' Council, which the Chancellor currently convenes monthly.

<sup>6</sup> UMS Board of Trustees Minutes, at 6, April 10, 1970 (UMS Board Office; emphasis added).

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Visiting Committee to the University of Maine, at 17 (R. Strider II, Chair, January 1986). In January 1984, a special Maine Commission on the Status of Education had recommended that "there be a public review of the University of Maine [S]ystem as a whole ...," to include review of the System's "overall mission and program priorities," its governance, the distinct mission of each campus, [and] the methods used for allocating funds among campuses ..." The Legislature established the commission in June 1984, and, in August 1984, Governor Joseph E. Brennan signed Executive Order 3 FY 84/85 to name members to what was called the Visiting Committee to the University of Maine and set its charge. The Committee's Report was transmitted in late December 1985. See Visiting Committee Report, at 2.

<sup>8</sup> The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) accredits higher education institutions in Maine, as well as New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. NECHE was formerly known as "NEASC," the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. NECHE began operating independently of NEASC in early 2018 to meet U.S. Department of Education requirements. NECHE continues to apply and enforce the higher education accreditation standards that were in effect through NEASC.

*contributed to the overall quality, purpose, and mission of the statewide System.*<sup>9</sup> The task force then boldly recommended that statewide/system-wide accreditation be considered:

The Committee recommends that efforts be made to have the accreditation process apply to the University System as well as to the separate entities within it. ... [T]he System as a whole has not received its own accreditation. There are instances throughout the country in which systemwide accreditation has been achieved. It would be desirable for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges to give special attention to the System at some juncture in the future.<sup>10</sup>



---

*The efficacy of the System is of central importance to the efficacy of the institutions that make up the whole.*

Report of the Visiting Committee to the University of Maine (1986)

---

Upon receipt of the Visiting Committee’s report, the UMS Board’s standing Educational Policy Committee considered its recommendations, including the recommendation to pursue a statewide, System-level accreditation. The Board’s committee “applaud[ed]” the Visiting Committee’s accreditation recommendation, calling it a “novel and intriguing concept” and “an excellent opportunity to pioneer in the pursuit of excellence.”<sup>11</sup> The full Board agreed, voting on February 24, 1986 to “seek accreditation for the System in an appropriate time frame.”<sup>12</sup>

But ten years on, another state-appointed review commission noted that UMS had apparently not given serious attention to statewide System-level accreditation for no other reason than that there did not then appear to be a recognized standard for accreditation of university systems across the country.<sup>13</sup> More generally, though the commission complimented the System’s educational organization and leadership, it noted that “fine tuning” was necessary to provide statewide vision, planning, coordination, and accountability. Further, it noted concern both in Maine and nationally of the inefficiencies of duplication of programs and services among System institutions at a time when state funding for higher education was shrinking.

---

<sup>9</sup> Visiting Committee Report, at 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*, at 24.

<sup>11</sup> “A Review and Evaluation of The Report of the Visiting Committee,” at 4 (UMS Board of Trustees Educational Policy Committee, February 24, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> UMS Board Minutes, at 6, February 24, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Final Report of the Commission on Higher Education Governance, App. Four (State of Maine, 1996).

Finally, the commission expressed concern that there was no clear information about, or availability or coordination of, statewide course and program offerings.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next two decades, facilities aged and costly-but-necessary maintenance was deferred. Enrollments failed to grow at the pace predicted by the 1985 commission. State appropriations did not keep pace with inflation or the System's rising expenses, and tuition rates climbed higher than Maine families could reasonably afford. Every System campus budget was strained to varying degrees by some combination of all three of the preceding factors. All the while, State needs for market-relevant academic programs grew, and the number of sufficiently credentialed citizens dwindled. And across the System, each university's separate NEASC (later NECHE) accreditation required that it maintain control over its own academic programming, with no clear standards to permit, let alone foster, innovative shared programs to make the most efficient use of limited academic resources between the System's campuses.<sup>15</sup>

Responding to many of these concerns, in early 2012, the UMS Board endorsed a set of goals and actions that would be foundational to what became the One University concept a few years later. Controlling student costs, imposing the first of six annual tuition freezes for in-state students, and fostering credit transfer both within the System and with Maine's Community College System were all key priorities.

Work began later that year on both a comprehensive intra-system block credit transfer policy and a general education block transfer agreement with the Maine Community College System, both of which became reality by late 2015. The work included key alignments of curriculum and general education requirements across the fourteen institutions of UMS and MCCS, respectively.

Administrative reviews began within UMS in 2013 to streamline Information Technology, Strategic Procurement, and Human Resources across the System, with the goal of eliminating the inefficiencies and inconsistencies inherent in having each System campus manage these functions separately. Facilities Management would follow by early 2015.

In mid-2014, the UMS Board adopted Strategic Outcomes, determining that it could not meet its statewide mission in either a financially responsible or sustainable way under its then-current business and organizational model. In the Strategic Outcomes, the Board declared that UMS would be an integrated system of distinct campuses, centers, and other facilities operating in concert to provide high-quality educational undergraduate and graduate opportunities that would be accessible, affordable, and relevant to the needs of Maine students, businesses, and communities.

In this environment, the One University concept was born. As conceived in early 2015 by then-Chancellor James Page, One University's goal was seven mission-differentiated, mutually

---

<sup>14</sup> Id., at 15-16, 18.

<sup>15</sup> See further discussion below at pp. 8-10.

dependent campuses operating as one fully integrated university singularly focused on student success and responsive service to the State of Maine.<sup>16</sup>

With most material administrative functions integrated across the System by then, UMS turned to academic integration. Through 2015, System-wide efforts toward academic planning and transformation, known as “Academic Portfolio Review and Integration Process” or “APRIP,” were led by Ellen Chaffee, Ph.D., and coordinated with the System’s Chief Academic Officers. Program Integration teams of faculty across the System were charged with developing recommendations for system-wide academic collaboration to improve quality, access, and financial sustainability.

With the academic integration work underway, the ultimate goal then expressed was to operate as One University – a single integrated statewide institution comprised of Maine’s seven public universities, offering both coordinated and integrated academic programming across the state. Indeed, in May 2015 – perhaps unknowingly harkening back to the February 1986 Board’s direction to seek a System accreditation “in an appropriate time frame” – Chancellor Page requested an advisory opinion from NEASC on the process for seeking a single accreditation for the UMS enterprise to replace the existing model of separate university accreditations. The UMS request was premised on the basic notion that, given its serious economic and demographic challenges, “[m]oving to a single accreditation [would] ... allow [UMS] a greater ability to offer new and enhanced programming to qualified students regardless of location.”<sup>17</sup>

NECHE responded favorably in July 2015, writing 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 ...” However, NECHE questioned whether the System as a whole could be the sole accredited entity, demonstrating what was then a fundamental misalignment between NECHE’s understanding that it could only accredit single universities as “institutions of higher education” and the University of Maine System’s chartered structure as a single institution of higher education made of up of Maine’s public universities.<sup>18</sup>

As late as Fall 2015, UMS remained committed to an operational transition to One University *that included pursuing a single accreditation through NECHE*. Chancellor Page shared a System-wide communication on behalf of the Presidents’ Council that explained both UMS’s intention to continue discussions with NECHE about transitioning to a single accreditation and the opportunities System university community members would have to provide input through the

---

<sup>16</sup> “One University for all of Maine,” February 10, 2015 (UMS Chancellor’s Office).

<sup>17</sup> James H. Page, Ph.D. letter to Dr. Barbara W. Brittingham, March 30, 2015, at 2; and Page letter to Brittingham, May 13, 2015, at 2 (UMS Chancellor’s Office). NECHE at that time was still known as NEASC.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Maguire Meservey letter to James H. Page, Ph.D., July 10, 2015, at 1, 2 (UMS Chancellor’s Office).

transition. Chancellor Page closed by noting that UMS would update NECHE about the status of its work in early 2016.<sup>19</sup>

But progress on academic integration proved difficult, and slow. In her January 2016 “Academic Transformation Recommendations for the University of Maine System” report to the UMS Board, Dr. Chaffee made the following relevant recommendations, among others:

- Academic portfolio review should continue, using data to identify and develop new or revised academic programs with high enrollment potential
- Give the resource needs of multi-campus collaborating programs priority consideration in budgeting and systems/technology development
- Academic programs that are not mission-critical, needed by the State, or fiscally sustainable should be discontinued, and work to do so should be ongoing in the regular course of academic administration
- Significant investments should be made in technology infrastructure and online academic program capacity and coordination (much of which was already planned or underway, even if resources had not then yet been identified)

Most significantly, Dr. Chaffee recommended that UMS develop new academic governance capabilities and faculty policies and assignment options to both enable and support collaborative multi-campus academic programs. Dr. Chaffee noted the importance of complying with accreditation requirements, but also clearly recommended that UMS take a system-level approach to accreditation if necessary to further develop collaborative academic programs.<sup>20</sup>

But by March 2016, Chancellor Page and the System Presidents turned the focus of their communications with NECHE to exploring whether System’s universities could continue to satisfy accreditation standards separately even as key One University efforts moved forward. Momentum waned on the direct pursuit of singly accrediting the System as a primary outcome of One University priorities – at least in part due to the understanding that NECHE did not then believe the System itself could be accredited.<sup>21</sup>

Still, a number of strategic initiatives continued through the present time, including several joint programs and collaborations between the universities – all manifestations of working together among and between the campuses as One University.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> James H. Page “Colleagues” Letter, August 28, 2015 (UMS Chancellor’s Office).

<sup>20</sup> Chaffee, Ellen-Earle, Ph.D., “Academic Transformation Recommendations for the University of Maine System, at 3, 6-8, January 24, 2016 (UMS Chancellor’s Office).

<sup>21</sup> James H. Page, Ph.D., and System Presidents’ letter to Dr. Barbara Brittingham, March 29, 2016 (UMS Chancellor’s Office).

<sup>22</sup> Over time, System leaders began to describe the One University initiative as “the framework by which UMS organizes and acts so as to bring all its resources into focused support for all Maine learners, businesses, and communities [...] driven by a realistic appraisal of Maine’s severe demographic and



By mid 2016, work was underway on a Unified Financial Management Structure. In October that year, the UMS Board approved the initial phases of the Maine Center for Graduate and Professional Studies, bringing the MBA programs from the University of Southern Maine and University of Maine together in a newly formed University of Maine Graduate School of Business (that included USM graduate business faculty) and joining it in an academic consortium along with the University of Maine School of Law and the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service.

At the same time, enrollment pressures and limited academic resources at several smaller campuses demanded more innovative One University solutions. The University of Maine at Machias, facing acute financial and operational strain, and the consequent potential loss of its NECHE accreditation as an independent institution, was joined with the University of Maine as its regional campus in mid 2017. By doing so, UMM retained its identity and status as an anchor institution in economically challenged Washington County and Downeast Maine, even though its ongoing accreditation continued as of July 1, 2018 only as a part of the University of Maine's accreditation. In Aroostook County, UMS initiated an ongoing and historic collaboration between the University of Maine at Presque Isle and the University of Maine at Fort Kent, with the institutions beginning to share programs<sup>23</sup> and administrative positions<sup>24</sup> to mitigate demographic and resource challenges in Maine's most remote rural area, even as each campus's independence and ongoing viability as separate institutions under current accreditation standards comes under heavy scrutiny from NECHE.<sup>25</sup>

In late 2016, following through on one of the Chaffee Report recommendations,<sup>26</sup> UMS hired Dr. Robert Neely as UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA) to lead academic transformation across Maine's public universities, with a specific focus on developing collaborative, multi-campus programming as an outgrowth of the previously-initiated "APRIP" process. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter, commenting on a few newly-developed multi-campus academic programs, NECHE (then NEASC) wrote:

---

fiscal facts and by the highly competitive and rapidly changing higher education landscape." See, e.g., "One University Accomplishments 2012-2019," at 1, May 2019 (UMS Chancellor's Office).

<sup>23</sup> For example, the University of Maine at Presque Isle began offering education degrees at Fort Kent after the University of Maine at Fort Kent's faculty in the program were lost due to attrition and retirement. Similarly, the University of Maine at Fort Kent began offering its nursing program at Presque Isle to meet a clear student need for such programming there. In each case, with the resource constraints each campus faced, it would have been financially impractical and imprudent for either university to restore or stand up a program its sister campus already offered nearby.

<sup>24</sup> UMFK and UMPI currently share four administrative positions: Director of Financial Aid, Executive Director of Enrollment Management, Dean of Students, and Registrar.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., David P. Angel letter to Dr. Raymond Joseph Rice and Dr. John Short, at 2, August 8, 2018 (UMS Chancellor's Office).

<sup>26</sup> See Chaffee, "Academic Transformation," at 9.

We applaud the fact that the System and its separate institutions are contemplating further cooperation to ensure that students enrolled in any of the Universities have as many academic options as reasonably possible. We understand that each of the current programs is governed by a steering committee with representation from the participating campuses. However, it is not clear to us who the responsible chief academic officer is for each of the multi-institutional organizational structures, at least in the short run, we find that the contemplated expansion of programs offered by multiple separate Universities will lead, in the longer run, to the System's Chief Academic Officer in effect becoming the Chief Academic Officer for individual Universities, at least where programs of multiple campuses are involved. *Such a situation would not be satisfactory to the Commission.*<sup>27</sup>

As the basis for its concerns, NECHE cited its Standards 3.14<sup>28</sup> and 4.5,<sup>29</sup> which address academic oversight, the role of faculty, and the control an accredited institution's Chief Academic Officer is to have over the academic program at each accredited university. By comparison, UMS academic governance policies generally provide the UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs with authority to engage at the System level in much of the academic oversight called for in these NECHE standards. But to the point of NECHE's correspondence quoted above, the VCAA's true exercise of that authority is at odds with NECHE accreditation standards for a single university's control over its own academic program.<sup>30</sup>

From then on, the Chancellor, VCAA, and others in UMS engaged in ongoing discussions with NECHE to explore various options for a multi-campus academic programs model that could satisfy NECHE standards for each university to remain separately accredited. Options included a lead campus, rotating lead campuses, formal committee structure involving representatives from the collaborating campuses, a stand-alone, separate academic entity accredited and recognized at the System level (separate from any one UMS campus), and course cross-listing. A lead campus model could potentially be workable with NECHE, but has proven problematic. First, the lead campus would offer its own program to other campuses, and thus not represent

---

<sup>27</sup> David Angel letter to James H. Page, Ph.D., at 2, October 3, 2016 (UMS Chancellor's Office; emphasis added).

<sup>28</sup> NECHE Standard 3.14 provides: The institution's chief academic officer is directly responsible to the chief executive officer, and 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. Off-campus, continuing education, distance education, correspondence education, international, evening, and weekend programs are clearly integrated and incorporated into the policy formation, academic oversight, and evaluation system of the institution.

<sup>29</sup> NECHE Standard 4.5 provides: 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.

<sup>30</sup> Board Policy 305, Section 305.2, for example, empowers the VCAA, with input from all university chief academic officers, to approve or reject proposed changes to existing academic programs across the System. This authority is at odds with a literal application of NECHE Standards 3.14 and 4.5 as long as UMS universities are separately accredited.

a true multi-campus program with two or more campuses collaborating to deliver the program. Second, the lead campus model has not generally been considered acceptable by those faculty who prefer a model of shared collaboration and oversight. NECHE did not believe the committee model could be scaled. A stand-alone multi-campus academic unit accredited at the System level to house collaborative programs piqued interest among campus leaders, but would result in confusion regarding faculty roles and reporting lines since such a unit would not have its own faculty, but use instead the faculty already assigned to existing UMS universities.<sup>31</sup>

As UMS explored and then began piloting course cross-listing in 2018, NECHE wrote:

... [T]he developing plans for cross-listing courses represents another form of collaboration. We concur that cross-listing courses between and among institutions in the University of Maine System has considerable potential for increasing collaboration among campuses and expanding the educational opportunities available to the people of Maine. At the same time, there is also the potential for students to take a very limited number of credits in their major from the institution at which they are matriculated thereby creating considerable challenges for the institution to ensure that students achieve the learning goals specified in the program. *It also has the potential to challenge the Commission, for example, in holding the institution accountable for the quality of its graduates.*<sup>32</sup>

Later, writing about the possibility of cross-listing courses between the University of Maine at Fort Kent and the University of Maine at Presque Isle, NECHE opined that course cross-listing would make it difficult, if not impossible, for UMFK and UMPI to each separately meet NECHE's accreditation standards.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, efforts to develop, administer, and scale-up multi-campus programming have been hampered for three years by the inability to come up with multi-campus academic governance policies and structures that satisfy NECHE accreditation standards with each university having its own separate accreditation. The issues from the outset have consistently stemmed from separate campus accreditation requirements for local oversight of academic programs, chief academic officers reporting to presidents, and participation of local campus faculty in academic oversight only at the individual university level. Repeatedly, and consistently, from 2016 through the present, NECHE has informally stated that *these issues would be rendered moot under a model of single or unified accreditation* because the Commission would then be accrediting a single statewide, System-level institution with campuses where they already are.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>31</sup> See David Quigley letter to James H. Page, Ph.D., at 2, May 10, 2019 (UMS Chancellor's Office). See also Aims McGuinness Memo to Barbara Brittingham, "Issues and Questions with Respect to the University of Maine System and its Universities," at 7, April 27, 2017 (UMS Chancellor's Office).

<sup>32</sup> David P. Angel letter to Dr. John Short, at 3, August 7, 2018 (UMS Chancellor's Office).

<sup>33</sup> David P. Angel letter to Dr. Raymond Joseph Rice and Dr. John Short, at 2, August 8, 2018 (UMS Chancellor's Office).

In sum, across the span of UMS's history from its formation to present, the question of whether the separately accredited universities that make up the System can efficiently coordinate, collaborate on, and integrate academic programming among themselves to best serve state-wide needs has been called again and again. A special review commission and an outside academic consultant have each recommended that UMS explore a System-level statewide accreditation to enhance UMS's ability to develop coordinated academic programming to better meet state needs. Over time, this Board and previous System leadership have voted and determined to take such action – and even started work to pursue a unified, System-level accreditation, only to pause for further consideration, perhaps from a desire for consensus. NECHE, pointing out the challenges of developing multi-campus collaborative programming at the scale necessary to best serve Maine's needs with UMS's universities separately accredited, has proven receptive to a System-level accreditation.

Finally, in December of 2018 the Board of Trustees adopted a *Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs*, in which it stated:

*... UMS must comprehensively and continuously adapt its curriculum, programs and services, both in substance and in manner of delivery, to meet Maine's workforce needs and to remain relevant and competitive. And UMS must continue to grow the research and knowledge base that will support those emerging workforce and business needs to enable and even catalyze innovation in Maine. However, solving Maine's workforce crisis in a time of rapid changes in learning and teaching requires more – a new vision for a public education continuum in Maine that creates learner success for all stakeholders from early childhood through life-long learning to retirement. UMS must play a vital role in bringing together education and policy leaders to ensure this vision is learner-centric, nimble, collaborative, data-driven, knowledge-generating, continuously improving, and properly resourced, and that the vision aligns with emerging State economic development plans and policies.*

*Therefore, it is the policy of the University of Maine System Board of Trustees that UMS exercise leadership among Maine's education systems and policy makers to realize this vision. System leadership shall promptly take the steps necessary to begin this process, initially including strategic collaboration among UMS universities and expanding to timely information sharing and innovation along the entire public and private education and learning continuum, including stakeholders in P-12, the Maine Community College System, and Maine's employers. The primary goal of these efforts must be maximizing educational attainment in Maine through the provision of quality, affordable, accessible, relevant and responsive programs and services that meet the changing needs of both Maine's students and employers.*

*UMS leadership will be guided by the One University principle of making all UMS university resources available to support Maine families, businesses and communities regardless of location. UMS has made significant progress since 2012 in transforming its business model to become more efficient, affordable, and responsive. However, the aggregate impact of*

*Maine’s current and future workforce crisis, demographics, societal problems, and the changing higher education marketplace on the educational needs of Maine students and employers requires UMS to take further definitive actions to deploy the fully realized benefits of One University in response to these urgent challenges.*<sup>34</sup>

To that end, Goal 4 of the *Declaration* directed System leadership to “accelerate the transition to One University organizationally, systemically, and culturally to facilitate resource allocation and investments across UMS that best achieve” the *Declaration’s* workforce readiness, attainment, program alignment, and sustainability outcomes.<sup>35</sup>

It is important to be clear about the strategic purpose of unified accreditation. *Unified accreditation is not a UMS strategic priority unto itself.* However, attaining it will better enable UMS’s capacity and ability to implement State and Board policy and meet Maine’s attainment and workforce needs for more market-relevant, multi-campus collaborative programming, and it should therefore be pursued without delay.

---

<sup>34</sup> “Declaration,” at 2-3.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*, at 6.

## ACCREDITATION

### *The Imperative*

Last updated nearly 23 years ago, UMS Board Policy 308 is a neutral statement acknowledging the importance of UMS universities having accreditation.

Policy 308 states:

*Accreditation is viewed as a necessary and valued means of quality assurance and self-improvement. Institutional accreditation should serve to ensure continuous self-review of mission, faculty, programs, resources, and support services, while specialized accreditation serves to improve professional education, prepare graduates for professional licensing, and protect the public. The University of Maine System supports the accreditation activities of its institutions.*

Though Policy 308 and the generally accepted description and purpose of accreditation both focus on quality – specifically as “a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement”<sup>36</sup> – accreditation serves other purposes as well, including:

- **Providing access to federal funds** – federal student aid funds (e.g., federal financial aid) are available only to students who attend an institution that is accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education
- **Engendering private sector confidence** – the accreditation status of an institution is important to employers evaluating the degree credentials of job applicants or deciding whether to providing financial support for tuition for current employees seeking additional education
- **Easing credit transfer** – an institution to which a student may wish to transfer will take note of whether credits the student wishes to transfer were earned at an accredited institution<sup>37</sup>

Institutions may operate without accreditation, but they would do so without the public presumption of academic and institutional quality that comes with having accreditation. And more importantly, *without accreditation, the institution’s students would not be eligible to obtain the various forms of Title IV financial aid to help pay for the costs of their higher education at the institution.*

**Having such eligibility is imperative to UMS universities’ financial viability.** Across the University of Maine System, with variation by campus, *more than seventy percent of*

---

<sup>36</sup> Hegji, A., “An Overview of Accreditation of Higher Education in the United States,” at 2, March 2017 (Congressional Research Service).

<sup>37</sup> Id.

undergraduate students who attend UMS institutions utilize some form of Title IV federal financial aid to pay for some or all of their tuition, fees and other costs. At Farmington, Machias, and Presque Isle, *more than eighty percent* of students rely on federal aid to attend.<sup>38</sup>

With the exception of the University of Maine at Machias, which since July 2018 has been accredited not independently but instead as a regional campus of the University of Maine, UMS universities are each accredited separately. In practical effect, this means that each accredited university must demonstrate to NECHE that it can and has sufficient resources to comply with every NECHE accreditation standard on its own.

### ***The Challenge***

As the historical discussion in the previous section makes clear, and generally speaking, an institution accredited by NECHE must have its own chief academic officer and chief executive that together control that institution's academic program. More simply, from NECHE's perspective, each separately accredited UMS university must control its own academic program in order to maintain full accreditation on its own, even though UMS is chartered under Maine law to coordinate its academic program across and among all of universities that make up the System. The 1986 Visiting Committee recognized this as the signal limitation of campus-by-campus accreditation, which assesses each university in isolation, never considering a statewide, System-level perspective of how the campuses, acting together as a System, meet statewide needs in the most efficient way. Dr. Chaffee's 2016 Report reached a similar conclusion, recommending that a System-level accreditation be explored to overcome the barriers that separate university accreditations imposed to greater multi-campus collaborative programming.

Beyond the issue of scaling multi-campus collaborative programs, having separately accredited universities within the University of Maine System requires, in order to maintain each institution's independent accreditation, that sufficient financial resources be devoted to each university for that university to *fully comply by itself* with all NECHE accreditation standards. This issue is compounded by the fact that, even if they are able to propose and maintain a balanced budget through the UMS fiscal year, the smallest UMS campuses can nevertheless find themselves challenged to fully comply with all NECHE accreditation standards independent of the other UMS universities. This, coupled with other financial challenges, led UMS to pursue and implement the previously-mentioned primary partnership relationship between the University of Maine and UMM, as NECHE had informally advised UMM and UMS that UMM could no longer be independently accredited as a separate institution. NECHE has informally advised more recently that UMFK's and UMPI's separate accreditations may not be sustainable either, a reality that underpins the need, at least in the short run, for the UMFK-UMPI collaboration to be successful.

---

<sup>38</sup> UMS Institutional Research (August 27, 2019).



---

*The University of Maine System One University effort is “an opportunity for new thinking about institutional accreditation in a dramatically changing [higher education] environment.”*

Aims McGuinness, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2017)

---



### ***The Potential***

Following NECHE’s initial receptivity in mid 2015 to singly accrediting one university for the whole System, though not necessarily the System itself,<sup>39</sup> UMS and NECHE have continued informal discussions since then on the question of whether UMS can itself, as a constellation of universities, be the accredited entity and recognized as an Institution of Higher Education for all purposes under NECHE’s Standards and the federal Higher Education Act.

Relatedly, NECHE sought independent review of UMS’s One University initiatives, including the Unified Financial Management Structure and its multi-campus collaborative program plans, from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), seeking advice on how UMS’s strategic plans might be considered from an accreditation standpoint. Nationally recognized higher education consultant Aims McGuinness observed to NECHE President Dr. Barbara Brittingham that UMS was “moving into uncharted territory in which policies and structures to ensure quality and accountability in the past” – in other words, when such assessments were made only separately, campus by campus – “may not be effective for the future.” McGuinness encouraged Dr. Brittingham and NECHE “to continue to work collaboratively with ... UMS” on its One University efforts, noting that doing so “may provide an opportunity for new thinking about institutional accreditation in a dramatically changing environment.”<sup>40</sup>

In May 2018, NECHE and UMS jointly retained Jay Urwitz, former legal counsel at the U.S. Department of Education, as outside legal counsel to advise on System-level accreditation. Specifically, NECHE and UMS asked Urwitz to opine on whether UMS, as legally constituted and chartered as it is under Maine law, could meet the federal Higher Education Act<sup>41</sup> requirements

---

<sup>39</sup> See footnote 18 and accompanying discussion at p. 6 above.

<sup>40</sup> McGuinness Memo, at 2.

<sup>41</sup> Section 1001(a) of the Higher Education Act, 20 USC §1001(a), defines an “institution of higher education” as an educational institution in a State that (1) admits students; (2) is legally authorized by the State to provide a program of education beyond secondary education; (3) awards academic degrees;



to be recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an Institution of Higher Education – as the UMS universities themselves already were. If so, NECHE and UMS asked Urwitz to advise on an appropriate process to follow should UMS itself seek to be accredited by NECHE and recognized as the single multi-location institution of public higher education in Maine.

In September 2018, Urwitz provided a legal opinion that generally concluded that the U.S. Department of Education could properly recognize a single multi-location/multi-campus institution of higher education in Maine organized either by the System or a single lead university, as long as it were accredited as such. NECHE President Barbara Brittingham, UMS Chief of Staff and General Counsel James Thelen, and Counsel Urwitz met in Washington, D.C. in early October 2018 with Diane Jones, Principal Deputy Under Secretary at the Department, to informally explore the Department’s views on the question of System accreditation. Through follow-up discussions with NECHE, UMS staff, and DOE staff in Washington, D.C. and Boston, UMS and NECHE have been assured that the Department will be receptive to System recognition if UMS attains System-level accreditation through NECHE.

Accrediting bodies nationally are being encouraged “to more fully embrace and lead innovation by streamlining the requirements that institutions must meet to engage in new and innovative practices,” as well as to “broaden the universe” of accreditation by reviewing new types of educational entities beyond the traditional university.<sup>42</sup> To that end, and in light of the work UMS and NECHE have done with Counsel Urwitz and the U.S. Department of Education, NECHE has confirmed as recently as May 2019 that it remains receptive to working with UMS to transition from separate university accreditations to a unified, statewide, System-level accreditation.<sup>43</sup>

---

(4) is a public or other nonprofit institution; and (5) is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association.

<sup>42</sup> Eaton, J., “Trends in Accreditation: What Matters to Governing Boards,” *Trusteeship*, September/October 2019.

<sup>43</sup> See David Quigley letters to James H. Page, Ph.D., March 13, 2019 and May 10, 2019, respectively (UMS Chancellor’s Office).

## RECOMMENDATION

Maine’s public universities should seek approval from NECHE to unify their separate accreditations within the University of Maine System to become one System-accredited institution.

With a unified accreditation, acting through its universities as it was chartered to do, the University of Maine System can more fully realize the intent and promise of its creation: developing and offering coordinated, multi-campus programs alongside university-specific programs and land-grant research responsive to state needs and available to students throughout the state, efficiently deploying academic resources and services, without unnecessary duplication, where they are needed most. In a resource-constrained state, where the population of college-bound students is expected to decline dramatically over the next two decades, the survivability of UMS’s smaller universities can be better ensured by relieving them of the administrative and financial burdens of fully complying with all NECHE accreditation standards on their own, which in turn will free up resources to invest in student support. And with Maine’s rapidly evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce and economy needs demanding new credentials and programs and new modalities to access them, UMS must respond with the statewide academic nimbleness a unified accreditation is expected to better permit.

The UMS Board of Trustees, in an earlier time, called the idea of System accreditation “novel” and even “pioneer[ing]” – indeed, adopting a state higher education commission’s recommendation that it do so, the Board voted in February 1986 to seek System-level accreditation “in an appropriate time frame.”<sup>44</sup> More than thirty-three years later, that pioneering step has not yet been taken, but an “appropriate time frame” is upon us now.

Considering UMS’s evolution, especially over the last decade or more, along with the coming demographic challenges and disruptive changes occasioned by advancing technology and student demand and expectations, it is time to become One University in more than name. Pursuing a unified UMS accreditation is the logical next step in UMS’s evolution, not only to more properly align accreditation with UMS’s chartered structure, but to free UMS universities from individual accreditation requirements so as to foster academic innovation among and between them to better serve Maine’s students.

In its pursuit of unified accreditation, UMS should follow the Guiding Principles set forth below. The Guiding Principles were developed through August 2019 by the UMS Chancellor and System Presidents to assure the University of Maine System community of the guideposts UMS intends to respect through the process of attaining a unified accreditation.

---

<sup>44</sup> See discussion at p. 4 and footnotes 11-12 above.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR UNIFIED ACCREDITATION**

*Recognizing that greater coordination and integration among UMS universities, access to more collaborative, multi-campus programs, and the preservation of all UMS campuses where they are will maximize the benefit Maine students and the State realize under the UMS Board of Trustees' Strategic Priorities, while acknowledging the practical burdens that separate university accreditations impose on achieving these goals at the scope, scale, and pace necessary to meet the educational and workforce needs of the citizens of this State, UMS universities will unify their NECHE accreditations following a robust period of campus engagement led by the UMS Chancellor and System Presidents.*

### ***Principle One***

UMS's primary goals are to:

- realize, to the fullest extent possible, the purpose and benefits the University of Maine System's formation was meant to achieve, which unified accreditation is expected to catalyze and foster;
- preserve the academic, financial, and administrative operations of UMS universities that best serve the interests of UMS students and the State and provide the highest quality educational experience; and
- relieve individual campuses of the burden of each fully complying on their own with all NECHE standards.

### ***Principle Two***

Pursuant to UMS Board Policy 212 and the UMS Statement on Shared Governance, faculty will retain all rights to academic freedom and shared governance to develop academic policy, curriculum, and faculty appointment and promotion and tenure standards on their campuses and as necessary for multi-campus programs developed under a unified accreditation.

### ***Principle Three***

UMS will follow existing collective bargaining agreements and bargain in good faith with its employees' representatives as necessary to achieve unified accreditation.

### ***Principle Four***

UMS universities will remain where they are as provided in 20-A MRS §10901-A, preserving all existing multi-campus arrangements (e.g., UMaine-UMM Primary Partnership, USM partnership in UMaine Graduate and Professional Center, etc.) and not merging or closing campuses to achieve unified accreditation. UMS Presidents will preside over their respective universities and be responsible for the day-to-day operation and development of their university's academic, research, service, and extracurricular programs within limits defined by the Board of Trustees

and Chancellor. UMS will continue to operate under its existing Charter, with Presidents accountable to the UMS Chancellor and Board as leaders of their universities and the Chancellor serving as UMS's Chief Executive Officer.

***Principle Five***

UMS will maintain, to the maximum degree possible, the current independent IPEDS reporting and financial aid eligibility and administration at each university (an example for which is the University of Maine at Machias IPEDS reporting separately from the University of Maine). Although UMS will be responsible for complying with NECHE standards, it will delegate substantial authority back to its universities for coordinated, unified compliance with NECHE standards where doing so improves the educational experience and student outcomes and maximizes efficiencies.

***Principle Six***

UMS will pursue unified accreditation transparently, making official written correspondence between UMS, NECHE, and the U.S. Department of Education and related materials publicly available without request, including past communications and records showing historical consideration of single and unified accreditation.

***Principle Seven***

UMS University Presidents will maintain and manage their current accreditations and correspondence with NECHE related to them and work with the UMS Chancellor to determine appropriate transition plans for unified accreditation. The Chancellor (and his designees) and UMS Presidents (and their designees) will develop and prepare all material UMS unified accreditation applications, reports, and correspondence, and Presidents will be copied on all records, reports, and correspondence received related to unified accreditation.

***Principle Eight***

The University of Maine will retain its land, sea, and space grant statuses, and each University will retain its Carnegie and related national classification and association status and individual program and professional accreditations according to all appropriate and relevant standards. All UMS universities will work to achieve strategic complementarity to ensure the success of unified accreditation. Each will retain, to the maximum extent possible within the higher education public policy of the State, its distinctive academic, research, athletic (including conference and division affiliations) and extracurricular programs.

## THE CASE FOR UNIFIED ACCREDITATION

Beyond the more than three-decades-long consideration of the issue, with recommendations to do so and even steps along the way to seek it, the reasons for UMS transitioning to a unified accreditation now range from the pioneering and noble to the pragmatic. The foundation and outcome of the effort must of course be improved service to students, enriched and more relevant academic programming, and the highest standard of academic quality, all achieved through the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars that ensures the survival of UMS campuses where they are.

But so much more can be gained. By charting a path to unified accreditation, the University of Maine System can, in the 1986 Board's words, "pioneer in the pursuit of excellence." Given the relatively small population but large geography UMS serves statewide, with acute demographic and rural challenges, the One University effort has already been lauded nationally, with the *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently labeling UMS a "laboratory for the future of public higher education."<sup>45</sup> Pursuing unified accreditation will be a bold step forward, not only for UMS, but also for NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education for their roles. UMS will be able to rightly claim the mantle of innovation in public higher education with the effort.

More simply, although the Board Chair charged the Chancellor to bring forward accreditation recommendations that foster the growth of multi-campus collaborative programs and the achievement of the Board's Strategic Priorities, there are many other practical benefits and cost/burden efficiencies that UMS may expect to realize by unifying campus accreditations. They are summarized below.

### ***Benefits***

A unified accreditation can be expected to result in the following advantages for students:

- more multi-campus programming, resulting in easier and greater access to a richer array of courses and programs throughout the whole of UMS, not just at a student's resident campus, perhaps through a common course catalog;
- access to the full complement of faculty expertise in the System (as opposed to only faculty on the campus where a student may matriculate, reside, or attend);
- much simpler process for students to enroll in courses offered by other UMS campuses, enabling more students to be retained and graduate on time because of this program flexibility;
- creation of new programs not currently available by streamlining the current academic program inventory, resulting in Maine students being better prepared for the changing workplace and to be leaders in the knowledge workforce and economy;

---

<sup>45</sup> Gardner, L., "How Maine Became a Laboratory for the Future of Public Higher Ed," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 25, 2018.



---

*A culture of innovation at a college or university begins with an understanding that the status quo is not sufficient for continued success or viability. While the institution's mission may still have value, the new environment for higher education requires fresh approaches for delivering that mission.*

AGB Board of Directors' Statement on Innovation in Higher Education (2017)

---



- greater availability and coordination of student support services among campuses, leading to increased retention, graduation and employment;
- enhanced research opportunities in collaboration with faculty across the System, as well as other forms of experiential learning where evidence shows this leads to improved retention and job placements;
- improved academic quality through sharing of faculty and access to financial, academic, and physical resources across the System, leading to higher quality program offerings that are more competitive nationally.

Faculty too can be expected to realize advantages through a unified accreditation, and in the best traditions of higher education shared governance, will be able to help shape the faculty policy and academic and curricular innovations that become possible in a unified accreditation model. Expected among them are:

- the pooling and coordination of faculty expertise across the System will ensure a critical mass of academic capability and diversity in specific disciplines and enable faculty to bring their teaching, research, and service expertise to sites where there are interested students and colleagues;
- particularly for faculty on smaller campuses, development and access to a broader array of faculty support services, e.g., faculty development centers/opportunities, innovative pedagogies grant development/management, joint appointments and research and scholarly collaborations, access to shared research and teaching laboratories, instruments, field sites, and facilities, and other forms of research support, library resources, graduate students, etc.;
- fewer service obligations, e.g., instead of multiple "Institutional Review Boards," a single review board could serve for the entire system; similar examples could be offered for various academic committees.

### ***Cost/Burden Efficiencies and Reinvested Savings***

Maine taxpayers provide substantial support to UMS each year, with Maine’s public policy on higher education dictating that the “highest priority” be given to supporting “the most cohesive system possible for planning, action and service in providing higher educational opportunities.” And Maine’s citizens are entitled to public accountability in UMS’s use of public resources.<sup>46</sup> Together this requires that UMS use its public resources efficiently, sharing them across its campuses when doing so better serves the State and its mission.

To that end, Maine citizens will benefit from UMS’s transition to a unified accreditation, as the survivability of UMS’s smaller campuses can be better ensured if they are relieved of the financial and administrative burdens of independently complying with all NECHE standards. The savings realized can be reinvested in student and faculty support and development and additional accessible academic programming, among other critical priorities, including elevating the profile of Maine’s strongest institutions. Additional savings can be expected from integrated academic units that minimize duplication of program offerings and better coordinate faculty expertise across the UMS enterprise, while UMS can pursue greater economic leverage in library subscriptions and academic purchasing agreements statewide.

In pure financial savings at the outset, NECHE estimates that UMS would save nearly \$800,000 over a ten-year accreditation cycle by transitioning from six separate NECHE annual dues and review fees to a single System-level NECHE membership and review cycle.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, although UMS internal review continues of the campus-by-campus administrative and financial burden associated with preparing for and managing NECHE’s accreditation and substantive change review cycles, each campus spends literally hundreds of hours of staff, faculty, and administrator time and up to two years to prepare for a ten-year accreditation review, with direct salary and other accreditation-related expenses far exceeding \$1,000,000 over that time. No direct comparative cost and burden calculation is possible yet for how much less the effort would be if streamlined to one System-wide review in NECHE’s ten-year accreditation cycle, instead of borne separately by the campuses six separate times over the same period. However, it is intuitively reasonable to assume substantial efficiencies and cost savings by managing the effort in a coordinated fashion once across the System instead of six times separately.

---

<sup>46</sup> 20-A Maine Rev. Stat. §§10902(3, 7, 8, and 9).

<sup>47</sup> Email from Barbara Brittingham to Dannel P. Malloy (UMS Chancellor’s Office, August 14, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

In an earlier time, after its Educational Policy Committee “applauded” the “novel and intriguing concept” of unified System-level accreditation as “an excellent opportunity to pioneer in the pursuit of excellence,” the UMS Board of Trustees voted to “seek accreditation for the System in an appropriate time frame.”<sup>48</sup>

Now, more than three decades on – as higher education faces disruptions unknown in its history, and as Maine faces needs that UMS cannot meet with the status quo – the opportunity to pioneer remains. Indeed, innovation is no longer optional, *but required* for institutions trying to advance their mission, to ensure their future viability and success, or to achieve their aspirational goals.<sup>49</sup>

Within UMS, some collaborative multi-campus programs are under way. More are in the works. There are some joint faculty appointments between campuses. More are needed. System universities have launched partnerships and new initiatives together, and are exploring new credentials and certificates. Maine needs more. UMS connections with Maine businesses are growing, and its academic programs reflect more market relevance, sending engaged citizens into Maine communities to stay and raise families and fill the jobs of tomorrow.

In this time, innovation is needed everywhere, including in the UMS accreditation model. To do more of everything that Maine needs from UMS, now is indeed “an appropriate time” for Maine’s public universities to unify their accreditations in the University of Maine System.

---

<sup>48</sup> See footnotes 11-12 and accompanying discussion at p. 4 above.

<sup>49</sup> AGB Board of Directors’ Statement on Innovation in Higher Education, at 2 (2017).