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The University of Maine

University of Maine
at Augusta

University of Maine
at Farmington

University of Maine
at Fort Kent

University of Maine
at Machias

University of Maine
at Presque Isle

University of
Southern Maine

March 18, 2020

Dr. Barbara Brittingham, President
New England Commission of Higher Education
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear Dr. Brittingham,

In its May 10, 2019 letter to former University of Maine System (UMS or System) Chancellor James H. Page, the Commission requested a Spring 2020 report regarding UMS progress on offering multi-institutional academic degree and certificate programs, as well as institutional academic collaboration more generally, in a manner consistent with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*.

At the same time, the Commission's May 10, 2019 letter recognized that UMS, then in the midst of a Chancellor transition with former Chancellor Page's planned retirement on June 30, 2019, was actively considering whether to pursue a unified accreditation for its currently separately accredited universities. The Commission noted that UMS's academic collaborations report should be submitted "unless the Commission and the System have an agreed-upon timeline for System accreditation ..."

As you know, on January 27, 2020, the UMS Board of Trustees unanimously directed UMS to pursue a unified accreditation for all of its universities. Taking that into account, this letter and the enclosed *UMS Report on Multi-Institutional Academic Degrees and Unified Accreditation* fully respond to the Commission's May 10, 2019 letter, addressing both the current status of our multi-university collaboration programs as well as our preliminary actions to prepare a substantive change request for System-wide unified accreditation.

Two weeks into my tenure as Chancellor, at my first Board of Trustees meeting, UMS 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*, 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 necessary to meet Maine's higher education attainment needs; some of these challenges stem from the fact that each UMS university is accredited separately from other universities in the System.

Recognizing these challenges, Chair Erwin asked me to review UMS's accreditation status and provide recommendations for what accreditation structure would be 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.

In my September 2019 report to the Board on this matter, which recounted not only the System's historical consideration of a statewide accreditation back more than three decades, but also the System's more active engagement with NECHE on the subject since 2015, I recommended that UMS universities begin a process to unify their accreditations to a unified accreditation based on a series of *Guiding Principles* that I developed with the UMS Presidents and senior System Staff (and with input from Commission staff). Accepting my recommendation at that time, the Board directed me to (i) visit UMS campuses to gather input from key academic leaders and staff to determine how to successfully implement unified accreditation, (ii) continue discussions with NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education as necessary to ensure that our planning and actions incorporated relevant input from those entities, and (iii) develop, with input from System Presidents and campuses, a process, plan, and timeline to seek unified accreditation from NECHE that could successfully transition UMS to a statewide accreditation model.

Meeting that charge, I presented another report to our Board, titled *UMS Summary of Process Considerations and Framework for Pursuing Unified Accreditation*, at its November 2019 meeting. The Board accepted my report and directed me, along with senior System staff and UMS university Presidents and their accreditation leaders, to begin planning how to prepare the necessary substantive change application to NECHE to transition existing university institutional accreditations to a unified accreditation for the University of Maine System. And finally, in a significant vote of support for the initiative, the Board unanimously approved the move to unified accreditation for the University of Maine System at its meeting on January 27, 2020.

Since then, UMS has undertaken preliminary work necessary to prepare an appropriate Substantive Change application that will demonstrate how the University of Maine System meets NECHE's Standards for Accreditation in a unified way. I formed two planning committees: an Academics and Student Affairs/Advising Committee, co-chaired by Presidents Joan Ferrini-Mundy (UMaine) and Ray Rice (UMPI); and a Finance, Administration, and Student Support Services Committee, co-chaired by President Becky Wyke (UMA) and UMS Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low. There are representatives from all seven UMS universities assigned to the committees, which will draw on still others across our System and externally as necessary to outline our substantive change application to NECHE. I have also co-convened a Unified Accreditation Coordinating Council with UMS Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen. This Council, which includes the four co-chairs of the other two committees, along with President Glenn Cummings (USM), UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido, and other System Staff, is coordinating the work of the two planning committees. Together, the planning committees and Coordinating Council are working to develop the broader narrative for how the University of Maine System, acting in System-wide coordination through its universities, will comply with NECHE's Standards for Accreditation at the time of our Substantive Change application.

Along with Presidents and my Senior Staff, I also convened a meeting of all UMS University Faculty Senate/Assembly leaders in mid-January 2020 to discuss an appropriate System-wide academic/shared governance model that will be necessary in our unified accreditation model. These Faculty leaders were and are overwhelmingly supportive of and optimistic about this engagement and opportunity to participate in System-wide academic governance.

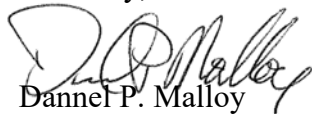
In a large but rural and resource-constrained state such as Maine, having unified accreditation will be critical to our ability to meet our statewide mission of teaching, research, and public service throughout Maine. Unified accreditation will, for the first time in the nation we believe, provide the quality assessment by which *all* of our state's public universities can be evaluated based on how well they share Maine's limited resources in service to students in the important elements of mission, governance, academic program, student services, institutional resources, teaching, learning, and scholarship, and educational effectiveness – for these are the NECHE standards of quality UMS universities will meet together with unified accreditation. And importantly, in the model we will pursue, as we first charted in our *Guiding Principles*, our universities will do so without giving up their local missions or ability to offer high-quality, properly resourced degree-programs on their own.

As its January 2020 resolution approving unified accreditation expressed, our Board is rightly concerned about measuring success. We believe that the NECHE *Standards for Accreditation* themselves initially establish the nationally recognized benchmarks for higher education institutional quality. I believe it will be appropriate for the Board to rely initially on NECHE itself as the first arbiter of the quality and success of the unified accreditation model that UMS will propose. Once NECHE confirms unified accreditation, the self-study report UMS will prepare in advance of NECHE's comprehensive evaluation will provide further important opportunities for UMS to reflect and improve on the quality of the student experience and academic program both at individual UMS universities and collectively across the System. And as provided in the Resolution before the Board, over that time we will work to align progress on the Board's *Declaration of Strategic Priorities* and *Key Performance Indicators* with the opportunities that unified accreditation presents.

Some of the history I recount above is repeated in the enclosed *UMS Report on Multi-Institutional Academic Degrees and Unified Accreditation* in the context of specific program planning covered in that report, with the hope that we have fully responded to the Commission's May 10, 2019 request for an update.

We remain deeply grateful for the Commission's guidance, support, and partnership as we pursue unified accreditation. If the Commission has further questions or would like additional information, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Daniel P. Malloy
Chancellor

New England Commission of Higher Education

UMS Report on Multi-Institutional Academic Degrees and Unified Accreditation

March 18, 2020

Like many states, Maine has experienced a dramatic decline in high school students, resulting in a five-year declining enrollment for its universities. And demographers predict an additional 25 percent decline through 2025. Maine's seven public universities serve a population of 1.34 million people, most of which cluster in two cities, and four of its universities serve rural communities of fewer than 5,000 people. Amidst these realities, the options to deliver a full set of quality programs in a financially sustainable way in these rural areas are few. To keep the University of Maine System's universities financially viable during these demographic challenges and resulting enrollment constraints, they can reduce programs or personnel, become more efficient in program consolidation or delivery, or more fully transform. Under the leadership of both the previous Chancellor, James Page, and the current Chancellor Dannel Malloy, the University of Maine System (UMS) will explore every one of these options, while strategically focusing primarily on the latter.

To meet its mission to the State of Maine, UMS must maintain a full portfolio of academic programs and services that educates Maine's citizenry and produces graduates who meet the needs of Maine's workforce, while at the same time preserving the distinctive missions of its universities and stabilizing their economic anchor status in the regions of the State they serve. In the past, when a university examined programs with long-term low enrollments, it had no choice but to suspend, merge, or eliminate the program. The suspension of Classics throughout the State is one example. No individual university could maintain enough interest in the Classics by itself; acting together, however, Maine's public universities could likely have saved these programs had they been able to deliver the curriculum and share faculty, resources, and students statewide. We believe attaining unified accreditation for all of Maine's universities through the University of Maine System is what will finally allow that to happen.

Workforce demands are changing rapidly. Universities need to be able to respond to these changes nimbly. Changes in the workforce normally require a university to launch new programs using dwindling financial resources on its own. Instead, UMS envisions pooling the expertise of existing faculty from its universities around the state to form innovative new programs that can launch rapidly, offered in multiple modalities to provide access wherever and however Maine's learners need them. An example of this kind of multi-university partnership is the Maine Geospatial Institute in the field of Global Information Systems (GIS). There are expert GIS faculty members at every UMS university. Each brings with them a specialty, such as database design, marine science, forestry, social service, and more. Combining these faculty to offer academic programming across traditional university borders allows students to receive a quality

education from the best faculty in their distinct areas, no matter where either is. Combining these faculty also allows UMS to deliver the program without the burden on any one university to hire the full complement of faculty necessary, or create the entire course curriculum, or purchase all the necessary supplies and facilities on its own—because these resources already exist in the aggregate, in sufficient critical mass to support credential-granting programs, throughout the System.

It is imperative that UMS become more efficient in its academic enterprise. UMS has successfully centralized Human Resources, Finance, Procurement, Risk Management, Legal Counsel, and Information Technology, saving tens of millions of taxpayer and tuition dollars in the process. As the Commission has previously noted, the University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) and the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) share an Executive Director of Enrollment Management and other administrative positions, and are collaboratively delivering Education (UMPI at Fort Kent) and Nursing (UMFK at Presque Isle) programs on each other's campuses to enhance enrollments and provide greater access to students in the region, given that each would not have had the resources to maintain or launch these programs on its own.

The examples above, along with others like them, have led the Commission to rightly question UMS's universities' ability to meet the *Standards for Accreditation* separately should UMS increase the scope, scale, and quantity of multi-university academic programs necessary to advance UMS Board priorities and serve its mission to the State of Maine. Indeed, the Commission's May 10, 2019 letter makes that very point. Yet UMS must continue to work and think with a statewide perspective and solution to provide the highest quality academic experience in service to Maine's students, communities, and employers, and to that end, on January 27, the UMS Board voted unanimously to unify the separate institutional accreditations of Maine's public universities within UMS, with UMS as the accredited institution, consisting of the existing seven universities. Unified accreditation will allow the UMS to leverage university strength wherever it exists in the System to maintain successful academic programs, transform struggling programs, create new innovative programs, and use limited resources more efficiently.

Board approval of unified accreditation followed a lengthy process of campus visits, multiple reports, and public discussions. To assure full transparency, nearly five years of accreditation correspondence with NECHE, records of Chancellor Malloy's outreach and university community feedback, and the Chancellor's recommendations to the Board regarding unified accreditation are posted at this website: [Unified Accreditation](https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/unified-accreditation/home).¹ Every initiative expected to be undertaken through unified accreditation will be grounded in a set of well-publicized Guiding Principles (included with this report). Chancellor Malloy and UMS university presidents developed the Guiding Principles to bring transparency to the unified accreditation effort and help UMS university stakeholders better understand the goals, reach, and limits of unified

¹ See <https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/unified-accreditation/home>.

accreditation. As such, the document represents a pledge to UMS universities of how unified accreditation will be pursued.

The principles are at the foundation of UMS's pursuit of unified accreditation, and for the purposes of this report, it is worth highlighting two that relate to collaborative programming. Principle One states that UMS desires to "preserve the academic, financial, and administrative operation of UMS universities that best serve the interests of UMS students and the State and provide the highest quality educational experience." And Principle Four states that UMS intends to maintain each System university's distinct mission, preserve existing collaborative arrangements, and not otherwise merge campuses.

Having distinct university missions serves local needs while allowing each university's strengths to serve higher education needs beyond its borders and throughout the state. Maine needs each of its public universities to not only serve their local communities, but also to work collaboratively with their peer UMS universities to meet educational needs at a distance; provide liberal arts enrichment; serve both traditional students and adult learners; and advance knowledge and catalyze economic growth with bench science and basic and applied research.

For the purpose of developing an appropriate Substantive Change application to seek unified accreditation, which UMS expects to submit in time for consideration at the Commission's June 18-19, 2020 meeting in York Harbor, Maine, UMS has launched several committees that will share the work of drafting the Substantive Change request: an Academic and Student Affairs/Advising committee co-chaired by two university presidents, with membership consisting of representatives from the universities and the System office (to address NECHE Standards 4, 6, 8, and part of 5); and a Finance, Administration, and Student Support Services committee co-chaired by a university president (and former UMS Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration) and the current Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, again with members from the System office and several UMS universities (to address Standards 7 and part of 5). A Coordinating Council, co-convened by the Chancellor and UMS Chief of Staff and General Counsel and consisting of the four committee co-chairs and other System leaders, will harmonize the two committees' work and itself address Standards 1, 2, 3, and 9.

University Faculty Senate and Assembly leaders and university faculty representatives to the UMS Board will be invited to provide input in all committee drafts for the Substantive Change request, and a web-based university community input tool will be publicized System-wide.

As the above work was getting underway, the Chancellor invited the Faculty Senate or Assembly President from each UMS university to meet together with him and senior System staff on January 14 to ask them to determine how to address UMS-wide academic governance and curricular matters that will arise with the expected proliferation of multi-university academic programming. Doing so respects UMS's tradition of shared governance and addresses the NECHE Standards' requirement that faculty have primary responsibility for the content, quality,

and effectiveness of the accredited institution's curriculum, and have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise. In just their initial meeting, these faculty leaders determined that they themselves, meeting as a body of the seven Assembly/Senate presidents with the UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs participating in an *ex officio* capacity, would address initial issues of multi-university academic and curricular policy, development, and governance and report on their progress to the UMS Chancellor. This plan is under review at UMS universities and is expected to be finalized later this spring.

This new academic governance organization created by faculty senate and assembly leaders will not be the first academic structure at the System level. The Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs already convenes the University Provosts through a committee called the Chief Academic Officers Council (CAOC). The CAOC works together to formulate academic policies, provide mentorship, deal with current events, and strategically manage the UMS academic portfolio.

UMS has also been exploring and developing a variety of programmatic and related collaborations across the state. Initiatives in Early College, micro-credentials, and Adult Learners are well underway, either within the System or in collaboration with other partners, including the State of Maine and the Maine Community College System. There are also several multi-campus collaborations already in place. The majority of them consist of program transfers (e.g., 1+3, 2+2, 4+1, etc.) or course-sharing agreements (e.g. UMM's MTR 101 counting for a requirement in UMA's Aviation program). There are also a handful of program collaborations that share some curricula for the same degree (e.g., BS in Cybersecurity at UMA and USM). These have developed over time on an ad hoc basis, each requiring and obtaining NECHE approval as necessary. That approach, while successful in the past, is likely not appropriate, sustainable, or scalable for the long term.

Additionally, there are numerous academic programs across the System that have separate program-level accreditation, requiring additional consideration and attention in the context of the unified (institutional) accreditation initiative. These programs are mostly in professional fields, such as education, business, engineering, social work, nursing, and recreation management. The programs in this category will need to retain their accreditations post-unified accreditation, and the System is committed to ensuring the success of those program-level efforts. Accordingly, university and System leaders have reached out to program accreditors to identify, understand, and mitigate any impediments for program accreditations. Thus far, none have been shown to be in conflict with unified accreditation, and will be maintained as currently accredited.

When System-wide faculty governance policies are in place for multi-university academic offerings and related matters in a unified accreditation environment, UMS will have the ability to develop and offer focused multi-university program collaborations in a number of fields that would either be new programs or scaling up of existing programs. In addition to governance,

UMS will also have the proper planning and assessment policies and resources in place to assure program viability and quality across the System, as required by the *Standards*.

Multi-university offerings like the Maine Geospatial Institute are poised to move forward with unified accreditation; MGI is primed for a shared certificate in Geographic Information Systems with the potential for developing a full program. Developing a shared Doctor of Physical Therapy program could also be realized, as could other shared programs in emerging fields like cannabis studies and eSports.

UMS understands that, in offering more collaborative, multi-university programs in unified accreditation, the System must still meet NECHE's *Standards*. The multi-campus faculty governance process, under the authority of the VCAA in collaboration with university-based academic leadership, will ensure that these programs meet the same standards that pertain to all academic programs.

UMS is looking forward to taking advantage of the opportunities that unified accreditation makes available. At its just-completed March meeting, for example, anticipating unified accreditation, the Board of Trustees voted to approve a collaborative Master of Science in Cybersecurity offered together by the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) and the University of Southern Maine (USM). The program was created by the faculty at UMA and USM. The courses are divided equally and the capstone will be delivered to the students at the institution that will certify to the UMS Board that degree requirements have been met. The program will be evaluated at each university and additionally under the UMS academic governance model being delivered. This type of program allows students from two distinct areas of Maine to have access to the best faculty in a way that is financially feasible for each participating university and UMS, and thus represents the realization of the goals of unified accreditation.

UMS is committed to working with the Commission through the unified accreditation substantive change process and will provide any additional information now upon request.

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

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.

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*,¹ 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.

¹ "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.² 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.³

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.⁴

² 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.

³ 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).

⁴ "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.⁵

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.*"⁶

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.⁷ The task force commended each System campus's attainment of regional accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (now NECHE)⁸ 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*

⁵ "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.

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

⁷ 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.

⁸ 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.*⁹ 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.¹⁰



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."¹¹ The full Board agreed, voting on February 24, 1986 to "seek accreditation for the System in an appropriate time frame."¹²

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.¹³ 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.

⁹ Visiting Committee Report, at 15.

¹⁰ *Id.*, at 24.

¹¹ "A Review and Evaluation of The Report of the Visiting Committee," at 4 (UMS Board of Trustees Educational Policy Committee, February 24, 1986).

¹² UMS Board Minutes, at 6, February 24, 1986.

¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

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

¹⁴ Id., at 15-16, 18.

¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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.”¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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

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

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Patricia Maguire Meserve 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 2016.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.²¹

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.²²

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

²⁰ 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).

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

²² 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 programs²³ and administrative positions²⁴ 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.²⁵

In late 2016, following through on one of the Chaffee Report recommendations,²⁶ 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).

²³ 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.

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

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ 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.*²⁷

As the basis for its concerns, NECHE cited its Standards 3.14²⁸ and 4.5,²⁹ 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.³⁰

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

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

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ 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.³¹

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.*³²

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.³³

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.

* * * * *

³¹ 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).

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

³³ 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.*³⁴

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.³⁵

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.

³⁴ “Declaration,” at 2-3.

³⁵ *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”³⁶ – 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 institution³⁷

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*

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

³⁷ 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.³⁸

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.

³⁸ 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,³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰

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 Act⁴¹ requirements

³⁹ See footnote 18 and accompanying discussion at p. 6 above.

⁴⁰ McGuinness Memo, at 2.

⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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.⁴³

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

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

⁴³ 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 21st 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.”⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵ 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;

⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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.

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

⁴⁷ 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.”⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹

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.

⁴⁸ See footnotes 11-12 and accompanying discussion at p. 4 above.

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



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September 18, 2019

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FR: Ellen N. Doughty, Clerk of the Board
RE: Notification of Board Actions

The University of Maine

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees on September 15-16, 2019 hosted by the University of Maine at Fort Kent, the Board approved the following action:

University of Maine
at Augusta

Unified Accreditation Recommendation

The Board of Trustees approved the following resolution as amended:

University of Maine
at Farmington

1. Accepted the Chancellor's Unified Accreditation Report and Recommendation.

University of Maine
at Fort Kent

2. Authorized and directed the Chancellor, with input from System Presidents and campuses, to develop a process, plan, and timeline to seek unified accreditation from NECHE that could successfully transition UMS to a statewide accreditation model.

University of Maine
at Machias

The Chancellor is directed to present the plan to the Board at its November 2019 meeting for discussion of any necessary additional Board actions and to seek approval of the plan at a future Board of Trustees meeting.

University of Maine
at Presque Isle

3. Authorizes and directs the Chancellor to visit and engage with all UMS campuses to obtain appropriate input from all UMS stakeholders in developing the implementation plan called for by this Resolution.

University of
Southern Maine

4. Accepts and ratifies all UMS communications with NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education to date regarding the consideration of unified accreditation, and authorizes and directs the Chancellor to continue such communications as necessary so that the implementation plan called for by this Resolution takes full account of the perspectives and requirements of those organizations.

cc:
Dannel Malloy, Chancellor
Ryan Low
Robert Placido
Faculty & Student Representatives
University Presidents
Additional System Staff
Boards of Visitors

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

A SUMMARY OF PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS AND FRAMEWORK FOR PURSUING UNIFIED ACCREDITATION

Chancellor Dannel P. Malloy

In consultation with and including contributions from

UMS Presidents • UMS Chief Academic Officers
James B. Thelen • Ryan Low • Chip Gavin
Beatrice Fevry • Robert Placido • Kay Kimball
Rosa Redonnett • Greg Fahy • Jeff St. John
Kathy Yardley • Kim-Marie Jenkins
Dominic Barraclough • Sara Mlynarchek

November 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*,¹ 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 other universities in the System.

Recognizing these challenges, Chair Erwin asked UMS Chancellor Dannel Malloy to review UMS's accreditation status and provide recommendations for what accreditation structure would be 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.

In his September 2019 report to the Board, detailing historical consideration of a System-wide accreditation back more than three decades, Chancellor Malloy recommended that UMS universities begin a process to unify their accreditations to a statewide accreditation within the University of Maine System based on a series of Guiding Principles that were developed by the Chancellor, the UMS Presidents, and Senior System Staff and reviewed by staff at UMS's regional accreditor, the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE).² Accepting that report on September 16, the Board directed the Chancellor to:

- Visit UMS campuses to gather input from key academic leaders and staff to determine how to successfully implement unified accreditation according to the Guiding Principles developed with UMS Presidents;
- Continue discussions with staff at NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education as necessary to ensure UMS planning and actions incorporate relevant input from those entities; and
- Develop, with input from System Presidents and campuses, "a process, plan, and timeline to seek unified accreditation from NECHE that could successfully transition UMS to a statewide accreditation model," to be presented at the November 17-18, 2019 Board meeting.

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

² See [Guiding Principles](#), Appendix A.

SUMMARY OF UNIFIED ACCREDITATION ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

Since the Board's September 2019 meeting, and by the time of this report's publication, the Chancellor and System leadership staff have visited all seven UMS universities twice except for a single visit to Machias, conducting 33 total meetings over that six-week span. Of these, the Chancellor has led "town hall"-styled open forum discussions and answered questions about his unified accreditation recommendation at all seven universities, met with six of the seven UMS faculty assemblies or senates (Machias is scheduled for November 20, two days following the Board's November 17-18 meeting at Farmington), as well as all seven Boards of Visitors and additional select faculty at all seven universities.

Throughout that time, UMS hosted an online survey about unified accreditation, inviting questions and comments about both the benefits of and concerns about unified accreditation from the perspective of survey responders. As of November 6, 67 responses, with more than 325 individual comments, have been logged and reviewed. Nearly half of responses came from faculty (46 percent), with staff equally responsive. Half of all respondents stated that they have either written for or participated in an accreditation review previously. Respondents identified themselves as associated with a particular UMS university as follows:

- UM Fort Kent (40 percent of respondents)
- USM (17 percent)
- UM Farmington (14 percent)
- UM (8 percent)
- UM Augusta (8 percent)
- UM Machias (6 percent)
- UM Presque Isle (3 percent)

As the online survey remains open through November 8, individual comments provided in response to the online survey remain under review and will be organized and presented thematically for the Board at its meeting on November 18, 2019. As a general matter, the overall nature of individual comments provided in the online survey are thematically similar to those offered by the Board faculty representatives (which are referenced further below and included here as Appendix B).

On October 9, at a joint meeting of all UMS Presidents and Chief Academic Officers with the Chancellor and senior System staff, along with additional academic leaders from the University of Maine, the University of Maine at Augusta, and the University of Maine at Farmington, the Chancellor invited NECHE President Barbara Brittingham to discuss NECHE's perspective on the expected near- and longer-term interaction UMS will have with NECHE should the Board of Trustees direct UMS leaders to pursue a transition to unified accreditation. Additional discussion about the issues addressed in this report occurred with UMS Presidents on November 4.

In advance of the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting on October 28, Board of Trustees Faculty Representatives informally surveyed their faculty colleagues around the System and compiled a list of written comments, concerns, and questions about unified accreditation. Faculty representatives submitted the two-page document for the ASA's public agenda. The Chancellor and System staff developed a written "FAQ" document that responded to the faculty's questions and concerns and other general issues about unified accreditation, reviewed the answers with NECHE President Barbara Brittingham for alignment with NECHE staff expectations, and posted both [the faculty concerns and FAQ online](#) on October 29 (see Appendix B, which is available as well through the hyperlink embedded here).

Representatives from the UMS faculty union – the Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine, known as AFUM – posed questions about the impact, relative to unified accreditation, of newly-negotiated contract language that permits faculty to work in cooperating departments between UMS universities who each offer their own degree programs. UMS leaders consulted with NECHE regarding these matters and transparently introduced the AFUM leaders to NECHE staff to ask further questions, though it should be clearly understood that NECHE's accreditation assessments are not bound or governed by the AFUM contract.

Nearly two dozen people across UMS – Presidents, Chief Academic Officers, other university academic leaders, and System staff – were consulted about or provided content for developing this report. An outline of issues to be addressed in the report was circulated to this group in early October, to which comments were invited. In parallel to the direct university community engagement meetings led by the Chancellor and described above, numerous meetings, discussions, and emails occurred to finalize the topics covered and content provided in this report. These same UMS leaders, as well as NECHE staff, provided comment to the final draft of this report before its publication.

UNIFIED ACCREDITATION PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS

NECHE

In answer to the Board's September 2019 charge to develop "a process, plan, and timeline to seek unified accreditation from NECHE that could successfully transition UMS to a statewide accreditation model," UMS proposes to prepare for and manage a transition to a System-wide unified accreditation by following essentially the same process as its universities do in maintaining their own separate NECHE institutional accreditations now.

It is thus helpful to first review how UMS universities currently manage their accreditations.

How UMS Universities Manage the Current NECHE Accreditation Review Process

UMS universities have each developed processes and relatively standardized practices for independently fulfilling their accreditation requirements and for completing the required reports and self-study documents. In some cases, for significant periods of time, large portions of one or more faculty or staff member's time are dedicated to writing or responding to NECHE correspondence and preparing for site team visits or Commission appearances. The number of faculty and staff shouldering these responsibilities vary widely by UMS university, ranging from 10 to 110 and consuming literally thousands of hours of time. While the University of Maine and USM each have a Vice Provost position whose duties include, among other things, managing the respective university's accreditation reviews and continuous improvement attendant in the accreditation process generally, in all other cases work on accreditation matters is additive to the involved faculty or staff member's regular duties, sometimes resulting in non-accreditation-related work being delayed or set aside.

Typically, though actual staffing varies by university, the responsibility for completing the work of preparing accreditation reports and correspondence falls to a designated Accreditation Liaison Officer – who can but need not be the institution's Chief Academic Officer – and Chief Business Officer at each university, and they work together with other faculty and staff as necessary, including notably institutional research staff who provide data for outcomes analysis and assessment. The work leading up to preparing the documents and database for a ten-year review can start as early as two-and-a-half years in advance of the NECHE team's visit, and preparing for five-year reports generally begins nine months to one year ahead of time. The estimated salaries associated with the identified time burden range from \$10,000 for a five-year review to 182,500 for a ten-year review, depending on the university at issue.

With all this said, accreditation should not be understood or viewed as a burden. Quite to the contrary, it is nearly universally agreed in the academy that there is great value in accreditation through the self-study process and interaction with NECHE to regularly assess and continually improve institutional quality and outcomes. Through these accreditation processes, the accredited institution reflects on what it is doing well, where it wants to improve, and how it

will prioritize improvement efforts. The multi-year comprehensive evaluation process, done well, brings together a university community to look beyond the institution's individual parts and consider instead how, and how well, the institution *as a whole* meets widely accepted academic and institutional quality standards in higher education,³ with additional constructive outside peer perspectives offered by the visiting team as well.

NECHE staff have committed to helping ensure that the value of accreditation remains at least as strong for the whole of UMS under a unified accreditation.

Appendix C provides examples of how the University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias prepared for and managed their nearly complete ten-year comprehensive review, how the University of Southern Maine is organizing to prepare for its Spring 2021 ten-year comprehensive review, how the University of Maine at Augusta prepared for and managed its nearly complete five-year review, and how the University of Maine at Fort Kent and the University of Maine at Presque Isle individually and together prepared for and managed their recent combined focused site visit and appearance before the Commission, as well as their five-year reviews, respectively.

The second half of Appendix D summarizes NECHE's review policies and procedures associated with the five- and ten-year institutional accreditation reviews.

Summary of the Proposed and Expected Process for a Unified Accreditation Transition

In written correspondence to former UMS Chancellor James Page in early 2019, which was cited in Chancellor Malloy's September 2019 Unified Accreditation Recommendation Report, NECHE summarized the process UMS would follow to initiate a transition from six separate NECHE institutional accreditations to one unified System-level institutional accreditation covering all seven UMS universities.⁴ In sum, should the Board authorize and direct UMS to transition to a unified accreditation, UMS would submit a substantive change⁵ application to NECHE sometime in Spring 2020, demonstrating that it meets NECHE's Standards as a whole and requesting that its separate university accreditations be unified into a System-wide accreditation.

³ It was this very idea of reviewing the quality of and extent to which the University of Maine System met its state-wide mission *as a whole* that first inspired the 1985 Visiting Committee recommendations and February 1986 UMS Board vote to seek a System-wide accreditation. See Malloy, D. and J. Thelen, [University of Maine System Unified Accreditation Recommendation](#), discussion at pp. 3-4 (UMS Board Office, September 2019).

⁴ See David Quigley letters to James H. Page, Ph.D., [March 13, 2019](#) and [May 10, 2019](#), respectively (UMS Chancellor's Office).

⁵ U.S. Department of Education regulations require that regional institutional accreditors, such as NECHE, require the institutions they accredit to submit an application for review in advance of any substantive change to the institution's educational mission or programs. Relevant here, federal regulations provide that NECHE must require UMS to submit to its substantive change process if there is to be any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution or to its legal status, form of control, or ownership. See [34 C.F.R. §§ 602.22\(a\)\(1\), 602.22\(a\)\(2\)\(i, ii\)](#).

As explained in more detail in Appendix D, in the content of its substantive change application, UMS would state its request to unify the currently separate university accreditations under the System, provide a detailed description and analysis of the proposed change, including the purpose of the change and how it is consistent with the institution's mission, and summarily describe how it meets the Standards in a unified way. UMS would also identify which of NECHE's Standards for Accreditation it wished the Commission to focus attention on in its initial consideration of the unified accreditation request and NECHE would schedule a confirming visit within six months. Unified accreditation would be granted when NECHE acted to approve the substantive change request, subject to any conditions imposed at that time.

If the substantive change request is approved, NECHE will then schedule a comprehensive evaluation for approximately two years later. In this two-year period, UMS would prepare a comprehensive self-study that addresses how it meets all NECHE standards in a unified way, and NECHE will send a visiting team to meet with System and university representatives, with members of the team visiting every university, to review and assess the self-study and UMS's unified compliance with NECHE's Standards.

A major element of the necessary work in this two-year period will be ensuring that the right structures, resources, policies, and groups are in place to make and implement whatever changes the universities will need to execute to fully comply with NECHE's Standards for Accreditation in a unified way.

It bears noting here that UMS is not yet proposing either the material content of a unified accreditation substantive change request or the identity of the faculty, staff, and other academic leaders from UMS's universities who would participate in that effort. Indeed, these matters are not for the Chancellor to dictate prior to Board action on the unified accreditation recommendation. But should the Board provide such a mandate, the process and effort should be chartered by the Chancellor immediately thereafter and then developed in coordination with UMS Presidents, their Provosts and Chief Academic and Business Officers, UMS university faculty senates and assemblies, and NECHE staff.

To prepare a unified accreditation substantive change request, consideration should be given to the following possibilities:

- Substantive Change Steering Committee – the Chancellor will charter an appropriately sized representative steering committee of UMS Presidents or their delegates, System staff, and appropriate university representatives as determined by their Presidents and faculty senates/assemblies to be responsible for a unified accreditation substantive change request. Firm deadlines will be established in coordination with NECHE staff for (i) developing an outline of issues to be addressed in the substantive change request, (ii) assessing what the implications and needed resources would be for addressing the issues at individual universities, along with UMS staff and the Board as necessary, and (iii) drafting and submitting the substantive change report in time for consideration by

NECHE according to a schedule agreed upon between NECHE staff and UMS. The Board would be kept informed of this progress as appropriate given its fiduciary governance obligations.

- Given UMS's expectation that NECHE will require consideration of faculty-led System-wide academic and curricular governance processes for any System-wide academic program areas in the substantive change request, and in keeping with both UMS Shared Governance principles and NECHE Standards that require that "[f]aculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise," UMS faculty senates and assemblies would be chartered to nominate representatives to an academic governance working group to propose options that will both meet NECHE Standards for institutional academic governance while preserving university-level governance as appropriate, in coordination with and subject to the same deadlines as the Substantive Change Steering Committee.

These teams will coordinate with the Chancellor and UMS Presidents to prepare for a NECHE confirming visit within six months of NECHE's consideration of the unified accreditation substantive change request.

- Unified accreditation implementation teams would be chartered by the Chancellor to prepare for a comprehensive evaluation by NECHE, which would occur approximately two years following approval of the substantive change request. These teams would be responsible for implementing new approaches, changes in organization, and communicating appropriately about the needed actions to ensure that, within two years, the UMS self-study will confirm unified compliance with NECHE's Standards as appropriate, in combination with or through substantial delegation back to UMS universities, or managed under some new approach determined to meet the Standards better.

Representatives from the implementation teams would be convened to lead the development of UMS's comprehensive evaluation report that demonstrates unified compliance with NECHE's Standards for Accreditation.

The Chancellor will lead appearances before the NECHE Commission as required regarding UMS's unified accreditation, joined by UMS Presidents directly as appropriate or as requested by NECHE. Additional UMS representatives would be chosen in consultation with UMS Presidents and subject to NECHE's directives about any areas of special focus in the appearance(s).

NECHE and UMS will determine how each university can inform the public that it remains fully accredited under a unified accreditation model, including by listing UMS's universities individually on NECHE's roster of accredited institutions. The matter could be simply addressed,

for example, by stating publicly that “The University of Maine (or the University of Maine at Augusta, etc.) holds NECHE institutional accreditation.”

UMS should seek external resources, including grant funding, to support the unified accreditation effort.⁶ National organizations that have expressed interest in the effort should be engaged as well, such as the American Council on Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. UMS may also benefit from dedicated project and change management expertise to monitor and maintain progress on the effort.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RECOGNITION

If NECHE accredits the University of Maine System as an institution of higher education consisting of Maine’s existing seven public universities, UMS would thereafter seek recognition from the U.S. Department of Education as an institution of higher education under federal law, maintaining every UMS university’s participation in all federal financial aid programs that are conditioned on such recognition.

If recognized as the accredited institution of higher education under federal law, UMS’s intention, in keeping with Principle Five of the [Guiding Principles](#), is to follow the model for financial aid administration with the U.S. Department of Education already established for the University of Maine-University of Maine at Machias primary partnership relationship. There, with UMM maintaining separate IPEDS reporting while being accredited as part of the University of Maine, UMM also locally manages its financial aid programs.

To be sure, following NECHE unified accreditation of UMS as a single institution comprised of Maine’s seven public universities, U.S. Department of Education institution of higher education recognition would transition from UMS’s separate universities to UMS itself as an entity. Such recognition is subject to comprehensive federal regulation over federal financial aid programs. UMS has established contact with Tracy Nave and Scott Schramm, representatives of the Federal Student Aid – Program Compliance office in the Department’s New York/Boston School Participation Division, for this purpose. Given the imperative that UMS maintain eligibility for its

⁶ On a small scale, for example, UMS will consider applying for a \$10,000 grant through the Davis Educational Foundation’s Presidential Grant Program, which offers institutions the opportunity to apply for funding to “assist college and university leaders in laying the foundation to redesign ongoing practices with the intent to contain cost increases and improve college affordability.” Funding is available in two levels: up to \$2,500 for “first-step awareness building activities that broadly engage the campus community,” or up to \$10,000 for follow-up or longer-term initiatives. UMS could apply, for example, for the longer-term funding opportunity to help support travel and coordination of planning meetings connected to unified accreditation work during the 2019-2020 academic year. UMS could submit a larger Davis Educational Foundation implementation grant proposal in March or May 2020 to more fully support the broad, inter-university work to be done on the anticipated compilation of a self-study connected with pursuing a unified accreditation. The UMS last received a Davis Educational Foundation grant in 2012 connected with early work on the administrative review that resulted in the development of several shared service opportunities.

students to participate in federal financial aid programs through all of its universities, interaction with the U.S. Department of Education and coordination with NECHE will be critical to the success of the unified accreditation transition, and UMS will regularly update the Board on these matters.

If the Board approves unified accreditation, the Chancellor will charter a U.S. Department of Education recognition working group comprised of appropriately experienced UMS staff (e.g., Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration and General Counsel or their delegates) and President-nominated university representatives with financial aid administration experience. The group's charter will direct that, following NECHE unified accreditation of UMS as an institution of higher education, UMS immediately pursue U.S. Department of Education recognition that permits UMS universities to administer their present federal financial aid programs locally. It may be beneficial for UMS to re-engage legal counsel Jay Urwitz, formerly of the U.S. Department of Education's legal counsel office, to assist and advise the UMS working group in managing the Department's recognition process to meet the objectives set in Principle Five of the [Guiding Principles](#).

IMPACT ON CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION STATUS AND REVIEW SCHEDULES

As has been noted in Principles Five and Seven of the [Guiding Principles](#) (see Appendix A below), should the Board direct UMS to pursue unified accreditation from NECHE and corresponding recognition from the U.S. Department of Education, UMS and its individual universities will coordinate their current separate accreditation statuses and review/reporting schedules with NECHE through the transition and their local (e.g., university-based) financial aid administration with UMS and appropriate U.S. Department of Education staff.

Absent a transition to unified accreditation, UMS itself and its universities would be subject to the following NECHE accreditation review and reporting schedule through Fall 2025:

NECHE Review and Reporting Schedule*	UMS University/NECHE Areas of Focus (See also Appendix C regarding reviews currently in progress)
Fall 2019	UMaine/UMM – Ten-Year Comprehensive Review expected to be complete following November 2019 NECHE Commission appearance UMPI/UMFK – Report on Focused Visit expected following September 2019 NECHE Commission appearance USM – Progress report submitted August 2019 (financial stability, use of assessment results, impact of One University collaborations); Commission action expected in November
Spring 2020	University of Maine System – Progress report due March 1, 2020 (if no progress toward unified accreditation, report on how multi-university academic programs comply with NECHE Standards with separate university accreditations, or focus on

	unified accreditation substantive change if Board acts to pursue transition) UMA – Fifth-Year Interim Report (retention/graduation, student loan default, metrics for student success, status of prison program) UMPI – Visit to Maine School of Science and Math instructional site
Fall 2020	UMFK – Fifth-Year Interim Report (combined President/Provost role, NACEP standards, cross-institutional programs with UMPI, deferred maintenance, shared student affairs officer with UMPI, distance education plan, communication, and update as necessary on unified accreditation) UMPI – Progress Report (update as necessary on unified accreditation or UMPI’s own compliance with NECHE Standards, Proficiency-Based Education, retention/graduation, website)
Spring 2021	USM – Ten-Year Comprehensive Review (including focus on retention/graduation rates) UMA – Substantive Change Visit (courses offered in USM’s Cybersecurity Master’s Program)
Fall 2021	(no reviews scheduled at present)
Spring 2022	UMF – Ten-Year Comprehensive Review (including focus on financial stability, academic collaboration, general education, retention/graduation, assessment)
Fall 2022	(no reviews scheduled at present)
Spring 2023	(no reviews scheduled at present)
Fall 2023	UMPI – Ten-Year Comprehensive Review (no focus established yet)
Spring 2024	UMaine/UMM – Fifth-Year Interim Report (no focus established yet)
Fall 2024	(no reviews scheduled at present)
Spring 2025	UMA – Ten-Year Comprehensive Review (no focus established yet)
Fall 2025	UMFK – Ten-Year Comprehensive Review (no focus established yet)

** does not include NECHE consideration of substantive change requests that may be submitted by individual UMS universities*

It is reasonable to expect – though would need to be confirmed with NECHE – that NECHE reviews and reports scheduled from Fall 2020 and later would be adjusted to account for a Board-directed transition to unified accreditation. As such, it is expected, for example, that UMF, UMPI, UMA, and UMFK would not be required to undergo their currently-scheduled separate individual ten-year comprehensive reviews on their own – notwithstanding their local

focus on and attention to continuous improvement that is one of the hallmarks of the accreditation review cycle – but instead would be included in UMS’s comprehensive review two years following approval of a unified accreditation substantive change request, with one System-wide schedule set for a fifth-year interim and ten-year comprehensive review thereafter. Impact on USM’s presently scheduled Spring 2021 ten-year comprehensive review is less clear and would need to be clarified with NECHE as soon as possible to avoid potentially unnecessary work.⁷ And NECHE could of course request focused Progress Reports and focused visits to any UMS university or universities.

Similarly, the need for individual universities to submit substantive change requests to NECHE for collaborating with another UMS university to offer an academic program would be greatly reduced, if not eliminated altogether. NECHE has confirmed that unified accreditation would mean fewer reports to the Commission in that situation. One example is the substantive change report that the University of Maine at Augusta submitted to offer graduate courses in a cybersecurity program to be offered by the University of Southern Maine. If UMS were the accredited institution, NECHE President Barbara Brittingham confirmed, that report would not have been necessary. NECHE also reports anecdotally of a recent Commission meeting at which up to eight substantive change reports were proposed from several individual UMS universities, of which arguably only one or two would have been needed under unified accreditation.

Should the Board not approve a transition to UMS unified accreditation, the above schedule of separate NECHE reviews will remain in place and UMS will be required to report, by March 1, 2020, how its universities can continue to be separately accredited by NECHE while offering and managing a growing number of academic programs offered jointly by two or more UMS universities collaborating and sharing resources and governance. UMS’s individual universities would continue on their present accreditation review schedules, with NECHE paying particular attention to the significant resource and program sharing between UMFK and UMPI, as well as UMF’s individual financial stability, among other issues noted in the Table above and discussed in the Chancellor’s September 2019 Unified Accreditation Recommendation.

IMPACT ON CURRENT PROGRAM-LEVEL ACCREDITATIONS

Program-level accreditation is critically important to UMS universities for many reasons, including faculty and student recruitment, access to federal funding, certifications and professional credentials for students, and measures of reputation and quality. The Chancellor’s university engagement regarding unified accreditation has confirmed the importance of maintaining the program-level accreditations held across UMS’s universities. Thus, as has been established in Principle Eight of the [Guiding Principles](#) (see Appendix A below), UMS proposes that its universities retain their current program-level accreditations through a transition to unified institutional accreditation. In the future, if unified accreditation is pursued and attained, UMS intends that programs that continue to be offered by a single UMS university as well as

⁷ See Appendix C for USM’s discussion of its preparations for its currently scheduled Spring 2021 comprehensive review.

programs offered on a collaborative basis between two or more UMS universities will determine for themselves whether to maintain or seek new or different program-level accreditations.

For background and context, recall that there are two basic types of higher education accreditation:

1. Institutional accreditation conferred in New England by NECHE – this is the type of accreditation under discussion for the purposes of unified accreditation; and
2. “Specialized” or “programmatic” accreditation, referred to herein as “program-level accreditation”

Institutional accreditation, of course, applies to the entire institution – in the traditional sense, the “institution” has meant a single university, though in the case of unified accreditation, UMS as a whole becomes the accredited institution – indicating that each of an institution's parts is contributing to the achievement of the institution's objectives and mission as a whole. Regional and national accreditors perform institutional accreditation (e.g., NECHE in the six-state New England region).

Specialized or programmatic accreditation – program-level accreditation – normally applies to programs, departments, or schools that are parts of an institution. The program-accredited unit may be as large as a college or school within a university or as small as a curriculum within a discipline. Most of the specialized or programmatic accreditors review units within an institution of higher education that is accredited by one of the regional or national accreditors (e.g., NECHE). However, certain accreditors also accredit professional schools and other specialized or vocational institutions of higher education that are freestanding in their operations – within UMS, for example, the American Bar Association accredits the University of Maine School of Law. Thus, a “specialized” or “programmatic” accreditor may also function in the capacity of an “institutional” accreditor in specific situations. Some of these “institutions” are found within non-educational settings too, such as hospitals.⁸

To illustrate, at the University of Maine, forty-five of the university’s academic programs, as well as two of the University of Maine at Machias’s academic programs, are accredited (variously) by thirteen professional accreditors, one national association, and the Maine Department of Education. Prominent accreditations at the University of Maine include AACSB (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), which accredits the Maine Business School's undergraduate program and the Maine Graduate School of Business’s MBA program, now offered in conjunction with USM Graduate Business faculty through the University of Maine Graduate and Professional Center, and ABET (the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology), which accredits all six departments and the School of Engineering Technology in the College of Engineering.

⁸ See generally <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation.html#Overview>.

In light of the Chancellor's unified accreditation recommendation and the Board's consideration of potential action on it in early 2020, at University of Maine Interim Provost Faye Gilbert's direction, University of Maine Deans collected feedback from their units about the potential impact(s) of unified accreditation on professional accreditations. While there are many instances in which unified accreditation will not disrupt or otherwise inhibit an academic program's ability to obtain or retain program-level accreditation at a single UMS university, UMS has not yet been able to confirm with all program-level accreditors what unified accreditation's impact may finally be.

For example, the University of Maine has been able to confirm that, upon application, AACSB may permit an ongoing unit-level (in other words, university level) program accreditation for the University's business programs. The university has also confirmed that transitioning to a unified System-level accreditation will not impact program-level accreditations from the International Society of Wood Science and Technology and the Society of American Foresters (for the School of Forest Resources' B.S. in Forest Operations, Bioproducts and Bioenergy), as well as the latter's program accreditation for the M.S. in Forestry and B.S in Parks, Recreation and Tourism. The University's engineering degree program accreditations, along with the engineering school's accreditation itself, all from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, will not be affected by a unified accreditation transition either, as ABET will permit separate, location-based/university-level program accreditation that is common at other multi-campus universities.

Similarly, the University of Maine at Farmington has confirmed that Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation program-level accreditation for teacher preparation programs will not be negatively affected if UMS transitions to a unified accreditation.

On the other hand, UMS has not yet been able to finally determine how the Council on Social Work Education's separate program-level accreditations for the three UMS universities that offer undergraduate (UMPI, USM, and UMaine) and graduate (USM and UMaine) Social Work degrees will be administered in a System-wide unified institutional accreditation model. And the program-level accreditation implications are as yet not entirely clear for Nursing either. All four UMS Nursing academic programs (UMaine, USM, UMA, and UMFK) are accredited, either by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) or the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), but work remains to confirm how to continue such accreditations with UMS as the accredited institution, as the University of Maine encountered accreditation challenges in attempting to expand its Nursing curricula to Machias as part of the primary partnership between those universities.

As UMS universities are in the nascent stages of research on how each program accreditor will respond to unified accreditation, the matter merits continued attention. It is likely that, as long as UMS is accredited by NECHE, the majority of individual program accreditors will support continued program accreditation. UMS expects that the response of most individual program accreditors to unified accreditation will be that programs should continue operating as they have been. That said, following a transition to unified accreditation, some program accreditors

may require some change(s) to the process of reaccrediting individual programs. Finally, those accreditors that either accredit multiple programs across the UMS or who generally require that all similar programs at an institution be accredited will probably require additional conversation, explanation, and effort if UMS's individual universities are to maintain them.

UMS therefore recommends that it work with NECHE and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to develop a joint letter from the Chancellor and UMS Presidents that would be sent to every professional/program-level accreditor that accredits one or more programs in the UMS academic program inventory. Ideally, the letter would include:

1. an overview of unified accreditation steps taken to date;
2. a clear statement of why the change is being pursued and what UMS universities collectively seek to achieve as a result;
3. assurances of our close working relationship with NECHE and the Board of Trustees in pursuing, achieving, and implementing unified accreditation;
4. a request for individual accreditors to identify any barriers to continued program-level accreditation by their organizations as a function of the UMS move to unified accreditation, along with the steps necessary to remove those barriers; and
5. a commitment to respond to any questions or concerns accreditors may have and keep them apprised of developments/timeline/outcomes in the process, etc.

After a transition to unified accreditation, those academic programs that are accredited will have to work individually with their accreditors to clarify expectations as to how to proceed under unified accreditation. UMS Academic Affairs can provide coordinated support to UMS universities to assist them with maintaining program-level accreditations. System-level coordination would be undertaken in a manner consistent with NECHE's Standards for Accreditation in a unified accreditation model, recognizing that a UMS university with an unaccredited program similar to one that is accredited at another UMS university, or vice versa, may require such coordination.

GOVERNANCE/POLICY CHANGES TO CONSIDER

Current UMS Board of Trustees 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.

If the Board directs UMS to seek unified accreditation for the System as a whole, considering the Guiding Principles, Policy 308 should be revised to reflect the change. The following proposed revision would reflect UMS's transition to unified institutional accreditation while recognizing the Guiding Principles and preserving university program-level and professional accreditations:

Institutional and programmatic accreditation are necessary and valued means of quality assurance and self-improvement for the University of Maine System and its universities. Institutional accreditation ensures continuous self-review of System and university mission, faculty, programs, resources, and support services, as well as providing UMS students eligibility for federal financial aid programs. Programmatic and professional accreditations ensure the quality and relevance of UMS degree-granting programs, including by providing graduates with eligibility for professional licensure where necessary and the public with assurances of program quality.

The University of Maine System will maintain a unified institutional accreditation for its universities through the New England Commission of Higher Education that ensures that all universities maintain federal financial aid eligibility, as well as their own local identities and missions, according to the UMS Guiding Principles established for unified accreditation.

It is the judgment of UMS General Counsel that UMS would remain in compliance with its legal charter by operating under a unified accreditation. But if unified accreditation is pursued, the Chancellor should charge the UMS General Counsel to review UMS governance policies and determine if any other policy changes should be made to ensure complete alignment of UMS governance and operations with NECHE's Standards for Accreditation, and such work should be undertaken in full coordination with a chartered Substantive Change Steering Committee as proposed above.

CONSIDERATION OF OTHER SYSTEM ACCREDITATIONS

In discussion at the Board's September 16, 2019 meeting at UMFK, Board members asked UMS representatives to provide information about other higher education institutions that have considered something analogous to the Chancellor's unified accreditation recommendation.

To provide comparative information to help inform Board members in their deliberations, three examples are summarized in Appendix E below: a state public university system consolidating their separate university accreditations (the University of South Florida), a state public university system that has merged universities together (the University System of Georgia), and a state public university system considering a unified accreditation due to a fiscal emergency (the University of Alaska System).

CONCLUSION

While this report discusses the general process considerations presently thought to be most relevant should the UMS Board direct a transition to System-wide unified accreditation, it bears repeating that, 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 in 1986 to “seek accreditation for the System in an appropriate time frame.”⁹

Now, more than three decades on – as higher education faces disruptions unknown in its history, and as Maine faces needs that UMS cannot afford to 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.¹⁰

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 if all UMS universities are to survive and thrive where they are, meeting the State of Maine’s public mission for higher education. 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.

At this time, unified accreditation is a necessary innovation to permit and foster more collaboration among UMS universities to do more of everything that Maine needs from UMS, meeting its tripartite mission of education, research, and service in spite of the challenges presented by Maine’s rural nature and economic and attainment challenges. Now is indeed “an appropriate time” for Maine’s public universities to unify their accreditations in the University of Maine System.

⁹ Malloy, D. and J. Thelen, [University of Maine System Unified Accreditation Recommendation](#), footnotes 11-12 and accompanying discussion at p. 4 (UMS Board Office, September 2019).

¹⁰ Id. (citing AGB Board of Directors’ Statement on Innovation in Higher Education, at 2 (2017)).

APPENDIX A

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.

APPENDIX B

October 22, 2019

TO: Academic and Student Affairs subcommittee of the UMS BoT

FROM: Faculty Representatives to the BoT

Lisa Leduc (UMPI); Patti Miles (UM); Heather Ball (UMM); Tim Surrence (UMA);
Clyde Mitchell (UMF); Matthew Bampton (USM)

RE: Faculty feedback regarding Unified Accreditation planning

As part of our role as liaisons between our faculty constituents and the BoT and this subcommittee, faculty representatives have been gathering feedback on the planning documents for moving toward Unified Accreditation.

We very much appreciate the Chancellors' efforts of visiting campuses and meeting with faculty in different forums and venues to discuss the principles and objectives and get feedback. The information we present here is not meant in any way to usurp or demean those vital communications. What we want to present is what we are hearing from our colleagues; positive feedback as well as questions and concerns.

The following information has been gathered on our various campuses through personal conversations, closed faculty meetings, anonymous surveys, as well as on-the-record faculty governance statements/documents. It does not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the individual faculty representatives themselves. We do believe however that we should be offering an alternative vehicle for faculty input to be on the record with the BoT.

Positive feedback on the plan to move towards Unified Accreditation (UA) was a minority of the feedback we received. Common comments included:

- 1) This may save some money and make smaller campuses more viable
- 2) If we truly share all of the larger campuses resources (ie library), as would be required under UA that could be a benefit to smaller campuses
- 3) Currently NECHE has concerns with instances where a campus relies on outside entities for courses and services; a single accreditation umbrella would alleviate those concerns
- 4) It would be nice to get Institutional Research (IR) support

However, the majority of feedback we have received has been about concerns and questions. We will summarize these themes here:

CONCERNS

- 5) Small campuses will lose their voice
- 6) We will lose mission differentiation of smaller campuses

- 7) Small campuses will become satellite/feeder campuses to larger ones and will only get the less prepared students
- 8) There are big implications on the peer review process – we have different standards across campuses (research vs teaching vs service)
- 9) This may limit campus based curriculum development if all similar programs across the system must collaborate
- 10) We have ongoing serious trust issues with any BoT/Chancellor/UMS office initiatives because of bad experiences in the past with top down change
- 11) Assessments of course and program outcomes are difficult as is, it would be unmanageable for an entire system. We would lose the granular information
- 12) Individual accredited programs being forced to combine/collaborate with other non/differently accredited programs on other campuses
- 13) Resources across campuses are not equal (ie library) – NECHE will be looking at that
- 14) One serious issue in one program or one campus could hold up accreditation for all
- 15) Not enough clarity of leadership and decision-making between UMS and campuses
- 16) Have not had the best experiences with centralized IT and HR – do not see how centralized accreditation would be any better
- 17) This is too rushed and poorly defined
- 18) Only lip-service is given to shared governance – recent experiences (Academic Partnerships, Academic Integrity Policy, System Research Plan) tell us faculty will not really be included
- 19) Another UMS initiative that will require extensive investment of time and resources for what might possibly be an abandoned pursuit – resulting in lowered morale
- 20) The Trustees are probably not familiar with the complexity and nuances of the academic accreditation process, it does not make sense to have them be making this decision just based on recommendations from the Chancellors office

QUESTIONS

- 21) If UA takes 2-3 years to develop, what about current timelines for each campus within their own re-accreditation schedule?
- 22) Will we have unified Financial Aid?
- 23) How will UA affect the general education – will it become unified?
- 24) What can be achieved by UA that we cannot do now by using Cooperating Departments (and MOUs if needed)? We can get collaborative programs this way. Also if we implemented the BoT cross-listing policy that would remove another roadblock to collaboration
- 25) Why not just have a centralized IR to help smaller campuses gather data for their own accreditation? Putting resources into IR would seem to be more cost effective and timely than pursuing UA
- 26) Is collaboration going to be mandated?
- 27) How will this impact campus budgets?
- 28) What is the actual cost savings?

- 29) Who will collect the accreditation data? Where will the voice of the small campuses be in that data collection?
- 30) How could NECHE do a visit?
- 31) How (specifically) will you reach the outcomes stated in the UA Recommendation document?
- 32) How will this end competition between programs and campuses?

Unified Accreditation FAQs (as of October 30, 2019)

The University of Maine System unites Maine's seven public universities with a mission of education, research, and service for the State of Maine's citizens, communities, and businesses. To provide our students and State with the highest quality academic programs and create knowledge through research and innovation, we need to consider all options that will allow us to act proactively and sustainably despite limited resources spread across a large rural state with a small population. Recognizing Maine's challenging demographics and their state-wide mission, Maine's public universities need to share resources and programs to maintain access to vital programs at every one of our universities and the local communities they serve, leveraging those resources and advances in technology across traditional university boundaries to increase access and attainment across the State.

Following his September 2019 recommendation to the UMS Board of Trustees that UMS universities unify their institutional accreditations, the Board directed Chancellor Malloy to develop a framework and planning process for Unified Accreditation for the University of Maine System and provide a report for the November Board meeting for how to successfully transition to a unified accreditation. The Board also directed the Chancellor to seek input from every campus to prepare the report, and to that end, the Chancellor committed to visiting each campus at least three times this semester and next. Starting September 30, the Chancellor and his team have visited each campus to discuss and gather feedback from faculty, staff, students, administrators, and Board of Visitor members about how to pursue Unified Accreditation to ensure that it allows Maine's public universities to work together to better meet their education, research, and service mission to the State of Maine and its citizens. All campus community members have been encouraged to respond to an [online survey](#) regarding unified accreditation as well.

The following list of "Frequently Asked Questions," with answers, is part of that effort. Faculty Representatives to the Board of Trustees compiled a list of Comments, Concerns, and Questions that were submitted to the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee for its October 28, 2019 meeting. This "FAQ" document responds to the Faculty Representatives' Concerns and Questions, noting each to which the answers below are responsive. The FAQ answers below also respond to questions posed during the Chancellor's campus visits, as well as to issues raised to date in the online unified accreditation survey.

Thank you to all university community members who raised the issues and asked the questions thus far, to which the following "FAQs" respond.

FAQs

1) What is “Unified Accreditation”?

The University of Maine System is a single legal institution and instrumentality of the State of Maine that is made up of the University of Maine, the University of Southern Maine, the University of Maine at Augusta, the University of Maine at Farmington, the University of Maine at Fort Kent, the University of Maine at Presque Isle, and the University of Maine at Machias. Maine’s seven public universities are not separate legal institutions themselves – no one university can own property or sign contracts by itself, for example – but they have historically each been separately accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) and recognized as separate accredited institutions by the U.S. Department of Education for purposes of federal financial aid. Since July 1, 2018, the University of Maine at Machias is no longer separately accredited, but is nevertheless fully accredited as a regional campus of the University of Maine and encompassed in the University of Maine’s institutional accreditation.

Unified Accreditation will be exactly what the term “unified” means: *a unification of each UMS university’s separate accreditation into one state-wide institutional accreditation covering all UMS universities*. Unified accreditation does not require or result in any university losing its accreditation -- quite to the contrary, it means that all currently separate NECHE accreditations will be joined together at the System level, with the University of Maine System recognized by NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education as one accredited institution made up of the current seven UMS universities. NECHE has committed to listing the individual institutions on its roster.

The Guiding Principles set the parameters for how unified accreditation would be implemented and how UMS universities will retain their identities and missions. New programs and curriculum will continue to be driven by campuses and their faculties, singly and in collaboration with each other and under the coordination of System leadership through the Chief Academic Officers Council and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

NECHE and UMS will determine how each university can inform the public that it remains fully accredited under a unified accreditation model, including by listing the individual institutions on its roster.

Responsive to Concern 17 (This is too rushed and poorly defined)

2) How long has Unified Accreditation been under consideration?

A state-wide, System-level accreditation has been under consideration in one form or another since 1986, when the UMS Board of Trustees accepted an independent review panel’s recommendation and voted that UMS should “seek accreditation for the System in an appropriate time frame” as a way to “pioneer in the pursuit of excellence.”

UMS began serious discussions with NECHE in 2015 about how to transition to what was then called a “single accreditation,” except that at the time NECHE did not believe a state-wide system of several universities could be accredited and recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as an institution of higher education under federal law. Since then, with input from a former U.S. Department of Education attorney, NECHE and UMS have worked with the U.S. Department of Education, which has confirmed that the University of Maine System itself can be accredited and recognized on behalf of its universities as an institution of higher education under federal law.

All of the relevant correspondence between UMS, NECHE, and the U.S. Department of Education since 2015 can be found here: [Unified Accreditation Historical Documents](#).

Responsive to Concern 17 (this is too rushed and poorly defined)

3) How will Unified Accreditation benefit students?

With Unified Accreditation, UMS universities and their faculties will be able to work out seamless ways for students to take courses from other UMS universities without having to transfer them back in, with their financial aid following them when they do, and with the credits they earn from other UMS universities applying to their qualification for Dean’s list status. Over time, with UMS universities working out the details in coordination with System leadership, UMS students could have access to the full array of courses and programs across the entire System.

Many Maine families already think we are acting as one institution and become confused and frustrated by barriers that prevent us from fluidly serving students. Unified Accreditation will simplify processes and make them more transparent, bring greater opportunities, facilitate more timely degree completion, and remove key barriers to student success.

4) How will individual campuses retain their voice and standing under Unified Accreditation?

UMS Presidents and provosts will retain their roles, and will continue to serve on the existing Presidents Council and Chief Academic Officers Council, respectively. Campuses will retain their faculty and student representatives to the Board of Trustees, as well as their internal mechanisms for ongoing engagement. The Board will continue to rotate its meetings among the campuses, and individual Boards of Visitors will continue to both serve their universities and meet with each other and the Trustees as they do now.

UMS universities will retain their already-established missions in coordination with the state-wide System mission. In fact, Maine’s universities, whether large or small, coastal or inland, *should* retain their distinct personalities because that will benefit students and local campus communities, and lend distinction to the whole System.

Additionally, faculty would be encouraged to develop System-wide programs, certificates, or minors, along with multi-campus System-wide academic governance policies, in keeping with their existing shared governance responsibilities. New multi-university programs can reflect the tone and essence of the universities from which they draw, and will be created by those involved in coordination with System leadership.

While the Board maintains governance authority and fiduciary responsibility for the System as a whole, there will be no top-down directive or mandate from the System or Chancellor's office about how unified accreditation must be implemented. Working with the System's leadership, each UMS university and their faculty will help to determine the proper implementation over a two-year period that will lead to NECHE's first comprehensive visit to assess the implementation of unified accreditation.

Responsive to: Concerns 5 (small campuses will lose their voice), 6 (we will lose mission differentiation of smaller campuses), and 15 (not enough clarity of leadership and decision-making between UMS and campuses)

5) How will Unified Accreditation affect small campuses?

Regardless of size, in a Unified Accreditation model, any UMS university will be able to share resources, positions, and programs with any other UMS university without being forced by NECHE to merge with whatever other university it chooses to share resources or programs. This will allow UMS universities to increase their programmatic options, which would improve retention and graduation of their own students, as well as welcome students from across the state into their programs and courses. Programmatic and campus admissions standards may remain the same, unless the faculty and admissions staff decide to change them within parameters established by UMS Board policy. Furthermore, Unified Accreditation will provide some protections for campuses that may not be able to meet every one of the individual accreditation standards and their requirements on their own.

Responsive to Concern 7 (small campuses will become satellite/feeder campuses to larger ones and will only get the less prepared students)

6) Will all academic programs be expected to collaborate? How would we assess program outcomes?

Under our current model, with each university being separately accredited, NECHE cannot permit the scope and scale of truly collaborative programs offered jointly by two or more UMS universities that will be necessary to meet state needs. Unified Accreditation will allow more programs to collaborate for a number of reasons, including to achieve greater efficiency, share faculty expertise, respond creatively to advances in technology and the economy, reduce internal competition, preserve programs that may be too small at any one university, and provide more options for students. Programs offered individually by a single university that have sufficient enrollment and resources and quality outcomes will not be expected to combine

with another program at another university unless faculty and academic leaders at both the involved universities and System think that makes sense as an opportunity to provide some of the benefits listed above or dwindling resources dictate the necessity of doing so.

Programmatic collaboration is an option that will benefit students and better serve the state through sharing resources and reducing unnecessary duplication of effort. There may be cases where it is not needed or desirable, but there may be other situations where it is a way to safeguard vulnerable (e.g., under-enrolled or under-resourced) programs and diversify curricular offerings. Unified Accreditation eliminates the primary impediment to collaboration so that faculty and academic leaders can explore those options and take advantage of the opportunities they present more nimbly.

Collaborative multi-university programs may need to be assessed differently than single-university programs, and multi-campus representative teams of faculty and academic leaders, including the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs office, will determine how best to coordinate program assessment across the System's universities in coordination with standard practices already in place at every university and in light of the Programs for Examination policy and process as well. It may become desirable for program assessments to become more standardized over the next few years, but that will be determined in a fully consultative fashion over time for NECHE's first comprehensive evaluation visit under a unified accreditation.

Responsive to Concerns 9 (this may limit campus based curriculum development if all similar programs across the system must collaborate), 11 (assessments of course and program outcomes are difficult as is, it would be unmanageable for an entire system. We would lose the granular information), and 12 (individual accredited programs being forced to combine/collaborate with other non/differently accredited programs on other campuses), and to Question 26 (Is collaboration going to be mandated?)

7) How will Unified Accreditation affect the general education curriculum?

While we don't want general education requirements to create a barrier to student retention and achievement, there is no need to unify the current model at this time; a transition to unified accreditation does not require doing so. There is a block transfer agreement already in place that could form the basis of a shared general education curriculum if that is something the faculty believe would benefit UMS students.

Responsive to Question 23 (How will UA affect the general education – will it become unified?)

8) How will shared governance be maintained?

Shared governance is a core value of the System and its campuses, and faculty and staff have expressed their thoughts, ideas, and concerns on this and other major endeavors that affect the System. While the Board of Trustees has the deciding authority, Unified Accreditation is designed to be an open and transparent process throughout, with faculty having the same

input and voice from a System shared governance perspective as they do within their own universities now. As stated in the Guiding Principles, “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.”

Any changes determined to be necessary to the University of Maine System’s shared governance policies to achieve a unified accreditation, such as multi-campus or system-wide curriculum committees, faculty bodies, or academic governance standards, will be determined by faculty system-wide and reviewed and approved by the Chief Academic Officers Council, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and UMS Board.

Responsive to Concern 18 (only lip-service is given to shared governance – recent experiences (Academic Partnerships, Academic Integrity Policy, System Research Plan) tell us faculty will not really be included)

9) What are the implications for the faculty peer review process?

We need faculty with multiple areas of expertise, including subject matter and teaching practices, aligned with university and student needs. There is no need to change the peer review process at the university level, which will remain flexible enough to recognize and honor distinctive faculty contributions. Subject to UMS policy and approval, faculty will themselves determine appropriate standards as deemed necessary on a System-wide basis for faculty engaged in programs offered by two or more universities.

Responsive to Concern 8 (There are big implications on the peer review process – we have different standards across campuses (research vs teaching vs service))

10) What happens with each campus’s current re-accreditation schedules and timelines?

Universities that are currently nearing completion of their 10-year re-accreditation review will continue those efforts. As stated in the Guiding Principles, UMS leadership, NECHE, and the involved universities will determine an appropriate unified accreditation transition schedule that takes into account the individual university’s accreditation status and schedule. Once a unified accreditation is achieved, UMS universities will not have to separately manage accreditation reviews on their own, although they will retain the opportunity to have NECHE teams visit their campuses as part of future System-wide accreditation reviews, and it is expected that NECHE teams will visit every university through the implementation of a unified accreditation model.

The current schedule of UMS university accreditation reviews can be seen [here](#).

Responsive to Question 21 (If UA takes 2-3 years to develop, what about current timelines for each campus within their own re-accreditation schedule?)

11) Who will be responsible for collecting the necessary data for accreditation? How would NECHE conduct its visits?

Both campuses and System staff will have a role to play. System IR will work closely with campus IR and experienced accreditation personnel to assure the self-study has sufficient data and other information for Unified Accreditation evaluations and reviews. Once NECHE has the self-study, we expect they would send a System-wide team, with sub-teams visiting individual universities. Individual universities can also request a visit, which NECHE will accommodate.

Responsive to Question 29 (Who will collect the accreditation data? Where will the voice of the small campuses be in that data collection?) and 30 (How could NECHE do a visit?)

12) Campuses have had some bad experiences in the past with the early stages of centralized services; why should they trust the System in this instance?

Trust is the foundation to any successful collaborative endeavor; to not invest time in building trust could negatively impact this work, which is so important to our future and that of our state. Transparency is also key, and the Chancellor has repeatedly stressed his commitment to transparency.

But Unified Accreditation is only the beginning. It is a mechanism by which to enhance campus-driven opportunities to work together to better serve our state, and, in cases where it makes sense, will allow interested provosts and faculty to partner on high-impact goals and multi-campus programs. The actual change, with Board approval, would take place over time by UMS universities working together to respond to their own needs in coordination with UMS leadership.

Responsive to Concern 10 (we have ongoing serious trust issues with any BoT/Chancellor/UMS office initiatives because of bad experiences in the past with top down change)

13) What can be achieved by Unified Accreditation that we cannot do now by cross-listing courses or by using MOUs? Why not just have centralized IR help smaller campuses gather data for their own accreditation?

Separate university NECHE accreditation is the main barrier to the scope and scale of meaningful collaborations that would allow us to best serve our mission and preserve all of our universities where they are. With separately accredited universities, NECHE will accept only a limited number of cross-listed courses and collaborative (multi-university) programs, as the accreditation process must hold the accredited institution accountable for the academic experiences of its students. Unified Accreditation removes that barrier so that faculty-driven programs and other academic collaborations across the system can be implemented to fully realize their potential and best meet our public mission all across the State.

The issue is more complex than the ability of any one university to get the data and related resources it needs for accreditation. Some of our universities, as they are currently configured, are in clear danger of not meeting all of the accreditation standards now. Because it draws on all of the resources of the entire System, and holds the entire System accountable and responsible, Unified Accreditation relieves those individual campuses of the burden for meeting each of the standards on their own, and reduces the expenses associated with undergoing individual accreditations.

Responsive to Questions 24 (What can be achieved by UA that we cannot do now by using Cooperating Departments (and MOU's if needed)? We can get collaborative programs this way. Also if we implemented the BoT cross-listing policy that would remove another roadblock to collaboration) and 25 (Why not just have a centralized IR to help smaller campuses gather data for their own accreditation? Putting resources into IR would seem to be more cost effective and timely than pursuing UA)

14) Could problems in one program or one campus hold up accreditation for all?

While the UMS will need to demonstrate system-wide compliance for each standard for continued unified accreditation, it will not depend on any individual program or university for doing so. Local problems will still need to be solved locally, but there will also be System and other university assistance and resources if needed, including adopting a collaborative program model if it makes sense to do so to preserve access to an otherwise under-resourced program. The preamble to NECHE's standards speaks to this: "Each of the Standards articulates a dimension of institutional quality. In applying the Standards, the Commission assesses and makes a determination *about the effectiveness of the institution as a whole*... The Commission recognizes that some aspects of an institution are always stronger than others. Meeting the Standards does not guarantee the quality of individual programs, courses, or graduates, but serious weaknesses in a particular area may threaten the institution's accreditation." (italics added)

Responsive to Concern 14 (one serious issue in one program or one campus could hold up accreditation for all)

15) Will Unified Accreditation save money? How will it impact campus budgets?

Some, as there will be savings in NECHE dues and the time and resources committed to preparing for six separate, uncoordinated university site visits and 5- and 10-year reviews. But Unified Accreditation is not being pursued as a cost savings initiative. It is, first and foremost, a mechanism to allow the universities and the UMS to better serve the State of Maine, and as a way to protect programs and campuses by giving UMS universities the ability to develop and offer shared programs, which is not possible in the current separate accreditation model.

The UMS already has a unified budget process and allocation model in place, and campuses have benefited accordingly as they are gradually being brought into closer alignment with their

peers. The implications of Unified Accreditation on individual budgets will vary depending on how each campus approaches the opportunities available to them in a unified accreditation model. At the very least, there will be some savings as campuses will no longer handle the full re-accreditation process and related expenses themselves.

Responsive to Question 28 (What is the actual cost savings?) and 27 (How will this impact campus budgets)

16) What impact will Unified Accreditation have on competition between UMS programs and campuses?

Right now, our universities are competing for the 30% of Maine high school college-going graduates who end up matriculating at one of UMS's universities. This ignores our more serious competition with some of the state's private schools, where most of the other 70% go. Collectively, with a unified accreditation, we can be more outwardly-focused and better coordinate our marketing and outreach efforts, thus reducing internal competition. We can also offer greater access to the System's academic portfolio no matter where a learner resides.

Responsive to Question 32 (How will this end competition between programs and campuses?)

17) What will the impact of Unified Accreditation be on Financial Aid?

Our Guiding Principles state that individual universities will continue to manage financial aid locally, and a UMS model for doing so already exists between the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias. Even though the Machias campus is accredited together with the University of Maine, the U.S. Department of Education has permitted UMM to continue to administer financial aid for its students.

Responsive to Question 22 (Will we have unified Financial Aid?)

18) We will be able to share library and other resources?

In a Unified Accreditation model, UMS expects to reduce the number of licenses required for library and IT materials so that these resources can be shared more broadly across our universities, rather than being forced to maintain separate licenses and subscriptions by separately accredited universities.

Responsive to Concern 13 (Resources across campuses are not equal (ie library) – NECHE will be looking at that.)

19) How prepared is the Board of Trustees for something of this magnitude?

The Board of Trustees has the legal and fiduciary responsibility to oversee the University of Maine System. Board and System leaders, including Presidents and Chief Academic Officers,

have met with Dr. Barbara Brittingham, president of the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), and understand their responsibilities in the context of the challenges the System's universities face. They may have a better perspective than those who have never participated in accreditation efforts, since they have engaged directly with NECHE on this question.

Responsive to Concern 20 (The Trustees are probably not familiar with the complexity and nuances of the academic accreditation process, it does not make sense to have them be making this decision just based on recommendations from the Chancellor's office)

20) How much time and effort will this take? Will it be worth it? How will we meet all the outcomes identified in the Chancellor's recommendation to the Board?

There is no doubt that this endeavor will require concerted effort and commitment from all of us. The Board has asked the Chancellor to submit a framework for moving this forward, and expects to vote on whether to pursue unified accreditation at its January 2020 meeting. The System would then submit a substantive change request to NECHE that the Commission would consider in late spring or early summer 2020. If the Commission accepts the request, the System as a whole would effectively become accredited at that point, would be subject to an initial implementation visit from NECHE (likely within 6 months), and would then have two years to prepare for NECHE's comprehensive evaluation visit, during which time faculty and academic leaders at UMS universities will determine with UMS leadership how best to satisfy NECHE's standards in a unified way and best permits UMS to meet its state-wide public mission.

UMS and university leaders will also work with U.S. Department of Education staff to ensure proper financial aid administration at each university in a unified accreditation model.

Not pursuing Unified Accreditation, however, may well result in the need to make some very hard decisions about eliminating unsustainable programs and practices. Given the known demographic threats, and the economic uncertainties we face, there may also be campus closures or reorganizations. If successfully realized, Unified Accreditation will allow us to better prepare for those challenges and, ideally, avoid them altogether.

At base, Unified Accreditation will give us the space and coordination we need to secure the futures of our smaller universities, respond more nimbly to market demands, serve the state more effectively, and, most importantly, better support our students and their success. It will require all of us working together to realize the potential of this initiative.

Responsive to Concern 19 (another UMS initiative that will require extensive investment of time and resources for what might possibly be an abandoned pursuit – resulting in lowered morale), and Question 31 (How (specifically) will you reach the outcomes stated in the UA Recommendation document?)

APPENDIX C

SUMMARIES OF SELECT UMS UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE WITH NECHE FOCUSED VISITS AND FIVE- AND TEN-YEAR REVIEWS

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE/UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT MACHIAS

Dr. Jeff St. John
Senior Associate Provost for Academic Affairs
University of Maine

The University of Maine and our regional campus, the University of Maine at Machias, are nearing completion of our ten-year accreditation review. We hosted a NECHE-appointed evaluation team in Orono and Machias in April 2019, received the team report in June 2019, and filed our response to the Commission in August 2019.

UMaine began preparing for its Spring 2019 evaluation in December 2016.

In early Spring 2017, we recruited writing teams attached to each of the NECHE standards. The 5-6 member teams comprised faculty, administrators, and staff. The teams produced drafts of the Self-Study's nine narrative sections in Summer-Fall 2017. (The most complicated and time-consuming draft— for Standard Seven: Institutional Resources—was completed in Spring 2018.) We assembled the first full draft of Orono's Self-Study material in Summer 2018, while a UMM writing team concurrently drafted Machias's contributions.

A six-member Steering Group comprising UMaine's Senior Associate Provost, Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Assessment, Assessment Coordinator, and two faculty members, along with UMM's former Head of Campus, formed in August 2018. A subset of that group— a three-person writing team— combined and aligned the two Self-Study narratives in September 2018, made extensive revisions and additions throughout, added initial in-text data, and shared a working draft with NECHE Vice President Carol Anderson at her invitation.

Guided by Vice President Anderson's feedback, the writing team made further revisions and additions, embedded more data, and shared the updated document with the Steering Group, the President's Cabinet, and the Deans' Council in December 2018. The Self-Study underwent two further sets of revisions before taking final shape in early Spring 2019. With help from a number of UMS finance and data personnel, UMaine's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment compiled and validated all of the UMaine and UMM data appearing in the Self-Study.

The evaluation team chair made a preliminary visit to campus in December 2018 to meet with President Ferrini-Mundy and Orono and Machias administrators, faculty, and staff. The full team visited in Spring 2019. Team members met with campus leaders, faculty, staff, students,

Boards of Visitor members (Orono and Machias), the former UMS Chancellor and his senior staff, and members of the UMS Board of Trustees.

About 110 University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias faculty, staff, students, and administrators in Orono, Machias, and Portland have contributed to the ten-year accreditation review, with roughly 3100 hours of staff time invested in the process.

President Ferrini-Mundy will meet with the Commission and the team chair on November 21, 2019 to discuss the report, the response, and the actions we have taken (or are taking) to address the concerns shared with us. We expect to receive the Commission's "action letter"— assessing our evaluation and recommending areas of emphasis or improvement— in early 2020.

The university's next NECHE reporting obligation will be the (regular/standard) annual report we file for Orono and Machias in April 2020.

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

Dr. Jeannine Uzzi

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Dominic Barraclough

Vice Provost for Mission and Accreditation

In Fall 2019, the University of Southern Maine (USM) began the process of completing the requirements for reaffirmation of accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). This process involves creating a one-hundred page institutional self-study with supporting evidence and “data first” forms that addresses not only the nine accreditation standards but also federal regulations and information about the institution’s finances and enrollment. The self-study is expected by the Commission to be the culmination of a significant campus-wide conversation, normally comprising at least eighteen months, on what the institution already does well and where it can improve.

At the time of this writing, the Provost has designated a larger Accreditation Steering Committee and a smaller Executive Steering Committee led by the Vice Provost for Mission and Accreditation. Compared to the process for the 2011 reaffirmation, which engaged more than 220 people across the university, USM’s 2021 process will be more efficient, while still allowing members of the community ample opportunity to contribute. The Executive Steering Committee has drafted a timeline of the process (see below), developed a structure for how working groups will interact, and begun soliciting individuals to take on leadership roles in the self-study process. Working groups will begin meeting regularly in the coming months in anticipation of holding focus groups and open forums in Spring 2020.

Sixty percent of the self-study is expected to convey to the review team, and to NECHE, an institution's appraisal of how well it meets each of NECHE's Standards for Accreditation. Because of this emphasis, USM expects that the work in the Spring will consist primarily of engaging the campus community in a forthright reflection on where the institution may be challenged. Writing will begin in late Spring or early Summer, with continued campus engagement in the Fall. The final product must be delivered to NECHE and the review team in March 2021, with a review team visit to campus scheduled for April 18-22, 2021.

University of Southern Maine NECHE Self-Study Timeline (as of October 30, 2019)

Fall 2019 Semester

October

~~Self-Study Workshop~~

~~NECHE VP Visit~~

Weekly Meetings on Calendar

Alternate between Full and Exec

November

Assign Standard Advisory Chairs and Committee Members

Develop Technology Plan (File-sharing and website)

First Run at Data First Forms

Campus Notification from Glenn

Develop naming convention for evidence files

December

Standard Advisory Committees begin regular meetings

Review previous NECHE Concerns

2019 Progress Report Response from NECHE (Dec. 1)

Winterim 2020

January

Data First Forms Workshop (January 16, 2020)

Schedule Campus Forums

Spring 2020 Semester

February

Hold Campus Forums

Writer's Instructions Shared

Develop Narrative Theme(s)

March

Hold Campus Forums

DRAFT First Draft of Description Sections

May

DRAFT Last Draft of Description Sections

Summer 2020 Semester**June**

DRAFT First Draft Appraisal Section (by August)

July

Self-Study Workshop II (July 28, 2020)

August

Schedule Appraisal-Projection Open Forums for September

Fall 2020 Semester**September**

Hold Appraisal-Projection Open Forums

DRAFT First Draft Projection Sections

October

DRAFT Last Draft Appraisal Sections

DRAFT Last Draft Projections Sections

Review Team Chair Campus Visit with President

November

Send DRAFT Self-Study to NECHE for Review

Bring in Professional Writer (?)

Last Run on Data First Forms

DRAFT Introduction, Campus Overview & Appendices

Review Commission suggested Review Team Members

December

Revise DRAFT per NECHE Feedback

Check Narrative against Last Run on Data First Forms

Winterim 2021**January**

Finalize DRAFT

Send Final Draft to Publications

Spring 2021 Semester

February

Coordinate with Team Chair on Visit Schedule, Accommodations, and tentative responsibilities

March

Final Self-Study sent to Review Team and NECHE (March 5, 2021)

Publish Invitation for Public Comments (March 15, 2021)

April

Comprehensive Review Team Visit (April 18-21, 2021)

Verbal Exit Report at Final Meeting (April 21, 2021)

POST-VISIT TIMELINE**Summer 2021 Semester****June**

Review First Draft of Report for Factual accuracy

Submit Corrections (if any)

July

Review Final Review Team Report

Draft Response Letter

Submit Response Letter

Fall 2021 Semester**November**

Attend Commission Meeting

Winterim 2022**January**

Official Letter expected from NECHE on Accreditation Status

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UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT AUGUSTA

Dr. Greg Fahy

Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences

UMA began the process of developing our five-year interim report in the spring semester of 2019, convening a group of eight faculty and staff from across the institution to draft a report. Over the summer of 2019, our Accreditation Liaison Officer and an English faculty member polished the draft document. In September, we sent the thirty-three page document out to the entire UMA community.

The document contains three substantive sections. These include: 1) updates on our focused visit themes: student success, student default rate and our Second Chance Pell program; 2) a reflective essay on student success at UMA and 3) updates since 2015 on each of the NECHE standards. We received feedback from dozens of individuals across campus and are working with a review team made up of faculty to provide more substantive suggestions for the document. There will be several iterations sent out to the community during this fall semester for a final draft sent to NECHE on January 20.

As part of our interim report, we also hosted a NECHE visitor at our Rumford Center to evaluate how we are serving our students who access our courses and services primarily at a center. That visit occurred October 7-8, and we developed a six-page report devoted to courses and services at centers. We received a very positive exit report from Dr. Maria Altobello and are awaiting her written report.

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UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT FORT KENT/UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT PRESQUE ISLE

*Dr. Tex Boggs, President and Provost
University of Maine at Fort Kent*

*Dr. Raymond Rice, President and Provost
University of Maine at Presque Isle*

In September 2018, NECHE recommended to President Rice and then-President John Short that a single evaluation team visit both the UMFK and UMPI campuses in Spring 2019 for the purpose of two year focused site visits that were required of each campus. UMFK was charged with providing documentation concerning (1) implementation of One University initiative and the academic integrity of the Rural U Early College program and (2) establishing UMPI as an instructional location for the University's nursing program. UMPI was charged with providing documentation concerning (1) implantation of its competency-based BA in Business Administration and (2) establishing UMFK as an instructional location for the University's education programs. As a result, although both institutions compiled individual reports, because the visit specifically examined elements of administrative service, staff, and academic collaboration, the reports were coordinated through a series of meetings between University leadership and the evaluation team chair.

UMFK and UMPI Site Visit Processes

At UMFK, prior to the generation of its report, the University Liaison Officer emailed the individual directly responsible for each of the areas (6 areas) identified by the Commission as requiring a response in preparation for the focused evaluation visit. In each email, the University Liaison Officer asked the responsible individual to prepare a response to the Commission's request for information. At UMPI, a similar process was followed, with the two

individuals responsible for the areas identified by the Commission identified to draft a response; the University Liaison Officer was identified as having provided the final editing and preparation of the document. The President/Provost serves as the Liaison officer at both UMPI and UMFK.

At UMFK, to ensure that there were no misunderstandings about the Commission's expectations, the University Liaison Officer cut and pasted the expectations directly from the August 7, 2018 letter prepared by Dr. David P. Angel. After receiving the responses for each section, the University Liaison Officer used them to prepare a draft report. The appropriate sections of the draft report were then returned to the responsible individuals for editing and correction of any errors of fact that had been introduced during the preparation of the draft. A similar process was followed at UMPI.

For the shared positions section of the report, an email was sent to each UMFK staff member reporting to an administrator in a shared position. Each staff member was asked to share with the University Liaison Officer the member's perspective of the effectiveness of the shared position. This information was used to further develop the draft report. A similar letter with a similar request was sent to each academic division chairs and their responses were considered in the preparation of the next draft. A similar process was followed at UMPI, with the academic Deans providing input to the draft.

Penultimate drafts were sent to institutional Presidents for review and edits. Drafts were also distributed to the members of the President's Cabinet, and to the University of Maine System Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs for review. Final drafts were submitted to NECHE and the members of the Visiting Team.

The Visiting Team spent two full days during the April visit, one at each institution, and met with program leadership, program faculty and students, and presidents and select members of the cabinets. The Visiting Team delivered a draft of its report to UMFK and UMPI Presidents for factual accuracy and a final draft to each institution and NECHE following feedback. The single report addressed the NECHE considerations for each institution individually as well as providing commentary upon the One University initiative in common to both.

Finally, UMFK and UMPI provided testimony directly to the Commission in Massachusetts concerning the Site Visits and Visiting Team report in September 2019. Four individuals from UMPI and one from UMFK comprised the specific teams (which met with the Commission in back-to-back sessions). This required two full days of additional compensation time for each member of the institutional teams. UMPI received verbal confirmation from the Commission to continue its CBE programming and its Education program delivery at UMFK; the institution is awaiting official NECHE correspondence concerning these findings. UMFK received verbal confirmation from the Commission to continue its Nursing program delivery at UMPI, and for its progress toward accreditation of its Early College program by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships.

Gathering information, preparing drafts for each of the areas of concern (5), seeking reviews and revisions from the individual contributors (6), circulating the initial draft, using responses to the initial draft to revise the report, and asking for higher level administrator review prior to submission required that the author devote approximately 4-5 hours of work per week at each institution for more than 4 months.

UMPI Fifth-Year Interim Report

UMPI submitted its Fifth-Year Interim Report in August 2019. UMPI was the first UMS institution to complete the fifth-year report under the revised guidelines, passed the previous spring, which included highly expanded assessment expectations (Standard Seven) and assurance of capacity/fiscal viability. UMPI responded explicitly to three areas of special emphasis as requested by NECHE correspondence from 2015: (1) the implementation of proficiency education pedagogy, (2) fiscal sustainability; and (3) implementing and evaluating university-wide strategic planning designed to inform decision-making and strengthening institutional effectiveness.

The report was directed by the University Liaison Officer and included input from multiple cabinet leaders and specific administrators and faculty holding administrative duties (i.e., the Director of Academic Planning and Program Assessment, Registrar, Executive Director of Enrollment Management, CBO, and Executive Director of University Advancement and External Affairs). Data gathering for approximately four weeks prior to the writing of the narrative required approximately 8 hours of work per week. The drafting of the narrative required approximately 30 hours of writing per week for 4 weeks for the University Liaison and 8 hours per week for 4 weeks in terms of aggregated work for other contributors.

UMFK Fifth-Year Interim Report

The University of Maine at Fort Kent began its Fifth-Year Interim Report process in Fall 2019 with submission of the Report due in Summer 2020. Concerns identified by the Commission that must be addressed in the Interim Report are UMFK's capacity to address the impact of major demographic shifts on enrollment, the stability of leadership, and the need to monitor majors and concentrations with low enrollments and few full time faculty while adequately serving students in accordance with the Standards for Accreditation.

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY OF NECHE SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE, EVALUATION VISIT, AND FIVE- AND TEN-YEAR REVIEW PROCESSES

Dr. Kathy Yardley

Associate Provost and Dean of Education, Health and Rehabilitation

University of Maine at Farmington

NECHE Substantive Change and Evaluation Visit

NECHE details many types of change that would require a substantive change request, including the joining of separate units into a single accreditable institution. A move to unified accreditation therefore requires a substantive change report and confirming visit.¹¹

Given its preliminary consideration of unified accreditation, UMS has already had exploratory discussions with NECHE about a potential substantive change.

If the University of Maine System decides to move ahead with unified accreditation, it must provide a report, typically 25-30 pages in length, to the Commission before the date of implementation. In addition to a cover sheet and introduction that summarizes the proposed change and timeline, as well as a brief institutional overview, the report must include the following:

(1) A detailed description and analysis of the proposed change, including the purpose of the change and how it is consistent with the institution's mission. Each of the Standards for Accreditation must be addressed, and evidence must be provided to show how the institution will continue to meet each of the standards after the change;

(2) A multi-year revenue and expense budget, including the assumptions underlying the projections as well as an indication of the fiscal and administrative capacity of the institution to oversee and assure the quality of the proposed change;

(3) A projection of Future Developments.

NECHE expects institutions to include an assessment of institutional strengths, concerns, suggested responses to concerns identified previously, and long-range plans in the report.

After the Commission reviews the submitted report, it may choose from the following actions:

(1) Approve the change without conditions;

¹¹ See NECHE's [Policy on Substantive Change](#).

- (2) Approve the change with conditions specified;
- (3) Defer consideration, pending receipt of additional information;
- (4) Disapprove the proposed change

The Commission may also:

- (5) Require a focused visit or other measures to assess implementation of the change
- (6) Require a comprehensive evaluation of the entire institution. The Commission may act to accelerate the date for the next comprehensive evaluation when there are extensive changes.

Under some circumstances, the Commission requires a site visit to assess the implementation of the proposed change.¹² The Commission selects a single evaluator or a team comprised of two to three individuals to visit the institution for a period of one to two days, depending on the complexity of the substantive change. The evaluator/team is responsible for validating the information provided in the institution's written update/report, evaluating the institution's success in implementing the substantive change, and preparing a report and recommendation for the Commission's consideration.

The institution's update/report includes a description of the steps taken to implement the proposed change, relevant enrollment and financial information, continued plans for implementation, plans for additional substantive changes, and any other information believed to be useful. This report, along with the original substantive change proposal, is sent to the evaluator/team at least four weeks prior to the evaluation visit.

Within a month of the completed evaluation visit, the evaluator/team prepares a five to six page report, which includes any strengths and concerns related to implementation of the change. The institution has the opportunity to review the report for factual accuracy and can write a substantive response to the team report.

The evaluator/team leaders also prepares a confidential recommendation for the Commission that contains the following elements:

- (1) The team's recommendation on whether the substantive change should be included in the institution's accreditation.
- (2) The team's recommendation on the timing and content of any follow-up reporting on the implementation of the substantive change.

¹² See NECHE's [Procedures for the Substantive Change Evaluation Visit](#).

(3) The rationale for the recommendations.

The Commission considers the team report and confidential recommendation, as well as institutional materials and response, at its earliest meeting, and informs the institution of the action taken.

NECHE Interim Review (Five-Year Report)

Five years after a comprehensive evaluation, institutions are required to prepare an interim report that includes how the institution continues to meet the Commission's Standards for Accreditation, updates on work undertaken since the comprehensive review, and projected areas of focus for the next five years.¹³

In addition to a cover sheet, brief institutional overview, and introduction that describes the process followed and individuals involved in the report's preparation, the approximately fifty-page report must include the following:

(1) Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis - Institutions are expected to discuss, analyze, and appraise actions taken in response to areas identified by the Commission in its notification letter, and include a projection of areas/issues needing continued attention.

(2) Standards Narrative - Institutions are expected to respond briefly to Standards 1-7 and 9, addressing any significant changes since the comprehensive review and how the institution continues to meet each standard. The narrative must be supported with evidence, contextualized analysis, and appraisal.

(3) Reflective Essay on Educational Effectiveness to Address Standard 8 - The essay is expected to address the following:

- a. What students gain as a result of their education
- b. Assessment of student learning; "what and how students are learning"
- c. Measures of student success, including retention and graduation
- d. Satisfactory levels of student achievement on mission-appropriate student outcomes.

The recommended format for addressing each area includes a description of how the institution measures its effectiveness, the incorporation of supporting data and summaries of data analyses, and an evaluation of current successes and plans for further progress in achieving educational effectiveness. Information collected in the E-Series forms is used as a foundation for the essay.

¹³ See NECHE's [Statement on Interim \(Fifth-Year\) Reports](#).

(4) Institutional Plans - Institutions are expected to summarize their most significant issues and initiatives for the next five years.

(5) Appendix - The appendix includes an affirmation of compliance with Federal Regulations Relating to Title IV, the institution's most recent audited financial statement, the auditor's management letter, interim report forms, and the E Series forms.

In addition to the narrative report, institutions complete two sets of data forms. E-series Forms (Making Assessment more Explicit) provide a template for institutions to share their basic approach to assessment and summarize improvements made as a result of their findings. Data First Forms provide a template for sharing basic information relative to each standard. Data First Forms for Standard 8, Educational Effectiveness, provide a template for reporting on progression, retention, and graduation rates; licensure passage and job placement rates; and other measures of success.

NECHE Comprehensive Evaluation (10-Year Review)

NECHE accredited institutions undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least every ten years. At the center of the evaluation is the institutional self-study, a roughly 100-page report in which the institution evaluates how and how well they meet the Commission's Standards for Accreditation. The self-study typically begins eighteen months to two years prior to the on-site evaluation team's visit, and is a means of providing quality assurance to external stakeholders while informing continuous institutional improvement.¹⁴

The on-site evaluation is led by a team of trained faculty and administrators from peer institutions. The team spends multiple days on campus reviewing documents and conducting interviews with faculty, staff, students, BOT, and other stakeholders as they seek to validate the self-study in light of the institution's mission. The Commission considers the self-study, the team report, the confidential recommendation of the team chair, the institution's response, the history of the Commission's action with respect to the institution, and public comments solicited by the Commission typically during the semester following the visit. The institution's president and team chair also participate in this interactive discussion.

In preparing for a comprehensive evaluation, an institution typically identifies a steering committee and a self-study chair or co-chairs. The institution also identifies the committee structure that will best serve the campus and advance the work of the self-study. Each committee is responsible for drafting a response to an assigned standard.

In addition to the Cover Page, Table of Contents, Institutional Characteristics Form, and a Table of NECHE Actions, Items of Special Attention or Concern, the self-study includes the following components:

¹⁴ See NECHE's [Statement on Comprehensive Evaluation](#).

(1) Introduction - a brief summary of the self-study process, participants, and goals, and identification of areas the institution was asked to focus on

(2) Institutional Overview, including a summary of the principal self-study findings

(3) Narrative - the 100-page narrative is organized in chapters according to the standard addressed. The analytical framework used to address each standard is Description-Appraisal-Projection.

a. Description - a realistic and objective presentation of the present status of the institution with respect to each standard.

b. Appraisal - a thorough analysis and evaluation of institutional practices in a given area, recognizing achievements and areas for improvement and informed by evidence. This section demonstrates accuracy of an institution's self-perception and integrity in identifying areas of growth.

c. Projection - specific commitments made by the institution to maintain and enhance strengths and address areas of concern.

(4) Data First Forms

(5) Appendix - includes the completed Affirmation of Compliance, the most recent year's audited financial statements, auditor's management letter, list of supporting documents available in the work room and/or URLs, and E Series forms.

Three to six months prior to the team visit, the team chair visits campus to familiarize him/herself with the institution's organization, touch base on the progress of the self-study, assist with the development of the visit schedule, and address logistical issues. The actual team visit typically occurs from Sunday afternoon until mid-day Wednesday.

APPENDIX E

CONSIDERATION OF OTHER SYSTEM ACCREDITATIONS

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA¹⁵

Founded in 1956, USF is the fourth-largest public university in Florida, with an enrollment of 50,755 in the 2018–2019 academic year. USF has, since 2001, operated as a system of three separately accredited institutions: USF Tampa, USF St. Petersburg, and USF Sarasota-Manatee. Each of the three universities is currently accredited on its own by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

In March 2018, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed into law the Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2018, requiring the USF system’s three universities to consolidate their separate institutional accreditations into a single institutional accreditation. In March 2019, the USF Board of Trustees adopted [an implementation plan](#) that included, among other things:

- The process, steps and timeline to terminate the separate institutional accreditation of each USF campus by June 30, 2020 with no lapse in accreditation.
- An organizational chart that detailed a new administrative structure; Registrar and Student Records; Inter-campus transportation and campus access.
- A process that ensures students graduate in four (4) years.
- Consolidated Data Reporting to IPEDS beginning with the 2020-21 IPEDS Data Collection schedule.
- A vision for a three-campus university functioning seamlessly across the geographic boundaries of the campuses with limitless potential for local and global impact. A critical element to ensuring a successful environment post-consolidation will be the creation of opportunities to bridge the geographical distance between the campuses through increased communications, virtual connectivity, and online and blended learning opportunities.

As described, USF’s accreditation implementation plan is not intended to achieve a full “switch-on” on July 1, 2020, but rather sets in motion a series of actions with prescribed timelines that ensure a consolidated, single accreditation on July 1, 2020 and continued development beyond that date. The USF Board proposes to achieve USF accreditation consolidation through a detailed plan that will establish and ensure academic and administrative structures consistent with that of a preeminent research university in the State and the requirements of SACSCOC accreditation, as well as university and academic administration that is responsible and efficient in unifying operations, ensuring alignment of accountability and authority across campuses while providing local leadership and immediacy of response.

¹⁵ Summarized by Beatrice Fevry, UMS Executive Director of Finance Policy and Special Projects.

A USF working group proposed [a detailed plan](#) to achieve USF consolidation and ensure, among other things:

- Uniformity of student admissions across the university while maintaining access, diversity and student success;
- Uniformity of learning outcomes for a degree program offered at multiple sites across the university irrespective of campus delivering the program; • Equitable access for students to services across the university;
- Faculty control of curriculum;
- Unified faculty governance across USF;
- Unified faculty tenure and promotion guidelines consistent with workload assignments; and
- Access to academic programs and infrastructure through digital and physical connections between campuses;

Speaking to the necessary culture change attendant with accreditation consolidation, USF intends that the unique identities and attributes of each campus in “a single university that is geographically distributed” can be expressed through the degree programs offered on each campus, and the related unique High Impact Practices, service learning and internships offered, research conducted, and community engagement activities promoted based on the local strengths of each campus. This is expected to enhance opportunities available to current and future students in a consolidated USF, while simultaneously promoting and celebrating local identity.

Additional information about the USF university accreditation consolidation is available [here](#).

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA¹⁶

Between 2012 and 2018, the University System of Georgia (USG) merged 18 of its original 35 institutions into nine through a Board of Regents- (BOR) approved consolidation process, resulting in USG’s current 26 institutions. In her article “Better Outcomes Without Increased Costs?”,¹⁷ Lauren Russell evaluated the effectiveness of the first five of those consolidations, which resulted in merging ten institutions into five between 2012 and 2015.

Before the mergers at issue, the BOR had identified six principles by which they would administer and assess the proposed consolidations:

- greater opportunities to increase student attainment levels;
- improved access and enhanced regional identities of the merged institutions;
- improved economies of scale and scope;

¹⁶ Summarized by Dr. Kay Kimball, UMS Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

¹⁷ Russell, Lauren. (2018). Better Outcomes Without Increased Costs? Effects of Georgia’s University System Consolidations. *Economics of Education Review*. 68. 10.1016/j.econedurev.2018.12.006.

- enhanced regional economic development;
- streamlined administrative services without loss of quality; and
- reduced duplication of access to programs while enhancing access to instruction.

At the time of Russell's study, there were a combined total of 325,551 students in the System, 91 percent of whom were drawn from within Georgia as first-time, first-year students. Employing a "differences-within-differences" methodology, Russell explored the impact of those initial consolidations on student retention and graduation cohorts before and after consolidation, and in comparison with other, non-consolidated institutions within the USG. Russell found that, on the whole, consolidation resulted in improved outcomes for students without increased costs for them or for the institutions. Additionally, transfers within the USG, collaborations, pooled resources, policy revisions, and academic student supports were all enhanced or made easier through consolidation.

The retention rates at the USG non-consolidated institutions had been higher than those at the consolidated institutions prior to consolidation (82-84 percent vs. 73-75 percent), in part reflecting the need for consolidating the underperforming institutions. That gap narrowed by five percentage points following consolidation despite the lack of evidence that the consolidated universities were enrolling students who were any better prepared than they had been previously. Students who matriculated after consolidation were 2.3 percentage points more likely to re-enroll in a USG institution the following year compared to the non-consolidated universities, reducing the dropout rate at those consolidated institutions by 8 percent. Consolidation also reduced the three-year graduation rate for Associate's degrees by three percentage points, mostly due to students transferring into baccalaureate programs within the USG.

Analysis of student attainment in baccalaureate programs was based on persistence estimates since consolidation was too recent for the author to track graduation rates. Those data revealed that the percentage of students graduating in four years improved by four percentage points, an increase of 29 percent, which was greater than the 1.7 percentage-point improvement for first-to-second-year retention. Russell posits that consolidation improved the probability of on-time graduation for students who would not have dropped out after their first year. In fact, she found that the effects of consolidation were largest on students in the top quartile of predicted retention and on-time graduation distributions, but the effects were positive for students in all quartiles.

Russell also reviewed pre- and post-consolidation expenditures in instruction, academic supports, and student services, as well as total operating expenditures, in an effort to determine whether the economies of scale and related BOR principles were reached through consolidation. Although total spending was decreased by five percent relative to that of the non-consolidated universities, there was no statistically significant evidence of reduced instructional spending. There were, however, statistically significant shifts in academic supports and student services expenditures. In fact, consolidation reduced spending in administrative and student services by 18 percent, which allowed USG to invest those savings in enhancing

academic supports by increasing those expenditures by 47 percent. The investment in academic supports seems an obvious, if potential, source for the improvements in persistence.

The author supplemented her statistical analysis with interviews with institutional administrators, who acknowledged greater ability to be more innovative and flexible specific to revising policies and reorganizing offices. Consolidation enabled them to create a more seamless experience for students in a more academically supportive environment by allowing them to reduce duplicative positions in student services and academic administration and reinvest the realized savings in academic advising and support personnel. Additionally, while new academic advising systems were implemented across the USG, the consolidated institutions were able to do so more quickly and with more staff than the non-consolidated institutions.

Considering whether the mergers increased the costs for students, Russell concluded the data were “too noisy” to reveal clear significance, but she found no “robust evidence” that consolidation negatively impacted costs for students, and also found clear evidence that it reduced costs for the universities themselves, which allowed them to reduce unneeded duplicated student services and invest in academic support. As she states in her conclusion, “Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that consolidations were quality improving and benefited students ... [and constitute] a promising policy option that merits further consideration.”

UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA SYSTEM

In early August 2019, as university leaders worked feverishly to manage a proposed \$135 million cut to their system's state appropriation, the University of Alaska System's Board voted overwhelmingly to pursue a transition from three separately-accredited universities to a single accredited institution with three locations. As reported, the proposal would have streamlined curricula and student services as well as created a single college for each major field of study throughout the university system.

By mid-September 2019, however, in response to smaller enacted state appropriation cuts – \$70 million over three years instead of \$135 million all at once – the University of Alaska Board of Regents approved a motion to consider both single- and multiple-university accreditation models.

Given the immediacy and scope of the budget crisis that motivated the University of Alaska System Board's consideration of unifying their university accreditations, it is difficult to draw parallels to UMS's motivations for pursuing a unified accreditation.



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November 19, 2019

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FR: Ellen N. Doughty, Clerk of the Board
RE: Notification of Board Actions

The University of Maine

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees on November 17-18, 2019 hosted by the University of Maine at Farmington, the Board approved the following actions:

University of Maine
at Augusta

Report on a Summary of Process Considerations & Framework for Pursuing Unified Accreditation.

University of Maine
at Farmington

The Board of Trustees approved the following resolution:

University of Maine
at Fort Kent

1. Receives and accepts the Chancellor's Report on a Summary of Process Considerations and Framework for Pursuing Unified Accreditation and directs that it be transmitted to appropriate officials at NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education to enable further discussions to prepare for a potential transition to unified accreditation.

University of Maine
at Machias

University of Maine
at Presque Isle

2. Authorizes and directs the Chancellor to continue to visit and engage with all UMS campuses to obtain appropriate input from all UMS stakeholders, and to engage with NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education as necessary and appropriate, in further developing implementation plans that would be necessary for a successful transition to unified accreditation.

University of
Southern Maine

3. Directs the Chancellor to prepare appropriate materials to bring to the Board for action at its January 2020 meeting the question of whether to initiate proceedings with NECHE, and as further appropriate with the U.S. Department of Education, to begin a transition to a unified institutional accreditation for the University of Maine System pursuant to the Guiding Principles already established.

4. Authorizes and directs the Chancellor and UMS Presidents to take such preliminary actions as may be necessary before Board action in January 2020 to ensure that a proper unified accreditation substantive change application can be prepared if the Board authorizes such action at that meeting.

cc:
Dannel Malloy, Chancellor
System Staff
Faculty & Student Representatives
University Presidents
Boards of Visitors



UNIFIED ACCREDITATION FINAL RECOMMENDATION

TO: University of Maine System Board of Trustees

FROM: Dannel P. Malloy, Chancellor

CC: UMS University Presidents

DATE: January 27, 2020

This statement summarizes my recommendation that the University of Maine System (UMS) Board of Trustees authorize and direct UMS's public universities to seek approval from the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) to transition their existing separate university institutional accreditations to a unified institutional accreditation for UMS. At your direction from your November 18, 2019 meeting, I have brought forward a Resolution calling for this action, along with the governance conditions that I believe will ensure its success.

As you know from [my previous reports](#), in response to concerns earlier in UMS's history that its universities were not meeting the purpose of the System's founding, this Board first authorized the pursuit of unified institutional accreditation for in 1986, calling it an "excellent opportunity to pioneer in the pursuit of excellence."¹ While that authorization was not implemented at the time or since, the more recent reality of constrained resources, declining demographics, evolving student expectations, technological advances, and state workforce needs, along with the Board's own strategic priorities that require increasing collaboration between UMS universities in better service to the State of Maine, all demand, more than ever before, that we finally take this step.

Unified accreditation offers the opportunity for our universities to work together to offer academic programming they cannot stand up on their own and share administrators, faculty, technology, and other resources and best practices to improve the overall quality of the

¹ See *Unified Accreditation Recommendation*, at 3-4.

student experience and the universities themselves. Our work to unify the current separate university accreditations will itself be transformative and culture-changing, allowing the best elements of institutional quality at each of UMS's universities to be shared System-wide without compromising quality anywhere. That, ultimately, is our goal, and the Resolution before you holds us accountable to it.

With NECHE now a ready partner, UMS is poised – in the words of NECHE's own [*Standards for Accreditation*](#) – to take the innovative step of unified accreditation to increase the effectiveness of higher education across the entire University of Maine System.

I now seek the Board's full support for the initiative with its authorization vote to proceed.

* * * * *

The process and work leading to my September and November 2019 reports – the *Unified Accreditation Recommendation* and *A Summary of Process Considerations and Framework for Pursuing Unified Accreditation* reports – are recounted in the Agenda item accompanying the Unified Accreditation Resolution before you (and available through links to our Unified Accreditation webpage in your materials). With these reports, you can refresh your understanding of the System's long, slowly evolving effort to coordinate its academic and limited financial resources to better meet its public teaching, research, and service missions to the State of Maine.

Since the November meeting, and with your authorization then to do so, I have been working on preliminary actions to position UMS to be ready to begin work immediately to seek unified accreditation from NECHE. I have formed two planning committees: an Academics and Student Affairs/Advising Committee, co-chaired by Presidents Joan Ferrini-Mundy (UMaine) and Ray Rice (UMPI); and a Finance, Administration, and Student Support Services Committee, co-chaired by President Becky Wyke (UMA) and UMS Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low. There are representatives from all seven UMS universities assigned to the committees, which will draw on still others across our System and externally as necessary to outline our substantive change application to NECHE. I will also co-convene a Unified Accreditation Coordinating Council along with Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen. This Council, which includes the four co-chairs of the other two committees, along with President Glenn Cummings (USM), UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido, and other System Staff, will coordinate the work of the two planning committees. Together, the planning committees and Coordinating Council will develop the broader narrative for how the University of Maine System, acting in System-wide coordination through its universities, will comply with NECHE's *Standards for Accreditation*.

Along with Presidents and my Senior Staff, I also convened a meeting of all UMS University Faculty Senate/Assembly leaders to discuss an appropriate System-wide academic/shared governance model that will be necessary in our unified accreditation model. These Faculty

leaders were overwhelmingly supportive of and optimistic about this engagement and opportunity to participate in System-wide academic governance.

As the 1986 Visiting Committee that first proposed unified accreditation presciently observed, having separate university accreditations does not permit consideration of how any one or more of UMS's universities together contribute to the overall quality, purpose, and mission of Maine's statewide public university system.² With unified accreditation for the University of Maine System, for the first time in the nation, all of a state's public universities will be evaluated based on how well they share the state's resources in service to students in the important elements of mission, governance, academic program, student services, institutional resources, teaching, learning, and scholarship, and educational effectiveness – for these are the NECHE standards of quality UMS universities *will meet together* with unified accreditation. And importantly, in the model we will pursue, as we first charted in our *Guiding Principles*, our universities can do so without giving up their local missions or ability to offer high-quality degree-programs on their own.

The Board is right to be concerned about measuring success. But it is important to note that the NECHE *Standards for Accreditation* themselves establish the nationally recognized benchmarks for higher education institutional quality. I believe it will be appropriate for the Board to rely initially on NECHE itself as the first arbiter of the quality and success of the unified accreditation model that UMS will propose. Once NECHE confirms unified accreditation, the self-study report UMS will prepare in advance of NECHE's comprehensive evaluation will provide further important opportunities for UMS to reflect and improve on the quality of the student experience and academic program both at individual UMS universities and collectively across the System. And as provided in the Resolution before the Board, over that time we will work to align progress on the Board's *Declaration of Strategic Priorities* and Key Performance Indicators with the opportunities that unified accreditation presents.

I have consciously not repeated here the volume of history, information, and recommendations in my September and November reports, though I hope you will consult both again as you finally weigh action. I close simply by noting that the time for decisive innovation in public higher education is now, and unified accreditation presents us with a *Dirigo* moment.

I urge the Board to give the University of Maine System this charge.

Dannel P. Malloy
Chancellor, University of Maine System

² See *Unified Accreditation Recommendation*, at 3-4 (citing Visiting Committee Report, at 15).



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January 28, 2020

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FR: Ellen N. Doughty, Clerk of the Board
RE: Notification of Board Actions

The University of Maine

At a meeting of the Board of Trustees on January 26-27, 2020 hosted by the University of Maine, the Board approved the following action:

University of Maine
at Augusta

Unified Accreditation Authorization.

The Board of Trustees approved the following resolution:

University of Maine
at Farmington

University of Maine
at Fort Kent

University of Maine
at Machias

The University of Maine System Board of Trustees directed the Chancellor and UMS University Presidents to prepare and submit an appropriate substantive change application to the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) to transition the current separate UMS university institutional accreditations to a unified institutional accreditation for the University of Maine System, covering all of its universities, in such time as to permit NECHE's initial consideration by June 30, 2020.

University of Maine
at Presque Isle

Board approval for unified accreditation is subject to the following conditions:

University of
Southern Maine

1. Unified accreditation must be planned, applied for, and administered in such ways as will follow the University of Maine System Charter, the Guiding Principles established by the Chancellor in consultation with System University Presidents, the Board's policies on academic freedom and shared governance, and current labor agreements. The unified accreditation model planned and developed by the Chancellor and UMS University Presidents will be structured to achieve the highest quality student experience, academic program quality and relevance, and university financial stability in accord with the System's mission in service to the State of Maine.
2. As the UMS substantive change application to NECHE is developed, the Chancellor and UMS University Presidents will review UMS Board Policies to ensure alignment with the unified accreditation model developed in compliance with NECHE's Standards for Accreditation. The Chancellor and UMS University Presidents will report and provide recommendations to the Board no later than the May 2020 meeting of any changes in existing UMS Board policies, or necessary new policies, that should be adopted for alignment.
3. At each Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting and every other Board meeting through NECHE's comprehensive evaluation of UMS's unified accreditation, there will be a standing agenda item for the Chancellor and Presidents to report to the Board on progress, status, and issues. The Chancellor is directed to, as soon as is

practical, present to the Board a project timeline and milestones, together with a tracking plan with which to monitor progress both toward achieving unified accreditation and the Board's strategic priorities that it advances.

4. Recognizing that NECHE's Standards for Accreditation themselves establish the essential elements of higher education institutional quality, by which UMS universities, acting together in the System in a unified accreditation model, will work together to improve the System's quality, increase its effectiveness, and continually strive for collaborative excellence, the Board expects that the process of developing the unified accreditation substantive change application and comprehensive evaluation report will necessarily identify opportunities to improve System quality on each of the NECHE Standards' elements. At the same time, the Board expects to maintain progress and momentum on its Declaration of Strategic Priorities and Key Performance Indicators. Therefore, as part of the report called for in Paragraph 3 above, the Chancellor will include proposals for aligning UMS's Strategic Priorities and KPIs with the outcomes intended to be achieved through unified compliance with NECHE's Standards at the System level.

5. It is the Board's expectation that unified accreditation will not require substantial increases to System administration or governance at the expense of university administration and governance or academic program and student support resources. UMS University Presidents and the Chancellor will develop and seek from NECHE a unified accreditation model that coordinates System and university-based resources in System-wide coordinated efforts to achieve compliance with NECHE Standards across the System, and sustain those changes to ensure high quality educational experiences in accord with the Standards.

6. Appreciating the Chancellor's transparency in the unified accreditation effort to date, the Board directs that all System and university constituencies be updated regularly on the status of UMS's application for unified accreditation, progress toward achieving the same, and the nature and extent of challenges and successes that are encountered throughout the System and at UMS universities in the process.

cc:
Dannel Malloy, Chancellor
System Staff
Faculty & Student Representatives
University Presidents
Boards of Visitors

University of Maine System Board of Trustees

Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs

Introduction

The University of Maine System unites Maine's public universities in the common purpose of higher education. Our universities produce citizens empowered by learning and scholarship to engage in free inquiry and employ the full range of human knowledge to solve complex problems. These graduates will be the thinkers and doers who advance our State and our nation in the future global economy.

The UMS Board of Trustees has a fiduciary responsibility to allocate resources strategically to serve the educational needs of Maine citizens most effectively and to advocate for public higher education as a means to strengthen the economy and communities of the State.

In May 2016, the Board adopted Primary and Secondary Outcomes to meet this charge and strategically guide resource allocation and investment within UMS through 2021.

Primary Outcomes

Increase enrollment

Improve student success and completion

Enhance UMS fiscal positioning

Support Maine through research and economic development

Secondary Outcomes

Relevant academic programming

University workforce engagement

While these remain the right general outcomes for our universities, the Board is keenly aware that the State of Maine's current and future demographic trends, social challenges, and workforce needs demand a renewed focus and amplification of the 2016 Outcomes. The Board has determined that, to be academically responsive to the State's critical workforce and societal needs and be more competitive in the national higher education marketplace, UMS universities must better serve their learners to help them become critical, creative, and ethical thinkers who can adapt to changes to work and society that will occur over the course of their lives. The Board therefore now declares a set of strategic priorities to meet these Outcomes and provide UMS leadership with sufficient direction and authority to address these critical student and State needs in service to the people, communities, and businesses of Maine.

The Challenge

With a total population of only 1,350,000, Maine is the nation's oldest state and is aging rapidly, creating new demands for services and great challenges for the state's workforce. Over the next 15 years, Maine's prime working age population of adults aged 25–64 will shrink from over 700,000 to 600,000, a decline of roughly 15 percent. Over that same time, the number of high-school graduates will gradually decline before making what some demographics experts predict will be a more precipitous drop after 2026 due to a nationwide decrease in births starting with and following the 2008 recession. While Maine's workforce is shrinking in absolute numbers, it is also experiencing a growing skills gap. In the years ahead, nearly two-thirds of new jobs will require a post-secondary credential or degree in existing and emerging fields in which

employers will demand concrete evidence of employability, while only just over 40 percent of adults hold such credentials today. The explosion of artificial intelligence and machine learning technology, and the growing spread of these and other data science capabilities throughout the economy, will result in many new economy jobs requiring new skill sets. Maine needs capital investment to land its share of those jobs, but it will not attract significant capital investment unless it increases the availability of human capital for business formation and expansion. Maine is already in an acute workforce crisis that could imperil its economy for a generation.

At the same time, a declining traditional-age student population, particularly in the northeastern United States, increases competition for students among higher education institutions – competition that will intensify at the same time a revolution is unfolding in higher education learning and teaching. Spurred by both information technology and changes in how the market assesses and values traditional degree programs, higher education is becoming unbundled, modular, and more focused on experiential learning and skills development. These trends presage acute enrollment challenges, particularly at UMS’s smaller campuses, at the very time when those campuses are ever more vital to their communities. And worse, this occurs as Maine’s rural economy and workforce and Maine employers need more – and more appropriately prepared – workers. Every UMS campus needs to be responsive to these trends as well as to the human capital requirements for the formation and expansion of Maine businesses.

The challenges UMS faces in Maine are consistent with the challenges faced by the entire U.S. higher education enterprise: escalating costs, intense global competition, poor completion rates, inadequate resources to enact transformation, and increased accountability for student outcomes and return on investment. As the Board proposes solutions for Maine through the goals and actions described here, it is at the same time addressing national and even global challenges to ensure meaningful, relevant, and sustainable approaches to higher education for a changing future.

The Solution

The State of Maine has charged its higher education institutions to work together cooperatively with Maine businesses to advance the Maine economy. At the same time, higher education exists to develop critical thinkers who can adapt to a changing world to solve problems with new solutions. To fulfill these mandates, 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.

The Board considers the new strategic actions called for in this Declaration while recognizing that many existing and planned UMS programs and actions not expressly identified herein also advance the Board's 2016 Priority Outcomes and serve the needs of the State. All such programs and actions should continue, with sufficient resources. Nevertheless, the University of Maine System Board of Trustees now finds, declares, and directs that UMS leadership take all necessary actions to achieve the following interrelated goals and actions. The actions described below are only first steps. The realization of the goals that follow will require sustained commitment, focus and resources for years to come.

Strategic Goals and Actions

1. **Advancing Workforce Readiness and Economic Development** – The State of Maine's declared higher education public policy requires UMS universities to cooperate among themselves and with Maine businesses to develop educational programs that produce critical thinkers with adaptable, transferable skills who will advance the Maine economy. Given Maine's demographic and economic challenges and workforce needs, UMS must strategically manage a collaborative, student-centered public higher education system that maximizes learner employability and economic opportunity and development, characterized by flexible, 21st century life-long learning opportunities, business and economic development, and research that drives economic innovation, all derived from effective partnerships and continuous feedback among students, parents, public education systems, policy makers, and employers.

Action 1:

Create effective partnerships and feedback loops with each major industry and employment sector that align priority program instruction, including experiential learning opportunities, with UMS capacity and workforce needs in order to maximize student employment readiness and executive and professional development and advancement. Ultimately, every UMS program will have the means to acquire continuous feedback from relevant market segments and provide meaningful work or professional development-related experiences for its students.

Immediate Deliverable: The Chancellor, working with senior leadership and using the most relevant current market data, will deliver a Workforce Engagement report that prioritizes programs and associated industries that maximize workforce impact and business and economic development, and that includes a gap analysis of UMS capacity with recommended steps for achieving full engagement, program alignment mechanisms, pathways for experiential learning opportunities, etc., for the March 2019 Board meeting.

Action 2:

Strengthen research and economic development efforts to support Maine industries and to foster business formation and expansion.

Immediate Deliverable: As chartered by the Chancellor, and in consultation with other System presidents and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the University of Maine President will, by March 2019, deliver a multi-year plan for prioritizing expanded research and development across the University of Maine System.

Action 3:

Operationalize the Maine Center for Graduate and Professional Studies as a central and robust resource for students and employers for graduate/professional education, development and advancement, including graduate certificates, across Maine.

Immediate Deliverable: This work is underway. The Maine Center Ventures Chief Executive Officer, working with and through the Maine Center Ventures Board and academic program leadership at the University of Maine and University of Southern Maine, will present a comprehensive analysis of current work and recommendations for the next project stage at the January 2019 Board meeting. UMS leadership will also consider whether Maine Center Ventures employer engagement efforts in support of the Maine Center can be applied effectively at scale to support Action 1 deliverables above.

Action 4:

In collaboration with existing businesses, non-profits, and community partners, UMS will develop coordinated workforce micro-credentials that are relevant in the workplace for economic advancement and expansion.

Immediate Deliverable: The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, in coordination with campus leaders and Maine Center Ventures as appropriate, and informed by the deliverables from Actions 1-3 above, will develop by May 2019 regionally-focused micro-credentials for current employment needs for all priority populations (including, but not limited to, veterans, rural populations, and new Mainers) that can be quickly adapted to future needs.

2. **Increasing Maine Educational Attainment** – UMS must expand access to the benefits of higher education in Maine. While Maine performs well in graduating students from high school, it lags behind much of the United States in post-secondary educational attainment. A worsening skills gap that stymies employers seeking to add new workers or replace retirees haunts our economy. There are a number of underserved populations UMS must draw on to increase attainment, including a greater percentage of high school graduates, adults – especially those with some post-secondary experience but no degree - historically underserved groups, veterans, new Mainers, which together comprise a “hidden workforce” that can be brought forward to compete successfully in the new economy. UMS must increase its commitment to serving all these populations across the early childhood to retirement continuum, but it must focus especially on adult learners and reducing the cost of credential or degree attainment.

Action 1:

In coordination with attainment efforts with public and private partners to meet the MaineSpark goal of 60% of adults having a post-secondary degree or credential by 2025, UMS must ensure its academic programs and student support services are fully aligned with and able to support adult learner needs.

Immediate Deliverable: Use all appropriate findings and recommendations from the June 2018 Adult Degree Completion (ADC) report, the workforce engagement report (Item 1 - Action 1), and the Maine Development Foundation’s 2018 *Making Maine Work* Report as the basis for developing comprehensive implementation and execution strategies to provide adult learners with

affordable, flexible, stackable, credential- and degree-based programming that is aligned with the needs of this learner population and their employers. These strategies should identify target opportunities for the immediate development of appropriate program delivery modalities and credential development, priority external partnerships (e.g., Department of Education, Department of Labor), and the needed resources and funding sources. A report of implementation and execution status will be provided for the March 2019 Board meeting.

Action 2:

Expand early college and related programs to reach a participation rate of 5,000 high school juniors and seniors by 2022, and support the development of programmatic capacity by 2025 in at least half of all Maine high schools sufficient to allow students in those schools the opportunity to obtain credits up to the equivalency of a high quality Associate degree by the time they graduate from high school, enhancing their educational goals and reducing their need for or reliance on student debt.

Immediate Deliverable: The Chancellor working with the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration will deliver a sustainable, long-term funding plan for this initiative by March 2019 and engage Maine policy makers as appropriate. The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs will deliver regular updates to the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee on program progress on a schedule to be determined.

Action 3:

To remain competitive, UMS must retain its status as a national leader in higher education affordability and tuition restraint, limiting tuition increases, investing in financial aid, and creating pathways for students with the highest need to complete their educational programs without tuition debt. UMS will strive to make all credential and degree attainment readily affordable and accessible to all Maine families, with the lowest possible level of debt.

Immediate Deliverable: Through the Chancellor's office, UMS and campus leaders will engage with Maine policy makers to share their expertise and develop state-wide strategies to increase access and affordability and further reduce student debt associated with attainment and report to the Board no later than May 2019 on these efforts. UMS and campus leaders will analyze existing efforts and report to Academic and Student Affairs Committee on which support programs can be scaled to have the most significant impact on reducing UMS student debt load.

3. Aligning Academic Programs and Innovation to Drive Student Success and Employer

Responsiveness – Each degree awarded by the UMS Board of Trustees certifies that the graduate has mastered a rigorous course of study that prepares the recipient for engaged citizenship and meaningful participation in Maine's economy. UMS must ensure that all its programs and credentials equip students with the best chance to be successful in both arenas. To accomplish these outcomes, UMS will ensure its courses and programs provide innovative market-relevant content and instruction that is aligned with the changing market for higher education.

Action 1:

UMS will develop innovative and highly collaborative academic programming models, pedagogical strategies, faculty development initiatives, and pilot projects to transform its academic programming to become and remain competitive with the changing post-secondary education market and achieve student success outcomes that meet critical State needs. This transformation will require bold steps that include a comprehensive and integrative process of System-wide program assessment, planning, prioritization, integration with workforce and attainment goals, and resource allocation, as well as all

necessary changes to program approval procedures and associated administrative processes to ensure rapid, flexible and responsive program consideration and deployment.

Immediate Deliverables:

- The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs will work with senior academic leadership to propose appropriate approval process(es), procedures, and structure that foster rapid, responsive program development, deployment, and evaluation. An expedited System-wide program implementation mechanism will be in place by Fall 2019.
- The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration will report recommendations to the Board by its May 2019 meeting for how the fiscal year campus budget development and approval process may be adapted to permit and facilitate more strategically coordinated human, financial, and programmatic resource allocation across the System to achieve the academic program responsiveness and efficiencies directed herein.

Action 2:

UMS will demonstrate academic responsiveness by establishing interdisciplinary programs with innovative pedagogies that prepare students to engage in key areas emerging for the growth of Maine's digital economy.

Immediate Deliverable: Building on work already underway, the Presidents of the University of Maine and University of Southern Maine will report to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Chancellor, and the Board with specific recommendations for programmatic innovations in the areas projected to be key to the future of the workplace in Maine and beyond -- specifically, data science (including artificial intelligence and machine learning), biomedical engineering, and health-related biosciences and genetics, with a timeline for implementation, by May 2019.

4. **Maintaining Competitiveness and Sustainability to Meet Critical State Needs** Although enrollment decline is acute in Maine, it is a problem throughout the United States and especially in the Northeast. Many higher education institutions in our region are competing for the same shrinking pool of potential traditional-aged students. UMS must move aggressively and collectively now to develop, implement, and communicate concrete plans to address this looming threat to assure the continued viability of our smaller campuses in the face of declining population and enrollment. At the same time, UMS must coordinate the use of its resources across and among all UMS universities on One University principles both to maximize public accountability and responsiveness to critical State needs and to assure ongoing competitiveness and relevance in the national higher education marketplace.

Action 1:

As deemed necessary to successfully execute the actions directed herein, UMS and campus leadership will accelerate the transition to One University organizationally, systemically, and culturally to facilitate resource allocation and investments across UMS that best achieve these outcomes.

Immediate Deliverable: As a summation of the above Action Item Deliverables, the Chancellor, as informed by UMS leadership, will make recommendations to the Board no later than May 2019 regarding budgetary, organizational, or structural changes that may be necessary to achieve the required deliverables, remain competitive, and meet critical State needs in a resource-limited environment.

Action 2:

UMS must raise public awareness and the aspirations of Maine citizens with sustained strategic communications about the actions undertaken pursuant to this Declaration, the benefit to students and the Maine economy of the further evolution of One University initiatives, and the value of higher education generally.

Immediate Deliverable: System and campus communications staff will align and distribute regular strategic public messaging about the actions taken pursuant to this Declaration, One University initiatives, and the 2016 Outcomes generally. Additionally, in conjunction with recommendations provided to the Board in May 2019 under Action 1 above, the Chancellor and System communications staff will include strategic internal and external communications plans for implementing all One University recommendations.