

NECHE
President of the Commission
Lawrence M. Schall
lschall@neche.org

Re: Substantive Change Request for Unified Accreditation of the University of Maine System
(Submitted June 10, 2020, Approved by NECHE June 23, 2020)

January 4, 2021

Dear President Schall,

As the Executive Committee of the Affiliated Faculties of the Universities of Maine (AFUM), we write to you on behalf of the almost 1,100 full-time faculty members of the 7 universities of the University of Maine System. Faculty have been told in various forums that the Unified Accreditation submitted by UMS on June 10 and approved less than two weeks later by NECHE was met with no objection by faculty or staff. We are writing to express deep concern over that characterization, made both by NECHE and repeated by UMS, that misrepresents the truth of the matter while ignoring important issues.

The rushed timeline to get approval means faculty were not provided a completed document until extremely late in the process (June), well after the NECHE deadline to provide comment. A short summary of events is provided below.

The UMS draft report distributed to faculty in early May 2020, excluded all mention of Cooperating Departments, a negotiated process for programs in different Universities to cooperate and share courses in a structure designed to preserve quality and faculty control of the curriculum. The document also had placeholder space, but no substance, for shared governance. Feedback closed May 15, 2020.

After much feedback and discussion, UMS did incorporate Cooperating Departments into the final document. This document however was not available to us, nor to the group working on Governance, until after it had been submitted to NECHE. The failure to include Cooperating Departments in the draft document negatively affected the ability of the Governance group to write the Governance section, as they were provided incomplete/misleading information on “shared” programs.

It was not until May 29, 2020 that the Governance section, with no reference or understanding of Cooperating Departments, was distributed to faculty. As UMS held that it was imperative that the proposal be considered at the June NECHE meeting, there was no provision for feedback on this draft.

UMS submitted the Substantive Change document to NECHE on June 10, 2020. It was only on this date that we had the ability to see the entire document.

It cannot go unmentioned that this process occurred in the early days of the global pandemic. Faculty and students were adapting to emergency teaching/learning. In May, students and we were focused on finishing the semester as successfully as possible and emphasis was on providing students with needed support.

As you no doubt know, NECHE requires that public comment be submitted sufficiently early to provide UMS 30 days to respond, and their response be given at least two weeks prior to the June 22 meeting. The facts make clear that it is disingenuous to claim that there even was a public comment period and why the statement that faculty raised no objection is so objectionable. That NECHE or UMS would make such a claim sacrifices truth for their own purposes.

We continue to have concerns associated with the accreditation and request a meeting, via technology, with you to discuss these concerns sometime before the Spring NECHE visit.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the AFUM Executive Committee,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim McClymer".

Jim McClymer, PhD AFUM President