

University of Maine System Unified Accreditation Progress Report / April 12, 2021

Introduction

In its July 17, 2020 letter to Chancellor Dannel Malloy granting unified accreditation to the University of Maine System (hereafter UMS), the Commission requested that

[a] report prepared in advance of the Spring 2021 visit include an emphasis on the System's progress with respect to:

a) the continued development of the System's internal governance structure, including further implementation of the University of Maine System Faculty Governance Council; [and]

b) further System planning with respect to the issues identified in [the June 2020 substantive change application requesting unified accreditation] to be addressed in the self-study for the comprehensive evaluation (pp. 1-2).

In this progress report, we outline the ongoing development of internal governance structures in four areas (section I), share updates on steps we have taken or will take in response to six issues identified in the substantive change application (section II), and conclude with an appraisal of work to date and a brief projection of next steps (section III).

UMS has sought to include a range of perspectives on unified accreditation, including inviting the UMS Faculty Governance Council to prepare the section below addressing that Council's implementation and participation in shared governance. We believe incorporating varied perspectives is important, including the honest concerns expressed by the Faculty Governance Council below. In the best traditions of shared governance in the academy, and more specifically with due heed to the internal governance expectations in Standard Three, UMS leadership will give due regard to these views in carrying out its executive responsibilities to manage and lead UMS as the accredited institution.

I. Development of UMS internal governance structures

Overview

Unified accreditation has not changed or required any change to the structure or authority of the UMS governing board—the University of Maine System Board of Trustees—or the Board-established mechanics of our internal governance, which are manifested in the executive authority UMS exercises in managing its constituent universities and the Maine Law School. While the UMS Chancellor is the chief executive officer for UMS, the accredited entity, and satisfies the requirements of NECHE Standards 3.12 and 3.13, unified accreditation has not required any changes to the individual internal governance of our respective universities. Each continues to be led by a president who reports to the Chancellor (as before) and, at the individual university level, is responsible for meeting those requirements, with attendant obligations (articulated in Standard Three and elsewhere) also met both UMS-wide and locally at each of our

universities, with both the Chancellor and our presidents working together in overall fidelity to the *Standards for Accreditation*.

Given the above, unified accreditation has not required or resulted in a marked increase in UMS staffing. Indeed, in its January 28, 2020 action authorizing Chancellor Malloy's formal pursuit of unified accreditation, the Board explicitly noted that "It is [our] expectation that unified accreditation will not require substantial increases to [UMS] administration or governance at the expense of university administration and governance or academic program and student support resources" (Unified Accreditation Authorization, 1/28/20).

Mindful of that expectation, in August 2019 UMS recruited an Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs from the faculty ranks at the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) to support unified accreditation efforts, particularly the recently formed UMS Faculty Governance Council. That person replaced a retiring Deputy Vice Chancellor with a comparable portfolio. Similarly, in January 2021, UMS appointed the University of Maine's (UM) Senior Associate Provost and NECHE accreditation liaison officer (ALO) to serve system-wide as the Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives. (The UM Senior Associate Provost position was not replaced. Instead, the UM Provost's office used that senior position along with a vacant Director position, and reorganized these two positions into two Associate Provost positions.) Neither of the two UMS hirings has compromised the administration or governance capacity, academic programming, or student support resources at UMS universities, and they have allowed UMS to manage system-wide functions— without increasing the overall UMS employee count— by using the expertise of staff who previously performed the same or similar functions at the university level.

In what follows, we address four elements of our internal governance structures: (1) the ongoing development and implementation of the UMS Faculty Governance Council; (2) our management structure and process for unified accreditation; (3) the governance and growth of multi-university academic programs; and (4) our administration of an historic \$240 million grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation to UMS.

I. (1) Advancing shared governance: implementation of the UMS Faculty Governance Council

Overview

The UMS Faculty Governance Council (FGC), which consists of the UMS university Faculty Senate and Assembly Presidents and Chairs, was first convened by Chancellor Malloy in January 2020 in anticipation of unified accreditation. This was a watershed moment in UMS governance history and was a rare convening of all UMS Faculty Senate and Assembly leaders to provide counsel for UMS. The initial meeting was followed by three more meetings over the remainder of spring 2020, during which the FGC portion of the June 2020 substantive change application for unified accreditation was prepared. The depth and scope of the responsibility and authority of the FGC is now being formulated and trialed in collaboration with UMS leadership, including the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and the Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer.

The 2020-21 academic year: actions to date

The FGC has met seven times in the current academic year, with additional meetings planned through May 2021. The following represent committee actions to date:

Charge. The Council is working to further define the group's charge as presented in the UMS substantive change application. Although much of the charge as submitted seems appropriate, FGC discussions on topics such as the multi-university academic program proposal review process, and associated communication channels, are underway to ensure all stakeholder groups are included and ample time is allotted for feedback from each university's faculty governance body.

The FGC has met with UMS leadership to discuss creating a process for gathering university-level feedback on UMS-wide academic initiatives (e.g. temporary grading structures proposed as part of pandemic relief efforts; movement toward a UMS unified catalog). These conversations have led to further discussion of the role of faculty and faculty shared governance models in a unified environment. One imperative is to ensure the faculty voice is heard at the beginning stages of new program development and related academic actions.

While the Council's work initially focused on multi-campus academic programming, the membership soon recognized the collateral task of coordinating UMS Board policy and Administrative Practice Letters (APLs) with the tenets of the Affiliated Faculties of the Universities of Maine (AFUM) collective bargaining agreement in service to the academic mission under unified accreditation. In reviewing possible processes for new academic program proposals as outlined in the APLs, the university Provosts and the FGC members agreed that the Council should be the initial group to review proposal requests. The VCAA used that feedback to work with the FGC to begin a review process that outlines administrative procedures and the flow of information about program proposals. The FGC appreciates its expanded role in reviewing APLs and establishing effective lines of communication.

Charter. Elements of the FGC charter, including council membership and charge, have been discussed at the Council level. Feedback on the FGC membership has been solicited from each of the university faculty governance bodies and continues to be gathered and considered as charter elements are being revised. Upon completion, the charter will require ratification by each university faculty governance body (senate or assembly) before it officially takes effect.

FGC membership has been established as follows, having been initially voted on at the FGC's February 2021 meeting, revised, and voted on again at its March 2021 meeting. The following information about the charter is proposed by the FGC pending ratification by all UMS university-level faculty governance bodies:

As a body, the Faculty Governance Council consists of a delegation from each named UMS university and the Maine Law School. Each delegation will consist of one to four members to include

1. The Chair/President of each UMS university faculty governance body, and the following optional members as determined by the individual campuses:
2. The Vice Chair/President of each UMS university faculty governance body. If a Vice Chair/President is unable to serve, a university may, if it wishes, substitute another representative;
3. An FGC representative provided by election or by faculty governance body appointment and serving a term of three years;

4. A past Chair/President of a UMS university faculty governance body who a) previously served on the FGC, and b) continues to hold a faculty position at the UMS university.

On all matters determined by vote, each delegation will cast a single vote. The Council will also include the following non-voting *ex officio* members:

1. An AFUM Executive Board member (UMS labor relations union for full-time faculty).
2. A VCAA staff member.

Appraisal

A challenge facing the FGC has been the rapidity with which the changes associated with certain provisions of unified accreditation have been implemented. The FGC looks forward to its continued work with the UMS administration and the Board, and hopes that a more deliberate and nuanced implementation can occur at a pace that is acceptable to all stakeholders, especially the UMS combined student body. The FGC members are attempting to appreciate the demands for action, such as the seemingly instant creation of the single UM and UMM course catalog while receiving directives to create the UMS-wide unified catalog. Imperial action on such critical items as faculty-authored course descriptions can only be viewed as a threat to faculty academic sovereignty. In such processes, the FGC seeks to be nimble, deliberate, and respectful while accessing and facilitating the full opportunities afforded by unified accreditation. As noted by Chancellor Malloy in his November 2019 “[Summary of Process Considerations](#)”:

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 (p. 28).

Council members have reported pleasure with the collaborative nature of the Council and the direct connection with the UMS administration. On multiple occasions, it has been helpful to have a forum that provides an opportunity to touch base with other UMS universities to find out how they are handling a particular issue or to get more information about their policies. These collective conversations have resulted in unified faculty responses to UMS actions— for example, a recent change in retiree health benefits, and proposed changes to Board Policy 310 (Tenure).

Due to a long series of actions taken by UMS leadership in the past that have been viewed as detrimental to the functioning of our individual universities— for example, the adoption of cumbersome software not well suited to the tasks they are supposed to perform, such as Concur and HireTouch, or such questionable initiatives such as the Academic Portfolio Review and Integration Process (APRIP, launched in summer 2014), faculty’s initial reaction to most UMS initiatives tends toward distrust. This distrust extends to a certain extent toward the FGC, which is why it is imperative that the FGC's charter be completed and sent to the university faculty senates and assemblies for ratification. Faculty continue to have many questions about the effect unified accreditation will have on the individual universities. We have made significant progress in defining the role of the Council, but there is more work to do to ensure clear communication and transparent processes going forward.

Conclusion

The founding principles for the authority and responsibility inherent to the FGC can be found in several governance declarations located in [UMS Board Policy](#) and in various individual UMS university governance documents (e.g. “The Governance Document of the University of Southern Maine” 2020, Article I Shared Governance) with buttressing statements such as the “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities.”¹ In brief, faculty are charged with the “primary authority over the academic area, including such matters as the curriculum, standards of faculty competence, and standards of student achievement.”² These responsibilities may manifest themselves in a variety of forms, including faculty hiring, review, and promotion; development of individual courses, entire curricula, and certifications/degrees; and all manner of academic infrastructure including committees, councils, departments, schools, and colleges.

The conclusion of the June 2020 UMS substantive change application referenced the Association of Governing Boards’ Board of Directors 2017 Statement on Innovation, which emphasizes the imperative for “innovation” in service to the development of “fresh approaches for delivering” on a university’s mission. UMS, through each of its eight unique educational units highlighted above, prospers through the diversity and hybrid vigor of these institutions collectively meeting the evolving and sometimes revolutionary demands of Maine’s student citizens. The expectation of each member of the FGC is that the UMS administration will optimize the “collective intelligence”³ of the UMS faculty community through authentic, mutually respectful, and bi-directional engagement with the FGC in shared governance.

Specifically, the FGC anticipates meeting its charge by facilitation and constructive criticism of both faculty- and administration-generated proposals for improvement and modification of our joint academic enterprise: UMS. We mirror UMS’s expectation that “UMS’s unified accreditation model and university collaborations, as well as a strong partnership with NECHE to bring them all about, serve as a fresh reminder that innovation in academic governance and student service is still possible”⁴ in service to the varied needs of our state, region, and country.

The FGC assumes with intention a key role in exercising and documenting successful shared governance within UMS. This role is captured in NECHE’s Standard Three: Organization and Governance, wherein UMS is charged to demonstrate “through its organizational design” that it “creates and sustains an environment that encourages teaching, learning, service, scholarship, and ... research and creative activity.” We can only do so if UMS administration adheres to its “[Guiding Principles for Unified Accreditation](#)” (p. 18-19).

I. (2) Management of unified accreditation via our tripartite oversight structure

Management structure

¹ American Association of University Professors Policy Documents and Reports, 10th ed, Washington: AAUP, 2006 (p. 136).

² [Gaff, J.G. 2007. What if the faculty really do assume responsibility for the educational program?](#) AAC&U, Liberal Education 93(4).

³ UMS, “Substantive Change Request for Unified Accreditation of the University of Maine System” June 10, 2020, p. 18.

⁴ Ibid, p. 53.

In Fall 2020, UMS adopted a carefully delineated structure for managing our unified accreditation work. The Executive Sponsor of the work is Chancellor Malloy. The second tier of accountability is an Executive Steering Committee comprising our six university presidents; the Vice Chancellor for Finance Administration and Treasurer; Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer; and the Provosts of our two largest universities, the University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine.

The third level of oversight is a Project Management Team tasked with organizing and documenting the unified accreditation work and communicating appropriately with faculty, UMS and campus leaders, the Board of Trustees, and other stakeholders. That team comprises the Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives; Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment; Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; the University of Southern Maine's Vice Provost for Accreditation and Mission; and the UMS Director of Organizational Effectiveness. The Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives chairs the Project Management Team and serves as its liaison to the Executive Steering Committee. He is responsible for day-to-day activity in various dimensions of unified accreditation, and is the UMS ALO to NECHE. He works in close coordination with the Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer, and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.

Unified accreditation in action: two examples

At its core, unified accreditation allows UMS's constituent universities and the Maine Law School to share academic programs and resources far more efficiently, and in ways far better suited to serve Maine's people, even as the universities and Law School retain their individual missions—complementary to the UMS mission as a whole—and their ability to deliver properly resourced, high quality, locally controlled academic programs and public services on their own. With unified accreditation now in place, teams of UMS faculty, staff, and administrators are actively working to remove historic barriers to student success, open doors to multi-university academic programming and partnerships, and increase opportunities for faculty to participate in funded research and/or graduate teaching with colleagues at other UMS universities.

Two examples of unified accreditation in action are the Unified Catalog initiative and the Research Faculty Affiliates and Exchange program. We briefly describe each to illustrate how unified accreditation is helping us expand opportunities for students and faculty and meet practical needs in a timely and effective way.

Unified Catalog initiative. Each UMS university's academic programs and courses are currently housed in separate, university-specific "instances" in our "MaineStreet" (PeopleSoft) academic catalog, with limited functional capacity for interaction. As a consequence, there is presently no way for data about courses, credit transfer, registration, billing, and related functions to be shared easily between or among UMS universities via MaineStreet. What should be a seamless academic experience supported by an efficient, behind-the-scenes flow of information available to students and faculty across UMS institutional boundaries is instead frequently frustrating for students, faculty, professional advisors, and academic and student support staff.

The nature and scope of the barriers at issue—rooted in outdated database and software "walls" dividing the separate university MaineStreet academic catalogs—are not mysterious. A

pair of UMS-led working groups identified the relevant set of student barriers in 2014-15, a finding subsequently affirmed by an external consultant's report in 2015. In plain terms: there are too many impediments hindering our academic processes and intra-UMS interactions.

To improve the student academic experience and increase system-wide academic accessibility, we began work in February 2021 on the Unified Catalog initiative, a project driven by three interconnected goals. First, by September 2022 we will bring all of our undergraduate and graduate course offerings together in a single data housing and make them visible and searchable for all students regardless of home institution. In parallel with and extending from that work, we will move systematically through our list of known barriers to student academic success—technical, structural, procedural, and cultural—and eliminate them. Finally, we will remove barriers to faculty participation in multi-university academic programs and partnerships.

This initiative will be led by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives in partnership with a team representing administrative and professional staff from all of our universities and from UMS IT. The team will also include representation from the UMS Faculty Governance Council and extensive faculty participation across UMS.

Research Faculty Affiliates and Exchange program. This innovative program has been developed by the President of the University of Maine (UM), who also serves as the UMS Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, the President of the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA), and UM's Director of Research Development. It is managed by an Intercampus Planning Committee led by UM's Director of the Office of Research Development, UMA's Provost, and the University of Maine at Presque Isle's Dean of Arts and Sciences. The program's core objectives are:

1. To advance unified accreditation via a faculty registry of teaching and research expertise.
2. To offer formal affiliation with the UM Graduate School to faculty at other UMS institutions seeking to pursue graduate teaching and research ties and opportunities.
3. To provide access to research-active colleagues, research infrastructure, and graduate students to increase UMS research competitiveness and intercampus collaboration.
4. To offer (initially on a pilot basis) sabbaticals to UM for faculty at other UMS universities coupled with trained graduate students providing teaching replacement at the sending universities.

Corresponding goals include highlighting the teaching and research expertise of UMS faculty; credentialing faculty in their respective disciplines across UMS; providing opportunities to teach at the graduate level and to serve students on dissertation and thesis committees as either chairs or associate committee members; and using the program as a means of sharing and highlighting UMS expertise with external audiences (e.g. state government, external research collaborators, internship and commercialization partners, student recruitment/enrollment management partners, and others).

The Research Faculty Affiliates and Exchange Program is expected to launch in pilot form in summer 2021, and will be open to any UMS faculty interested in applying for a formal research affiliation with UM, the state's land-, sea-, and space-grant research institution. Participation in the program will give UM faculty affiliates access to all of the UM services and supports for research; allow them to partner with successful UM research faculty; allow them to

work with graduate students based in UM programs; afford them opportunities to teach graduate courses; and provide ample opportunities to pursue new projects and ideas with UM faculty, centers, and institutes.

I. (3) Multi-campus academic programs: governance and growth

Developing oversight and refining and aligning program approvals and policies

This section of the report responds to the Commission's request for an update on UMS's progress in developing oversight of multi-university (multi-campus) programs, and in refining and aligning Board-established program approval processes and policies under unified accreditation.

In the "Guiding Principles for Unified Accreditation"—developed and adopted in 2019 as UMS prepared its substantive change application requesting unified accreditation status—Principle Two affirms that

Pursuant to University of Maine System Board Policy 212 and the University of Maine System 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 ([UMS Guiding Principles for Unified Accreditation](#)).

To align this ongoing commitment with the Commission's expectation of increased UMS oversight of academic programming—as required in a unified environment, and specifically with respect to multi-university programming—the UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA) has established a formal plan to refine the UMS program approval process.

The University of Maine System Board of Trustees develops and approves all UMS policies. The Chancellor and UMS senior staff develop corresponding procedures, including academic procedures, which are codified and housed in the form of Administrative Practice Letters (APLs). APLs explicate procedures and practices in support of Board policies addressing all facets of activity in UMS and its constituent universities and the Maine Law School: academic affairs, student affairs, finance and administration, among others.

In a process launched in January 2021, the VCAA and his staff have copied each APL whose content addresses academic matters into a editable document that has then been linked to a project management tracking software. The APLs have been prioritized within that software for review by the VCAA and the Chief Academic Officers Council (CAOC), a body comprising the six UMS university Provosts, the Maine Law School Vice Dean, the University of Maine at Machias (UMM) Head of Campus, and the VCAA and his staff. The VCAA has shared and discussed the revised review process with various stakeholders, including university-level faculty senates and assemblies (via the UMS Faculty Governance Council); the CAOC, the Presidents' Council (comprising the Chancellor, the six university Presidents, the Maine Law School Dean, and UMS senior staff, including the VCAA), the six universities' faculty representatives to the Board, and the Board's Academic and Student Affairs (ASA) Committee. ASA is the Board governance body responsible for development and initial review of academic-related policies, procedures, and practices.

Timeline

Beginning in spring 2021, the VCAA will deliver the first of the academic-related APLs to the Faculty Governance Council for its review. Their joint goal is to align revised APLs with existing practice(s) in keeping with the Guiding Principles for Unified Accreditation.

Along with the other leadership groups listed above, the Faculty Governance Council is tasked with confirming that academic-related processes continue to ensure that no actions taken under unified accreditation diminish local (university-level) decision-making about academic programming. Rather, the Council will exercise its role within shared governance to establish that policies and procedures under review support university-level academic work while offering appropriate UMS-level monitoring and evaluation.

The VCAA and his team and the Faculty Governance Council anticipate completing two policy revisions before June 2021. They will resume their work in September 2021 by addressing four additional APLs. Many of the [UMS APLs](#) correspond to Board policies maintained in the [Policy Manual](#). As work on APLs is completed, complementary attention will be paid to these BOT policies to ensure that our policies and procedures are appropriately updated and aligned.

I. (4) UMS TRANSFORMS initiative: administration of the Harold Alfond Foundation grant

Administrative structure and process

On October 6, 2020, the Harold Alfond Foundation announced \$500 million in investments to be made in several organizations and institutions in Maine. The next day, UMS and the Alfond Foundation jointly announced that \$240 million of that total would come to UMS and its universities.

UMS's stewardship of the historic \$240 million grant, the largest gift ever made to a public higher education institution in New England, begins with an Executive Leadership Group chaired by Chancellor Malloy. UMS will manage the gift as a grant; the co-principal investigators for that purpose are the UM President—who also serves in the complementary role of UMS Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation—and the UMS Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer. The Executive Leadership group includes a project director (UM's Vice President and Chief of Staff) and a financial director (the UMS Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration and Treasurer).

In addition, a project operations group manages match and fundraising, budget and grant management and financial reporting, communications and publicity, and capital project planning. Each of the four major initiatives of the grant is headed by a lead and one or more co-leads. The grant, its aims, and its administrative structure are collectively called UMS TRANSFORMS <https://www.maine.edu/transforms/>.

The major grant initiatives are:

- Black Bear Athletics (\$90M grant in support of UM athletics, with a \$20M match)
- Student Success and Retention (\$20M grant in support of all UMS universities, with a \$25M match)
- The creation of the Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Science (\$75M grant with a \$75M match)
- Advancing the Maine Graduate and Professional Center (\$55M grant with a \$50M match)

Regular Executive Leadership Group meetings and check-in meetings with the leads and co-leads commenced in November 2020. As of January 2021, the leadership had begun to present its work to various internal groups on request. Cash flow, budget planning, expense-tracking, and planning for the match, including initial consultation with the University of Maine Foundation and partner consultants, as well as development of an InfoReady tracking tool for grant-seeking that may qualify as match funding, were underway as of March 2021.

UMS TRANSFORMS in action: an example

Here we summarize work to date on one of the grant initiatives—the formation of the Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Science (MCECIS)—to illustrate our administrative approach to UMS TRANSFORMS.

The grant envisions UMS bringing together the existing engineering, computing, and information science faculty, programs, and research resources at UM and the University of Southern Maine (USM) to form MCECIS. The leads for this initiative are the Dean of the UM College of Engineering, the Director of the UM School of Computing and Information Science, and the Dean of USM's College of Science, Technology and Health (of which USM's two engineering programs are a part).

As noted in a recent internal UMS communication, "MCECIS is expected to unify and expand undergraduate engineering programs at the University of Maine and University of Southern Maine, expand UMaine graduate engineering programs [based in Orono] to Portland, streamline pathways into the statewide college from all UMS universities, and create new opportunities for shared programs, interdisciplinary structures and partnerships."

A Kickoff Visioning Workshop on the future of engineering, computing, and information science was held in January 2021. Over 220 faculty, administrators, state and local government leaders, private industry professionals, industrial advisory board members, K-12 partners, and non-profit and fundraising partners participated in a multi-stage exercise to lay a groundwork for collaboration and for future discussion of internal governance, organization, and academic and research activity. The three MCECIS leads are working closely with UM and USM faculty and administrators and with the Executive Leadership Group as the planning progresses. Progress is measured against a set of benchmarks established jointly between UMS and the Harold Alfond Foundation in December 2020.

II. Issues identified in the substantive change application: steps taken or to be taken

Overview

The June 2020 substantive change application identified a number of organizational and functional issues UMS had addressed or would address in preparation for unified accreditation. In what follows, we share updates on six of those issues.

II. (1) The status of professional (program) accreditation within unified accreditation

In September 2019, in preparation for its June 2020 substantive change application, UMS requested information from its six universities about professionally accredited programs on their

campuses whose standing with their respective accreditors might be adversely affected by unified accreditation. Further inquiries were made locally (with leadership at individual UMS universities) in January 2020 and again in April 2020 (as the substantive change application took shape) to ensure that the campus administrators (e.g. deans, department chairs) of every professional program at our institutions had ample opportunity to respond on this subject.

The responses received from the universities led UMS to conclude that a global communication to all of our professional programs' accreditors prior to filing our substantive change application would not be necessary. As of April 2021—contrary to what we anticipated when preparing the application— this holds true post-application as well, because feedback from deans, chairs, and directors at our flagship research institution and elsewhere within UMS yielded some requests for additional information or clarification, but no material concerns were expressed about UMS's move from individual university accreditation to unified accreditation before or after that transition.

For example, following initial communication with their respective accreditors, responses from University of Maine (UM) academic administrators to the UMS request included these:

- The College of Engineering (11 ABET-accredited programs): "Single, [UMS]-wide accreditation will not affect our ability to maintain ABET accreditation."
- The College of Education and Human Development (14 CAEP-accredited programs): "CAEP accreditation will be solely dependent upon evaluation by the CAEP process."
- The School of Social Work (2 CSWE-accredited programs): Social Work shared a lengthy response from CSWE indicating that the accreditor would continue to evaluate existing programs within UMS separately from one another, asking only that the three UMS universities with CSWE-accredited programs "designate one program director for CSWE purposes"— an accreditation liaison for UMS with CSWE.

Relatedly: since early 2020, campus and UMS leaders have collaborated in explaining unified accreditation to professional program accreditors and answering their questions about it. For example, in March 2020, the President of UM and the Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer replied to queries from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), and the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), respectively, about whether unified accreditation would trigger a program-level substantive change process in advance of an external program review in the UM Department of Art. UM's responses satisfied both accreditors: a program-level substantive change was not required, and the program review itself was positive. And in March 2021, UMS and UM leaders contributed to an application by the Maine Business School and its Graduate School of Business for "unit accreditation" from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), a designation for which a clear statement about the structure and purposes of unified accreditation was needed.

II. (2) Aligning and advancing UMS and university strategic planning efforts

Each UMS university and the Maine Law School engages in periodic strategic planning. Though differing in process, timeline, and goals— as reflective of the unique but complementary missions and aims of each institution and its academic programs— all UMS strategic planning activity embodies a core set of assumptions and practices.

First, strategic planning is undertaken to establish specific goals and identify the necessary resources and time frame in which the mission and purposes of the university in question may be achieved, with opportunities to assess the impact and achievement of benefits for its students, faculty, and staff when the plan is successfully executed. Second, when such planning is undertaken, representatives from key constituencies—e.g. faculty, students, staff, administrators, Board of Visitors members, and others—serve on strategic planning teams. Third and relatedly, relevant stakeholder groups are engaged in the planning process via solicitations for their input, regular updates shared with internal and external community members, or similar means. Fourth, goals and outcomes of strategic planning are articulated clearly and transparently, and the progress made in achieving them is tracked systematically and shared publicly.

An important element of coordination for university strategic planning is required under unified accreditation: intentional strategic alignment between the planning work done by UMS universities and the Maine Law School so that the aggregate execution of all plans complements the overall UMS strategic vision articulated by the Board and the Chancellor.

NECHE's July 1, 2020 granting of unified accreditation for UMS inspired new and targeted strategic planning with the support of grant funding from the Davis Educational Foundation. The planning work at issue will guide the development of Statewide Strategic Program Plans for academic programs that exist at two or more UMS universities, with the intent that the unified accreditation environment will foster faculty collaboration and resource sharing between universities in those programs to better meet statewide needs, reduce resource-draining competition between similar programs within UMS, and expand academic options, pathways, and credential opportunities for students in the programs no matter where they matriculate within UMS.

More broadly, UMS is developing a longer-term strategic plan for UMS as a whole to take full advantage of unified accreditation and most efficiently share and use its limited resources among its constituent universities while meeting its statewide mission through those universities to each of the rural areas, communities, and regions where they—including their sites and centers— operate.

II. (3) Delivering general education for collaborative (multi-university) academic programs

Preliminary to delivering general education for multi-university programs, and to initial discussions between UMS and NECHE about unified accreditation, an *ad hoc* UMS Credit Transfer/General Education Work Group was formed in 2013. It comprised mainly faculty and included representation from every UMS university. The group developed a general education block transfer standard in 2015 to facilitate transfer within UMS.

There is considerable variation in UMS general education programs: a strength inasmuch as that variation reflects real differences in mission, and optimizing of local resources for student learning. To preserve and respect those differences, the block description includes only existing common outcomes, with the understanding that each local general education program will continue to be more extensive and will include other outcomes. Examples of local applications of general education include capstone experiences and mission-specific general education requirements (or, categories).

Students who have completed the UMS General Education Transfer Block at any UMS institution are regarded as having completed their general education requirements at every other UMS institution, except for up to ten credits of additional general education coursework to be

specified by the receiving institution. Each institution will publish a description of its transfer-out block on its website, so that the other institutions participating in the transfer block agreement can determine which courses (if any) need to be taken in addition by students transferring from that institution to their own. When the registrar at the "sending" UMS institution certifies that a transferring student has completed the block at the sending institution, the "receiving" institution will accept the block as degree credit, with at least 35 credits counting as general education credits. Eight key general education categories were identified as aligned across all UMS institutions' general education requirements and so form the "block." The outcomes of the block align closely with the LEAP Essential Learning outcomes.

The UMS Credit Transfer/General Education Work Group used the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes as the framework within which UMS universities' general education outcomes were aligned, because the Essential Learning Outcomes describe, at a very broad level, a set of elements every baccalaureate liberal arts education should include (although not all elements need be included as parts of an institution's general education program). The LEAP outcomes thus provide a common framework and common language for describing the alignment of, and formulating common outcomes for, general education programs. The LEAP outcomes have served as a basis for rubrics used in general education category-specific scoring exercises, in which UMS faculty have gathered to read a common set of student artifacts and apply an associated rubric to measure competency in a given category.

Another example of a successful transfer agreement between UMS universities is the Foundations Program, developed and led by the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) in partnership with the University of Maine (UM). Foundations students matriculate at UMA and are physically in residence at UM for their first three semesters, where they take courses from UMA instructors and are supported by a UMA academic advisor. After completed their third semester (in good standing), Foundations students are awarded a reverse transfer—the first of its kind within UMS—earning their UMA Associate's degree while having the option to continue in a four-year degree program at UMA or UM or elsewhere.

The Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs (VCAA), in partnership with the Chief Academic Officers Council (CAOC), is responsible for a systematic review and coordination of learning outcomes following the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes in all courses, and a periodic review and assessment of student learning/achievement in relation to those outcomes. For inclusion as part of the evaluation process, the general education work group detailed above was originally scheduled to meet periodically as of the beginning of the third year in which block transfer was in force to evaluate block transfer outcomes and recommend to the UMS Faculty Governance Council and individual university faculty senates whether to continue, revise, or terminate the block transfer agreement. Records were to be kept by each campus regarding which students transfer in or out under the block transfer agreement so those data could be collected and analyzed.

UMS delayed this review for a number of reasons, not least of which was very low numbers of completed blocks. UMS will reconvene a subset of the work group to review this process, and will do the same with its Maine Community College System partners. In preparation for this work, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment will meet with the UMS registrars to determine current numbers and collect related data on block transfers.

This form of general education alignment allows for efficient credit transfer among all UMS institutions and their general education programs. Pending initial assessment, it may also

spur a broad, faculty-informed review of such programs to ensure the programs are employing best practices for coverage of course content and for fostering student success and retention.

II. (4) Administering financial aid: three updates

Several strands of planning and work across the past six years have produced the current alignment of financial aid functions within UMS in the areas described below.

The UM-UMM financial aid integration

The integration of UM and UMM financial aid has involved a complex but constructive dialogue with the U.S. Department of Education (hereafter US DOE) that began in 2019 and is ongoing.

In support of the multi-stage "primary partnership" between the University of Maine (UM) and the University of Maine at Machias (UMM)—a relationship culminating in the latter becoming a regional campus of the former in 2017, and, in 2018, becoming accredited through UM instead of separately—the UM Office of Student Financial Aid began managing all facets of UMM financial aid activity in December 2015. UM Student Financial Aid's former director and former associate director (now director) were compensated for the increase in their respective workloads, and each ultimately saw her job description updated to account for those additional duties. Both sets of changes were formalized in January 2018.

Unlike the coordinated management of campus-based independent financial aid packaging among the six UMS universities currently under discussion with the U.S. Department of Education's Federal Student Aid office (and described below), the integration of UM and UMM student financial aid management constituted a merger, with UM taking over financial aid administration for UMM. The two offices became one, and UM is now the institution responsible for all UM and UMM financial aid awarding, tracking, and reporting.

Campus-based financial aid management and IPEDS reporting under a UMS OPEID

With unified accreditation in place, UMS is in discussions with US DOE to manage federal student financial aid for its universities (except UMM) as follows:

US DOE will reactivate OPEID 008012-00 for UMS, and our universities will all be identified as part of UMS by the common UMS OPEID 008012, but each will have a unique two-digit suffix identifier not yet assigned by US DOE (e.g. 008012-01 for UM, 008012-02 for UMA, and so on). UMM, since 2017 a regional campus of UM, is not expected to have a separate suffix but will instead most likely be included as part of UM's OPEID suffix identifier.

Each UMS university will be able to draw down funds separately from US DOE through its individual "invoice" to US DOE. US DOE will send those funds to the individual university according to its name and eight-digit (6+2) OPEID, but in practice the electronic funds disbursement actually comes to the same account within UMS for each university (as has been the case even with the universities separately recognized with separate institutional accreditation and OPEIDs), which is managed centrally by UMS accounting staff for all UMS universities. Base Title IV allocations to the universities will remain unchanged, and each of our universities will continue to draw down its allocation individually.

UMS will have a single Program Participation Agreement (PPA) with the Department that covers all six universities (with UMM a part of UM and the Maine Law School likely to be administered through USM, as has historically been the case); the PPA will recognize the terms set forth above. The six universities will retain their current IPEDS numbers and continue to report separately to IPEDS/NCES for all purposes. UMM will be included in the UM reporting.

Applicants to UMS universities will be able to submit FAFSAs directly to each university according to the 6+2 OPEID for each institution. The process for UM's regional campus, UMM, remains under discussion.

Current and future steps

US DOE staff continue to help us manage the Title IV implications of the planned transition from separate university institutional accreditations to a unified institutional accreditation from NECHE for UMS (of which the constituent universities make up the whole). As the process moves forward, we are engaging the appropriate US DOE staff on the best way to structure the interface on some of the data flow between UMS and US DOE. In support of that work, we have contracted with an external consultant, Huron, to evaluate our IT and data systems (what we collectively call MaineStreet) to determine what we will need to change internally for the OPEID transition.

A Financial Aid Leadership Team was formed in January 2021. It will liaise with Huron and oversee work conducted jointly by IT, UMS senior staff, and university financial aid staff. To achieve the appropriate alignments of financial aid structures and processes under unified accreditation, we have formed various work teams to respond to areas in which internal changes will be necessary.

We expect to continue using the existing OPEIDs for our universities through the 2022-23 financial aid year and report to US DOE with them. We plan to make all of our IT system changes at once for the 2023-24 aid year, rather than attempting partial development along the way, some of which might not ultimately be useful and would prolong the overall process, not to mention potentially disrupt the student financial aid experience.

II. (5) Standard assessment reporting model

In coordination with the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA), university assessment/IR staff formalized in March 2021 a previously *ad hoc* assessment group, and have developed a two-committee structure for achieving alignment and uniformity in key areas of learning outcomes assessment and the tracking of student success. This two-committee structure is intended to provide consistency across UMS universities, but also serve as a forum for collaboration. The following summary will focus on the first committee, whose formation is further along at this juncture, and briefly mention the second.

The first body is the UMS Academic Assessment Committee. The committee will be advisory to the VCAA and will focus on the following (NECHE standards in parentheses):

- Academic program assessment (8.2, 8.3, 8.5, 8.8, 8.9, 8.10).
- Assessment of co-curricular learning (8.4).
- Assessment of student engagement (8.5).
- Assessment of general education (8.2, 8.3).

- Program effectiveness (e.g. student evaluations of teaching, surveys).

Similar to the *ad hoc* assessment group, the Assessment Committee membership will include representatives from each UMS university whose work has a focus on student learning assessment. It will also include faculty representatives identified in consultation with the UMS Faculty Governance Council.

The following three broad goals of the committee are intended to help build a stronger culture of assessment among UMS universities.

- To foster a common language with respect to academic assessment.
- To identify collaborative ways to assist academic programs in measuring student learning and implementing change based on the results of the assessment.
- To provide input to the VCAA and chief academic officers regarding the development of assessment reporting procedures.

In coordination with the VCAA, the Academic Assessment Committee will support UMS universities in building an assessment focus. The responsibility for the assessment process will remain at the university level. Consequently, the purpose of this committee is not to provide instructions for how assessment must be conducted, but rather to promote a culture in which effective assessment is normative and reflects the unique or distinctive qualities of each university. Below, we expand briefly on the committee's three broad goals and how each can be activated in the service of effective assessment and unified accreditation:

To foster a common language with respect to academic assessment. This aim requires a shared understanding of (a) the definition of assessment and related terms, (b) NECHE's expectations for how assessment is to be used to improve the academic program, and (c) optimal methods for assessing student learning. To this end, we propose the following initial tasks for the committee:

- Creation of an assessment definitions document/handbook for the UMS.
- Development of an overarching assessment plan that includes a UMS statement of core values with respect to assessment and general guidelines for assessment across the system. (This plan would be topline; the methodologies and implementation plan will be developed at the university level.)
- Development of a calendar for shared assessments/surveys (e.g. NSSE, which is already administered on an aligned cycle system-wide).

To identify collaborative ways to assist programs in measuring student learning. This goal will require coordination and ongoing dialogue among our universities, and could entail a centralized clearinghouse for assessment tools for use across UMS, and an assessment event at least once a year to allow the sharing of assessment strategies, challenges, and successes. (Possible models are the University of Maine at Augusta's Teaching with Technology series, and the UMS System-Wide Advising Group's work.) We propose the following initial tasks in this sphere:

- Conducting campus surveys of faculty and administrators to take stock of their view(s) of assessment and solicit suggestions regarding needed assessment support.
- Researching the collaborative strategies of other institutions/systems that have a solid foundation of assessment.

To provide input to the VCAA and chief academic officers regarding the development of reporting procedures. For NECHE reporting, the VCAA will need access to information about where each UMS university stands with respect to assessment. To that end, the Academic Assessment Committee will (a) propose a template that is modeled after the E-Series forms and (b) serve as advisory to the VCAA in making decisions about the mode of the report, timing, and frequency.

UMS will work with members of the former *ad hoc* committee and others to develop a second committee comprising university and UMS institutional research staff. That body will develop the student success metrics (for retention, graduation, time-to-degree, etc.) and protocols for disaggregation, including assessment of non-academic learning (e.g. co-curricular and extra-curricular activities). Although there will be common metrics, variations and/or additional metrics will be necessary to best reflect differences in program mix, student demographics, and university mission. The responsibility for tracking student success metrics and assessing non-academic learning will primarily lie at the university level for those universities that have institutional research and/or assessment staff. As there is a strong relationship between assessing student learning outcomes and tracking student success measures, the two committees will meet periodically to compare findings and prepare recommendations for further evaluation and reportage. They may also collaborate with the UMS Student Success Steering Committee on new and ongoing initiatives.

II. (6) Policy on policies

Overview

All formal policies applicable to UMS and its universities are established and directed by the UMS Board of Trustees. Responding to feedback from the Board, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (VCAA) is developing a "policy on policies" aimed at achieving several ends. First, it will clarify UMS policy ownership and oversight. Second, it will provide a template and corresponding process for the proposal, development, review, and approval of new policies, as well as the revision or updating of extant policies. Third, it will improve outcomes for university stakeholders seeking to understand, apply, and/or create policy to advance unified accreditation initiatives.

The policy on policies: major components

Work on the policy on policies began in early fall 2020 and is ongoing as of March 2021. We anticipate Board initial consideration of the proposed policy in spring or summer 2021.

Briefly described, the policy on policies will address the process for developing, issuing, and maintaining all UMS policies and will apply to all university departments, faculty, staff, and students. Its main purpose is to ensure the UMS community has ready access to well-developed

and understandable university policies. A corollary purpose is to ensure uniformity of process to enhance shared governance under unified accreditation. Goals of the policy include:

- To support the UMS mission and the mission of its constituent universities.
- To achieve accountability by identifying the offices responsible for policies.
- To provide faculty, staff and students with clear, concise guidelines.
- To document how the UMS and its universities conduct business.

In its current (draft) form, the policy on policies comprises three sections: (I) Policy Statement; (II) Definitions; and (III) Related Policies, Procedures, Forms, Guidelines, and Other Resources.

Section (I) delineates policy development involving policy initiators, owners, and administrators, and outlines the role of each. It also details the steps of policy development and an attendant review process led by key stakeholders. Section (II) defines key terms, and is especially important in its careful distinguishing of "policies" and "procedures." (The two are often conflated, but in fact reflect distinct realms of UMS administrative process.) Section (III) establishes a standard template for proposing a new policy or the revision of an existing one, and identifies resources related to the policy on policies and the template. In addition, Section (III) provides information about policy ownership, archiving, and location.

Unified accreditation was developed and brought to fruition with an abiding emphasis on transparency. Consistent with that emphasis, the policy on policies will be reviewed in draft by the Faculty Governance Council. We see the creation and adoption of the policy on policies as a continuation of that transparency and the provision of an important shared governance resource for UMS faculty, staff, university leaders, students, and other constituents.

III. Appraisal and projection

Overview

In addition to areas of activity already addressed in the first two sections of this report, we share below a summary and short appraisal of our communication with UMS stakeholders about unified accreditation. We conclude with a brief projection of next steps.

Communicating about unified accreditation

Regular and transparent communication with the UMS community about unified accreditation remains paramount and has been woven into the fabric of every element of our work. Since NECHE's granting of unified accreditation to UMS in July 2020, that communication has included:

- Chancellor Malloy sharing news of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs's hiring and portfolio with UMS senior staff, the Presidents' Council, the Chief Academic Officers' Council, the UMS Faculty Governance Council, and other leadership groups (August 2020);
- Faculty Governance Council members' reports to their respective university senates and assemblies regarding the Council's work, and the Associate Vice Chancellor for

Academic Affairs updating the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Chief Academic Officers' Council about the Faculty Governance Council's work (September 2020 - present);

- Chancellor Malloy, the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, and the Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer sharing regular updates about UMS TRANSFORMS with UMS senior staff, university leadership, and the UMS community (October 2020 - present);
- Chancellor Malloy sharing news of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives's hiring and portfolio with UMS senior staff, the Presidents' Council, the Chief Academic Officers Council, the Faculty Governance Council, and other leadership groups (December 2020);
- UMS sharing monthly unified accreditation updates via an extensively revised unified accreditation website (February 2021 - present)
- The UMS Director of Organizational Effectiveness sharing updates and engaging in substantive dialogue with the Presidents' Council and the Chief Academic Officers Council about our Davis Educational Foundation-funded work supporting the successful implementation of unified accreditation (January 2021 - present);
- The Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment convening and leading multiple meetings with key stakeholder groups—financial aid directors, bursars, registrars, enrollment managers, and others—to share updates about our financial aid work with US DOE;
- UMS senior staff (in various combinations) sharing verbal updates and engaging in productive conversations with NECHE staff regarding our unified accreditation work, substantive change policy, and our preparations for the spring 2021 visit (January 2021 - present)
- The Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives sharing regular updates on unified accreditation with the Board of Trustees, the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee, the Presidents' Council, the Chief Academic Officers' Council, the Faculty Governance Council, and university faculty senates and assemblies (January 2021 - present);
- Chancellor Malloy and UMS senior staff sharing unified accreditation updates, including information about the Unified Catalog initiative and related activity, in university-wide town hall meetings and in smaller meetings with faculty, administrators, and Boards of Visitors as part of the Chancellor's spring 2021 visits to the UMS university campuses and the Maine Law School (March/April 2021); and
- Presidents communicating regularly about unified accreditation with their campus constituencies, Boards of Visitors, and other groups.

In sum, UMS continues to honor our commitment to frequent and open communication. We believe this communication has met with a largely positive response among faculty and other constituencies and we will remain engaged (and engaging) with all stakeholder groups.

Next steps

UMS also continues to communicate regularly with NECHE while fulfilling our obligations to the Commission in several contexts. Two brief examples:

Annual reporting. UMS will file its first annual report under unified accreditation in May 2021. In doing so, we will join a handful of other New England institutions (by invitation from NECHE Vice President Laura Gambino) in beta-testing the Commission's new institutional portal as UMS and NECHE seek a means of reporting UMS's institutional data in a way that reflects our unified state as well as individually distinctive university-specific data (e.g. enrollment data, information about Pell recipients, etc.).

The Fall 2022 comprehensive evaluation. Preparations are underway for our first evaluation under accreditation, and— given the comparatively compressed time frame— we are following an aggressive schedule. In January 2021, UMS formed nine writing teams comprising 103 faculty, professional staff, and administrators from the UMS universities and the Maine Law School. By the end of May 2021, each team will submit its draft of its sections of our Fall 2022 self study narrative. In summer 2021, we will form a Self Study Data team, and we will begin shaping the first full draft of the self study narrative.

In closing: By June 2021, UMS TRANSFORMS, the Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Science initiative, the Unified Catalog initiative, and the Faculty Research Affiliates and Exchange program will be in various stages of implementation. UMS and its universities are excited about our progress in these and other areas. While cognizant of the need to continue communicating transparently and effectively with the UMS Faculty Governance Council and with faculty at all UMS universities, and to operationalize unified accreditation collaboratively, UMS is confident that the foundation laid in the years leading to the July 2020 grant of unified accreditation will continue to strengthen and grow as we move forward.