



November 29, 2021

Mr. Dannel P. Malloy  
Chancellor  
University of Maine System  
267 Estabrooke Hall, 15 Estabrooke Drive  
Orono, ME 04469

Dear Chancellor Malloy:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 23, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the reports submitted by University of Maine System (UMS or the System), as well as the reports of the evaluators, and took the following action:

that the progress report regarding the unified accreditation of the University of Maine System be accepted and unified accreditation be confirmed;

that the report regarding implementation of the competency-based education (CBE) online programs (Bachelor of Arts programs in Accounting, History and Political Science, and Liberal Studies) offered through the Presque Isle (UMPI) campus be accepted and inclusion of the CBE programs within the system's accreditation be confirmed;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2022 be confirmed; that the System be reminded that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the Fall 2022 self-study will include an update on the matters specified for attention in our letters of October 26, 2021, May 25, 2021, November 6, 2020, and July 17, 2020 (reiterated here):

**Letter of October 26, 2021:**

- 1) provide an update on the contractual arrangement between the University of Maine System's Farmington campus and Seguinland Institute with particular emphasis on UMF's success in:
  - a. achieving the financial and enrollment goals set for the program;
  - b. strengthening its agreement with Seguinland Institute with attention to ensuring that academic resources and student services are sufficient and appropriate to support the program;
  - c. evaluating the effectiveness of the program with attention to assessing student learning outcomes and using the results to make improvements;

**Letter of May 25, 2021:**

- 2) University of Maine at Augusta's success in achieving its goals for graduation rates;

**Letter of November 6, 2020:**

- 3) implementation of the MAOL CBE program offered at the Presque Isle campus with attention to:
  - a. evaluating the effectiveness of its governance structures on the Presque Isle campus;
  - b. assessing student learning outcomes in the MAOL CBE program and using the results to make improvements;
  - c. ensuring that student services are sufficient to support the program with emphasis on career services;

**Letter of July 17, 2020:**

- 4) further developing the system of reviewing academic programs, including an evaluation of the effectiveness of the methodology to ensure a System-wide perspective as well as qualitative judgments of the programs at the individual institutions;
- 5) strengthening the funding model for research and increasing research funding and doctoral-level education at the University of Maine;
- 6) further developing the internal governance of the System, including the University of Maine System Faculty Governance Council;
- 7) for each of the Commission's standards, addressing the issues identified in the substantive change report to help ensure that the System and its universities are better situated to address important issues and gain value from the move to single accreditation;

that the University of Maine System further be reminded that it may, in the Fall 2022 self-study, request general approval to offer CBE programs within the scope of its mission and that, until general approval is given by the Commission, any new competency-based education program proposed by the System to be offered at any of its universities are considered a substantive change.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The Commission accepted the report and confirmed the unified accreditation of the University of Maine System because the report addressed the matters specified for attention in our letter of July 17, 2020 and provided evidence that the System is implementing the transition to unified accreditation in a manner consistent with Commission standards and policies.

The Commission thanks the University of Maine System for its comprehensive report that documents the progress it is making toward ensuring its policies, processes, and procedures under unified accreditation align with its mission and each of the nine *Standards for Accreditation*. Particularly noteworthy is the “ongoing development” related to improving internal governance structures and aligning and advancing the strategic planning efforts of UMS and the universities within the System. We recognize that shared governance is among the most challenging elements of unified accreditation and, while noting there are some tension and differences of opinions during the transition, we appreciate the System’s commitment to ensuring transparency and including the collective faculty voice and “a range of perspectives” on unified accreditation. For example, the Faculty Governance Council (FGC) and UMS leadership have met regularly “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),” and a section of the report was prepared by the FGC. The visiting team confirmed that, at the System level, Information Technology and the Office of Finance are working together to evolve the EMS/ERP system which is a foundational component of making unified accreditation work, and we were particularly impressed to learn of the System’s thoughtful approach to assuring a uniform level of quality education with improved attainment within the wide diversity of student populations and academic programs across the System. While viewpoints about the necessity or value of unified accreditation vary, the team confirmed that there is consensus among the campus community that access to high-quality educational programs, transferability, and student success, including program completion, are central to the success of the mission of the System, and the development of underlying process and systems across the campuses is a significant step forward in improving student support and leveraging the System’s value.

The Commission also accepted the report submitted by University of Maine System and confirmed inclusion of the competency-based education programs offered through the UMPI campus within the System’s accreditation because the report addressed the matters specified for attention in our letter of July 17, 2020 and provided evidence that the system is implementing the CBE programs offered through the UMPI campus in a manner consistent with Commission standards and policies.

The University of Maine System submitted a well-written, comprehensive report that detailed the implementation of its Bachelor of Arts programs in Accounting, History and Political Science, and Liberal Studies delivered in an online, competency-based format through UMPI’s “Transformational Unit B, YourPace Program for Continuing Adult Learners.” The evaluator verified that the competencies in the CBE YourPace courses and programs are equivalent to conventional courses and programs with respect to the conceptual framework, course learning outcomes, program learning outcomes, and field experiences. We further note positively that the YourPace Program is led by an Executive Director; an Academic Dean was recently appointed to oversee the programs’ planning, development, delivery, and assessment; and four FTE-equivalent personnel have been added in various student support service roles. In addition, faculty work closely with external partners through an Advisory Board, and institution-level program reviews are regularly conducted as part of UMPI’s Academic Program Planning and Assessment practices. We note with favor that, as of Spring 2021, enrollment in CBE programs has grown to a headcount of 340 students which accounts for about 25% of UMPI’s entire headcount (including Early College students). Also noteworthy are the success rate of 87% for students who completed YourPace modules in AY2020-2021 and the 150% increase (from 2018 to 2020) in the number of graduates in the Business Administration

program from which nearly half of the 52 students who graduated in 2020 represented YourPace students.

The comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Fall 2022 is confirmed.

As noted positively above, the Commission is encouraged to learn of the strides UMS has made in transitioning to unified accreditation. We also recognize that there is still much work to be done. The self-study prepared in advance of the Fall 2022 comprehensive evaluation will provide the University of Maine System an opportunity to demonstrate its continued progress and, in particular, to address the items specified for attention in our letters of October 25, 2021, May 25, 2021, November 6, 2020, and July 17, 2020 (cited above).

We remind the System that any new competency-based education program proposed by the System to be offered at any of its universities will be considered a substantive change until such time as general approval is given by the Commission and that the System may, in the Fall 2022 self-study, request general approval to offer CBE programs within the scope of its mission.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the reports prepared by University of Maine System and the evaluators and hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the System's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the System's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Mark Gardner. The System is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/sjp

cc: Mr. Mark Gardner

Visiting team/evaluator

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions