

Report to the
Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students
of
University of Maine System
Orono, Maine

by
An Evaluation Team representing the
New England Commission of Higher Education

Prepared after study of the institution's self-evaluation report
and visits to the University Maine System on
September 30 - October 5, 2022

The members of the Team:

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This report represents the views of the Evaluation Team as interpreted by the chairperson. Its content is based on the committee's evaluation of the institution with respect to NECHE's criteria for accreditation. It is a confidential document in which all comments are made in good faith. This report is prepared both as an educational service to the institution and to assist the Commission in making a decision about the System's accreditation status.

NEW ENGLAND COMMISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Preface Page to the Team Report

Please complete **during the Team visit** and include with the report prepared by the Team

Date form completed: October 3, 2022

Name of Institution University of Maine System

- 1. History** Year chartered or authorized 1968 (System charter date)
 Year first degrees awarded 1864 (at what is now the University of Maine at Farmington)

- 2. Type of control:** State City Other; specify:
 Private, not-for-profit Religious Group; specify: _____
 Proprietary Other; specify:

- 3. Degree level:**
 Associate Baccalaureate Masters Professional Doctorate

- 4. Enrollment in Degree Programs** (Use figures from fall semester of most recent year):

	Full-time	Part-time	FTE	Retention ^a	Graduation ^b	# Degrees ^c
Associate	221	261	303.9	47.2%	12.1%	140
Baccalaureate	15,283	4,323	16,650.6	71.1%	49.2%	4,225
Graduate	2,878	1,621	2,923	80.6%	n/a	1,031

(a) full-time 1st to 2nd year (b) 3 or 6 year graduation rate (c) no. of degrees awarded most recent year

- 5. Number of current faculty:** Full time 1,179 Part-time 812 FTE: 1,455

- 6. Current fund data for most recently completed fiscal year:** (Specify year: 2021)
 (Double click in any cell to enter spreadsheet. Enter dollars in millions; e.g., \$1,456,200 = \$1.456)

Revenues

Tuition	\$204.218
Gov't Appropriations	\$218.157
Gifts/Grants/Endowment	\$215.449
Auxiliary Enterprises	\$45.150
Other	\$59.108
Total	\$742.082

Expenditures

Instruction	\$185.295
Research	\$85.791
General	\$351.561
Auxiliary Enterprises	\$56.837
Other	\$3.818
Total	\$683.302

- 7. Number of off-campus locations:**
 In-state 31 Other U.S. n/a International n/a Total 31

- 8. Number of degrees and certificates offered electronically:**
 Programs offered entirely on-line 153 Programs offered 50-99% on-line 35

- 9. Is instruction offered through a contractual relationship?**

No Yes; specify program(s):

Individual courses applied to various degree programs are delivered at the University of Maine at Farmington's Seguinland Institute instructional location (Georgetown, ME)

- 10. Other characteristics:** n/a

Introduction

University of Maine System (UMS) leadership, faculty, staff and students welcomed the Evaluation Team to the System office and to the seven University campuses and Law School for the unified accreditation visit. The representatives of UMS provided candid comments and assistance throughout the Evaluation Team's visit and comprehensive evaluation. Individuals with whom the Team met were prepared and understood the purpose of the visit. In Orono (the location of the System Office and the University of Maine), extensive meetings were held with System office and campus leaders from every University in the System and the Law School, and faculty and staff from all campuses. Meetings were conducted on a one-on-one basis with small groups and in open meetings with faculty, staff and students. The Evaluation Team members also visited (in person) all seven Universities and the Law School and met with campus leaders, faculty, students and Board of Visitor representatives. In Orono, 10 Trustees joined the reception and dinner for the Team the Sunday night of the visit. One meeting was held with UMS Trustees only, with three Trustees attending -- the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the Chairs of the Academic & Student Affairs and Finance, Facilities & Technology Committees. The Team members held in total 70 meetings with over 500 representatives of the UMaine System. The large majority of participants were on-site/in-person. All of University of Maine System-wide focused meetings had virtual participation options which made it possible for campus representatives from all universities and the Law School to participate in the System-focused meetings.

The Evaluation Team Chair was present in Orono throughout the full Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday schedule of meetings. He met with Chancellor Malloy individually three times, attended all the open in-person meetings on the Orono campus, attended meetings with other Team members and delivered the public oral exit report on Wednesday morning with Chancellor Malloy and all the University Presidents and the Law School Dean attending in person or virtually. Approximately 100 faculty and staff also attended in-person or virtually. The entire Evaluation Team attended the exit report in-person.

The Evaluation Team appreciated the preparation of the self-study and the additional documents provided in the virtual workroom. The Team found the self-study report and other materials provided to be accurate descriptions of the System overall but lacking in data and detail about individual campuses. Greater University/campus-level detail particularly on key matters, such as those regarding NECHE concerns in previous letters, was needed. Evaluation Team members had to try to fill in gaps of information related to individual campus details in their ½-day visits to campuses and interviews. Given that this was NECHE's first unified accreditation visit and self-study, it is understandable that it was difficult *ex ante* for UMS to determine the appropriate mix of System and campus-level details to provide on each standard in the self-study.

A review of the available documents before and during the Evaluation Team's visit and responses to interviews and requests for information while on the visit provided the basis for the information and evaluative judgments contained in the nine sections of this report, which addresses the Standards for Accreditation of the New England Commission of Higher Education. The evaluation also includes updates, documentation, and assessment on NECHE actions since NECHE's visit to the System in 2021 and the most recent comprehensive evaluations at each of the seven universities that comprise the System.

1. Mission and Purposes

The University of Maine System (UMS) has a powerful public mission tied to its founding and history. The System's mission is focused on serving the state of Maine by providing access to high quality higher education, service and research throughout the state. The System's mission and purposes are appropriate to higher education, consistent with its charter, and implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the New England Commission of Higher Education.

There is broad commitment by leadership and others to the unification mission and principles. Leadership teams, at System and campus levels, and faculty and staff across the System, have a strong commitment to its mission. For the most part across the System, leadership and others are ready and willing to work within the unified accreditation mission to achieve shared goals.

The System and its mission provide organizational structure and guiding principles to foster beneficial collaboration and the sharing of resources across the seven universities and Law School that comprise the System. The unified System and its mission and guiding principles also intend to preserve the independence of the campuses and allow for individualized approaches to preserving each institution's unique mission and serving the diverse needs of students and regions across the state.

The mission and the purpose of UMS guides its actions. A strong institutional commitment to the mission at all levels and across all campuses has been sustained and even enhanced during the challenging period of the global pandemic and the move to unified accreditation.

While each University within UMS has its own mission, the System's mission and the guiding principles for unification were clearly identified as providing guidance on decision making and investments by almost everyone with whom the Evaluation Team spoke. This commitment was evident in our meetings with the Chancellor, Presidents, Trustees and System and University leaders, faculty and staff.

UMS's mission frames the System's plans, policies, budgets, and program development. The strong commitment to the System mission is strongly demonstrated by the move to unified accreditation itself. Enhancing fiscal positioning, improving student outcomes, and supporting Maine through research and economic development were clearly key motivators for unified accreditation. Of particular prominence and agreement at all UMS campuses and among all System leaders was the emphasis on students' access to quality higher education and serving the state and its distinct localities.

The mission gives firm direction to the activities of UMS and all its Universities and Law School and the priorities of its faculty, staff and administration. The mission defines the System's character. This is evidenced in the focus on student access and success and the educational programs, research, and community engagement activities throughout the System.

The UMS mission and purpose provide only general direction to the educational effectiveness objectives. Specific curricula and educational objectives are developed by the System's individual institutions without established structure at the System level for assurance of outcomes.

The mission helps to identify the students the System seeks to serve and reflects both the institution's traditions and its vision for the future. This vision includes priority to serving an increasing

“non-traditional” student population with early college programming, articulations and pathways with Maine’s community colleges, distance education and competency-based education.

The UMS mission is widely accepted and understood by its governing board, administration, faculty, staff and students. The mission, however, was last formally approved by the governing board in 1996 and should be revisited by the Board in light of the move to unified accreditation.

There will be a need for alignment of individual campus and System missions. In addition, the Law School still needs a mission statement. University campus leaders spoke of working to ensure that their missions were aligned with the System mission and unified accreditation. The Board of Trustees will have to ensure regular review and validation of System, University, and Law School missions and their alignment. This has not happened yet.

2. Planning and Evaluation

UMS conducts ongoing planning and evaluation to ensure that it accomplishes its mission and purposes with continuous improvement. The UMS self-study, published information, and observations from the site visit demonstrate that the System takes on planning and evaluation systematically and at multiple levels, placing importance on using data to guide planning and evaluation to inform decision making at all levels. There are unique characteristics and challenges related to planning and evaluation within the context of unified accreditation. The self-study, public exhibits, and the site visit have provided evidence that UMS is cognizant of unification challenges and committed to trying to address them.

Unified accreditation itself reflects UMS’s forward and innovative thinking in planning for the changing environment in higher education, in the state of Maine and in the local areas served by the System. With unified accreditation of Maine’s public universities, the System carries out planning and evaluation at multiple levels, reflecting a broad-based approach to include multiple constituencies such as Trustees, leadership teams, faculty, staff, students, administration, alumni, and the local communities served by UMS and serving UMS. During the planning process for and the initial execution of unified accreditation, there has been cultivation of a culture of collaboration and receptivity to try to reduce competition among sister institutions. Strong and resilient commitment to serving the people and students across Maine, especially those in smaller towns and rural areas, is evident throughout the System.

Abundant materials in the self-study, in the public exhibit, and on UMS’s websites demonstrate the System’s planning and evaluation are appropriate to the institution. Both planning and evaluation include feedback from individuals and all divisions plus external perspectives. UMS systematically collects and uses data to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness.

Conversations at the open forums indicated that data governance teams have played a critical role and contributed to ensuring data integrity and accuracy. Data is trusted at all levels. This trust is a result of many years of hard work by data governance leadership and foundational detailed work. Data usage and utilization have grown tremendously and are still growing. Depending on whichever tools fit the purpose, both Tableau and Power BI are utilized to build dashboards. The spirit of collaboration among the data teams is obvious and people have shown that they are willing and able to work with each other across the System. UMS emphasizes the importance of planning and evaluation and allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts.

The evidence from the self-study, confirmed from the site visit, indicates that UMS regularly and systematically identifies and acts on priorities for planning and evaluation. Data shows that the System fulfills the responsibility and accountabilities established by the governing bodies and consistently searches for new opportunities to serve students. Throughout the move to unified accreditation, the System has mobilized stakeholders of all levels to be engaged in planning and has invested significant time, effort, and resources into this effort. Observations from the site visit suggest varied but mostly positive responses to unification planning. This observation confirms what the self-study has described.

Understandably, there are different opinions and some fears about the changes related to unified accreditation. One of the challenges is that, on the one hand, System-wide communications indicate strong commitment to unified accreditation and the investment of resources, with senior leadership regularly communicating about activities and working to cultivate a culture of transparency. On the other hand, many on the campuses do not feel that their questions and concerns are being addressed, particularly regarding planned next steps. At the open forums, many expressed that they feel that the move to unified accreditation has been mostly a “top-down” process. There was a desire for more transparent and inclusive communications, and for greater voice and agency. This sentiment was most strongly expressed by faculty.

While general planning has moved forward, execution and operational plans in some key areas do not match the extensive scope and complexities of this undertaking. This includes in such key areas as: assessment of educational effectiveness of academic programs (Standard 8), plans to allow students to take advantage of offerings on multiple campuses, co-curricular and DEI efforts (Standard 5) and faculty governance (Standards 3, 4 and 6).

To assist their strategic planning, UMS selected the consulting firm Huron. Using data from both internal and external stakeholders, Huron identified eight emerging strategic priorities: (1) access, affordability, & learner success; (2) academic innovation & collaboration; (3) workforce & economic development; (4) interdisciplinary research; (5) diversity, equity, & inclusion; (6) environmental sustainability; (7) operational excellence & infrastructure; and (8) financial sustainability.

High expectations are placed on the work of this consultant. The most recent strategic plan by the University of Maine System happened in 2004. This lapse of time coupled with the use of external consulting for planning seems incongruent with the publicly articulated sense of urgency and aspiration for collective engagement on achieving the goals of unified accreditation. The absence of a strategic plan has delayed progress on unification. A well communicated and broadly supported strategic plan with clear goals, metrics and timelines will be needed to advance efforts in a timely and unified way.

Planning:

Evidence from the self-study, confirmed by the site visit, indicates that the System office, all the universities and the Law School are engaged in planning activities to integrate and coordinate efforts across many areas, such as academic programs, student services, a master plan for physical plants, an information technology plan and library plans. During open forums, discussions demonstrated a strong sense of collaboration among many units including information technology, institutional research and financial aid. Participants at the forums mentioned that although unified accreditation

occurred recently, the System began moving in this direction decades ago. Campus teams genuinely embrace the spirit of collaboration. They openly and eagerly share their stories and appreciate the shared expertise among colleagues with the shared passion to support students and the mission of UMS and their home campuses. At these same forums, there was frequent mention of challenges with planning, such as uncertainty about where authority resides to move processes forward; challenges with dismantling existing silos which block effective collaboration; uneven distribution of resources; and inadequate resources in general. For example, certain IT tools are only available to a very limited number of people due to high expenses. Although people have a strong sense of commitment to advancing work on diversity, equity, and inclusion, the staff engaged in this important work all have other job responsibilities as their primary position descriptions. A related example is when people from campuses were asked to indicate whether it is important to have a senior-level person lead in a particular area. Most replied no because they addressed the issue from the perspective of their individual campus and did not necessarily need a System-level perspective. In other words, although unified accreditation is meant to reduce competition among institutions, competing perspectives and fragmentation do persist.

Evaluation:

In the document “Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs,” May 2016, the University of Maine System Board of Trustees adopted Primary and Secondary Outcomes to guide strategic resource allocation and investment within University of Maine System through 2021. Their primary outcomes include: *“Increase enrollment; Improve student success and completion; Enhance UMS fiscal positioning; Support Maine through research and economic development.”* The secondary outcomes include: *“Relevant academic programming; University workforce engagement.”* It is unclear the degree to which this document is guiding decisions while the strategic plan is being developed.

IR teams play an increasingly important role in ensuring high quality data to support System-wide evaluation and decision making. They conduct surveys and collect data in both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure valid information from students of all levels to serve and support the University’s planning priorities. The self-study, public information from the websites, and public exhibit materials have provided a demonstrable record that data and evaluation activities play crucially important roles to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation. Individual campuses also have evaluation processes and procedures that are suitable to their local situations. UMS and each University use analytical information from these assessment activities to advance planning priorities, including enrollment. Data are collected from all students including current undergraduate and graduate students. In the self-study, many examples of data and survey results point to collaboration in planning that is inclusive of stakeholders accessing data to drive their decision making.

Two areas should be considered for future planning and evaluation:

1. First, the impact of unified accreditation should be measured in various ways, and those data should be made widely available to guide future decisions.
2. Second, in meetings with the visiting team, the considerable scope of non-credit activities was frequently mentioned. It would be beneficial for non-credit activity to be measured and evaluated more systematically at campus and System levels.

3. Organization and Governance

Governing Board:

State law and the University of Maine System charter, combined with the System's Board of Trustees bylaws, set forward the structure and responsibilities of the 16-member Board. All but one of the Trustees are publicly selected and confirmed by the Governor's Office and the Maine legislature, including 14 trustees with five-year terms, a full-time student with a two-year term, and an *ex officio* State Commissioner. This composition provides breadth of voice and representation, including faculty and students on both the full Board and relevant committees. Board oversight, communication, operation, and action is frequent and detailed. Committees of the Board and the full Board meet frequently, each meeting six times annually. Trustees also hold an annual retreat and complete an annual self-evaluation. In meetings with Trustees and System Office administrators, it was clear that Board members understand and respect each institutions' mission and take their fiduciary responsibilities very seriously.

The Board of Trustees has a functional working relationship with the UMS administration. The Board appoints the Chancellor and all University of Maine System Presidents and evaluates them annually. The Chancellor and Board appear committed to improve executive hiring transparency and information disclosure in response to concerns expressed, most notably with regards to the 2021-22 search for the President at University of Maine Augusta and also the hiring of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. Recent actions by the Board and Chancellor related to the Augusta presidential search and public *mea culpa* appear to have reduced faculty and staff agitation and concern on this issue. This is inferred from the subject not being mentioned in any of the Evaluation Team's open meetings with faculty, staff or students. However, faculty and staff clearly indicated their desire for greater transparency overall and for more avenues for System-level engagement.

Internal Governance:

The Chief Academic Officers Council – in partnership with the Vice Chancellors overseeing Academic Affairs and Strategic Initiatives – plays the critical role of reviewing and maintaining policies and procedures around educational quality and student success, which then moves to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, and upwards to the Chancellor and the Board of Trustees. Several new positions have been created to aid in efforts toward unified accreditation, including an Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, an Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives, a Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation and a Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives. The Evaluation Team found that the UMS administrators work well together, communicate frequently, and operate collegially. The Chancellor supplements the above structure with regular in-person visits to each institution, System-wide e-mail communications, and weekly updates to the Board of Trustees.

Campus leadership, faculty, staff, and students are focused on their individual campuses, but most all expressed concern for the viability of all campuses. While some faculty and staff expressed opposition to unified accreditation, most of their concerns were about effective communication regarding the current status of the process and the ultimate structure once the process is complete. While there have been many modes of communication and ways to receive input from stakeholders,

the Evaluation Team heard from several stakeholders that administrators in the University of Maine System and on the Board of Trustees could be more transparent regarding their decisions and plans for the future.

Faculty governance is protected in state law, and constituent universities have faculty and student representative bodies. Complications have arisen regarding unifying faculty governance through a System-wide Faculty Governance Council (FGC). With the System Office rightly expressing the need for such a Council to exercise purview over System-wide curricular quality and System-wide policies, the Evaluation Team found that the creation of the FGC has been a work in progress over the last two years. Throughout this process, each campus has had representation, largely through their local Senate or Assembly leaders, and Council members have been allowed to design the structure and authority of the FGC as they saw fit. At the time of the visit, the FGC remained an advisory group, with curricular and policy decisions still made at the institution level and then sent through the FGC to the System Office and the Board. The Evaluation Team wants to recognize the System-wide academic leadership's efforts to have faculty, student, and staff engagement in this process – in System and academic policy – both in virtual and in-person settings, as well as asynchronously through web-driven input. However, more effort is needed to show how faculty, staff, and student input is being considered at the System-level.

Concerns about being kept informed and clarifying their roles apply to members of leadership as well. With the common catalog, clear processes of academic governance, and clear definitions of the roles of academic and executive leadership at each campus vis a vis the System needs to be achieved. The Repaving MaineStreet project would benefit from development of strong processes to identify course equivalencies across campuses, particularly for major sequences and general education requirements, and a clear timeline for the establishment of those equivalencies. Specificity on the roles of campus leaders in creating the unified catalog and strong communication and clarity on its purpose and use is needed.

The Unified Catalog Initiative – inclusive of the Repaving MaineStreet work to centralize these and other systems – will be important to effectively implement. Leadership, faculty, and staff appreciate the need for effective, efficient delivery of scheduled coursework and for clear, and as much as possible internally transferable curriculum. The Evaluation Team maintains that, like the need to define roles of academic leadership and faculty governance at the System level to support unification described above, systems and curricular development, delivery, and sharing is core to being a singly accredited system consistent with the UMS mission. These achievements form the foundation for governance bodies to act. With this in mind, the Evaluation Team recognizes the progress made to date to meet the stated goals with broad, representative input across the state, as well as the extensive work left to do. Continued movement towards unified accreditation will result in exacerbation of expressed concerns in tight timelines, and we advise more communication regarding processes and project plans to keep systems and academic integration moving.

UMS has worked hard to establish and refine policy to move towards unified accreditation. This is true upwards to the Board level, as well as in collaboration with faculty. This represents a significant accomplishment. From an organization and governance perspective, further progress on four fronts will be important (1) shared technological systems undergirding the storage of academic and student success requirements and data; (2) a unified catalog built on this system with transfer requirements and policies; (3) bolstered central governance for faculty, staff and student constituents; and (4) enhanced central governance for academic leadership.

Each of these is taken, in turn, below:

1. A unified student information system and data is foundational to functioning as a unified accredited system. The Repaving MaineStreet initiative is progressing. The web presence for soliciting student, faculty, and staff input is robust, and the project roadmap to be live on Human Resources and Financials is laudably aggressive. Campus solutions implementation, however, will be most critical. The present timeline of implementation is not clear, nor is the ability to meet requirements for governance in a singly accredited system. From a governance perspective, common elements in the academic core would aid System review, and common data on educational quality and student success would provide guidance for System functions and reports to Board Committees and the Full Board.
2. The Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Chief Academic Officers Council, and Faculty Governance Council would benefit from stable, unified course transfer requirements. Clear timeline and project plans here would be helpful.
3. The *2021 NECHE Report on Substantive Change Progress on Unified Accreditation* expressed the most challenging element of unified accreditation across the System as governance, and, within that, the position of the Faculty Council. At the time, the System-wide Council was still in its infancy. The Evaluation Team reiterates this point. The role of the System-wide Faculty Governance Council must be defined clearly, differentiated from the roles of the campus faculty senates/councils, and perform a role that adds value to UMS efforts to achieve its mission. We note progress made to date, however, without completion of common academic policies, requirements, catalogs and systems, the concerns regarding local autonomy versus System-level governance will remain.
4. The governance structures, especially the matrix of leadership between local and System levels, requires consideration of what the System will eventually look like under unified accreditation. Progress is clear on achieving common technical systems and beginning to address academic considerations. Analogous to the faculty governance concerns, campus leadership must operate within defined roles and responsibilities in System-level curriculum and program management.

The Evaluation Team understands the time it takes to unify systems and academics – from curriculum, to underlying technology, to governance structures – and the resulting clarity from this process will certainly both derive from – and drive further – central academic leadership and faculty governance strength. The visiting team notes that attention to academic leadership will help drive the shared catalog creation, and the Repaving MaineStreet project will be a critical complement to the bolstering of unified, System-level voice of faculty and students.

4. The Academic Program

Review of the academic programs of the UMS universities reveals progress achieved to date in the multi-year unified accreditation effort. Policies and procedures at the System-level have been and continue to be developed and implemented. These policies and processes consistently reflect the UMS mission, which includes retaining the roles and autonomy of the seven universities while working to ensure systemwide adherence to quality standards. In multiple areas, policies and procedures are established at the System-level while individual universities have made needed adjustments. Compliance has been accomplished with varying degrees of success to date.

The complexity of this effort is demonstrated in the difficult but necessary process being followed to create the Maine School of Engineering, Computing & Information Sciences that will result in an entity that combines the statewide goals of UMS while allowing the local focus and application to the University partners' communities and local industries.

Assuring Academic Quality:

Systemwide policies and processes have been established to ensure academic quality at all locations. Closer examination of the program review and program development processes suggest large-scale compliance with a few possible exceptions.

UMS policy provides a comprehensive set of requirements for program review at all universities. These policies guide the responsible unit's program-review self-study to examine a consistent set of data. Key elements include assessment results, a student-learning-outcome matrix, study plans for students, credit- and degree-production results, retention and graduation rates, student qualifications, rosters of participating faculty with vitae, student surveys, and external reviews by two disciplinary experts. Review of the results moves from department to dean to provost to president. UMS policy allows no more than seven years between reviews of an individual program, with a five-year cycle preferred. Review of individual campus practices demonstrates full compliance at University of Maine (UM) and University of Southern Maine (USM). University of Maine at Presque Isle's (UMPI) published schedule complied through 2021. University of Maine at Machias' (UMM) published program-review timeframe, though, is for no more than 10 years. University of Maine at Augusta (UMA), University of Maine at Farmington (UMF), and University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) are working to comply; however, some delays have occurred due to issues such as faculty turnover at a time a specific program review is due. Although UMS program-review policy meets the standard, four universities need to update timeframes and ensure all programs are on track.

Program and curriculum development processes at all campuses consistently comply with System policies. Processes outline steps for approval of new programs and courses; modifications of existing programs and courses; and new and modified concentrations, minors, and certificates. For new programs, departments declare an intent to plan, which precedes the full proposal. The intent to plan allows consideration of academic standards, examines the match with University and System missions, identifies potential obstacles, and prompts early discussion among Provosts to consider potential opportunities to partner. Full proposals include development of the program by a planning committee, completion of a financial analysis, review and advice of the Faculty Senate, and approval by the Provost and President before moving to System-level consideration. Criteria are established for academic quality, centrality to mission, and availability of resources. Financial considerations are based on the program being self-sustaining, meeting a social or economic need, or filling an essential role in support of other programs or activities.

Undergraduate Degree Programs:

Access to recommended progressions of courses and clear identification of course prerequisites in undergraduate programs are readily available on websites of all UMS universities. Descriptions of recommended progressions of courses in academic programs took varied forms; however, they were generally easy to understand. Program plans consistently provided foundational elements at lower levels and more advanced coursework at upper-division levels. Program learning goals were published in consistent manners and were easy to locate for UMA, UMF, UMFK, UMM, and UMPI.

UM program learning goals were mostly accessible, though a few lists were difficult to find or could not be found. USM's presentation of program learning goals could benefit from greater consistency.

Review of 3+3 and 4+1 programs presented clear guidelines for students to understand where undergraduate work ends and graduate work begins. Strong, positive efforts to connect students from multiple universities to 3+3 and 4+1 opportunities at different UMS universities reflected careful thought and planning. Numbers of student participants are not large as yet. Students cited the importance of being able to address occasional conflicts and to broaden access to elective courses through study away.

General Education:

The general education requirements at all UMS universities provide evidence that they are coherent, substantive, and reflect the System and University missions. Each program includes elements of arts, humanities, science, mathematics, and social sciences. General education at UMA, UMF, and UMPI each require 40 credits; UMPI's general education requirements are organized and presented around 22 learning objectives. UM's requirement is 45 credits, and UMM's minimum is 44. UMFK requires 38-42 credits, therefore falling 2 credits short of the minimum of 40 credits required by NECHE standards. USM's general education requirements cover all required discipline areas and provide multiple options. Each UMS institution accepts a completed general education program from a different UMS campus in lieu of its own requirements if transfer from one University to the other occurs after those requirements are met. The general education program at UMFK needs to be revised to require a minimum of 40 credits.

The Major or Concentration:

All UMS universities' bachelor's degree programs are appropriately sized, employ the progression of introductory level requirements at the lower division, and require areas of inquiry beyond introductory level in upper-division courses. A strong majority of upper-division courses carry prerequisites of lower-division courses and some upper-division courses as well. Graduation requirements are clearly presented and published online.

Graduate Degree Programs:

Graduate-level program-development processes require program goals and precise student outcomes. Of the five universities with graduate programs, only UM graduate programs and UMPI's one graduate program published those goals and outcomes on their websites. UMA does present course-based outcomes for its MS Cybersecurity program, though not for the MS Trauma-Informed Emergency Management degree.

UM and USM each employ a formal process of identifying graduate faculty. UMA, UMF, and UMPI do not, though some of their faculty members are identified as formal members of the UM or USM graduate faculty. UM's *Graduate School Constitution* establishes minimum requirements for being granted and continuing with graduate faculty status. Scholarship of tenured and tenure-track faculty is reviewed on a regular basis.

Policy and process at UM through its *Graduate School Constitution* and USM through its Graduate Council responsibilities confirm that graduate faculty play an active role in determining admissions criteria for graduate programs. Though not clarified in graduate-school policy or procedures, the

two programs at UMA, three at UMF, and one at UMPI each show faculty involvement in determining admissions policies through program-development processes applied at each location.

The self-study states, “Transfer credit accepted for graduate programs is limited and typically constitutes no more than 25% of the overall credits required to earn a master’s or doctoral degree.” Exceptions to the 25% guideline are present throughout UMS. At UMF, the MS Educational Leadership and the MS Education-Special Education programs both allow up to 9 credits in transfer in a 33-credit program. The self-study states that “UM allows no more than six external post-baccalaureate credits for master’s degree programs, and no more than 30 credits for doctoral programs.” However, UM graduate school policies state that doctoral degrees will permit up to 50% of the required credits to be accepted in transfer. The UMS Graduate Business Program accepts up to 9 credits in transfer for its MBA programs, which exceeds the 25% guideline for the 30-credit MBA-General degree and for four 33-credit degrees: MBA-Accounting, MBA-Business Administration, MBA-Finance, and MBA-Sustainability. UMS identifies no specific credit limits for its graduate programs but instead describes a process that students wishing to transfer credits into graduate programs must follow. Documentation confirms that all MS, MFA, EdD, and PhD programs at UMS universities require theses or dissertations.

UMS has been a leader in the United States in providing distance education opportunities to students. Online and distance education courses include asynchronous online, synchronous online, hyflex, and hybrid courses. Of the System’s 27,975 headcount students served, 23.9% (6,677) are identified as online students. Each campus enrolls online students. Of the 6,677 UMS online students, 45.3% (3,023) are UMA students. At UMA and its second location in Bangor, 68.4% of its total student population is online.

Materials presented in support of this self-study confirm that in all areas of program preparation, presentation, and support for students and faculty, UMS continues to be a leader. For example, UMA provides academic success coaching and professional advising for all of its students at its Augusta and Bangor sites and through eight additional centers throughout the state. Although all student support services may not be available from UMS employees at each specific location, all online and distance education students have access to those services not delivered at their home University or site through online access from other UMS locations.

Quality control is maintained by requiring additional scrutiny by appropriate faculty committees including plans for a proposed change of a course to a different instructional mode. Decisions to develop online, distance education, and multi-University opportunities have occurred through various paths; however, the greatest commonality appears to be meeting a specific need to serve a community, an industry, or a group of students from one or more universities in Maine.

Among the goals of the creation of the unified catalog is a simplification of the process required for a student of one UMS University to enroll in and take a course at another UMS University. Revisions of the process will allow individual students to confirm online whether a particular course from a different UMS University will count toward his or her individual degree program and will allow for students to register for courses for other UMS universities online, as opposed to the current process of completing paper-based forms.

Reconciliation of off-campus instructional locations lists has not yet been completed. Accurate lists of locations are required for reporting to NECHE and to the U.S. Department of Education. These lists need to be completed, verified, and reported to these two organizations as soon as possible.

Revision of internal systems of establishing, tracking, and reporting these locations need to be achieved.

Transfer Credit:

Transfer-credit policy and processes for undergraduate programs are consistent among all UMS universities. Transfer credits may also be considered for CLEP, AP exams, and credit for military training. Graduate transfer policies differ. UM allows up to 6 credits for master's degrees but up to or equal to 50% of the credits in doctoral programs. UMA and UMPI limit transfer to no more than 6 credits for master's degrees. UMA allows up to 3 credits in transfer for certificate programs. UMF allows up to 9 credits in its four master's degrees. USM allows up to 12 credits in the Muskie School but only two courses (6 credits) in Special Education.

UMPI's YourPace is delivered by UMPI full-time and adjunct faculty who have completed a comprehensive training process to prepare them to develop curriculum, work with students, and evaluate performance in a competency-based program. Individual competency-based education units are determined by connecting the CBE units back to the regular curriculum through the established learning outcomes. Evidence collected and reported through the NECHE substantive change process, including the initial proposal and a follow-up external review resulting in a progress report, support a conclusion that this program meets quality standards of NECHE.

UMPI has successfully responded to the concerns NECHE raised in a November 6, 2020 letter about its Master of Arts in Organization Leadership competency-based education program. To address the issue of program governance, the University hired a Dean of Competency-Based Education and Degree Completion in September 2021. The Dean's role is to provide oversight of the program, manage logistics, ensure compliance with regulations, and market the program to prospective students. The curriculum itself is faculty driven and managed by faculty in Arts & Sciences and Professional Studies. With respect to evaluation, UMPI faculty now have the ability to develop their own content and competencies for the program and are beginning to assess them. Like other competency-based education programs at UMPI, assessment will be both summative and formative. Students in the program have access to services, including Career Readiness, that help them find new career opportunities upon completion of the program.

Degree programs are appropriately named and sized in terms of credit requirements. Degree programs reflect increasing levels of complexity, specialization, and generalization. Required and elective courses are offered with sufficient availability. Access to elective courses will increase as UMS continues to refine the study-away process to allow for more widespread access for students pursuing degrees at other UMS universities.

Oversight of the academic elements of degree programs by faculty and administrators of UMS universities relates to key areas of responsibility identified in NECHE standards. These areas of responsibility include course content; identification of required competencies; delivery of instructional programs; hiring, evaluating, and developing faculty; admission, registration, and retention of students; evaluation of prior learning; and evaluation of student progress. Learning objectives are largely available with a few exceptions, and objectives are relevant to the level of instruction. Degree programs reflect NECHE standards and expectations of the inclusion of lower-division introductory levels with more complex and focused advanced work in majors and concentrations.

One area of emphasis identified by NECHE was the contractual relationship between UMF and the Seguinland Institute, with a focus on achieving financial and enrollment goals, ensuring student support services are provided, and assessing the achievement of student learning outcomes in each course. Students who enroll at the Institute receive credit from UMF, and administrators report that they met their enrollment targets for AY2021-22. The Associate Provost at UMF approves all students that the Institute recommends be admitted to ensure these students meet UMF's admissions criteria. Institute instructors are vetted by UMF personnel, and new courses must be approved by the appropriate department chairs and the Associate Provost. UMF uses student evaluations and retention rates to assess the program, but there is no direct assessment of whether students are achieving the student learning outcomes, as no learning outcomes have been established for those courses.

NECHE also requested an update of UMF's progress in shifting from a four- to three-credit course model. The self-study and UMF administrators report that most programs have completed the process and have "catalog-ready" programs and course descriptions that will be submitted to the Curriculum Committee during the fall 2022 semester. At the time of the visit, the Education programs are awaiting feedback from their accrediting body, and work had not begun on courses in the general education program.

Academic suspension, termination, and readmission processes are governed by a System policy, "Admission/Readmission of Student." This policy ensures that readmission consideration to the same campus follows the parameters of the suspension. Admission to a different UMS campus requires the applicant to describe how academic success is more likely at the new campus, in light of the previous suspension from the other campus.

Processes are in place to regularly review systemwide and individual campus compliance with credit-hour requirements for on-ground, on-line synchronous, online asynchronous, hyflex, and hybrid courses before they are offered. Credit-bearing certificates are developed and approved consistent with policies at the System and University levels. Digital badges and micro-credentials are approved based upon criteria identified by UMS micro-credential teams. Evidence of regular efforts to measure the success of dual enrollment and early college programs and their participants is present through multiple reports produced by UMS Institutional Research.

A systemwide Academic Integrity Policy, issued on September 1, 2020, established clear expectations for honesty and integrity in all academic work throughout the System. Individual campuses hold authority to adopt campus-based procedures consistent with System policy.

A wide range of efforts to expand consistent access to resources is evident. Working groups of staff leaders from admissions units, information technology services, registrars' offices, and student services units apply a collaborative approach to identifying and addressing challenges and eliminating barriers to students in each of their areas of responsibility.

The process that is evolving in the effort to create the Maine College of Engineering, Computing and Information Sciences (MCECIS) reflects the challenging nature of the UMS mission. The process being applied recognizes the importance of retaining UMS's seven universities' distinctiveness, support of local communities, and application to industries statewide. These goals guide actions of participating administrators and faculty leaders in seeking to define an organizational structure and working relationships that can promote and deliver excellence within the established parameters. Though the process is slow, the recognition and respect being applied to the process serves as a

model for future multi-University cooperative efforts within the boundaries of the System's and individual universities' missions. Systemwide collaborative activities to implement the new System-wide learning management system, Brightspace; the Repaving MaineStreet project; reducing barriers to student transfer activity; improving graduation rates; and considering greater alignment of the seven universities' general education programs, each carry additional promise for strengthening UMS's impact on the students, communities, and industries of the State of Maine.

5. Students

Through the self-study materials and in speaking with students, faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the University of Maine System, the Evaluation Team found considerable evidence that the System's institutions provide accessible and effective educational opportunities, services, and supports for students in all offered degree levels, modalities, and locations. The individual institutions and campuses offer unique experiences and are oriented towards the needs of specific populations they recruit and enroll, as well as the communities they serve. In addition to highlighting systematic supports for UMS students, such as unified policies, System-wide initiatives, multi-campus programs, and collaborative delivery of services, stakeholders repeatedly offered examples demonstrating System-wide dedication to helping resolve individual student challenges through cooperation between staff and administrators within and across institutions, often on a case-by-case basis.

There was promising evidence of continued work to create shared systems in important areas such as HR, IT, and Student Accessibility Services. In particular, the Unified Course Catalog project has progressed, establishing shared conventions for representing course information, which will provide the necessary materials for the development of a System-wide course search tool. However, this project also exemplifies the limits of System-level implementations thus far. The unified catalog will eventually allow students to browse offerings throughout the System and identify important information such as prerequisites and course delivery modality. However, as discussed below, without extensive further work, students will continue to encounter considerable barriers to taking courses at other campuses within the System, limiting the utility of the unified catalog to support higher level System-wide goals such as student retention and progression.

Throughout the Evaluation Team visit, examples of unresolved barriers for students wishing to take advantage of opportunities beyond their 'home' institution highlighted the need for clear System-level processes. Constituents in areas such as Admissions, Student Affairs, and Facilities found System-level working groups that bring staff and administrators from all of the campuses together on a regular basis to be a valuable forum for enhanced collaboration and knowledge-sharing. In many cases, these groups have been able to identify shared solutions to common problems. However, these groups have not been charged with specific actions or projects to move the establishment of System-level processes, policies, and procedures forward, nor was that a clearly stated goal of collaborative work.

The UMS Transforms project which aims to enhance student exposure to high impact practices such as research, as well as more closely connect the System's campus career efforts to state-wide workforce development, offers promise as a vision for UMS's aspirations as a System. Achieving a clear plan, timeline, and governance process to realize that vision still remains ahead. However,

evidence of collaboration among staff across the System, and a student-focused orientation on all campuses can provide the basis for establishing and implementing concrete next steps.

Admissions Overview:

UMS admissions offices have established strong collaborations that were strengthened by coordinated efforts during the pandemic to provide prospective students and families with centralized opportunities to meet with the System's institutions. As noted in the self-study, these collaborations, as well as the movement towards unified accreditation, have prompted evaluation and improvement of recruitment practices both at each institution and at the System level. As outlined in Standard 1 of the self-study, each institution has an identity and mission within the System as defined by the educational environment and opportunities it offers and the populations it serves. These in turn significantly inform the recruitment and admission practices across institutions.

Evidence from individual System institution websites supports the self-study assertion that admission to UMS universities is based on demonstrated potential to be successful at a given institution; admission criteria remain specific to each institution. Information outlining application processes, criteria, and expectations are available on each institution's individually branded application page. A permanent move of all institutions to a test-optional policy on the undergraduate side has both created an area of System-wide similarity and lowered barriers for some students. The ApplyMaine site allows students a single access point for the application process, with links to individual institutions' pages for more detailed instructions that vary to some degree by institution.

Enrollment management professionals spoke highly of the agreement among institutions to cease sending recruitment emails to students once they have deposited at any one of the UMS campuses. However, students did note that recruitment is not coordinated prior to the point of deposit; when applying to more than one UMS institution, a prospective student will receive separate offers, each 'branded' with different school colors and symbols, and each containing distinct financial aid packages. More than one student pointed to this as evidence that admissions is still largely operating on an institution-specific basis. Enrollment management administrators and staff also noted that while they do collaborate overall, there is still a great deal of competition among institutions in the System, and that each institution is still judged (and to some degree financed) by its enrollment counts.

This competition among institutions for enrollment, particularly those offering similar programs, was cited by students, faculty, and staff as an impediment to implementing a "System vision." For example, faculty noted a need to balance the number of online courses their students take at other System institutions, since this could have the unintended consequence of reduced enrollment in, and possible cancellation of, in-person sections needed by students on their campus. Conversely, students in programs with high enrollments were concerned that they would be competing for needed spots in required courses with students from other campuses. At the same time, several graduate students spoke of being unable to complete their degrees on time due to "missing" required courses offered only once a year and stated that they wished they could complete their degrees by taking equivalent courses at another campus. These diverse examples point to needed examination of the goals for System-wide integration, as well as barriers to achieving those goals.

Much hope is being placed in the Repaving MaineStreet project to resolve systems-based barriers to student retention, progression and graduation, for example, by creating greater ability for students to access courses at other campuses and initiating new programs offered collaboratively across UMS institutions. However, it is clear that pursuing specific solutions to these issues will require decisions

that balance the desire for continued individual institution independence with System-wide decisions. Important issues to address include the movement of funds associated with individual student class enrollments, student athletics eligibility as they move from a single-campus to multi-campus program, System-wide transferability of courses, and student access to library and other resources System-wide.

Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences:

As noted above, each campus serves different populations and strives to provide appropriate supports to further the education of these populations. This connection to individual institutions was apparent in the contrast between the relatively well-attended student forums for each individual campus (averaging 10 to 20 students at each campus), and the poorly attended System-wide student forum (3 students). Student services and supports are organized and provided on a campus-by-campus basis, including advising, accessibility services, career services, health and wellness services, recreation/athletics, and clubs and events. Overall, the students who met with the Evaluation Team, including undergraduate, graduate, distance learning, international, and student athlete populations, spoke highly of the supports available to them, particularly academic advising and international student advising. However, several noted that the organization of advising differs from program to program and institution to institution, with corresponding variability in the quality of advising available depending on program size and advisor workloads. Given the current “case-by-case” approach taken to resolve individual student issues, this variability in advising quality and organization raises questions regarding access for all students to the ad-hoc solutions that currently keep the system working.

Each campus provides a range of co-curricular and leadership opportunities for its students. In general, student leaders noted solid working relationships with administrators and faculty on their home campuses. Opportunities for student leadership at the System level were less well defined, and some students pointed to DEI issues as an area where greater System-wide engagement and support for student efforts could enhance outcomes on individual campuses. Notably, students expressed some confusion about sources of funding for potential System-wide events, leadership opportunities, or co-curricular activities. This is another area where organization and investment could offer positive outcomes for building greater student investment and retention in the larger System.

Financial aid services have been consolidated to ensure service to smaller campuses, with UM providing financial aid administration to UMM, UMFK, and UMPI. However, as noted in the self-study and confirmed in meetings during the site visit, considerable variation in the organization of financial aid administration persists. While the upcoming move to a single Office of Postsecondary Education Identifier (OPEID) could potentially serve to streamline and coordinate financial aid administration, thereby also allowing smoother flow of students from one campus to another, the System has chosen to maintain the autonomy of individual System campuses. This decision does allow individual campuses to maintain current practices in the delivery of financial aid; however, it also perpetuates many of the challenges students experience when trying to utilize financial aid and other benefits when they take courses at other System institutions.

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) as well as student conduct/student of concern notations and records have both been unified for System-wide access by support professionals. For SAS, this helps ensure that the System meets its legal obligations to provide accessibility services to students in accordance with their documented accommodations, even when a student takes a course at another

campus. Student services professionals across the System adhere to common professional standards established by their respective national organizations. Other services, such as medical, mental health/counseling, advising and career services are still campus-based, which serve students who primarily take remote coursework (e.g., UMA) or who take most coursework on their 'home' campus. Much more complex questions began to come forward when services for students in existing and proposed collaborative and combined programs were discussed.

University registrars on each campus are responsible for the integrity and accuracy of student records and ensure that FERPA and other appropriate student records regulations are followed. System-wide expectations regarding students' abilities to inspect and challenge their records are in place. The University registrars collaborate closely across the System campuses and are close to completing a project focused on standardizing the course information and format for course listing across campuses. This work lays the foundation for a Unified Course Catalog, which will provide a central search tool for students to see available courses across all campuses presented in the same format, including necessary information regarding course instructional modality, meeting times, etc.

As noted above, the Repaving MaineStreet project remains at the center of discussions regarding unified accreditation. Student, staff, and faculty expectations of what this project will bring, and the timeline for implementation appear to be out of sync with project timelines and immediate goals. Thus, stakeholders frequently referred to "seamless movement of students" throughout the System, but the Evaluation Team found little evidence that this was the actual goal of the coordination of systems. Furthermore, while solutions to challenges such as the application of financial aid or veterans' benefits when students enroll in courses across campuses may arise with greater integration of campuses within the System, no one group seemed to know who was empowered to make such integration happen. In the absence of clear goals, including balancing individual campus autonomy with sustainability at the System level, students, faculty and staff "filled in the blanks" with their own hopes and fears for the actual outcomes of the completed Repaving MaineStreet/System integration project.

A frequent concern of students was whether they were truly University of Maine System students, or whether their opportunities would be limited by their home campus affiliation. For example, students at several campuses noted that they were sometimes unable to access travel grant opportunities, library databases, or extra-curricular activities at other campuses (particularly UM, Orono) despite being "UMaine" students. Specific complications, such as whether UMaine students in the MBA program to be housed in a new dorm on the USM campus would be able to participate in on-campus activities when their own activity fee funds would be allocated to their 'home' campus, were frequently raised, with little understanding of how these challenges would be identified and resolved. Similarly, concerns regarding students' continued eligibility for participation in sports teams or even continued residence in housing on their home campus should they take too many credits at other campuses still lack answers.

These specific concerns speak to the need to focus not just on the promising vision of UMS Transforms, but on the specific unresolved questions and barriers to achieving that vision. The dedication of staff, faculty and administrators to the success of their students was clear to the Evaluation Team, and this dedication should be linked to clear System-level goals for student success that will move the System beyond case-by-case solutions to System-wide successes.

Special Emphasis:

An area of emphasis related to progress made by UMA in achieving its goals for graduation rates was reviewed. The self-study reports that the four most recent cohorts had graduation rates of 18%, 19%, 13%, and 16%. The self-study notes that the goal for the next cohort is an 18% graduation rate and suggests that the EAB Navigate platform will be used by faculty and staff to provide early alerts for students facing challenges, thereby enhancing student success. Administrators from UMA reported that the deployment of Navigate was already resulting in improved retention rates, and that its recent deployment was also showing promise and successfully engaging faculty in retention practices.

6. Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

Faculty and Academic Staff:

University of Maine System faculty are deeply committed to their students and their home institutions. All described their willingness to go above and beyond to help their students in any way possible. All also had a deep understanding and commitment to the mission of their home institution and type of student that institution has traditionally served.

There are five categories of academic rank outlined in the *Agreement between the University of Maine System and the Associated Faculties of the University of Maine, MEA/NEA (AFUM)* collective bargaining agreement: lecturer, instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor. Similar ranks exist for extension, research, and clinical faculty. Part-time faculty are governed by the AFT-Maine AFL-CIO (PATFA) collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The AFUM CBA requires that the workload of unit members consists of teaching, research, university, and public service, though the mix of those responsibilities varies across campuses, schools, and divisions, ranging from heavy teaching loads at the smaller institutions to lighter loads at UM and USM. Faculty on the smaller campuses indicated that their heavy teaching loads made it difficult to conduct their own research or research with undergraduates.

UMS had a total of 1,141 full-time faculty as of FY2022, ranging from 583 at UM/UMM to 27 at UMFK. That total represents a 2% decline from FY2019. Full-time faculty's proportion of the total faculty increased from 46% in FY2019 to 47% in FY2020. Over the same time period, part-time faculty have decreased 9% from 88 in FY2019 to 80 in FY2022, while adjuncts have declined 4% (1,280 in FY2019 to 1,228 in FY2022). The proportion of female faculty also varies greatly across the institutions, ranging from 62% at UM/UMM to 82% at UMF. Institutions across the System continue to face challenges in attracting and retaining faculty of color. UM/UMM has the most diverse faculty with 21% identifying as BIPOC, while the proportions of faculty of color are 18% at USM, 15% at UMFK, 13% at UMPI, and only 7% at UMA and UMF. The self-study reports that the vast majority of full-time faculty hold terminal degrees, but the proportion also varies by campus. Librarians, advisors, and instructional designers also have at least a bachelor's degree.

New faculty are hired through a multistep process that is outlined in the AFUM and on the University of Maine System website. It actively involves faculty in the process and adheres to all federal equal employment opportunity regulations. Members of search committees are required to participate in Inclusive Search Training before the search begins. Each campus does engage in significant training regarding diversity in an effort to diversify its faculty and staff when hiring.

The AFUM sets minimum salaries for each rank, and salaries vary across the System based on the mission of the institution and the cost of living in the surrounding communities. Faculty from the smaller campuses reported frustration with pay inequity compared to colleagues at UM and USM, particularly if unified accreditation means more students are taking courses from faculty on multiple campuses. Faculty development funds are available at all institutions, though the amounts and models for applying for those funds vary across the System. Several administrators that met with the Evaluation Team indicated unified accreditation will create opportunities for faculty development to occur System-wide.

Several institutions, but not all, publish faculty handbooks that outline faculty responsibilities and the criteria for promotion and tenure. The AFUM also outlines the criteria for evaluating faculty for tenure and promotion and the process for evaluating faculty, but in general terms that can be applied to all institutions within the System. Unified accreditation provides the opportunity for the creation of one faculty handbook that can apply to all faculty across the System. Both the AFUM and PATFA contain statements that protect the academic freedom of full and part-time faculty.

Teaching and Learning:

Faculty are regularly evaluated through the promotion and tenure process and through student evaluations required by the AFUM CBA. Since all student evaluations are online, response rates vary depending on whether the instructor allows time in class to complete them or expects students to do so out of class. Part-time faculty are also evaluated based on criteria and processes outlined in the PATFA.

Interviews with faculty and administrators across the campuses indicate that assessment of student learning outcomes, and even whether student learning outcomes have been created for particular programs, is uneven across the institutions. As will be discussed in Standard 8, there does not appear to be annual assessment of programs that are not externally accredited at all institutions. The Annual Academic Program Report (AAPR Report) does indicate whether the program has student learning outcomes on its website and the date of its last program review. Most unaccredited programs rely on these periodic program reviews, which do utilize external reviewers, as the only means of assessing student learning. These reviews occur after five years for new programs, and System-level policy sets the timeline for program review at all campuses to no more than seven years for existing programs. Unified accreditation offers the opportunity for the System-wide Assessment Committee, which was formally created in 2022, to provide information and develop a process for each institution to strengthen their assessment programs.

Advising models also vary across the System. All institutions except UMF have dual advising programs shared by faculty and professional advisors. The self-study indicates that UMF and USM are considering adopting those models. The effectiveness of advising is not assessed on any campuses. However, the 2020 NSSE survey did include the section on advising and was administered on all campuses.

In meetings with the Evaluation Team, several faculty members indicated that unified accreditation was beneficial to faculty members on the smaller campuses in regard to research and creative activity. Faculty from other campuses are now able to receive support from UM's Office of Research Administration. Further, there are currently about 50 faculty from other campuses who have been appointed as UMS Graduate Faculty. This appointment allows them to teach graduate courses, serve on graduate student committees, and conduct research with graduate students.

Special Emphasis:

NECHE asked that the University of Maine provide an update on efforts to strengthen the funding model for research and increase funding for that research and doctoral-level education. Campus administrators report that the funding model is being revised so that a percentage of the facilities and administrative money from each grant will be returned to the unit where the principal investigator (PI) is housed, and another portion of the money will be reinvested to continue to enhance the research infrastructure. The self-study also notes that UM generated a record \$133.6 million in external funding to support research and development in FY2021, up from only \$56.9 million in FY2017. Expenditures on R&D by UM also reached a record \$179.3 million in FY2021. Finally, UM has seen a slight increase in the number of students enrolled in its doctoral programs (from 500 in spring 2021 to 522 in fall 2021), largely by increasing the graduate stipends offered. The University intends to continue to increase the graduate stipend budget until it is more in line with other New England universities.

7. Institutional Resources

Financial Resources:

The University of Maine System is in a strong financial position. This strength is in no small part due to its being well positioned to successfully weather enrollment uncertainties associated with demographic challenges across the country and in the New England region especially.

Headcount enrollment, System-wide, has increased slightly since 2016; however, the full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE) has declined modestly since that time. The FTE decline is felt most keenly at UMFK with a -22.8% drop and at UMM, which had its own -19.3% decline, UMF at -11.6% and UMA at -4.9% have also seen substantial declines in FTE during these last five years. Of these, UMA alone appears to be largely related to the pandemic – as the greatest changes for this location were between Fall 2015 and Fall 2017. From that point to the Fall of 2020, full-time enrollment increased at UMM. Enrollments are growing at UMPI, USM, and UM. This growth is remarkable, as the national trend for regional public higher education institutions, especially those in New England, has been one of decline in enrollment. UMS has addressed the enrollment challenges through aggressive discounting with a near 27% increase in total financial aid since FY2017.

The University of Maine System net position is strong, having improved by \$113M, or 14% from FY2020 to FY2021. This increase is due in no small part to the strong enrollment described above, which, though uneven, outpaces regional trends for public four-year colleges, considering demographic challenges and resulting substantial discounting. This unevenness should also be better managed in future years, as the System's governance structure embraces a fully statewide approach incumbent to a singly accredited setup that will allow for agile, comprehensive response to fluctuations within the System.

Unsurprisingly, core financial metrics – primary reserve ratio, return on net position, net operating revenue and viability ratio – describing underlying fiscal health also vary across colleges. Anticipating governance changes demanded of a singly accredited operation, as with enrollment above, the Evaluation Team spent its energy reviewing financials on a consolidated basis. Analysis on key financial indicators are as follows:

Primary Reserve Ratio. The primary reserve ratio provides a snapshot of financial strength and viability and provides a proxy for assessing how long an institution – in this case, the full University of Maine System – could function using the expendable net position of the organization. The higher education standard benchmark for this ratio is .40, and the System’s primary reserve ratio for FY2021 was .47, up sixteen points from FY2020. This increase in primary reserve is largely due to one-time, pandemic related allocations – consistent with other higher education institutions and systems – and provides for a half-a-year of operations as a safety net.

Net Operating Position. The net operating position answers the question “is the institution (System) living within its means?” The net operating position for the University of Maine System was 7.92% for FY2021, up nearly eight points from FY2020. The benchmark for this category is between 2% and 4%. In three of the last ten years, the net operating position has been below the low benchmark, with several years being negative, suggesting the System was not living within its means. However, with unified accreditation, including derivative cost containment and efficiency enhancements, it is expected the net operating position will improve over time.

Return on Net Position. The return on net position assesses performance against the prior year and gives a sense as to whether UMS is better off than the previous year. The benchmark for return on net position is 6%. In all years, with the exception of FY2021, UMS’s return on net position was below the benchmark and, in five of the last ten years, was negative. Roughly speaking, this means the System was not better off than the year before. Interestingly, UMFK had the strongest return on net position over this 10-year period. As with Net Operating Position, the Evaluation Team expects improved performance as a System from unified accreditation.

Viability Ratio. The viability ratio measures the expendable resources available to cover debt obligations. The viability ratio benchmark is 1.25. University of Maine System has met or exceeded this target for each of the last ten years.

Composite Financial Index (CFI). The four key financial ratios are combined into the composite financial index, a single measure of financial health for an institution or System. Typically, a CFI score of 3.0 to 5.0 is adequate to allow an organization to direct resources to transformation and maintain existing operations. Positive scores under three would suggest an organization should direct its attention to reengineering its business processes. With UMS’s CFI score averaging 2.4 for the ten years prior to the pandemic, the System’s CFI did not hit this benchmark. System accreditation will employ efforts to reengineer business practices and positively impact financial sustainability, serving as one of many possible appropriate actions to improve CFI.

UMS and its component institutions possess the competent and professional staff necessary to lead this complex financial organization. Led by the Vice Chancellor for Finance, Administration, and Treasurer, the System has key financial leaders at each of the institutions in the form of Chief Business Officers (CBOs). The CBO role is unique within the University of Maine System in that each individual reports directly to the Vice Chancellor, with a dotted-line reporting relationship to the institutional President. This function allows each President to maintain a degree of control regarding institutional budgets and performance while simultaneously protecting the financial assets of the System through the direct reporting relationship to the System CFO.

UMS has a strong operating budget process. The Vice Chancellor oversees this process, working through the institutional CBOs, and regularly shares progress updates. In the most recent budgeting

round, the System offered many opportunities for institutional feedback with listening sessions held at each campus. The budget process, most recently updated in 2014, provides a strong fiduciary role for the Board of Trustees, founded on the mission, vision, and key strategic priorities of the System. Each institution is then responsible for offering a budget, within the context of its supporting mission and vision, to meet the Board's key strategic priorities.

A key element of UMS's budgeting process is development of a multi-year budget that incorporates fiscal planning at all levels. Called the Multi-Year Financial Analysis (MYFA), the model uses key drivers to assess the future. These drivers include enrollment management, faculty and staff compensation, facilities infrastructure, and state appropriations. The Board of Trustees, as part of the budgeting process, reviews the MYFA, and from this review, it has the financial data needed to make informed decisions regarding resource allocation.

UMS financial statements are created annually in accordance with Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) standards. In addition, the System conducts an annual single audit of federal funds, an important condition of receiving federal grants, and Title IV federal aid. The System's single and financial audits continue to receive a clean opinion.

In April 2022, UMS updated its program participation agreement (PPA) with the US Department of Education to merge the Other Postsecondary Education Identification (OPEID) numbers from the seven UMS institutions into a single OPEID. Once approved, this action allows the System to consolidate financial aid functions across the System. The financial aid team is currently working to unify regulatory and compliance processes and will soon begin work on unifying practices for awarding federal aid such as Pell and Student Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG). The team was unclear regarding how extensive the remaining consolidation activities will be, though they acknowledge that additional work will be required.

Human Resources:

The University of Maine System employs more than 5,250 faculty, staff, and administrators with a full-time equivalent status of more than 4,700 employees. Each University is led by a President, or Dean in the case of the Law School, with a core leadership team including a dually reporting chief business officer, Provost, and executive in charge of student life/student success. Full and part-time faculty, and many staff, are assigned to a single institution from which they receive direction. Some staff, specifically information technology and human resources professionals, work as part of a matrixed organization in which they directly report to a shared services function housed at the System office, yet work most closely with partners at the campus where they are embedded.

Staffing varies widely from location to location. The volume of resources, and the specific functions offered is largely dependent on the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled, as well as the size and scope of academic offerings. Decisions regarding new hiring and/or replacement of staff are reviewed and approved by the System Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO). Decisions regarding filling new and/or vacant faculty lines are made by the institutional Provosts in conjunction with the institutional President and the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. There are some inequities in services between universities; for example, four of the seven locations have an in-house institutional research function, comprised of between one and four staff, while the other three locations have no such in-house function. It is difficult to assess how these locations receive this specific service, though it is the Evaluation Team's expectation that movement to unified accreditation will increase the

alignment of resources to student enrollment levels by headcount, by FTE, and to the array of academic programs needed to address state demand.

Shared functions across the System – including information technology, human resources, facilities/general services, and procurement – offer an extensive array of services to the universities, especially to the smaller locations that may not have the capability to employ highly qualified staff in these functions. Inherently, this shared support may be an issue for the larger locations who had greater independence and more degrees of freedom historically, though the move to unified accreditation is a governance model that renders this potential concern moot.

Within the past year, UMS hired a new Chief Human Resources Officer. This individual is highly qualified and well positioned to shepherd the System into a new era of single accreditation. With oversight of contract negotiations, talent acquisition, ADA compliance, labor relations, benefits, and payroll administration, the role of the CHRO and the Human Resources staff is comprehensive, especially in light of the growing pains associated with building out organizational culture.

Several key initiatives underway will improve the University of Maine System’s technical processing as well as its human relations. First, the System is working across functional areas to implement a new payroll system that will streamline processing and assist those who struggle with monthly payrolls. Second, the CHRO is heavily engaged in building upon the diversity, equity, and inclusion framework outlined by the Chancellor, Presidents, and institutional diversity committees. A first major step in this regard was implementing Higher Education Data System’s (HEDS) climate survey. This baseline data is being used to develop critical programs and initiatives that support the UMS’s directive “Imperative for Change.”

Multiple functional areas expressed concerns about the attrition and the ability to recruit and retain staff. The CHRO is committed to a 90-day hiring process – from launch of search to hire – to address some of these issues. However, leaders cite concerns about the overall availability of resources requiring highly specialized skills such as plumbing, HVAC, electrical, and financial aid. Other areas, such as the library, cite staffing levels that are as much as 50% below pre-pandemic levels. While leaders remain hopeful staffing ranks will be shored up, they remain concerned about the regional availability of highly qualified staff. Additionally, there was a general lack of understanding regarding the System’s overall staffing plan by functional area.

Physical Resources:

The University of Maine System owns approximately 8.7 million square feet of space across its seven institutions and the System office. The owned spaces are highly varied, incorporating traditional classroom, lab, studio, and performance space along with forest, agricultural, marine, and aquaculture research facilities. Like many systems of higher education, UMS carries more square footage than it can effectively use. Since 2012, the System has divested itself of approximately 3 percent of its facilities.

University of Maine System contracts with Gordian, the national leader in higher education facilities evaluation, to assess its return on physical assets (ROPA) and space utilization. According to the System’s most recent ROPA review, 54% of all square footage within the System is considered high-risk, with a campus renovation age of 50 years or more. Exacerbating matters in the last decade, the proportion of buildings older than 50 years increased 20%, from 34% to 54%. Like many

higher education institutions and systems, UMS has not been able to replace or maintain facilities at the rate of depreciation. At its current rate of investment, 60% or more of the System's space will be deemed high-risk.

UMS is committed to zero growth in its facilities. Therefore, as new buildings are constructed, the System is divesting of an equal or greater volume of square footage elsewhere. The divestment process includes a combination of creative solutions such as razing buildings, public-private partnerships, and leasehold opportunities with outside entities. At present, UMS has identified approximately 650,000 square feet of space for decommissioning. In many cases the cost of divestment, especially building demolition, is exponentially greater than the cost of holding a building vacant. To assist with the razing process, the System has an incentive program that shares the burden of demolition between the System and institution. However, even with this program, the cost outweighs the benefits.

The financial fluctuations described earlier have certainly influenced monies put to critical maintenance. Since FY2017, UMS has under-invested in its facilities by approximately \$20 million per year, posing potential capital risk due to accumulated deferred maintenance. As noted in the self-study, more than half of all facilities have an adjusted life of fifty or more years. The age of these facilities means that the System will likely have greater failures in the coming years specifically with the building envelopes, mechanical, and electrical systems. Building condition, age, and deferred maintenance varies by institution. Due to limited state capital dollars, the System self-funds the majority of construction and renovation projects. Smaller locations, especially those with fewer students and poorer financial performance, are somewhat hampered in their ability to make the necessary changes due to the pressures associated with taking on debt locally.

The Evaluation Team recognizes UMS's consideration of appropriate allocation processes to shore up critical maintenance issues. The UMS experience confirms anew that facilities concerns derive from financial sustainability, which in turn, devolves from mission and strategy around student success and academic operations. As such, it is clear one intention of unified accreditation is to deliver more efficiently on mission to free-up resources for many initiatives, not the least of which is bringing facility age in line with postsecondary sector standards. Therefore, earlier suggestions to move quickly in areas of organization and governance to unified accreditation are reiterated here to further improve financial health, particularly by redressing the buildup of critical maintenance issues.

In terms of space utilization, as a System, UMS does not have a uniform or formal space utilization process. The absence of a formal process represents an opportunity for the System to develop utilization metrics and a formal space utilization process that will assess the best use of excess space in a way that is in keeping with the mission of the System and affected location(s) and that simultaneously supports local and regional needs, as well as the prioritization of critical maintenance needs described above.

Library Resources:

The University of Maine System has a federated library system where the System-wide digital and print collections are managed at each institutional location to support local imperatives. The libraries share a catalog of ten to eleven databases that are universally available to all students across the System. Specialized databases are purchased independently by institutional libraries and sometimes by specific academic departments. These databases are available only to the students attending that

institution or program. However, students attending classes at more than one institution have digital access to all materials associated with the location for their courses, regardless of the library location. This gives students adequate access to the materials necessary for their studies. The library staff acknowledges that this same courtesy does not extend to faculty and researchers; instead, these individuals have access only to the location for which they regularly work. A library resources taskforce, established in 2017, offered a path forward to correct this issue. However, the proposed fix was too costly to implement, beyond the creation of a per credit fee which has remained static for approximately ten years. The resulting fund has remained flat at approximately \$271,000 annually. The effect has been a reduction of digital resources over the years, cutting the volume of shared databases by half.

Despite static funding, the libraries are adequately resourced with appropriate levels of professional library services and collection management at most locations. However, staffing levels have declined since 2019, and recent retirements at the library director level have left considerable gaps in institutional knowledge.

A library strategic plan, completed November 2021, includes eight strategic priorities to address the UMS library system; including shared resources and collections, cooperation between libraries, operating procedures, information literacy, assessment, professional development, partnerships outside of the System's libraries, and marketing. The first two priorities, shared resources and collections, and System-wide cooperation, are vital to the continued pursuit of unified accreditation.

Shared Resources and Collections. The Library Strategic Plan notes two primary objectives in shared resources and collections. The first is to establish a shared budget for shared resources that takes into consideration inflation. The second is to address access to System-wide collections across UMS. With unified accreditation, it is imperative that a shared library budget be developed, and that all students, faculty, and researchers have access to the resources necessary to complete their work. The System acknowledges that this continues to be a challenge for faculty and researchers. Identifying this issue as part of the Library Strategic Plan is a good first step, though more work is necessary to broaden access.

Cooperation between Libraries. This priority includes key objectives that support expanding the overall range of knowledge and skills across UMS libraries by sharing knowledge and the development of new expertise. Key objectives of this priority include standardizing policies, addressing staffing across all the System libraries, and development of shared positions. Increasing the cooperation among the System libraries and sharing staff and resources will support and enhance UMS's unified accreditation and address underlying disparities in accessing library services between institutions.

Information Technology:

Led by the University of Maine System Chief Information Officer, information technology services have been provided to the System's institutions via a shared services model since 2013. In this model, all IT resources and services are provided to the universities by System information technology personnel. Staff members who provide local services to the universities are embedded within the institution providing direct service to students, faculty, and staff. While the structure and oversight of these resources is centralized, the model allows for near real-time and close contact assistance in classrooms, labs, and offices.

Teaching and learning technologies, hardware procurement, wide area network, and wireless infrastructure are critical priorities of UMS's IT Strategic Plan. These resources directly support the academic and research mission of the System and its component institutions; as such, these priorities receive great attention. UMS recognizes that maintaining adequate equipment and technology infrastructure is necessary to the success of each institution. An Educational Technology Advisory Committee (ETAC), comprised of faculty, instructional design professionals, and information technology staff, provides guidance and direction regarding capital improvements and investments in technology.

A Chief Information Security Officer (CISO), reporting to the Chief Information Officer, oversees the System's cybersecurity efforts. The office of the CISO is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the cyber landscape, establishing security policies, training employees on security measures, and responding to incidents. Cyber policies are well developed, and the team has adequate resources to prevent and respond to incidents.

UMS leadership and staff rightly put primacy on systems integration for unified accreditation and operations to be a success. The Evaluation Team recognizes progress in developing and implementing System-wide policy, practice, and support in human resources and finance, and the Team is eager to see the System establish information requirements necessary for interface for registration, transcribing as would be expected of an institution with unified accreditation. The absence of these features at the System-level illustrates the foundational issue of numerous, present interoperability gaps the System is addressing to guarantee a superior student experience across all universities, and to furnish enough necessary data demanded of reporting on key student success, financial, human resource, and facilities metrics for strong decision support processes. To that end, the development of the Data Governance Committee is a step in the right direction.

8. Educational Effectiveness

Standards of Student Achievement:

The University of Maine System has made strides to support standardized reporting of assessment information at the System level, efforts which also have the support of individual campus leadership. The UMS Academic Assessment Committee has been established to focus on Standard 8 and address the following goals:

1. To foster a common language with respect to academic assessment.
2. To share knowledge and best practices to assist academic programs in measuring student learning and implementing change based on the results of the assessment.
3. To provide input to the VCAA and chief academic officers regarding the development of assessment reporting procedures.
4. To strengthen the process for program review and integrate program review with program assessment.

The work of the UMS Academic Assessment Committee is ongoing. It has made significant strides on fostering a common language with respect to academic assessment (Bullet 1) and providing input to the VCAA and chief academic officers (Bullet 3). For example, it was reported during the Evaluation Team visit that the committee has and will continue to establish common definitions and

language to support the assessment work to be conducted by UMS institutions. Complementing this committee's work is the AAPR reporting system (see below) that provides a common data set for each program and supports campus and System-level decision making. In addition, UMS has standardized the Academic Practice Letter (APL) for cyclical program review by establishing a 5-to-7-year program review process. The APL includes a self-study in which the campus must indicate how it has used assessment data to make program improvements.

While representatives from the UMS Assessment Committee are available to support faculty with assessment, no information was provided about how they will identify collaborative ways to assist academic programs in measuring student learning and implementing change (Bullet 2) and strengthening the process for program review and integrating program review with program assessment (Bullet 4) from a System-wide perspective. It is also not clear whether establishing System-wide perspectives or processes on these assessment components was a primary goal in establishing the Academic Assessment Committee. In this sense, collection and analysis of program-level and campus-level data on educational effectiveness remains campus-based and processes for setting System-wide measures of educational effectiveness or identifying exemplary assessment practices to serve as models have not been established. As feedback from NECHE was cited as one means for institutions to establish external perspectives on program review processes, it is imperative that UMS consider how evaluation of educational effectiveness data from individual campuses will be represented in unified accreditation.

UMS catalyzes and supports standards of student achievement through its implementation of the Annual Academic Program Report (AAPR) process and its procedure for program review (APL). Specifically, the AAPR includes student data (e.g., head counts, degree conferral), faculty data (e.g., number and type), instructional data (e.g., class size), and accomplishment status information (i.e., whether a program has learning outcomes, date of last program review). These data are reported annually and used by each campus to decide whether to grow, sunset, or merge programs and to consider implications on campus resources, both human and financial. As each institution enrolls a different array of student populations, the common data set does provide the basis for System-wide tracking and analysis of student success by population and location.

While there is some variation in the location and structure of program-level learning outcomes, each UMS campus publishes program-level learning outcomes. The University of Maine (UM) has established a three-year assessment cycle for its graduate programs that requires each program to develop learning outcomes, conduct curricular mapping, and create assessment plans. This type of process, as well as assessment knowledge-sharing by programs with external accreditors, can provide helpful models to expand systematic planning for the assessment of program-level educational effectiveness.

Each University and the Law School are assessing the effectiveness of the programs they offer, in alignment with their stated mission and goals for their students' education. Assessment tools also vary, although most institutions reported using direct as well as indirect assessment. Some programs and institutions also utilize qualitative data, such as analysis of focus group data, to support assessment. Particular attention to additional quantitative measures such as retention, progression, and completion rates have received attention at the System-level; however, efforts to improve these numbers or hit targets were communicated primarily through campus-level examples, rather than outlining a System-wide strategy that would maximize the value of the system to support student success across campuses. The rollout of additional EAB tools holds promise for the coordinated

collection and use of retention data across the System to identify areas of cross-institutional collaboration in essential areas such as improving student retention.

The Series E forms included in the self-study show the extent to which assessment is happening in programs throughout the system. Although some of the tables prepared are entirely or partially illegible, due to small font or text that is hidden in cells, the forms were completed for each campus and demonstrate that a variety of strategies are employed for assessing student learning and that results of these assessments are used to make program improvement. Assessment occurs both in programs with specialized accreditation, as documented on the “Inventory of Specialized and Program Accreditation,” and in those without specialized accreditation. Some common tools include capstone courses and projects, major field tests, licensure examinations, e-portfolios, and course embedded assessments. Numerous improvements have been made to programs based on assessment efforts, such as changes in course sequencing, enhancements to course content, additions of certificates and concentrations, streamlining of degree requirements, and greater emphasis on experiential learning.

Data First forms for Standard 8 demonstrate that each campus collects data on licensure passage rates and job placement rates; however, little analysis or evidence of closing the loop based on these data were offered in the self-study or during the Evaluation Team visit. The UMS Transforms initiative offers promise for a more focused and System-wide use of such data, with an emerging emphasis on the role of UMS campuses in workforce development within the state.

Although work remains to be done on creating System-wide student outcomes, many of the individual campuses have clear statements of what they hope students will achieve. For example, UMA delineates the characteristics of the “Educated Person” it prepares its students to become, while UMPI makes academic commitments to students and lists responsibilities that both the institution and students must make for these commitments to be honored. That institution has also begun to develop some infrastructure necessary to evaluate the achievement of educational goals for students across the System. A strong program of data governance has been established, ensuring consistency in definitions, and dashboards are now available at the System-level with some basic data on institutional outcomes such as retention and graduation rates. In addition, UMS recently administered the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to gather information on the student experience across the System.

The individual campuses report retention and graduation rates individually, including to external parties such as IPEDS. Some tracking of these indicators is being done at the System level. According to the most recent data available on the UMS dashboard, 65% of students are retained one year after entry, 23% graduated in four years, and 36% graduated in six years. Compared to peer schools, UMS underperforms on retention rates and six-year graduation rates but has similar four-year rates.

The Data First forms, which were prepared for each individual campus, show that retention and graduation rates vary considerably by institution in the System, reflecting the different student populations served by each. UMA, which educates a largely adult commuter population, has one-year bachelor’s degree-seeking retention rates in the low-60’s, while the more traditional UM campus has a rate of 77%. Similarly, six-year graduation rates range from a low of 15% at UMA to a high of 57% at UM. Outcome measure rates, which capture a wider range of students than those who enter as full-time, first-time students, provide a more complete picture of the contributions the

institution makes to students' educational attainment. For UMA, 51% of students have received a degree from the campus, are still enrolled, or transferred to another institution eight years after entry.

Campuses that have graduate programs also provide retention and graduation rates for those programs. Not surprisingly, both retention and graduation rates are higher for graduate programs, particularly at the Master's level.

Conversations with University student affairs and athletics leaders demonstrated that there is commitment to improving retention and graduation across the System. Some mechanisms have been developed to enable this work, such as a System-level student success group and enrollment summits across the campuses. The potential to improve student outcomes across the System through System-level work, however, will not be realized without stronger and more intentional effort and structures.

In addition to standard retention and graduation rates, institutional effectiveness measures such as credit accumulation rates; completion rates for distance education courses; licensure exam pass rates; loan default and repayment rates; and post-graduation outcomes, including graduate school attendance and employment, are also collected throughout the System. These measures are generally presented at the level of the individual campuses, and the campuses do not all report on the same measures. UM tracks the percentage of students who earn 30 credits by the end of the first year and 60 credits by the end of the third year, as well as graduate school attendance rates. USM also tracks the percentage of students who pursue additional education, while many of the other campuses do not. The Data First forms show that pass rates on licensure exams, such as NCLEX and PRAXIS, are strong, although performance varies across institutions. For example, while 100% of PRAXIS takers at UM pass the exam, only 70% did at UMA. Default rates range from a low of 4% at UM to a high of 12.7% at UMPI. Loan repayment rates are reported as 99%-100% for all institutions in the system.

With respect to employment outcomes, no singular tool is used across the system. Some campuses reported employment rates for individual programs on the Data First forms, and others did not. UM conducts a post-graduation survey entitled "Life After UMaine," and UMA publishes data on employment outcomes on its "About our Graduates" website. Some other campuses offer profiles of successful graduates rather than statistical information on students' activities post-graduation. Given the diverse missions of the institutions, developing a simple set of measures related to graduates' success would be a challenge but development of some core measures would be beneficial. Whether and how the System and the individual campuses use the data they do gather for planning and decision-making was not clear from the self-study or conversations during the Evaluation Team visit.

The System and the individual units are in the nascent stages of determining what it means to do work on educational effectiveness from a System-wide perspective. Peer groups (i.e., IR representatives, Chief Academic Officers, Provosts) are very collaborative and meet regularly to share and exchange information and discuss best practices. In some cases, these meetings have resulted in efforts in which representatives from two or more institutions collaborate on programmatic and other efforts. However, neither the self-study nor any conversations had during the site visit revealed progress toward developing approaches for assessing student learning outcomes from a System-wide perspective, making it difficult to know if NECHE educational standards under the unified accreditation were being met across all the units without doing visits to each campus. This difficulty applied particularly to the following elements of assessment:

- Use of a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods and direct and indirect measures to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students, employing external perspectives including, as appropriate, benchmarks and peer comparisons.
- Assurance that results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the curriculum and learning opportunities and results for students.
- Appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning and student success are valid and useful to improve programs and services for students and to inform the public.

Most of the stakeholders were not aware of any expectations to assess educational effectiveness at the System level. Greater clarity about System-level assessment expectations is needed as UMS continues to build the infrastructure to support faculty engagement in this work. Accreditation and the review of the NECHE standards for UMS are done at the System level and not at the level of each individual institution, creating the need for additional efforts to engage in this System-level data collection and analysis of student learning.

When asked, representatives from the various campuses expressed a willingness to engage in such efforts, but the majority revealed that that was not the focus of their current collaborative efforts. A major barrier to engagement in potential efforts appears to be a lack of clarity about System-level expectations. For example, it was not clear to stakeholders that accreditation would require assessment at the System-wide level, nor had they begun discussing how the System would design and facilitate such an assessment system.

Engagement in such an effort would require faculty to reach consensus about core learning objectives for programs and courses offered by institutions across the System, while honoring their ability to tailor the courses to meet the unique needs of their student population. As noted in the self-study (e.g., UMM and UMPI aligning aspects of their General Education program with UM) and shared during the visit (e.g., [UMS TRANSFORMS Student Success and Retention initiative](#)), there are several examples that can serve as models for what might be possible when such an approach is taken.

UMS requires each campus to develop learning outcomes for each academic program and to utilize these as the basis for measuring student outcomes. Every UMS University is committed to and has made some progress toward meeting this requirement; however, across campuses, there is variability in how much progress is being made. Current efforts have focused primarily at the individual campus level. Limited progress has been achieved addressing assessment practices at the System-wide level, thus these same concerns remain from those expressed in the NECHE July 2020 letter. There are a substantial number of individuals who are committed to assessment practices at the System-level and are supporting these efforts, providing a basis for future progress in this area.

Progress is needed on establishing goals and implementation plans for System-wide assessment of learning and other student success outcomes. These efforts should continue to ensure that student learning outcomes are assessed at the course, competency, program and institutional levels, with focus on policies and procedures for assessing student outcomes at a System-level.

9: Integrity, Transparency and Public Disclosure

UMS has made progress in standardizing policies and practices related to integrity and transparency and in sharing information with the public in consistent ways across the institutions that comprise the System. While greater uniformity throughout the System is needed in many of these areas, as well as clearer communication about unified accreditation itself, UMS generally demonstrates a commitment to high ethical standards and openness with its constituencies.

Integrity:

UMS is authorized to award degrees and conduct other affairs through the *Charter of the University of Maine System*, which outlines responsibilities of the System Board of Trustees, each constituent institution's Board of Visitors, and campus leaders (the charter was last updated in 2005 and still reflects institution names from the 1960's). The entire UMS values integrity, ensuring that all associated activities are consistent with mission and applicable state and Federal laws through policies such as sponsored events and name trademark. In recent years, UMS has adopted policies that demonstrate its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Non-discrimination policies exist at the System level and address employment, student recruitment and admissions, and advancement. Many of the institutions, such as UMA and UMPI, have their own statements of non-discrimination, but they are consistent with the System policy. The institution requires all campuses to publish an equal opportunity/affirmative action statement whenever open positions are posted.

Strides have been made in ensuring and enhancing equity and inclusivity for many groups. A "Diversity Action Plan" has been developed, and centers exist throughout the System to represent various identities, such as the Center for Diversity and Inclusion, the Rainbow Resource Center, the Veterans Education and Transition Services Center, and the Intersectional Feminist Resource Center. A UMS Bias Team has been established, and admissions practices have been adjusted to remove the question about criminal history, a factor that has been disproportionately harmful to prospective students of color. To be more inclusive and affirm student gender identity, UMS has also adopted a policy that allows students to have preferred names recorded on the student information system. Increasing faculty and staff diversity across the System and ensuring adequate training and development is offered in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion should continue to be important goals for UMS.

UMS prioritizes academic freedom and integrity. A Board of Trustees Free Speech, Academic Freedom, and Civility Policy emphasizes the importance of free inquiry and academic freedom for all members of UMS. A recently revised academic integrity policy now applies to all institutions in the System; although individual campuses may follow their own procedures for implementation, those procedures must be consistent with the UMS-wide policy. UMS's Intellectual Property policy is executed through a University System Intellectual Property Committee with representation from each campus. However, campuses have their own human and animal subject review boards. A detailed "Conflict of Interest" policy exists for the University System as a whole. UMS's policies on student privacy follow closely the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, and the registrars at each campus administer these policies. With respect to fairness for students, the University of Maine Student Conduct Code applies, stipulating appropriate behavior and outlining procedures for fair resolutions when students are charged with violations. Issues of fairness for faculty and staff are addressed in the contracts of the respective labor organizations to which each group belongs (Maine Education Association/National Education Association for faculty and the Universities of Maine Professional Staff Association for staff).

Policies, including those discussed above related to grievances, harassment, and conflict resolution, are regularly reviewed and updated as needed. UMS has established some critical infrastructure for managing policy making at the System level, with the Office of General Counsel at UMS taking the lead. When new policies are proposed or existing ones are revised, input from critical stakeholders is sought, and training is provided for implementation. Newly adopted policies are communicated through various channels, including general announcements from the Chancellor's office and correspondence from General Counsel.

UMS has also created an organizational structure and set of protocols to ensure that it successfully fulfills its responsibilities with NECHE as a System. A System-level Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO) sits in the UMS office; and, consistent with Principle 7 of Unified Accreditation, each campus has its own ALO. The System-level ALO coordinates site visits and preparation of key documents, such as substantive change proposals, with campus Presidents and keeps them abreast of changes and developments in NECHE policies.

Transparency:

UMS strives for openness with internal and external audiences and communicates information through a variety of channels, including student and faculty newsletters, social media, emails, and direct communication from leadership at the System and campus levels. An internal communications specialist in the System office often sends important communications to the campuses that can be repackaged to meet their individual needs. A primary mode of sharing information across UMS are the System and campus websites. Each campus publishes information on admissions requirements, employment processes, and student discipline. To obtain this information for some of the campuses, it is necessary to access online versions of the catalog, of which each campus maintains archives going back, in some cases, 20 years or more. For a few of the campuses, such as UMA and UMFK, only a few years of catalogs are available online.

UMS has a Public Access Officer listed on the "Freedom of Access Requests" page who responds to requests for each institution in the System. Audited financial statements up to fiscal year 2021 are available on the Finance and Administration page for the System. For UM, they can be accessed from the Budget and Business Services website. Most, but not all of the campuses have made their individual financial statements available. Some refer to the UMS statements, while others (like UMF) list contact information for officials who can make the campus-specific statements available.

When making statements and promises to students and the public about program quality and outcomes, evidence and documentation is somewhat uneven across the institutions. On the System website, UMS makes claims about its reach and economic impact on Maine that could be supported through the extensive "UMS Strategic Data Book" it posts. Some of the campuses, such as UMM and USM, create profiles of successful graduates to validate their success in helping students find meaningful employment; others publish survey data on student satisfaction and placement, such as UMA. UMFK aspires to become a model rural University in New England but does not offer direct evidence that it is on the path to get there, while UMPI makes academic commitments to students and lists responsibility that both the institution and students must make for these commitments to be honored.

To ensure that website content remains current and accessible, UMS hired a Digital Content Specialist in 2020, as part of a comprehensive review of its website. The role of the Digital Content Specialist is to work with constituencies at the campuses and help ensure web content is consistent with best practices. In addition, the cross-institutional marketing and communication team confirmed that they regularly review web content for out-of-date information and consistency with the course catalogs.

Regarding communication specifically related to unified accreditation, some faculty and staff at the campuses expressed that they are not receiving sufficient information about the “real” intent of the process. Some worry that it will result in campus closures and loss of individual identities, despite the proclamation in the “Principles of Unified Accreditation” that the individual campuses will be preserved. In fact, knowledge and familiarity with these principles does not appear to be widespread throughout the System. Similarly, conversations with a handful of students suggested that they, too, are often not clear on what unified accreditation means and how it will help them. When they have heard, the benefits of easier transfer and the uniform catalog is what they recall, and some have voiced frustration with the apparent lack of progress on the latter initiative. More recently, the Chancellor has changed his approach to sharing information about unified accreditation by hosting town hall meetings that give various constituencies across the System opportunities to ask questions and voice concerns.

Public Disclosure:

Through a variety of media, including campus webpages and print publications, UMS discloses key information to the public. Although this information is available on each website for prospective and current students to make informed decisions, the look and feel of each, where information is located and how much information is available, varies by campus. Therefore, it is not always easy to find the information for each campus. UMS recognizes that it may need to develop templates and standards for all campuses to follow when formatting their websites. Discussions with communication and marketing leads across the System revealed that steps have been taken to achieve greater uniformity in how information is made available. For example, nearly all campuses have already adopted WordPress for their web content management software, and the layout of web pages is likely to become more consistent across the System in the future. Several marketing team members indicated they were willing to have their webmasters follow the same design guidelines as UM and UMM.

Much of the critical public information can be found in the institutional catalogs, which set forth the expectations each campus has for its students in terms of academic standing, satisfactory academic progress, degree requirements, and transfer. Institutions with which campuses have articulation agreements are also generally listed on websites. While UMS notes that information in the catalog is subject to change, it assures students that they are accountable to the curriculum in place when they entered the institution. UMS has a documented process for removing courses from the catalog that have not been offered in the past two years and are not planned to be offered for a third. This process appears to be followed at UM, but it is not clear that the other campuses adhere to it regularly. In fact, students at one campus claimed that courses that have not been offered for many years still occasionally appear in the catalog.

With respect to the availability of faculty, some campuses, like UMF, publish a list of those on sabbatical, while others do not appear to have this information easily accessible. All campuses publish information on faculty by department, degree, and institution attended. Generally, this information is available in the course catalog, but some campuses also make this information

available on their websites, often through biographical profiles by department. Key administrators and Board of Trustee and Visitors information can also be found in catalogs and on web pages. However, principal affiliation of Board members is not as easy to find for all the campuses. Information on faculty and staff can also be obtained, in many cases, through online directories.

As a multicampus institution that includes several instructional locations and outreach centers throughout Maine, UMS provides information on the size and setting of each site; the students served; academic programs offered; and other services available, including the library. Some of the University Centers of UMA do not mention all available services; in particular, the library is missing from some of the descriptions.

Critical student consumer information on the costs and outcomes of a UMS education is shared through various media, and some formats are more user friendly and accessible than others. The UMS website contains comprehensive publicly available data on topics such as enrollment, cost of attendance, completions, financial aid, and graduation rates. But accessing the information requires several clicks and, in some cases, weeding through tables, charts, and lengthy written reports that may not be easily understandable by the general public. Finding information on tuition and fees by residency and room and board from the individual institutional websites is fairly easy, as nearly all the campuses have sections of their websites dedicated to the cost of attendance. General guidelines on financial aid, including a link to the net price calculator, can also be found on each of the campus' websites. In addition, several of the campuses, such as UM and UMA, have tools available to help students develop financial literacy skills. With respect to default and repayment rates, information generally must be obtained through the College Navigator, as only some of the campuses publish this information directly on their web sites. A discussion with financial aid officers from throughout the System suggests that financial aid information might be better streamlined in the future, perhaps through an expanded student consumer information page on the UMS website.

Retention, graduation, and employment rates appear through various media at UMS. Many campuses include basic retention and graduation rates on their student consumer information pages, some with links to more detailed information from institutional research offices. The USM website, for example, has a retention report in dashboard format that can be disaggregated by factors such as race/ethnicity and residency. The availability of other outcomes data varies by institution. The Law School publishes bar exam pass rates and employment summaries for recent classes, while UMA has an "About our Graduates" link on its "Student Consumer Information" page that provides data on degrees awarded by fields of study; graduate school attendance; results of a graduating student satisfaction survey; and post graduate employment data.

The UMS website clearly communicates the institution's unified accreditation status with NECHE, listing each constituent institution. Details on this accreditation visit, including schedules, a copy of the self-study, and instructions for submitting public comment are also prominently featured on the System website. In addition, statements about the University's accreditation status can be found on the websites of each campus. Most acknowledge that they are accredited as part of UMS accreditation, but a few of the campuses do not. For example, USM continues to present its accreditation status as an entity separate from the larger System. In addition to regional accreditation, campuses also list those specialized agencies that accredit individual programs, where relevant.

Affirmation of Compliance

To document the institution's compliance with Title IV Federal Regulations, the team reviewed the University of Maine's Affirmation of Compliance form included in the Self Study and signed by the CEO. Transfer policies and a list of institutions with which articulation agreements exist are published in the course catalogs of each institution that comprises the System. The University of Maine Student Conduct Code, as well as student handbooks and other documents at the individual campuses, outlines students' rights, responsibilities, and procedures for filing grievances. For verifying student identity in distance education courses and programs, the University uses a centralized system whereby students enrolled in online or hybrid courses sign into Brightspace, the learning management system, through a secure login and submit all work via Brightspace or the University's email system. Prior to the visit, the University of Maine notified the public of the system's reaccreditation process through its institutions' websites (on homepages or links specifically dedicated to accreditation) and media outlets in the various regions where its campuses are located; examples of the latter include *The Portland Press Herald*, the *Bangor Daily News*, the *Kennebec Journal*, and the *Aroostook County Star Herald*.

Summary

The University of Maine System has a purposeful public mission focused on serving the state of Maine by providing broad access to high quality higher education, service and research throughout the state. There is strong commitment internally and externally across Maine to UMS, its move to unified accreditation and to the principles underpinning unified accreditation. Internally, this commitment is evident among Trustees and System leadership and the large majority of faculty and staff across the System who are ready and willing to work within the unified accreditation mission to do the difficult work to achieve important shared goals. The unified System and its mission provide an organizational structure and guiding principles to foster beneficial collaboration and the sharing of resources across the seven universities and Law School that comprise the System.

The move to unified accreditation by UMS represents an effort to address demographic, geographic and other challenges for Maine's public higher education that have been under discussion for years. With the move to unified accreditation, UMS has taken a bold and innovative approach to ensure that the institution is positioned to sustain its very important work. UMS is moving forward on unified accreditation and doing its mission related work under the leadership of an involved and committed Board of Trustees, a Chancellor focused on achieving unified accreditation in principle and now in practice, Presidents and a Law School Dean who are committed to working with each other in innovative ways to achieve shared goals of unification, and deeply committed faculty and staff all across the state of Maine focused on their students and UMS's public mission.

One of the key areas for UMS will be the development and execution of its strategic plan. UMS's intention to use, along with an external consultant report, the self-study and NECHE review as the foundation for the next strategic plan is indicative of its data and analysis-based, forward-looking approach. Another key area will be the establishment of System-level policies and procedures in several important areas. Currently System-level efforts in several important areas do not match the extensive scope of the complexities of the planned future with unified accreditation.

There has been significant work done in the move to unified accreditation. This progress is important to recognize and build upon, and significant work remains to be done. With this in mind, the Evaluation Team offers the following summary of the most important strengths and concerns:

Strengths:

Standard 1: Mission and Purpose

There is broad commitment by leadership and others to the unification mission and principles.

Standard 3: Organization and Governance

The University of Maine System through its organization is strongly committed to being responsive to the changing context and to the needs of the many communities that make up the state. The former shows in the move to unified accreditation and the latter shows in how the System is trying to best balance local autonomy with the need for statewide efficiency.

Standard 5: Students

Throughout the System on each campus, as well as at the System-level, the staff, faculty, and administrators are dedicated to the success of the students and the specific populations their institutions serve. This is evident not only in the thoughtful identification and response to student needs on each campus, but also in students' engagement.

Standard 7: Institutional Resources

Universally, there is a strong commitment to the System mission across the finance, facilities, information technology, human resources, and libraries teams. This passion extends to all areas of their work and is especially apparent in the groups' understanding of their role - which is to support the academic program. It was refreshing to see that each System administrative leader had a clear understanding that their role, and that of their team, is to support academic affairs. This is truly commendable.

Unification efforts have provided a strong "case" for support with major funding sources – public and private – with clear early success in attracting this funding.

CONCERNS

Standard 1: Mission and Purpose

UMS's mission was last formally approved by the governing board in 1996. The Board of Trustees will have to ensure regular review and validation of System, University, and Law School missions and their alignment.

Standard 2: Planning and Strategy

The most recent strategic plan by UMS happened in 2004. This lapse of time coupled with the reliance on external consulting for planning seems incongruent with the publicly articulated sense of urgency and aspiration for collective engagement on achieving the goals of unified accreditation. A well communicated and broadly supported strategic plan with clear identification of goals, metrics and timelines will be needed to move forward on unified accreditation in a systematic and effective way.

Standard 3: Governance and Organization

The lack of clear definition and agreement on the faculty role in governance at the System level, with the Faculty Governance Council or otherwise, has been identified as a deterrent to getting stronger buy-in and progress on unified accreditation. It will be important to advance efforts in this area to help overcome anxiety and cynicism among a not insignificant percentage of faculty. With regards specifically to the Faculty Governance Council, the charter/charge needs to be clear with the objective to have it agreed upon by all campus faculties, Presidents, Provosts and System leadership.

There is the need for clear and consistent System policy and procedures with KPIs and other measures to ensure accountability and compliance with System and NECHE standards, expectations and goals. This need is across many areas including academic programs, student life, faculty governance and educational effectiveness, for which the System principles are for general support of campus independence.

Standard 5: Students

Successful efforts to address student needs remain largely focused at the individual campus level, with considerably less organized efforts at the System level to resolve substantial barriers for students wishing to take advantage of courses and services on other System campuses. These barriers include challenges with transferability, residency, and applying financial aid or veteran tuition benefits when students take courses at other campuses, as well as limitations on accessing resources available to students on other campuses but not on their home campus (e.g., library databases; maker spaces; student travel opportunities or funding). While individual students, faculty and administrators can sometimes resolve issues on a case-by-case basis, these barriers represent a significant hurdle to students realizing the advantages of unified accreditation.

Each campus within the System serves somewhat different populations; this is a strength of the System, yet responses to those unique needs are still being organized on a campus-by-campus basis. Unified targets and analysis of retention and completion rates by specific populations across the System will allow for clearer understanding of the role each campus plays in serving the diverse higher education needs of Mainers. A System-wide approach to analyzing factors contributing to the success of specific populations would allow for the identification and prioritization of lowering those barriers through System-based solutions.

Standard 7: Institutional Resources

Re-Paving Maine Street project (to transition HR and Financial systems to cloud platforms and a reimplementation of the student information system) is vital to the success of UMS with many pointing out that the success of unified accreditation is tied to the success of this project. Given the criticality of this endeavor, UMS's project plan will need to be effectively executed with clear goals, objectives, and milestones.

Standard 8: Educational Effectiveness

There is need for System-level processes and policies for assurance that campuses will be in compliance with System and NECHE educational effectiveness standards, expectations and goals. Currently, it is difficult for an Evaluation Team to assess or ensure educational effectiveness across the unified System without having separate comprehensive visits to all universities, which would negate key benefits put forward for unified accreditation.