

On December 11, 2019 AFUM President Jim McClymer distributed a letter that focuses on “transfer issues” associated with University of Maine students who wish to transfer credit for courses taken at other universities, concluding that unified accreditation is not necessary to solve problems students have accessing courses from other universities within UMS that these policies are meant to address. Further, he posits that efficiencies can be achieved without pursuing unified accreditation. Dr. McClymer acknowledges that some aspects of the course/credit transfer process should be streamlined.

The Chancellor’s many campus visits with students brought forth numerous examples of students who struggled to complete their degrees on time because they did not have access to the coursework they needed at their home university and, despite there being policies allowing “study away” – the phrase used when a student seeks a course from another university in UMS. In one case, one of our universities refused a request from another of our universities for the latter university’s student to take a course available at the former but unavailable at the latter. The student had no choice but to take the course from one of Maine’s private universities instead, which readily offered the course to our student. In many other cases, our students expressed frustration with not having courses available at their home universities when they needed them, and either extreme difficulty or outright impossibility with finding, registering for, and transferring back courses from other UMS universities.

The singular focus of Dr. McClymer’s letter on course and credit transfer at UMaine also fails to address the many other reasons for unified accreditation that are described in the Chancellor’s [September 2019 Unified Accreditation recommendation](#).

With unified accreditation, we would have opportunities over the next several years is to imagine and build something much better than this. We are a system of thoughtful faculty and staff who share a common vision: to enroll, educate and graduate students who will live, work, and stay in Maine.

The [Unified Accreditation Frequently Asked Questions](#) document begins to envision a transfer experience far superior to our current state:

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

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

The work that would follow unified accreditation, including identifying which problems to solve and how to solve them, has to be driven by the faculty, staff, and leadership on campuses whose students live these challenges every day. There is no pre-written solution to resolving the transfer issues or any other barrier to a student’s ability to successfully complete his or her coursework in a timely way. We do have, however, [Guiding Principles](#) for the work ahead. The first Principle states that UMS’s goals are to preserve the operations of our universities, including administrative operations, that best serve the interests of UMS students and provide the highest quality educational experience. The second Principle

ensures that faculty will retain shared governance with regard to developing academic policy (among other things).

Our state and our system are too small to continue expending energy enforcing policies that students find to be roadblocks to accessing our available courses across UMS.