

## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

1. **NAME OF ITEM:** Unified Accreditation Authorization
2. **INITIATED BY:** Dannel P. Malloy, Chancellor
3. **BOARD INFORMATION:** **BOARD ACTION:** X
4. **OUTCOME:** **BOARD POLICY:** 308  
Increase Enrollment  
Improve Student Success and Completion  
Relevant Academic Programming  
Enhance Fiscal Positioning  
Support Maine through Research and Economic Development
5. **BACKGROUND:**

At the Board's July 2019 meeting, Chair James Erwin stated that it was the Board's sense that, in order for UMS to move forward with and attain the strategic goals established in the December 2018 Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs, UMS needs to be able to deliver significantly more collaborative, market-relevant cross-campus programming. In recent years, however, there have been significant challenges to developing, delivering, and managing such programs at the scope, scale, and pace the Board determines to be necessary to meet Maine's higher education attainment needs, some of which stem from the fact that each UMS university is accredited separately from other universities in the System.

Recognizing these challenges, Chair Erwin asked UMS Chancellor Dannel Malloy to review UMS's accreditation status and provide recommendations for what accreditation structure would be most likely to permit UMS to achieve its strategic goals and best serve the higher education needs of its students and the State of Maine.

In his September 2019 report to the Board, detailing historical consideration of a System-wide accreditation back more than three decades, Chancellor Malloy recommended that UMS universities begin a process to unify their accreditations to a statewide accreditation within the University of Maine System based on a series of Guiding Principles that were developed by the Chancellor, the UMS Presidents, and Senior System Staff and reviewed by staff at UMS's regional accreditor, the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE). Accepting that report on September 16, the Board directed the Chancellor to visit UMS campuses to gather input from key academic leaders and staff to determine how to successfully implement unified accreditation, continue discussions with NECHE and the U.S. Department of Education as necessary to ensure UMS planning and

actions incorporate relevant input from those entities, and develop, with input from System Presidents and campuses, a process, plan, and timeline to seek unified accreditation from NECHE that could successfully transition UMS to a statewide accreditation model, to be presented at the November 17-18, 2019 Board meeting.

UMS and University leaders presented the *UMS Summary of Process Considerations and Framework for Pursuing Unified Accreditation* report and answered questions from the Board at the November 17-18 meeting.

As directed in the November 18, 2019 Resolution following Board acceptance of the report, the Chancellor, Senior System staff, Presidents, and university-based accreditation leaders have been planning how to prepare the necessary substantive change application to NECHE to transition existing university institutional accreditations to a unified accreditation for the University of Maine System, including by engaging University Faculty Senate and Assembly leadership to discuss an appropriate academic governance model and process.

UMS leaders will discuss the Chancellor's *Unified Accreditation Final Recommendation* included with the Board's materials and the Chancellor will ask the Board to adopt the following resolution authorizing UMS to seek unified accreditation from NECHE.

## **6. RESOLUTION:**

That the University of Maine System Board of Trustees directs the Chancellor and UMS University Presidents to prepare and submit an appropriate substantive change application to the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) to transition the current separate UMS university institutional accreditations to a unified institutional accreditation for the University of Maine System, covering all of its universities, in such time as to permit NECHE's initial consideration by June 30, 2020.

Board approval for unified accreditation is subject to the following conditions:

1. Unified accreditation must be planned, applied for, and administered in such ways as will follow the University of Maine System Charter, the Guiding Principles established by the Chancellor in consultation with System University Presidents, the Board's policies on academic freedom and shared governance, and current labor agreements. The unified accreditation model planned and developed by the Chancellor and UMS University Presidents will be structured to achieve the highest quality student experience, academic program quality and relevance, and university financial stability in accord with the System's mission in service to the State of Maine.
2. As the UMS substantive change application to NECHE is developed, the Chancellor and UMS University Presidents will review UMS Board Policies to ensure alignment with the unified accreditation model developed in compliance with NECHE's *Standards for Accreditation*. The Chancellor and UMS University Presidents will report and provide recommendations to the Board no later than the May 2020 meeting of any changes in existing UMS Board policies, or necessary new policies, that should be adopted for alignment.

3. At each Academic and Student Affairs Committee meeting and every other Board meeting through NECHE's comprehensive evaluation of UMS's unified accreditation, there will be a standing agenda item for the Chancellor and Presidents to report to the Board on progress, status, and issues. The Chancellor is directed to, as soon as is practical, present to the Board a project timeline and milestones, together with a tracking plan with which to monitor progress both toward achieving unified accreditation and the Board's strategic priorities that it advances.
4. Recognizing that NECHE's *Standards for Accreditation* themselves establish the essential elements of higher education institutional quality, by which UMS universities, acting together in the System in a unified accreditation model, will work together to improve the System's quality, increase its effectiveness, and continually strive for collaborative excellence, the Board expects that the process of developing the unified accreditation substantive change application and comprehensive evaluation report will necessarily identify opportunities to improve System quality on each of the NECHE *Standards'* elements. At the same time, the Board expects to maintain progress and momentum on its Declaration of Strategic Priorities and Key Performance Indicators. Therefore, as part of the report called for in Paragraph 3 above, the Chancellor will include proposals for aligning UMS's Strategic Priorities and KPIs with the outcomes intended to be achieved through unified compliance with NECHE's *Standards* at the System level.
5. It is the Board's expectation that unified accreditation will not require substantial increases to System administration or governance at the expense of university administration and governance or academic program and student support resources. UMS University Presidents and the Chancellor will develop and seek from NECHE a unified accreditation model that coordinates System and university-based resources in System-wide coordinated efforts to achieve compliance with NECHE *Standards* across the System, and sustain those changes to ensure high quality educational experiences in accord with the *Standards*.
6. Appreciating the Chancellor's transparency in the unified accreditation effort to date, the Board directs that all System and university constituencies be updated regularly on the status of UMS's application for unified accreditation, progress toward achieving the same, and the nature and extent of challenges and successes that are encountered throughout the System and at UMS universities in the process.

Attachments:

*Unified Accreditation Final Recommendation*