



UNIFIED ACCREDITATION FINAL RECOMMENDATION

TO: University of Maine System Board of Trustees

FROM: Dannel P. Malloy, Chancellor

CC: UMS University Presidents

DATE: January 27, 2020

This statement summarizes my recommendation that the University of Maine System (UMS) Board of Trustees authorize and direct UMS's public universities to seek approval from the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) to transition their existing separate university institutional accreditations to a unified institutional accreditation for UMS. At your direction from your November 18, 2019 meeting, I have brought forward a Resolution calling for this action, along with the governance conditions that I believe will ensure its success.

As you know from [my previous reports](#), in response to concerns earlier in UMS's history that its universities were not meeting the purpose of the System's founding, this Board first authorized the pursuit of unified institutional accreditation for in 1986, calling it an "excellent opportunity to pioneer in the pursuit of excellence."¹ While that authorization was not implemented at the time or since, the more recent reality of constrained resources, declining demographics, evolving student expectations, technological advances, and state workforce needs, along with the Board's own strategic priorities that require increasing collaboration between UMS universities in better service to the State of Maine, all demand, more than ever before, that we finally take this step.

Unified accreditation offers the opportunity for our universities to work together to offer academic programming they cannot stand up on their own and share administrators, faculty, technology, and other resources and best practices to improve the overall quality of the

¹ See *Unified Accreditation Recommendation*, at 3-4.

student experience and the universities themselves. Our work to unify the current separate university accreditations will itself be transformative and culture-changing, allowing the best elements of institutional quality at each of UMS's universities to be shared System-wide without compromising quality anywhere. That, ultimately, is our goal, and the Resolution before you holds us accountable to it.

With NECHE now a ready partner, UMS is poised – in the words of NECHE's own [*Standards for Accreditation*](#) – to take the innovative step of unified accreditation to increase the effectiveness of higher education across the entire University of Maine System.

I now seek the Board's full support for the initiative with its authorization vote to proceed.

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The process and work leading to my September and November 2019 reports – the *Unified Accreditation Recommendation* and *A Summary of Process Considerations and Framework for Pursuing Unified Accreditation* reports – are recounted in the Agenda item accompanying the Unified Accreditation Resolution before you (and available through links to our Unified Accreditation webpage in your materials). With these reports, you can refresh your understanding of the System's long, slowly evolving effort to coordinate its academic and limited financial resources to better meet its public teaching, research, and service missions to the State of Maine.

Since the November meeting, and with your authorization then to do so, I have been working on preliminary actions to position UMS to be ready to begin work immediately to seek unified accreditation from NECHE. I have formed two planning committees: an Academics and Student Affairs/Advising Committee, co-chaired by Presidents Joan Ferrini-Mundy (UMaine) and Ray Rice (UMPI); and a Finance, Administration, and Student Support Services Committee, co-chaired by President Becky Wyke (UMA) and UMS Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low. There are representatives from all seven UMS universities assigned to the committees, which will draw on still others across our System and externally as necessary to outline our substantive change application to NECHE. I will also co-convene a Unified Accreditation Coordinating Council along with Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen. This Council, which includes the four co-chairs of the other two committees, along with President Glenn Cummings (USM), UMS Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido, and other System Staff, will coordinate the work of the two planning committees. Together, the planning committees and Coordinating Council will develop the broader narrative for how the University of Maine System, acting in System-wide coordination through its universities, will comply with NECHE's *Standards for Accreditation*.

Along with Presidents and my Senior Staff, I also convened a meeting of all UMS University Faculty Senate/Assembly leaders to discuss an appropriate System-wide academic/shared governance model that will be necessary in our unified accreditation model. These Faculty

leaders were overwhelmingly supportive of and optimistic about this engagement and opportunity to participate in System-wide academic governance.

As the 1986 Visiting Committee that first proposed unified accreditation presciently observed, having separate university accreditations does not permit consideration of how any one or more of UMS's universities together contribute to the overall quality, purpose, and mission of Maine's statewide public university system.² With unified accreditation for the University of Maine System, for the first time in the nation, all of a state's public universities will be evaluated based on how well they share the state's resources in service to students in the important elements of mission, governance, academic program, student services, institutional resources, teaching, learning, and scholarship, and educational effectiveness – for these are the NECHE standards of quality UMS universities *will meet together* with unified accreditation. And importantly, in the model we will pursue, as we first charted in our *Guiding Principles*, our universities can do so without giving up their local missions or ability to offer high-quality degree-programs on their own.

The Board is right to be concerned about measuring success. But it is important to note that the NECHE *Standards for Accreditation* themselves establish the nationally recognized benchmarks for higher education institutional quality. I believe it will be appropriate for the Board to rely initially on NECHE itself as the first arbiter of the quality and success of the unified accreditation model that UMS will propose. Once NECHE confirms unified accreditation, the self-study report UMS will prepare in advance of NECHE's comprehensive evaluation will provide further important opportunities for UMS to reflect and improve on the quality of the student experience and academic program both at individual UMS universities and collectively across the System. And as provided in the Resolution before the Board, over that time we will work to align progress on the Board's *Declaration of Strategic Priorities* and Key Performance Indicators with the opportunities that unified accreditation presents.

I have consciously not repeated here the volume of history, information, and recommendations in my September and November reports, though I hope you will consult both again as you finally weigh action. I close simply by noting that the time for decisive innovation in public higher education is now, and unified accreditation presents us with a *Dirigo* moment.

I urge the Board to give the University of Maine System this charge.

Dannel P. Malloy
Chancellor, University of Maine System

² See *Unified Accreditation Recommendation*, at 3-4 (citing Visiting Committee Report, at 15).