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Dannel P. Malloy

University of Maine System

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April 27, 2020



UMS Community,

While our attention has rightly been focused lately on teaching, working, learning, and researching remotely at the same time we're supporting the State of Maine through the ongoing pandemic, we've also been following the Board's January 2020 charge to prepare the necessary substantive change application to seek unified accreditation from the New England Commission of Higher Education.

Our first draft of the substantive change application shows how the University of Maine System, with its universities acting together, will meet NECHE's Standards for Accreditation. The draft is posted online now with a survey and comment tool for you to use. I'd like to invite you to review the draft online and share your suggestions at this link:

<https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/unified-accreditation/substantive-change-feedback>

The comment period is open and will remain so through the end of the day, Sunday, May 10. We expect to review your comments, finalize the application, and submit it to NECHE by the end of May, in time for NECHE's consideration at its late June meeting.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions on our movement preventing me from visiting with you on our campuses this early Spring, it's more important than ever that we hear your suggestions on our unified accreditation application through the online survey. I hope you'll participate.

I'd like to take a few more minutes to bring you up to date on the tremendous work happening throughout our universities in the midst of the pandemic.

Our most significant work, as you know, required essentially an emergency transition to remote teaching, learning, and work in just two weeks. You might wonder how it's going.

The primary goal of this transition was to provide academic continuity for our students to continue their instruction even as the public health crisis required us to empty our classrooms and residence halls for the time being. Comparing our current headcount and credit hour retention to last year's at this point in the semester, it appears we're succeeding -- 98.5 percent of the students who started the semester with one of our universities this year remains with us through the pandemic transition, compared to 98.4 percent at the same time last year with regular face-to-face instruction. We're doing even better with credit hour retention -- students remain enrolled in 97.1 percent of the credit hours they began the current semester with, compared with 96 percent credit hour retention last year at this time.

I want to be very clear -- our student and credit hour retention through this crisis so far is a tribute to your hard work. On behalf of the entire System, let me simply say, *thank you*.

The national conversation in higher education focuses now almost entirely on what will happen in the fall. You'll remember that we [announced last Tuesday](#) our plans to resume safe and as-normal-as-possible operations when the fall term commences. (We had already determined that summer instruction will occur in online and other remote and distance modalities.) Our Fall 2020 Safe Return Planning Committee has begun its work. Co-led by Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido and Chief General Services Officer Chip Gavin, the group has representation from each university's key constituencies (e.g. HR, IT, student life, security, academics) and has been engaged in scenario planning for reopening in the fall. A chief consideration, of course, is what modes of instruction will be possible and, most importantly, safe in our dynamic and ever-changing public health environment. I've asked our Presidents and their Chief Academic Officers to brainstorm a number of approaches for fall courses and scheduling, including 8-week blocks; hybrid courses with in-person for the first few weeks and online following that; project-based learning approaches with options for remote work; class size adjustments; and other ideas. The main goal is to develop plans with multiple flexible options for both students and faculty. Our discussions are in their most nascent stages, but will continue and be critical for us to be prepared for fall no matter what the public health situation is.

A related element of our preparedness work is a Scientific Advisory Board that began work last week. I expect that UMaine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy will have the overall lead of the effort, with convening support from Chip Gavin. With the hope to include public health experts from USM as well, UMaine Professors Melissa Maginnis (Assistant Professor of Microbiology), Kristy Townsend (Associate Professor of Neurobiology), Caitlin Howell (Assistant Professor of Bioengineering), and Rob Wheeler (Associate Professor of Microbiology) will be the core scientific members of the advisory group, and they will be putting together briefing materials, reading scientific literature daily, conducting their own research, and conferring with scientific colleagues around the world. The Advisory Board's charge is to discuss science-based approaches to safely welcome our students, faculty, staff, and the public back to our universities. The group will be reviewing progress on vaccines and antivirals and current policies and discussing the possibility of expanding testing for the state of Maine -- through COVID-19 diagnostic testing or serology (antibody) testing (antibody), including our own testing capacity for our students and community members.

Finally, I hope you feel some measure of pride in being part of an institution that is doing so much to serve the State of Maine in a time of great crisis. The University of Maine's chemical engineering labs have produced and distributed nearly 3,000 gallons of medical grade hand sanitizer for Maine's medical and healthcare institutions. We've put a number of our facilities into service around the state in other ways, providing food services and temporary shelters to first responders, medical staff, and homeless persons. And [nearly 200 nursing students and faculty answered my call](#) to volunteer on the front lines, with UMaine [graduating its nursing students early](#) to join the pandemic fight.

In the history of our System, we've never had a semester quite like this one. And I'm sure the dedication, goodwill, and commitment you've shown to our students and state through it are unmatched as well.

With sincere thanks,



Dannel P. Malloy
Chancellor

