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New England Association of Schools & Colleges, Inc. Commission on Institutions of Higher Education Accreditation Letter

University of Maine

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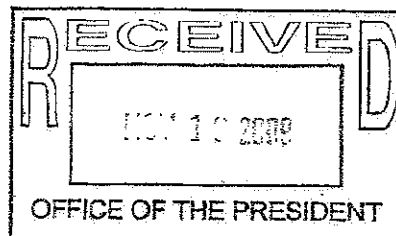
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November 17, 2009

Dr. Robert A. Kennedy
President
University of Maine
5703 Alumni Hall, Suite 200
Orono, ME 04469-5703



Dear President Kennedy:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 18, 2009, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Maine:

that University of Maine be continued in accreditation;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Fall 2012 that gives emphasis to the institution's success in:

- 1) completing its strategic planning process;
- 2) implementing a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning;
- 3) implementing its plans to address deferred maintenance and improve its physical facilities;

that the University submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Spring 2014;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the University give emphasis to its success in:

- 1) implementing a coordinated approach to enrollment planning and management;
- 2) setting academic priorities consistent with its mission and purposes;
- 3) continuing to implement a comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2019.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its actions.

University of Maine is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*. We commend the University for its highly collaborative self-study process and for the candor and comprehensiveness of its institutional review. We take favorable note of the University's many strengths and accomplishments, including a new mission statement, an integrated approach to planning, centers of research and faculty excellence that include marine sciences, forestry, and climate change, the recently negotiated shared governance document, and a significantly improved financial condition since the time of the last NEASC visit. We concur with the visiting team that the University benefits from the leadership exercised by the president and his senior team, from the commitment to student success of its dedicated faculty and staff, and from the "strong sense of community and institutional loyalty" evident among all University of Maine constituencies.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2012 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, and *Physical and Technological Resources*.

The Commission understands that the University's strategic planning process, which was begun in 2004, has been "stalled" by the economic challenges presently facing the state and the nation. We are gratified to learn that the University intends to restart the planning process and develop goals and objectives that will address the campus' many constituencies and reinforce its leadership role as the flagship institution in the University of Maine system. We look forward to learning, through the Fall 2012 report, of the University's success in this regard, in keeping with our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*:

The institution undertakes short- and long-term planning, including realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities (2.2).

We concur with the visiting team that, to date, the University's efforts to assess student learning, as documented in the Student Success data forms included with the self-study, have been "modest." We are pleased to learn that the institution has begun a process to develop a more comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning, and we anticipate being apprized, through the Fall 2012 report, of the University's success in implementing and supporting "a broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning focused on educational improvement through understanding what and how students are learning through their academic program and, as appropriate, through experiences outside the classroom" (4.44). We remind you of our standard on *The Academic Program*:

The institution's approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Data and other evidence generated through this approach are considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.45).

The institution's approach to understanding what and how students are learning and using the results for improvement has the support of the institution's academic and institutional leadership and the systematic involvement of faculty (4.47).

The institution uses a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to understand the experiences and learning outcomes of its students. Inquiry may focus on a variety of perspectives, including understanding the process of learning, being able to describe student experiences and learning outcomes in normative terms, and gaining feedback from alumni, employers, and others situated to help in the description and assessment of student learning. The institution devotes appropriate attention to ensuring that its methods of understanding student learning are trustworthy and provide information useful in the continuing improvement of programs and services for students (4.50).

We are pleased to learn that the University has developed plans to deal with deferred maintenance, currently valued at \$325 million, and to make improvements to its physical facility, including HVAC improvements to the library. The Fall 2012 report will provide an opportunity for the institution to update the Commission on its success in implementing these plans, in keeping with our standard on *Physical and Technological Resources*:

The institution undertakes physical resource planning linked to academic and student services, support functions, and financial planning. It determines the adequacy of existing physical and technological resources and identifies and plans the specified resolution of deferred maintenance needs (8.4).

Commission policy requires a fifth-year interim report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution's current status in keeping with the policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all fifth-year reports the University is asked, in Spring 2014, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation, Students* and *The Academic Program*.

The Commission concurs with the visiting team that the University of Maine would benefit from the implementation of "coordinated enrollment planning and enrollment management" to facilitate academic decision-making, including decisions concerning curricular and research directions, allocation of faculty time, and the management of class size. We understand that the University expects to hire an enrollment management director to coordinate its efforts in this arena. Through the Spring 2014 report, we look forward to learning of the institution's success in enrolling "a student body that is broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve" (6.1) and in using evaluation results "systematically for improvement and to inform institutional planning" (2.6).

We are gratified to learn that the University has convened a working group, chaired by the provost, to engage in academic program prioritization, based on the criteria established in the strategic plan. The Spring 2014 report will provide an opportunity for the institution to update the Commission on the success of this initiative, in keeping with our standard on *The Academic Program*:

The institution undertakes academic planning and evaluation as part of its overall planning and evaluation to enhance the achievement of institutional mission and program objectives. These activities are realistic and take into account stated goals and available resources. The evaluation of existing programs includes an external perspective and

assessment of their effectiveness. Additions and deletions of programs are consistent with institutional mission and capacity, faculty expertise, student needs, and the availability of sufficient resources required for the development and improvement of academic programs. The institution allocates resources on the basis of its academic planning, needs, and objectives (4.9).

Finally, we look forward, in Spring 2014, to receiving evidence of the University's continued success in implementing its comprehensive approach to the assessment of student learning. We recognize that this matter will require the institution's sustained attention over time; hence, we ask that further information be provided in the fifth-year report. Our standard on *The Academic Program* (quoted above) provides additional guidance on this aspect of the report.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2019 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by University of Maine and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Dr. Susan Hunter, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, and Dr. Nancy Zimpher, team chair, during its deliberations.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all of the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Lyndel Wishcamper. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with Commission policy.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in New England.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham, Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo Maydew

MJM/slo

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Lyndel Wishcamper
Visiting Team