

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

General University of Maine Publications

University of Maine Publications

9-20-2000

Remarks of Peter S. Hoff on the State of the University of Maine

Peter S. Hoff

University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Hoff, Peter S., "Remarks of Peter S. Hoff on the State of the University of Maine" (2000). *General University of Maine Publications*. 1621.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications/1621

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in General University of Maine Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Remarks of Peter S. Hoff

President, University of Maine

The State of the University of Maine

Wednesday, September 20, 2000

Minsky Recital Hall, Class of 1944 Hall

The University of Maine

[Click here to see the speech.](#) (Quick Time 4.0 required.)

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining me. I appreciate your interest in hearing my thoughts on the State of the University — where we are, where I'd like us to go, and how I think we should get there.

Along with those of us here in Minsky Recital Hall, we are joined via tape delay by listeners to WMEB-FM, the student-run campus radio station. And we are joined by an audience listening and watching as this presentation is streamed in “real time” over the Internet through our UMaine web site. Our efforts to reach out this way reflect our interest in using technology as effectively as possible to fulfill the university's mission.

Over the past three years, I have visited many communities in Maine and about 85 high schools across the state. It has been a great experience for me literally to get to know where our students are coming from. It has also helped me demonstrate that the university is connected to — and clearly interested in — Maine's people.

I have learned many lessons from these visits—about the nature and diversity of the state, about the extent of poverty, about the quality of education students are receiving, and about student aspirations. Most of these lessons are quite positive. Mainers are achieving remarkable things in spite of economic challenges, and contrary to much of what you read, their educational aspirations are quite high and laudable.

But I have learned one thing that puzzles and troubles me very much. Especially in the secondary schools of Maine, but also across the communities—even in Orono and Old Town, they believe in the existence of an institution with which I am not familiar. They call it U.M.O.

You may recall that once in fact there was a “UMO”—a University of Maine at Orono. It was created in 1968, when the state's land-grant university relinquished its name (“The University of Maine”) to become part of a statewide “super-university” of six campuses, with a seventh campus added a couple of years later. Each institution aspired to— and was awarded—a name that suggested they possessed the complexity of universities. Throughout what might be called the “Babylonian captivity” of our name, only one institution—this one— truly was a “university” in the fullest sense, offering a multitude of academic programs through the level of the doctorate and carrying out world-class research. Still, as part of the statewide super-university, we were one of seven campuses that shared the designation of “The University of Maine AT . . .”

You are all familiar with the confusion this has led to, and the difficulty we have had ever since in explaining the significant differences among the campuses and the unique mission, quality, and extensiveness of this university. You also know that the confusion led to underfunding and under-utilization of the flagship campus, while the state strove in a well meaning but ill-advised way to make all campuses somehow “equal.”

With the Muskie Commission report of 1986 came the recommendation to restore the university's name and to support its mission as the premier university—the flagship, the land grant university, the center of advanced research, and the sole source of doctoral-level education. And on the day the law took effect, University

President Arthur Johnson joyfully instructed staffers to painted out the words “At Orono” on campus signs. President Johnson himself took part in the effort.

But some concepts and images linger, despite our best efforts to snuff them out quickly. Even though it died with a stroke of the governor's pen back in 1986, “UMO” lives—partly because there are many proud graduates of UMO scattered across the state and nation, many of them teaching in Maine's schools; partly because many proud UMO grads are the parents of today's students; and partly because we haven't done a good enough job of explaining “what's in a name.”

Believe me, I wouldn't waste a minute on this touchy issue if it were not important to the future of the University of Maine. Why do I care so much about not being known as UMO? It has nothing to do with our membership in the University System. In fact, I believe we are stronger politically as a member of the System than we could be if we were independent of it. No, my reason relates to interpretation. To paraphrase the rhetorical critic Kenneth Burke, never underestimate the power of a name to shape perceptions. In my opinion, the convention of referring to us as UMO perpetuates the public view of UMaine as a limited institution—a regional school, one comparable in mission, function, and responsibilities to our sister campuses. That misperception has led critics to question why our funding level, tuition rates, and statewide presence are greater than all the others.

I believe the residue of the name “UMO” has inhibited the public's ability to understand this university — to perceive this university — for what it truly is: Maine's most comprehensive and influential educational institution, with a unique and explicit charge to use high-quality teaching, research, and public service outreach in ways that benefit the people and interests of the entire state.

We are a doctoral, research-extensive university. No other school in Maine shares that Carnegie Foundation classification. In fact, only four percent of the nation's 3800 accredited colleges and universities have received that top classification.

We have a statewide mission. No other public school in Maine does.

We have assembled, in our faculty, staff, and students, the largest collection of talent and brain power in the state. No other school in Maine—public or private—can match it for breadth and depth of expertise and potential.

Every year we award many more degrees in far more subjects than any other college or university in the state. Many of our graduates occupy key leadership positions in public service and private enterprise.

We have been, and will continue to be, a major influence on Maine's economic vitality and quality of life. No other school can boast of that record of performance and value.

As it existed during the 1970s and 1980s, and as it was often perceived during the 1990s, “UMO” is dead. However, the University of Maine — UMaine — is very much alive. And it is in that context and spirit that I speak today about the state of the university — the State's university — and its direction for this academic year and beyond.

Let's start by taking a look at the present. This academic year is off to a good start. Several trends are evident:

Enrollment is up for the third year in a row. We started the semester with approximately 10,200 students — almost a three percent increase over last year, an eight percent increase over 1998, and an 11 percent increase over 1997.

Twenty-one percent of our total enrollment is comprised of graduate students. Our graduate student enrollment is up three percent this academic year, another positive trend.

Three weeks ago we welcomed more than 1700 first-year students as members of the Class of 2004. That's the largest entering class we've enrolled since 1990. And we accomplished this milestone without lowering any

admissions standards. According to a survey of new students, nearly three-quarters said that UMaine was their first choice of schools.

We continue to attract quality students, those with the talent, preparedness, and motivation to succeed in a rigorous learning environment. Nearly 40 percent of this year's incoming students finished in the top 20 percent of their high school graduating class. Twenty-one percent finished in the top 10 percent.

Furthermore, this semester we enrolled a record number of high school valedictorians and salutatorians from Maine who accepted our offer of a Top Scholars Award, a full-tuition scholarship. Ninety-two students in this fall's class, and about 300 in all. Virtually everyone I visit — school superintendents, legislators, the Governor, prospective students and their families, business and community leaders — all praise us for our Top Scholars Program. They view it as one of the most influential and rewarding steps that could be taken to encourage Maine's best students to stay in their home state for their college education — and, we all hope, for future careers, family life, and civic involvement.

That's an important message, one I've taken to high schools around the state. It's important for our young people and their families to recognize that high quality educational opportunities exist right here in Maine. That point was reinforced Labor Day weekend by one of our most successful young graduates and entrepreneurs, Heather Blease, the founder of EnvisioNet. Heather spoke positively of her UMaine experience at this year's convocation. The 1400 students in attendance loved her. That shouldn't be surprising; in 15 years Heather has gone from being like they are today — a UMaine undergraduate facing the challenges of course work, relationships, and campus social life — to the head of her own company, one with thousands of employees and \$40 million in annual revenue.

Fifteen years from now it will be interesting to see who, or how many, of the first-year students in attendance for Heather's speech will have achieved similar success.

Along with the attributes and numbers of our new and returning students, a lot has been happening here at UMaine to improve the quality and functionality of campus. Let me share some examples.

The Memorial Union expansion is moving along, with the new wing scheduled to open in the spring of 2001. The entire project should be completed a year from now.

Groundwork will begin next month for the Hitchner Hall expansion. That project will strengthen our biotechnology and food science programs.

Historic Oak Hall is being renovated and will reopen as a student residence hall in January. The reopening will be particularly appealing to many of our alumni who remember Oak Hall from their undergraduate days.

The Colvin Hall renovation is nearly finished. It's already open as the new home for our Honors Program and as the new residence hall for many of our Honors Program students.

Other construction projects being undertaken include:

- wall-to-wall renovation of 86-year-old Aubert Hall, home to our Chemistry Department;
- a new 200-bed residence hall, to be located adjacent to Doris Twitchell Allen Village, across from the credit union on the upper east side of campus;
- Phase Two of Kessock Field, the new women's softball field on which play began in April;
- construction of a new Public Safety building on Rangeley Road, adjacent to the Facilities Management buildings;
- and the privately-funded Buchanan Alumni House, which will be located on College Avenue, on the site where the current Public Safety building sits.

And of course, we have the parking lot expansion project. We are creating nearly 600 additional parking spaces, with two-thirds of them available for use within two weeks. No employee, student, or visitor will be more than

an 8-minute walk from Fogler Library or Memorial Union.

Along with additional parking spaces on campus, we have taken other steps to increase the availability of parking and lessen the amount of traffic on campus. We have arranged for all students and employees to receive unlimited free rides on the regional public transit service known as The Bus. That new benefit is being subsidized by the university, and should save riders both time and money. It will also ease traffic and parking congestion on campus and in the region, and help the environment by reducing auto emissions.

In addition, the Student Affairs Division continues to sponsor the Maine Bus, a shuttle bus service that runs between campus, the Bangor Mall, movie theaters, and other popular area venues. The Maine Bus is designed to make the off-campus social and entertainment attractions of college life more accessible to our students.

Some of the construction projects I just mentioned are being supported in part by state and federal research funds. Federal support for our research enterprise surpassed the \$40 million level for Fiscal Year 2000, the first time in the University's history that we have reached that level. Only a small amount of the money actually goes to construction; most of it supports the cost of labor, equipment, and materials needed for the research to be conducted. Congratulations to Vice President Dwyer and the many faculty members, students, and staff members whose credentials and creativity made reaching that benchmark possible.

Along with the collective success of our faculty and students in their scholarly pursuits, we have had several important developments on the academic front since I spoke in this setting last year:

We received our full 10-year re-accreditation from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

We have received trustee approval to proceed with two fast-growing academic fields. We are in the “intent-to-plan” stage for a bachelor's degree in New Media Studies, a diverse discipline which is highly relevant to e-commerce, mass communication, and a host of other commercial and non-commercial enterprises. We also received permission to award the doctorate in Computer Science. Both New Media and Computer Science factor heavily in the future course of our university.

- The Hutchinson Center in Belfast, is off to a great start. More than 400 students have enrolled in classes there, exceeding our projections. Many people have worked hard to make the Hutchinson Center a success — Dean Bob White of our Division of Lifelong Learning, who has coordinated the project; Dr. Jim Patterson, the new director of the Center; the many UMaine faculty and staff who are teaching courses in Belfast, both in face-to-face settings and through interactive means; and of course, to MBNA, which donated the building to make this endeavor possible. It's this type of creative engagement with the private sector that helps us fulfill our statewide mission and mandate.

On the athletics front, I'm particularly proud of the academic performance of our teams as well as their performance in competition. One-third of our varsity athletes achieved Dean's List status last year. The women's basketball team was particularly impressive, finishing 7th in the nation in team grade-point average. Congratulations to Dr. Sue Tyler, her coaches, and of course, to the students who have performed so well in competition and in the classroom.

Financially, the university is stable. That's a description we didn't hear much during the 1990s, due to the state's financial problems and the ripple effect they had on education at all levels in Maine. But today things are better — not great, but better . There are several reasons for this:

Over the past three years, state policymakers have begun reinvesting in higher education after a long period of doubt and drought. We sincerely thank them for their confidence in us.

Our faculty and staff have been more successful in generating extramural funding, aided by the availability of state and university matching funds. It's making a difference.

People such as Stephen and Tabitha King, Phil and Susan Morse, Leonard and Renee Minsky, the late John Murphy, and other UMaine alumni have stepped forward to support scholarships, professorships, and projects that improve the quality and opportunity of our university. Their generosity and devotion to their alma mater will leave an impressive legacy.

And, under the guidance of Vice President Bob Durringer and other leaders across campus, we have been able to manage our university resources in a prudent and productive manner.

Every one of the projects and achievements I've mentioned so far today relates to our overarching reason for being — to provide a world-class educational experience, and, through research and engagement, to help build the kind of society and economy in Maine where people can find rewarding lives and careers without having to leave the state.

Most of what I've outlined so far this afternoon also relates in one way or another to BearWorks, the action plan we initiated in 1997. BearWorks has served us well as a guide to the immediate progress of the university. And now it is time to move beyond BearWorks to a new strategic vision.

[Continued on Page Two](#)