

University of Maine System Board of Trustees

Declaration of Strategic Priorities to Address Critical State Needs

Introduction

The University of Maine System Board of Trustees has a fiduciary responsibility to allocate resources strategically to serve the educational needs of Maine citizens most effectively and to advocate for public higher education as a means to strengthen the economy and communities of the State. In May 2016, the Board adopted the following Primary and Secondary Outcomes to meet this charge and strategically guide resource allocation and investment within UMS through 2021.

Primary Outcomes

Increase enrollment

Improve student success and completion

Enhance UMS fiscal positioning

Support Maine through research and economic development

Secondary Outcomes

Relevant academic programming

University workforce engagement

While these remain the right general outcomes for University of Maine System universities, the Board has become keenly aware that the State of Maine's current and future demographic trends and workforce needs demand a renewed focus and amplification of the 2016 Outcomes. The Board has determined that UMS universities must better serve their learners to be academically responsive to the State's critical workforce needs and be more competitive in the national higher education marketplace. The Board therefore now declares a number of strategic priorities necessary to meet the Outcomes and provide UMS leadership with sufficient direction and authority to address these critical State needs in service to the people, communities, and businesses of Maine.

The Challenge

With a total population of only 1,350,000, Maine is the nation's oldest state and is aging rapidly, creating new demands for services and great challenges for the state's workforce. Over the next 15 years, Maine's prime working age population of adults aged 25–64 will shrink from over 700,000 to 600,000, a decline of roughly 15 percent. Over that same time, the number of high-school graduates will gradually decline before making what some demographics experts predict will be a more precipitous drop after 2026 due to a nationwide decrease in births starting with and following the 2008 recession. While Maine's workforce is shrinking in absolute numbers, it is also experiencing a growing skills gap. In the years ahead, nearly two-thirds of new jobs will require a post-secondary credential or degree in existing and emerging fields in which employers will demand concrete evidence of employability, while only just over 40 percent of adults hold such credentials today. The explosion of artificial intelligence and machine learning technology, and the growing spread of these and other data science capabilities throughout the economy, will result in many new economy jobs requiring new skill sets. Maine needs capital investment to land its share of those jobs, but it

will not attract significant capital investment unless it increases the availability of human capital for business formation and expansion. Maine is already in an acute workforce crisis that could imperil its economy for a generation.

At the same time, a declining traditional-age student population, particularly in the northeastern United States, increases competition for students among higher education institutions – competition that will intensify at the same time a revolution is unfolding in higher education learning and teaching. Spurred by both information technology and changes in how the market assesses and values traditional degree programs, higher education is becoming unbundled, modular, and more focused on experiential learning and skills development. These trends presage acute enrollment challenges, particularly at UMS’s smaller campuses, at the very time when those campuses are ever more vital to their communities. And worse, this occurs as Maine’s rural economy and workforce and Maine employers need more – and more appropriately prepared – workers. Every UMS campus needs to be responsive to these trends as well as to the human capital requirements for the formation and expansion of Maine businesses.

The challenges UMS faces in Maine are consistent with the challenges faced by the entire U.S. higher education enterprise: escalating costs, intense global competition, poor completion rates, inadequate resources to enact transformation, and increased accountability for student outcomes and return on investment. As the Board proposes solutions for Maine through the goals and actions described here, it is at the same time addressing national and even global challenges to ensure meaningful, relevant, and sustainable approaches to higher education for a changing future.

The Solution

The State of Maine has charged its higher education institutions to work together cooperatively with Maine businesses to advance the Maine economy. To fulfill that mandate, UMS must comprehensively and continuously adapt its curriculum, programs and services, both in substance and in manner of delivery, to meet Maine’s workforce needs and to remain relevant and competitive. And UMS must continue to grow the research and knowledge base that will support those emerging workforce and business needs to enable and even catalyze innovation in Maine. However, solving Maine’s workforce crisis in a time of rapid changes in learning and teaching requires more – a new vision for a public education continuum in Maine that creates learner success for all stakeholders from early childhood to retirement. UMS must play a vital role in bringing together education and policy leaders to ensure this vision is learner-centric, nimble, collaborative, data-driven, knowledge-generating, continuously improving, and properly resourced.

Therefore, it is the policy of the University of Maine System Board of Trustees that UMS exercise leadership among Maine’s education systems and policy makers to realize this vision. System leadership shall promptly take the steps necessary to begin this process, initially including strategic collaboration among UMS universities and expanding to timely information sharing and innovation along the entire public and private education and learning continuum. The primary goal of these efforts must be maximizing educational attainment in Maine through the provision of quality, affordable, accessible, relevant and responsive programs and services that meet the changing needs of both Maine’s students and employers.

UMS leadership will be guided by the One University principle of making all UMS university resources available to support Maine families, businesses and communities regardless of location. UMS has made significant progress since 2012 in transforming its business model to become more efficient, affordable,

and responsive. The readily apparent aggregate impact of Maine's current and future workforce crisis, demographics, and the changing higher education marketplace on the educational needs of Maine students and employers requires UMS to take further definitive actions to more fully realize the benefits of One University to best respond to these critical State needs.

Now, therefore, acting in furtherance of its purpose to invest its resources strategically to serve the educational needs of the citizens and strengthen the economy and communities of the State most effectively, and recognizing as well that existing UMS programs and actions not identified herein that nevertheless advance the Board's 2016 Priority Outcomes and serve the needs of the State should continue to be strategically pursued and adequately resourced, the University of Maine System Board of Trustees finds, declares, and directs that UMS leadership take all necessary actions to achieve the following interrelated goals and actions. The actions described below are only first steps. The realization of the goals that follow will require sustained commitment, focus and resources for years to come.

Strategic Goals and Actions

1. **Advancing Workforce Readiness and Economic Development** – The State of Maine's declared higher education public policy requires UMS universities to cooperate among themselves and with Maine businesses to develop educational programs that advance the Maine economy. Given Maine's demographic and economic challenges and workforce needs, UMS must strategically manage a collaborative, student-centered public higher education system that maximizes learner employability and economic opportunity and development, characterized by flexible, 21st century life-long learning opportunities, business and economic development, and research that drives economic innovation, all derived from effective partnerships and continuous feedback among students, parents, public education systems, policy makers, and employers.

Action 1:

Create effective partnerships and feedback loops with each major industry and employment sector that aligns priority program instruction, including experiential learning opportunities, with UMS capacity and workforce needs in order to maximize student employment readiness and executive and professional development and advancement. Ultimately, every UMS program will have the means to acquire continuous feedback from relevant market segments and provide meaningful work or professional development-related experiences for its students.

Immediate Deliverable: The Chancellor, working with senior leadership and using the most relevant current market data, will deliver a Workforce Engagement report that prioritizes programs and associated industries that maximize workforce impact and business and economic development, and that includes a gap analysis of UMS capacity with recommended steps for achieving full engagement, program alignment mechanisms, pathways for experiential learning opportunities, etc., for the March 2019 Board meeting.

Action 2:

Strengthen research and economic development efforts to support Maine industries and to foster business formation and expansion.

Immediate Deliverable: As chartered by the Chancellor, the University of Maine President will deliver a multi-year plan for expanding the UMS research profile by March 2019.

Action 3:

Operationalize the Maine Center for Graduate and Professional Studies as a central and robust resource for students and employers for graduate/professional education, development, and advancement, including graduate certificates, across Maine.

Immediate Deliverable: This work is underway. The Maine Center Ventures Chief Executive Officer, working with and through the Maine Center Ventures Board and academic program leadership at the University of Maine and University of Southern Maine, will present a comprehensive analysis of current work and recommendations for the next project stage at the January 2019 Board meeting. UMS leadership will also consider whether Maine Center Ventures employer engagement efforts in support of the Maine Center can be applied effectively at scale to support Action 1 deliverables above.

Action 4:

UMS will develop coordinated workforce micro-credentials in collaboration with existing businesses, non-profit, and community partners and deemed relevant in the workplace for economic advancement and expansion.

Immediate Deliverable: The Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, in coordination with campus leaders and Maine Center Ventures as appropriate, and informed by the deliverables from Actions 1-3 above, will develop a regionally-focused, pop-up style of credentialing for current employment needs that can be quickly adapted to future needs by May 2019.

2. **Increasing Maine Educational Attainment** – UMS must expand access to the benefits of higher education in Maine. While Maine performs well in graduating students from high school, it lags behind much of the U.S. in post-secondary educational attainment. A worsening skills gap that stymies employers seeking to add new workers or replace retirees haunts our economy. There are a number of underserved populations UMS must draw on to increase attainment, including a greater percentage of high school graduates, adults – especially those with some post-secondary experience but no degree - historically underserved groups, veterans, new Mainers, which together comprise a “hidden workforce” that can be brought forward to compete successfully in the new economy. UMS must increase its commitment to serving all these populations across the early childhood to retirement continuum, but it must focus especially on adult learners and reducing the cost of credential or degree attainment.

Action 1:

In coordination with attainment efforts with public and private partners to meet the MaineSpark goal of 60% of adults having a post-secondary degree or credential by 2025, UMS must ensure its academic programs and student support services are fully aligned with and able to support adult learner needs.

Immediate Deliverable: Use all appropriate findings and recommendations from the June 2018 Adult Degree Completion (ADC) report, the workforce engagement report (Item 1 - Action 1), and the Maine Development Foundation’s 2018 *Making Maine Work* Report as the basis for developing comprehensive implementation and execution strategies to provide adult learners with affordable, flexible, stackable, credential- and degree-based programming that is aligned with the needs of this learner population and their employers. These strategies should identify target opportunities for the immediate development of appropriate program delivery modalities and credential development, priority external partnerships (e.g.,

DOE, DOL), and the needed resources and funding sources. A report of implementation and execution status will be provided for the March 2019 Board meeting.

Action 2:

Expand early college and related programs to reach a participation rate of 5,000 high school juniors and seniors by 2022, and make available programs that will provide opportunity for at least half of all Maine students to graduate from high school with an Associate degree or equivalent credits by 2025, enhancing their educational goals and reducing their need for or reliance on student debt.

Immediate Deliverable: The Chancellor working with the VCFA will deliver a sustainable, long-term funding plan for this initiative by March 2019 and engage Maine policy makers as appropriate. The VCAA will deliver regular updates to the Board's Academic and Student Affairs Committee on program progress on a schedule to be determined.

Action 3:

To remain competitive, UMS must retain its status as a national leader in higher education affordability and tuition restraint, limiting tuition increases, investing in financial aid, and creating pathways for students with the highest need to complete their educational programs without tuition debt. UMS will strive to make all credential and degree attainment readily affordable and accessible to all Maine families, with the lowest possible level of debt.

Immediate Deliverable: Through the Chancellor's office, UMS and campus leaders will engage with Maine policy makers to share their expertise and develop state-wide strategies to increase access and affordability and further reduce student debt associated with attainment and report to the Board no later than May 2019 on these efforts. UMS and campus leaders will analyze existing efforts and report to Academic and Student Affairs on which programs can be scaled to have the most significant impact on reducing UMS student debt load.

3. **Aligning Academic Programs and Innovation to Drive Student Success and Employer Responsiveness** – Each degree awarded by the UMS BOT certifies that the graduate has mastered a rigorous course of study that prepares the recipient for engaged citizenship and a readiness to engage meaningfully in Maine's economy. UMS must ensure that all its programs and credentials equip students with the best chance to be successful in both arenas. To accomplish these outcomes, UMS will ensure its courses and programs provide innovative market-relevant content and instruction that is aligned with the changing market for higher education.

Action 1:

UMS will develop innovative and highly collaborative academic programming models, pedagogical strategies, faculty development initiatives, and pilot projects to transform its academic programming to become and remain competitive with the changing post-secondary education market and achieve student success outcomes that meet critical State needs. This transformation will require bold steps that include a comprehensive and integrative process of System-wide program assessment, planning, prioritization, integration with workforce and attainment goals, and resource allocation, as well as all necessary changes to program approval procedures and associated administrative processes to ensure rapid, flexible and responsive program consideration and deployment.

Immediate Deliverables:

- The Chancellor and VCAA will work with senior academic leadership to propose appropriate approval process(es), procedures, and structure that foster rapid, responsive program development, deployment, and evaluation. An expedited System-wide program implementation mechanism will be in place by Fall 2019.
- The Chancellor and VCFA will report recommendations to the Board by its May 2019 meeting for how the fiscal year campus budget development and approval process may be adapted to permit and facilitate more strategically coordinated human, financial, and programmatic resource allocation across the System to achieve the academic program responsiveness and efficiencies directed herein.

Action 2:

UMS will demonstrate academic responsiveness by establishing interdisciplinary programs with innovative pedagogies that prepare students to engage in key areas emerging for the growth of Maine's digital economy.

Immediate Deliverable: Building on work already underway, the Presidents of the University of Maine and University of Southern Maine will report to the VCAA, Chancellor, and the Board with specific recommendations for programmatic innovations in the areas of data science (including artificial intelligence and machine learning), biomedical engineering, and health-related biosciences and genetics, with a timeline for implementation, by May 2019.

4. **Maintaining Competitiveness and Sustainability to Meet Critical State Needs** - Although enrollment decline is acute in Maine, it is a problem throughout the United States and especially in the Northeast. Many institutions in our region are competing within the same shrinking pool of potential students. UMS must move aggressively and collectively now to develop and implement concrete plans to address this looming threat to assure the continued viability of our smaller campuses in the face of declining population and enrollment, while at the same time strategically coordinating the use of UMS resources across and among all UMS universities on One University principles to maximize both public accountability and responsiveness to critical State needs, and to assure ongoing competitiveness and relevance in the national higher education marketplace.

Action 1:

As deemed necessary to successfully execute the actions directed herein, UMS and campus leadership will accelerate the transition to One University organizationally, systemically, and culturally to facilitate resource allocation and investments across UMS that best achieve these outcomes.

Immediate Deliverable: As a summation of the above Action Item Deliverables, the Chancellor, as informed by UMS leadership, will make recommendations to the Board no later than May 2019 regarding budgetary, organizational, or structural changes that may be necessary to achieve the required deliverables, remain competitive, and meet critical State needs in a resource-limited environment.