



Founded in 1885

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS & COLLEGES, INC.
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

DAVID P. ANGEL, Chair (2018)
Clark University

DAVID QUIGLEY, Vice Chair (2018)
Boston College

G. TIMOTHY BOWMAN (2018)
Harvard University

THOMAS L. G. DWYER (2018)
Johnson & Wales University

JOHN F. GABRANSKI (2018)
Haydenville, MA

KAREN L. MUNCASTER (2018)
Brandeis University

CHRISTINE ORTIZ (2018)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

JON S. OXMAN (2018)
Auburn, ME

ROBERT L. PURA (2018)
Greenfield Community College

ABDALLAH A. SFEIR (2018)
Lebanese American University

REV. BRIAN J. SHANLEY, O.P. (2018)
Providence College

HARRY E. DUMAY (2019)
College of Our Lady of the Elms

JEFFREY R. GODLEY (2019)
Groton, CT

COLEEN C. PANTALONE (2019)
Northeastern University

MARIKO SILVER (2019)
Bennington College

GEORGE W. TETLER (2019)
Worcester, MA

KASSANDRA S. ARDINGER (2020)
Trustee Member, Concord, NH

RUSSELL CAREY (2020)
Brown University

FRANCESCO C. CESAREO (2020)
Assumption College

F. JAVIER CEVALLOS (2020)
Framingham State University

RICK DANIELS (2020)
Cohasset, MA

DONALD H. DEHAYES (2020)
University of Rhode Island

PAM Y. EDDINGER (2020)
Bunker Hill Community College

THOMAS S. EDWARDS (2020)
Thomas College

KIMBERLY M. GOFF-CREWS (2020)
Yale University

THOMAS C. GREENE (2020)
Vermont College of Fine Arts

MARTIN J. HOWARD (2020)
Boston University

SUSAN D. HUARD (2020)
Manchester Community College (NH)

JEFFREY S. SOLOMON (2020)
Worcester Polytechnic Institute

President of the Commission
BARBARA E. BRITTINGHAM
bbrittingham@neasc.org

Senior Vice President of the Commission
PATRICIA M. O'BRIEN, SND
pobrien@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
CAROL L. ANDERSON
canderson@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
PAULA A. HARBECKE
pharbecke@neasc.org

Vice President of the Commission
TALA KHUDAIRI
tkhudairi@neasc.org

March 27, 2018

Dr. Glenn A. Cummings
President
University of Southern Maine
P.O. Box 9300, 96 Falmouth Street
Portland, ME 04104-9300

Dear President Cummings:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on February 28, 2018, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education considered the report submitted by University of Southern Maine and took the following action:

that the report submitted by University of Southern Maine be accepted;

that the University submit a report for consideration in Fall 2019 that gives emphasis to the institution's continued success in:

1. strengthening its financial stability by further decreasing its deferred maintenance backlog and achieving its goals for enrollment growth and fundraising, including as evidence the most recent financial statements of the USM Foundation;
2. providing evidence that assessment results are used for program improvement across the institution;
3. evaluating the impact of the "One University" initiative on the institution's ability and capacity to achieve its mission and purposes;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2021 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2021 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in improving its retention and graduation rates.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The report submitted by University of Southern Maine was accepted because it was generally responsive to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of July 10, 2015 and November 30, 2016.

The Commission appreciates University of Southern Maine's (USM) well-written and informative report documenting the progress made by the institution in each of the areas identified for attention. We note with approval that the University has emerged from a period of considerable change with stable and experienced leadership that has permitted the institution to again move forward with a focus on student opportunity and success. We recognize, too, that the number of faculty has also stabilized since the Spring 2016 interim report (289 full-time and 381 part-time in Fall 2017) leading to a recent "flurry" of curriculum proposals that provides evidence of a "collective enthusiasm for growing the institution." In addition, we understand that the Core Curriculum Committee has designed an Engaged Learning requirement that will be considered by the Faculty Senate at its March meeting. The steps USM is taking to be an affordable option for Maine students are also noteworthy, including adding \$500,000 to its financial aid budget and increasing its discount rate to be more in line with those of the other University of Maine System institutions. The Last Mile Scholarship that provides funding for students who have exhausted both federal and state aid options is particularly commendable; we note that all 24 recipients to date have finished their degrees.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2019 are related to our standards on *Students, Institutional Resources, Planning and Evaluation, Educational Effectiveness, and Organization and Governance*.

As a result of difficult budget adjustments made by the University of Southern Maine to tackle the institution's FY2015 operating deficit of \$16.0 million and FY2016 revenue shortfall of \$4.3 million, \$1.6 million in operational savings was available to invest in needed equipment and to begin to address the deferred maintenance backlog that remains significant at some \$250 million. We understand SMU has established a goal to grow the institution's headcount to 10,000 over the next five years and are pleased to learn that the number of new undergraduate students increased from 1,535 in Fall 2014 to 1,682 in Fall 2017, and the number of new graduate students rose from 391 to 425 over this same period. We also are aware that the USM Foundation has a goal to raise \$50 million for scholarships, infrastructure, and other student investments, and that the "aggressive fundraising campaign for scholarships is already yielding funds." The Fall 2019 report will provide the institution an opportunity to update the Commission on the success of these and other initiatives implemented to strengthen its financial stability by further decreasing its deferred maintenance backlog and achieving its goals for enrollment growth and fundraising. Given the role of the USM Foundation in enhancing USM's financial position, we also ask that additional information be provided on its activities, along with a copy of the Foundation's most recent financial statements. Our standards on *Students and Institutional Resources* provides this guidance:

Consistent with its mission, the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve (*Students, Statement of the Standard*).

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution is financially stable. Ostensible financial stability is not achieved at the expense of educational quality. Its stability and viability are not unduly dependent upon vulnerable financial resources or an historically narrow base of support (7.5).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6).

The institution has sufficient and appropriate information, physical, and technological resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered. It devotes sufficient resources to maintain and enhance its information, physical, and technological resources (7.21).

We view positively the increased emphasis USM has given to assessing student success and understand that the mandatory training for department chairs now includes coverage of assessment; a Mini Assessment Conference was held engaging 69 faculty participants; and the assessment website was expanded to include additional resources. Further, the work of the Office of Academic Assessment and the guidance provided by USM's Assessment Committee have helped to refine the process, and we note with favor that the attention given to the Core Curriculum has led to modifications of the Capstone course to ensure foundational concepts are "applied and assessed." We also are aware that campus discussions are planned to consider ways the results of the different surveys administered (including NSSE) can be better used for institutional improvement. As specified in our standards on *Planning and Evaluation* and *Educational Effectiveness*, we seek assurance, through the Fall 2019 report, that assessment results are used for improvement across the institution:

The institution has a demonstrable record of success in using the results of its evaluation activities to inform planning, changes in programs and services, and resource allocation (2.8).

The results of assessment and quantitative measures of student success are a demonstrable factor in the institution's efforts to improve the learning opportunities and results for students (8.8).

The institution integrates the findings of its assessment process and measures of student success into its program evaluation activities and uses the findings to inform its planning and resource allocation and to establish claims the institution makes to students and prospective students (8.10).

With respect to the University of Maine System's plans to create "One University," we acknowledge USM's participation in several of the initiatives underway, including committees looking at Academic Transformation, Adult Degree Completion, Credit Transfer, and Strategic Resources Allocation. As many operational functions are now centralized at the system level, we note USM's concern about the lack of a service agreement assigning responsibility (and correspondingly accountability) for the services provided to the campus. We welcome further information, in the Fall 2019 report, on the institution's evaluation of the impact of the "One University" initiative on its ability and capacity to achieve its mission and purposes. This request is in keeping with our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *Institutional Resources*:

In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered (3.6).

The institution has sufficient human, financial, information, physical, and technological resources and capacity to support its mission (*Institutional Resources*, Statement of the Standard).

Finally, the scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2021 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The item the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation is related to our standard on *Educational Effectiveness*.

We understand that University of Southern Maine has established a goal to retain 72% of its students and note from the institution's Data First forms that retention rates for the past four years have exceeded 60% for full-time undergraduate students and averaged 41% for part-time undergraduate students. At the same time, the institution's six-year baccalaureate graduation rate has remained flat, between 32-34%. Accordingly, we are encouraged that increases in total credit hours – 3.1% in Fall 2017 and 5% in Spring 2018 – appear to be a sign that the University's "retention efforts are paying off." In addition, enrollment management initiatives such as the establishment of a Summer Melt Committee that successfully decreased the loss of deposited students from 25% to 11%, and implementation of a student onboarding process demonstrate USM's commitment to fulfill its service promise of "Student Focused Every Day." The Spring 2021 self-study will afford the University an opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of these and other efforts implemented to improve the institution's retention and graduation rates. Our standard on *Educational Effectiveness* (cited above and below) is relevant here:

The institution defines measures of student success and levels of achievement appropriate to its mission, modalities and locations of instruction, and student body, including any specifically recruited populations. These measures include rates of progression, retention, transfer, and graduation; default and loan repayment rates; licensure passage rates; and employment (8.6).

The Commission expressed appreciation for the report submitted by University of Southern Maine and hopes that its preparation has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education New England.

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. James R. Erwin. The institution is free to release information about the report and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

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

Sincerely,



David P. Angel

DPA/jm

Enclosure

cc: Mr. James R. Erwin