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

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November 29, 2011

Dr. Selma Botman  
President  
University of Southern Maine  
PO Box 9300  
Portland, ME 04104-9300

Dear President Botman:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on September 23, 2011, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education took the following action with respect to University of Southern Maine:

that University of Southern Maine be continued in accreditation;

that University of Southern Maine submit a report for consideration in Fall 2013 that gives emphasis to the institution's progress in:

1. developing its capacity to regularly collect and analyze data to inform decision making and planning;
2. more fully engaging faculty and staff in the design and implementation of a comprehensive and systematic approach to program review and assessment of student learning across all academic programs and using the results for improvement;

that University of Southern Maine submit a fifth-year interim report for consideration in Spring 2016;

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

1. continuing to address the items specified for attention in the Fall 2013 report;
2. assessing the full-time/part-time composition of the faculty and developing systems to support and evaluate part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants to enhance the quality of instruction provided;
3. establishing achievable enrollment goals and enrolling students who demonstrate potential for success with evidence of improved first-to-second year retention rates;

4. developing policies to guide the design and delivery of online courses and an approach to evaluating their effectiveness to assure comparable quality with traditional forms of instruction;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Spring 2021.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

University of Southern Maine (USM) is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be substantially in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission commends USM for its thorough and candid self-study that portrays an institution with a passion for serving its students and confidence in its ability to fulfill its mission as an urban, public, comprehensive university in the state of Maine. Along with the visiting team, we commend the institution's committed leadership and dedicated faculty and staff for confronting the University's financial challenges, stabilizing its budget during a period of declining enrollment and reduced state appropriations, going from a deficit of \$3.9 million in FY2006 to a surplus of \$5.1 million in FY2010, and repaying the \$4.4 million loan it received from the University of Maine System ahead of schedule. We are pleased to learn that the institution's strategic plan – *Preparing USM for the Future 2009-2014* – now guides administrative and academic actions and that it was developed with the involvement of the University's three campuses. We take favorable note of the reorganization of USM's eight schools and colleges into five colleges, a structure designed both to increase administrative efficiency and to expand "opportunities for collaboration among a range of disciplines." The University's strong undergraduate and graduate degree programs, including the new "rigorous, interdisciplinary, and innovative" USM and Lewiston-Auburn Campus (LAC) cores, are applauded. Overall, USM understands what it needs to do to build on its success of the previous decade and to continue its institutional development.

The items the institution is asked to report on in Fall 2013 are related to our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, and *Faculty*.

As recognized in the institution's self-study, and as confirmed by the team, USM acknowledges the need to coordinate its collection and analysis of data to better inform its planning and decision making. The Commission is therefore encouraged to learn of the University's plans to create a centralized institutional research office by bringing together employees from student assessment, student data, and human resources. We also understand that USM's first Director of Institutional Research and Assessment has been appointed to lead this effort. As guided by our standard on *Planning and Evaluation*, in the Fall 2013 report, we are interested to receive evidence of the success of this effort and of the progress made by USM to more systematically collect and analyze data and then to use the results as a basis for evaluation and improvement:

Institutional research is sufficient to support planning and evaluation. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness (2.2).

The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and purposes, giving primary focus to the realization of its educational objectives. Its system of evaluation is designed to provide relevant and trustworthy information to support institutional improvement, with an emphasis on the academic program. The institution's evaluation efforts are effective for addressing its unique circumstances. These efforts use both quantitative and qualitative methods (2.5).

The Commission concurs with the team that USM has yet to develop an evidence-based “culture of assessment.” We are therefore gratified to learn that, to align with the University of Maine System’s mandate, the University recently revised its program review processes to provide for systematic program reviews once every seven years. Additional assessment initiatives employed at the undergraduate level include a survey of students enrolled in the University’s Pilot Entry Year Experience courses, a Program Assessment Inventory intended to identify the assistance and resources needed by departments to support their efforts to measure and evaluate student achievement, and grant funding from the Davis Foundation to aid implementation and assessment of the new core curriculum. At the same time, however, we understand that a number of academic programs have yet to articulate learning outcomes for their students. At the graduate level, we appreciate that several of the institution’s professional programs hold specialized program accreditation and that a new internal process designed to assess graduate student learning is scheduled for implementation in academic year 2011-2012. We ask that the Fall 2013 report give emphasis to the University’s success in developing and implementing a comprehensive approach to assessing student learning across all programs, especially of the progress made to use data/evidence for program improvement, an effort that will require the full engagement of the institution’s faculty and staff. This portion of the report should be informed by our standards on *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program* and *Faculty*:

The institution has a system of periodic review of academic and other programs that includes the use of external perspectives (2.6).

The institution develops, approves, administers, and on a regular cycle reviews its degree programs under effective institutional policies that are implemented by designated bodies with established channels of communication and control. Faculty have a substantive voice in these matters (4.9).

The institution implements and provides support for systematic and broad-based assessment of what and how students are learning through their academic program and experiences outside the classroom. Assessment is based on clear statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. Assessment provides useful information that helps the institution to improve the experiences provided for students, as well as to assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded (4.48).

The institution’s approach to understanding student learning focuses on the course, program, and institutional level. Evidence is considered at the appropriate level of focus, with the results being a demonstrable factor in improving the learning opportunities and results for students (4.49).

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 (4.51).

Faculty accept the responsibility for ensuring ... that considerations of program improvement are informed by a shared understanding of what and how students are learning in the program (5.12).

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 interim reports, University of Southern Maine is asked, in Spring 2016, to report on its progress in continuing to address the items specified for attention in the Fall 2013 report; the Commission realizes that these are matters requiring sustained attention

and effort. We further ask that the report address three additional matters related to our standards on *Faculty*, *Students*, and *The Academic Program*.

The Commission notes with favor that USM has a “strong tradition of full-time faculty teaching classes” and that the most important criterion for obtaining tenure is effective teaching. At the same time, a “significant portion” of the courses, approximately 30% of the credit hours delivered, is being taught by part-time faculty. In addition, graduate teaching assistants are employed in undergraduate instruction, primarily leading laboratory sections. Given the prominent role of part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants in delivering undergraduate instruction, we concur with the team that, in keeping with our standard on *Faculty*, procedures need to be in place to evaluate their effectiveness and sufficient resources allocated to support their professional development. We ask that the Spring 2016 report give emphasis to these issues and to the University’s review of its dependence on part-time faculty:

Where graduate teaching assistants are employed, the institution carefully selects, trains, supervises, and evaluates them (5.5).

The full-time/part-time composition of the faculty reflects the institution’s mission, programs, and student body and is periodically reviewed. The institution avoids undue dependence on part-time faculty, adjuncts, temporary appointments, and graduate assistants to conduct instruction. Institutions that employ part-time, adjunct, clinical or temporary faculty assure their appropriate integration into the department and institution and provide opportunities for faculty development (5.8).

Faculty are demonstrably effective in carrying out their assigned responsibilities. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of faculty appointments, performance, and retention. The evaluative criteria reflect the mission and purposes of the institution and the importance it attaches to the various responsibilities of faculty, e.g., teaching, advising, assessment, scholarship, creative activities, research, and professional and community service. The institution has equitable and broad-based procedures for such evaluation applying to both full- and part-time faculty, in which its expectations are stated clearly and weighted appropriately for use in the evaluative process (5.11).

Between 2006 and 2010, the University’s fall headcount fell nearly 8%, from 10,478 to 9,655. In addition, as reported in the self-study, USM’s first-year retention rate (64% in 2008) was considerably below the average of its peer comparators. We appreciate that the admission of students with academic profiles that place them at risk for college success into the University’s “GO” program, while in keeping with the institution’s mission to provide access to education in the region, creates a challenge to increasing student retention. We therefore note with approval that the first-year retention rate increased to 70% in 2010 and are encouraged by the creation of a Student Success Center, an Academic Alert Program, and the Entry Year Experience to address the institution’s concerns about undergraduate student retention. We look forward to learning, through the Spring 2016 report, of the University’s progress in achieving its enrollment objectives, enrolling and retaining a student body with the potential to succeed as specified in our standard on *Students*:

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution’s academic program, including specifically recruited populations. It ensures a systematic approach to providing accessible and effective programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their academic goals. The institution provides students with information and guidance regarding opportunities and experiences that may help ensure their academic success (6.5).

The institution's goals for retention and graduation reflect institutional purposes, and the results are used to inform recruitment and the review of programs and services (6.8).

Data on retention, graduation, and other measures of student success are regularly reviewed within the institution, with the results being used for planning, resource allocation, and improvement (6.9).

Finally, we commend the University's development of a Center for Technology Enhanced Learning (CTEL) to support its new emphasis on distance education that aligns with its mission to offer "accessible education to its regional population." We understand that plans are in place to increase the number of courses offered online from 118 (Fall 2009) to 155 (Spring 2010). The Spring 2016 report will provide an opportunity for the institution to update the Commission on the policies developed to guide the design and delivery of online courses and on its approach to evaluating their effectiveness to ensure they are offered at a level of quality comparable to more traditional formats. We remind you for our standard on *The Academic Program*:

The institution offering programs and courses ... via distance or correspondence learning demonstrates that students completing these programs or courses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies equivalent to those achieved in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods and modalities. Programs and courses are designed to ensure an opportunity for reflection and for analysis of the subject matter and the identification, analysis and evaluation of information resources beyond those provided directly for the course (4.39).

Courses and programs offered for credit ... through distance or correspondence education ... are consistent with the educational objectives of the institution. Such activities are integral parts of the institution and maintain the same academic standards as courses and programs offered on campus. They receive sufficient support for instructional and other needs (4.40).

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.

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 Southern Maine and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and Patricia Maguire Meservey, 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 Ms. Michelle Hood. 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.

Dr. Selma Botman  
November 29, 2011  
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If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Barbara Brittingham,  
Director of the Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Jo Maydew".

Mary Jo Maydew

MJM/jm

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Michelle Hood  
Visiting Team



**NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

209 Burlington Road, Bedford, MA 01730

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**Public Disclosure of Information  
About Affiliated Institutions**

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The following policy governs the release of information regarding the status of affiliated colleges and universities by institutions and by the Commission.

**1. Release of Information by Institutions Regarding Their Accreditation  
Following Commission Action**

At the conclusion of the evaluation process institutions are encouraged to make publicly available information about their accreditation status including the findings of team reports and any obligations or requirements established by Commission action, as well as any plans to address stated concerns. Because of the potential to be misleading, institutions are asked not to publish or otherwise disseminate excerpts from these materials.

While the Commission does not release copies of self-studies, progress reports, evaluation reports, or other documents related to the accreditation of individual institutions, it believes it to be good practice for institutions to make these materials available, in their entirety, after notification of Commission action.

While the Commission does not initiate public release of information on actions of show cause or deferral, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

If an institution releases or otherwise disseminates information which misrepresents or distorts its accreditation status, the institution will be notified and asked to take corrective action publicly correcting any misleading information it may have disseminated, including but not limited to the accreditation status of the institution, the contents of evaluation reports, and the Commission actions with respect to the institution. Should it fail to do so, the New England Association, acting through its Chief Executive Officer, will release a public statement in such form and content as it deems desirable providing correct information.

## 2. Published Statement on Accredited Status

The Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of regional accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the New England Association indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the New England Association is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
209 Burlington Road, Suite 201  
Bedford, MA 01730-1433  
(781) 271-0022  
E-Mail: [cihe@neasc.org](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)



The shorter statement that an institution may choose for announcing its accredited status follows:

College (University) is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc., through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

**Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
 209 Burlington Road, Suite 201  
 Bedford, MA 01730-1433  
 (781) 271-0022  
 E-Mail: [cihe@neasc.org](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)

Accreditation by the New England Association has reference to the institution as a whole. Therefore, statements like “fully accredited” or “this program is accredited by the New England Association” or “this degree is accredited by the New England Association” are incorrect and should not be used.

### 3. **Published Statement on Candidate Status**

An institution granted Candidate for Accreditation status must use the following statement whenever it makes reference to its affiliation with the New England Association:

College (University) has been granted Candidate for Accreditation status by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc. through its Commission on Institutions of Higher Education. Candidacy for Accreditation is a status of affiliation with the Commission which indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing toward accreditation.

Candidacy is not accreditation nor does it assure eventual accreditation.

Inquiries regarding the status of an institution affiliated with the New England Association should be directed to the administrative staff of the college or university. Individuals may also contact:

**The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education**  
**New England Association of Schools and Colleges**  
 209 Burlington Road, Suite 201  
 Bedford, MA 01730-1433  
 (781) 271-0022  
 E-Mail: [cihe@neasc.org](mailto:cihe@neasc.org)

**4. Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions by the Commission**

Upon inquiry, the Commission will release the following information about affiliated institutions:

- The date of initial accreditation and/or when candidacy was granted;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the most recent on-site evaluation and subsequent Commission action on the institution's accredited status;
- The date and nature (comprehensive or focused) of the next scheduled on-site evaluation;
- Submission date and action taken on the most recent written report required by the Commission;
- The extent of, or limitations on, the status of affiliation;
- In cases of adverse action (denial or termination of candidacy or accreditation, placing an institution on probation), the Commission's reasons for recommending that status and, in the case of probation, its plans to monitor the institution. The Commission, in consultation with the institution, will prepare a written statement incorporating the above information. The Commission reserves the right to make the final determination of the nature and content of the statement. The institution will also be offered the opportunity to make its official comment; if the institution does make an official comment, the comment will be made available by the Commission.
- For institutions whose candidacy or accreditation has been terminated, the date of, and reasons for, termination.

The Commission does not provide information about deferments of action on candidate or accreditation status, or show-cause orders. However, if such information is released by the institution in question, the Commission will respond to related inquiries.

Adverse actions (placement of an institution on probation, denial of candidate status or accreditation, revocation of candidacy, and termination of accreditation) are communicated after the available appeals process is completed. The Commission, at its discretion, may make the adverse action public before an appeal is completed. In so doing, the Commission will provide information about the appeal process.

The Commission recognizes that, to be fully understood, information about the accredited status of institutions must be placed within the context of the policies and procedures of the Commission and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. In responding to inquiries, the Commission will endeavor to do so.

#### 5. **Public Disclosure of Institutional Actions**

Within 30 days after the action on accreditation status is taken, the Commission will notify the Secretary of Education, New England state higher education officers, appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. Such actions include:

A final decision to:

Grant candidacy or accreditation

Continue an institution in accreditation

Deny or terminate the accreditation of an institution

Place an institution on probation

Approve substantive change (e.g., moving to a higher degree level)

A decision by an accredited or candidate institution to voluntarily withdraw from affiliation with the Commission.

*November 1998*

*September 2001*

*April 2010*

*September 2011*