Report and Recommendations of The OnLine Maine Workgroup

Background: The short-term OnlineMaine work group was formed to provide recommendations to Chancellor Pattenaude and President Handley on how best to revise and refine the business model for OnlineMaine to reflect the last round of input from the campuses. This was to include the topics of the range of services provided, location of services (there can be outsourcing to campuses), phasing in of services, priorities of service provision, budget levels and e-tuition (or other funding model). The task of the group was to determine what campuses need and expect from OnlineMaine and then to develop a set of recommendations that would address all of this.

The Workgroup reviewed the current draft Business Model, an associated array of services that delineated the seven key service areas comprised within OnlineMaine, the range of programs available via OnlineMaine, and the services and resources already provided by the campuses. In addition, campus-based workgroups were formed to provide feedback and guidance to the group and that feedback was brought into Workgroup discussions. As a result, we identified a set of key overarching issues, which we feel need to be fully considered yet also promptly resolved. While there are numerous topics that can be fruitfully addressed to advance distance education across the UMS (many of which are already being discussed in other venues), we are convinced that decisions on these issues is critical to setting a sturdy framework for the development of the details and the long term effectiveness of UMS distance education.

Below, we identify those issues, provide principles on which they should be grounded, and outline a structure to resolve them that is broadly informed and timely.

The following overarching issues were seen as those, which needed resolution within the UC business model:

1. Clear articulation of the vision for OnlineMaine in advancing access to quality UMS distance programs across Maine and beyond;
2. Determination of the array of services provided by University College to support program quality and delivery across UMS given the current and planned resources at each of the System’s universities and how this translates for each campus given its current and planned resources;
3. Exploration of a potential structure to promote and facilitate shared services across universities;
4. Establishment of a UC funding model that responds to the array of services provided and to UC and university budgetary needs, including consideration of e-tuition structures and student fees;
5. Identification of an ongoing participatory process including faculty, student representatives and other key stakeholders, to guide the ongoing development of UC, OnlineMaine and effective distance education coordination across the UMS.

The Work Group determined that more work was needed to arrive at the final recommendations focused on the overarching issues above. The following Guiding Principles are fundamental to the next stages of this work:

- We intend to be a major provider of quality online programs;
- We will identify unique opportunities to develop programs that will allow us to attract students we are not presently engaging;
- We establish the educational needs of students and the State of Maine as our top priority;
- We recognize and affirm the role that University College, including the sites and centers, plays in promoting effective access, learning, service and outreach;
- We recognize that the academic curricula and programs offered through distance education emanate from the seven universities and their faculty;
- All campuses will participate in distance education and the support of University College, albeit not all in the same way;
- Flexibility will be provided to individual campuses but some consistency/commonality is also important;

Recommendations:
- That an update of the work of this group be given to the Board of Trustees at its September 2011 meeting. This update will reflect on the work of the summer, discuss the recommendations, and share the successes and work of the past few months (enrollment, SIF grant, etc.)
- Form a Distance Learning Steering Committee by the middle of September. This Committee will be advisory to President Handley in her University College role and to UC Director Madison. Additionally, this Committee will serve to advise the Chancellor in resolving key strategic policy decisions that affect all of the universities. Membership in this Steering Committee should include two people from each campus, one of whom should be a faculty member, and System-level membership as identified by the Chancellor. We would recommend that, in addition to faculty, campus representatives might include individuals from the following groups: chief academic officers, chief
financial officers, and chief student affairs officers. In addition, we recommend that the committee include at least one student representative to the Board. The UMS Chief Information Officer should be a member of the committee. We anticipate that among this group, there would be crossover membership with T4. Further, it will be critical that this Steering Committee reach out to other groups, including campus based groups, to gain feedback and advice from as broad a range of stakeholders as possible. It is important that the work of this Committee is as transparent and inclusive as possible.

• Although this Steering Committee will be a standing committee to support strategic development of distance education across the UMS, the first key task for this Committee will be to develop a strategic plan addressing the five overarching issues referenced above:

  1. Clear articulation of the vision for Online Maine in advancing access to quality UMS distance programs across Maine and beyond;
  2. Determination of the array of services provided by University College to support program quality and delivery across UMS given the current and planned resources at each of the System’s universities and how this translates for each campus given its current and planned resources;
  3. Exploration of a potential structure to promote and facilitate shared services across universities;
  4. Establishment of a UC funding model that responds to the array of services provided and to UC and university budgetary needs, including consideration of e-tuition structures and student fees;
  5. Recommendation of a structure and charge for the ongoing Steering Committee; it may be that the membership of the Steering Committee needs to evolve and the specifics of the structure and charge may shift as these overarching issues are resolved and the work of the Steering Committee evolves.

There are a number of critical details to discuss in advancing UMS distance education, many of which are currently being considered by System-wide and campus-based groups, as well as by the UC Business Model. However, this Steering Committee must initially focus on establishing a sturdy framework for the coordination and support structure for UMS distance education. This work on the identified overarching issues must be completed by no later than December 1, 2011 with recommendations made to the Chancellor and President Handley. This will allow for enough time to revise the business model to reflect approved recommendations and for a final review by the Steering Committee and the Presidents prior to presentation to the Board.
Chancellor will make recommendations to the Board of Trustees based on the work of the Steering Committee at the January 2012 meeting.

- We recommend that a skilled facilitator be identified to work with the Committee and help guide this work. President Handley and UC Director Madison will recommend a slate of facilitators to the Chancellor; one will be identified so that work can begin immediately upon appointment of the Steering Committee. Selection of a chair will be made by President Handley in consultation with the Chancellor.