The USM Plan
2001
The USM Plan:
Achieving National Recognition for Regional Excellence

USM must become a highly regarded and vital community of inquiry and learning which provides its region with outstanding academic programs, rigorous research and creative activity, and valued services.

The USM Plan

**Goal 1:** Actively embrace and support a highly regarded and enduring community of intellectual inquiry and learning.

**Goal 2:** Deepen and enrich the organizational culture in support of inquiry and learning.

**Goal 3:** Build a responsive and coherent curriculum aimed at student success and regional needs.

**Goal 4:** Mobilize institutional resources in an innovative fashion through a more inclusive budget process leading to a clear alignment of budgets with plans and priorities.
Dear Colleagues:

As a comprehensive public university, the University of Southern Maine reflects and responds to its region; and regional resources and requirements have led to significant opportunities for its growth and development. As clearly articulated in USM’s Board of Visitors’ report, “A Southern Maine Imperative: Meeting the Region’s Higher Education Needs in the 21st Century” (October 2000), regional leaders see USM as critical to the economic, social, and cultural well-being of the region, and they are prepared to advocate for the University.

USM’s Board of Visitors has high expectations that the University will, in the next decade, gain national recognition for its breadth, quality, and accessibility of academic programs, all built on and responsive to its regional base. To accomplish this goal, the region’s citizens expect USM to have clear direction and to perform multiple roles. USM must build scale and depth in science and technology while sustaining strong liberal arts and professional programs. USM must be a high-quality, first-choice institution and a source of lifelong learning opportunity. USM is expected to maintain high and consistent academic standards and at the same time to be flexible and responsive to regional needs and expectations in program development. Regional leaders also recognize the need for USM to gain additional financial support from the state and from business and industry to accomplish these ends.

At the same time, the University of Maine System Chancellor’s 2001-2003 legislative plan, “The Maine Idea,” a multi-year effort to make UMS graduates “among the best prepared for the 21st century’s education, economic, and social challenges,” requires us to assess how we work as an organization and to build an enduring intellectual infrastructure and a coherent consensus about USM’s future.

The Board of Visitors’ goals expressed in “A Southern Maine Imperative” are consistent with those expressed during University planning over the last academic year, as are the intellectual underpinnings of “The Maine Idea.” The resulting USM plan is a collective statement about what the University stands for, how it will achieve its potential, and how it will fulfill the Board of Visitors’ challenge. The plan describes goals and actions for the next five years—what we want to do and how we will do it—thereby setting a course for the University for at least the next decade. Achieving the plan’s ambitious vision requires faculty, staff, students, and supporters to take responsibility for significant rethinking in the way we conceptualize and do our work.

Many people have contributed to this document—through participation in town meetings, by providing critical comments, and by suggesting language to reflect the academic vision the plan details. It is the work of a mature community of inquiry and learning.

Sincerely,

Richard L. Pattenaude
September 2001
Introduction

What does it take to be a top-ranked university? Is it the quality of the students it admits, the training of its faculty and staff, the state of its facilities, the support it provides to faculty and students, the value of its public financial support, or the size of its endowment? Each of these elements signifies the potential for success, but none guarantees success. To achieve national recognition for regional excellence, it is essential to develop all parts of the University even as we focus on academic qualities.

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The plan embodies the values that inform our work as a university and describes goals and actions required to achieve academic excellence. Our mission remains to educate citizens so they are intellectually engaged, knowledgeable about the world they inhabit and shape, information- and technology-literate, and capable of leading by the depth and force of their ideas and the quality of their efforts. Much of the foundation required is in place already. But we have the opportunity—and the responsibility—to transform the institution in ways that exceed the expectations others have of us.

The plan commits us, the people who make up the University, to the following broad goals:

- Actively embrace and support a community of inquiry and learning,
- Deepen and enrich our organizational culture in support of inquiry and learning,
- Create a responsive and coherent curriculum,
- Mobilize institutional resources in alignment with our purpose, and
- Measure and assess what we value.

Woven through these goals and resulting actions are our longstanding commitments to teaching and learning, linking national standards with regional responsibility, linking theory with practice, fostering diversity, and providing responsive and efficient service.

The University

USM today is a university of great complexity, shaped in large measure by a scarcity of resources. The University’s 1996 plan, “USM in the 21st Century: Building a Better University During a Time of Challenge,” has served us well, as demonstrated in USM’s 2001 New England Association of Schools and Colleges re-accreditation report, which lauded our substantial achievements. Still, while it is clear that the University has matured and expanded academic programs in the last decade, it has much unfinished business. External imperatives and internal pressures have altered the context in which the University operates. We increasingly drive up our own expectations of scholarly productivity, even as the state expects a visible return on its investment in research and development for Maine’s increasingly knowledge-based economy. That economy also requires of our students ethical, cultural, linguistic, and environmental understanding and competency; it requires considerable written and oral communication literacy, as well as technical and information literacy; and it requires intellectual flexibility and critical thinking. We are witnessing a shift in learning principles from simply conveying knowledge to also developing sophisticated capacities for evaluating and
expressing ideas. Learning is expected to be reflective and conceptual while at the same time problem-based and experiential.

Even as such expectations have increased, students’ own work expectations have changed, as have college attendance patterns. Many students begin higher education in two-year institutions or at other universities, and it is not uncommon for students to attend multiple institutions in order to complete a degree. Baccalaureate degrees can no longer be measured in four years or even 120 credit hours, and standard measures of student accomplishment unduly focus on retention and graduation, not whether students actually attain their educational goals.

Impediments to Growth and Development

USM’s organizational capacity remains an impediment to development of the university we aspire to be and our region demands. We have not fully achieved the financial goals of the last decade because of our own choices in allocating funds toward academic programs, and because we have invested the benefits gained from enrollment increases in increased salaries and benefits and to meet institutional requirements over which we often have no effective control. Nor can we continue to rely on enrollment growth alone to increase revenue.

Resource scarcity, for instance, has constrained program development, library collections, and rehabilitation of classrooms and labs. Facilities planning is an on-going process, but space and facilities remain critical impediments to accomplishing University goals. Our own geography further hampers our work. We provide significant access to the University by offering courses on three campuses as well as at numerous off-campus centers and sites, thus eroding economies of scale.

The University’s overall student-to-faculty ratio of less than fourteen to one is both a resource problem and an opportunity for educational reform. Still, despite the promise of such a low ratio, many sense a lack of community among students, staff, and faculty. In addition, many admitted students require developmental work; financial aid resources for students are limited; student retention is not satisfactory to us; and many believe academic programs, especially general education, lack coherence.

The singular exception to resource scarcity has been the state’s recent research and development investment, which is beginning to have a positive impact in science and technology disciplines. Indeed, research and development activity has significantly increased in the last decade. External grants and contracts now generate revenue equivalent to tuition, but the effect on the University as a whole remains limited.

All that said, faculty and staff work hard and stretch existing resources remarkably far to provide comparatively low-cost and high-quality education, thereby affirming that the most important resource we have at USM remains the intellectual and creative talents of the University’s faculty and staff.

Distinctive Attributes

Components of the University are strong, far stronger than their current reputation would suggest. In a very real sense, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The University’s particular combination of strong liberal arts undergraduate programs with professional and graduate programs is designed to address state, regional, and national needs for an educated citizenry and workforce. New and expanded academic programs reflect responsiveness to external and internal opportunities and imperatives, especially interdisciplinary and integrative studies programs and graduate programs that reflect unique regional opportunities and
unusual regional needs. USM’s strong faculty values both instruction and scholarship, and its superb staff works to offer a high level of University services. Indeed, like most comparable universities, USM offers rigorous academic programs, but like small residential colleges, it also has many small classes. Moreover, USM’s student body increasingly brings diversity in age, cultural background, life experiences, and academic interests. Finally, the Board of Visitors and other community supporters are assets our peer institutions envy. But as is true of any institution, what others know about USM is usually incomplete and often inaccurate.
Achieving National Recognition
for Regional Excellence

The Primacy of Inquiry and Learning
So how are we to proceed? Critical intellectual and practice-based inquiry and learning must be the primary values and fundamental endeavors of a university. Curiosity, inquiry, and learning are critical to development of human potential and our ability consciously to imagine possibilities, create ourselves, and shape our lives, institutions, and institutional practices. A learning culture recognizes that all knowledge is tentative and fosters lifelong critical inquiry in fields vital for human needs and opportunities.

Members of a culture of inquiry and learning relate learning to both theory and experience and develop mutual respect for knowledge bases, practices, disciplines, and interdisciplinary realms. A culture of inquiry requires dialogue and debate to establish rigorous collective standards for what is truly valued as a community. The goals and actions we set out in this plan are all directed toward deepening, enriching, and sustaining engaged and substantive inquiry and learning in all of its various forms and settings. It is through inquiry and learning that the extraordinary transformative effect of education improves the lives of individuals and their communities. This approach will bring the greatest benefits to students and to the region, and it will bring national recognition to our work.

Criteria for Action
To achieve national recognition for regional excellence, we must value and support the following criteria:

- Rigorous academic programming responsive to the diversity of ideas, experiences, and backgrounds of all participants in learning, and responsive to regional needs.
- Exceptional research and creative activities, both academic and applied, essential to the interests of our disciplines, our students, and our community.
- Outstanding service to our colleagues, professions, and community that extends learning.
- Stable and consistent resources aligned with policies and priorities that are critical to effective inquiry and learning.
- Strong coalitions enlarging our capacity to act.
- Effective and regular assessment that improves the University.

Outcomes
If we value and support these criteria, we will be recognized as:

- An invaluable Maine resource worthy of significant support.
- A Tier-1 regional university in national ratings.
- A “doctoral extensive” university by established national criteria.

Although we intend not to be driven by others’ perceptions of us, such recognition will validate our own work and our aspirations for regional excellence.
The Plan

Goals and Actions

How do we achieve this vision of a university? How do we empower ourselves to achieve regional excellence and distinguish the University? A number of goals with specific actions follow. The goals—for achieving academic, organizational, curricular, and managerial excellence—are built on principles and values meant to foster and sustain inquiry and learning. They focus on who we are, what we do, what we hold in common, and how we will proceed.

Goal 1: Actively embrace and support a highly regarded and enduring community of intellectual inquiry and learning.

Building and sustaining a community of inquiry and learning requires dialogue and debate to establish rigorous collective standards and accept responsibility for the transformative possibilities of learning. To achieve such academic excellence, we must:

Action 1.a: Strengthen our culture of intellectual inquiry and learning across all degree programs and throughout the University.

Specific steps:
- Develop a faculty model of strong teachers who are also scholars, creative artists, or service practitioners.
- Build forms of evaluation that assess the culture of intellectual inquiry and learning by means of objective, rigorous, peer-review based analysis to facilitate improvement.
- Evaluate, celebrate, and publicize what we have accomplished and how we have changed.

Action 1.b: Infuse liberal learning in all undergraduate degree programs.

Specific steps:
- Revise and extend inquiry and learning to ensure shared cultural references, to value diversity, and to build competencies for long-term professional success, effective citizenship, and lifelong learning in an information-rich economy.
- Create increased opportunities for students to engage in inquiry through research, analysis, critical reading, and original thought.

Action 1.c: Value scholarship in all of its manifestations.

Specific steps:
- Generate a definition of scholarship unique to each academic unit and relate it to appointment, reappointment, promotion, tenure, and post-tenure review criteria.
- Recognize effective teaching and learning built on engaged and successful scholarship.
- Recognize scholarship that crosses the boundaries of one’s discipline, that strengthens understanding of contemporary social issues, and that contributes to professional practice and pedagogy.

Action 1.d: Relate inquiry and learning to experience at all degree levels.

Specific steps:
- Use local, regional, national, and global linkages and contexts as topics of learning, resources, and extensions of the learning environment.
- Institute service learning throughout the curriculum, both as learning methodology and for the intrinsic value of learning civic responsibility.
**Action 1.e:** Use technology in support of intellectual inquiry and learning. Specific steps:

- Develop technology literacy plans for each degree program relevant to the discipline that provide students with the skills and discernment necessary to locate information in whatever format it is available, to evaluate its appropriateness, and to use it effectively.
- Exploit technology to expand learning opportunities and to enable learning for all students.

**Goal 2:** Deepen and enrich the organizational culture in support of inquiry and learning. Faculty, staff, and students require commonly held and accepted collegial principles and mechanisms of engagement, discourse, governance, and conflict resolution. To achieve organizational excellence, we must:

**Action 2.a:** Enhance diversity, respect, and civility throughout the University community. Specific steps:

- Foster opportunities and forums for regular and open civil discourse, while exploring, discussing, and celebrating diversity; employ mediation processes to facilitate civil discourse and behavior.
- Employ shared governance effectively in establishing an environment that supports inquiry and learning and improves the University.
- Recognize and act on the principle that diversity is a critical strength for a culture of inquiry and learning.
- Ensure a learning and working environment that is intellectually, socially, and physically safe.
- Provide supportive venues and significant opportunities for exploring professional self-understanding of our roles in a community of inquiry.

**Action 2.b:** Foster instructional development as an opportunity to build communities of learning and inquiry. Specific steps:

- Strengthen the Center for Teaching to support research on learning, and develop learning strategies by tapping the considerable recent literature on learning.
- Develop methods for self-reflection that attend to how we teach, not just what we teach, and assess what students learn, not simply content covered.

**Action 2.c:** Institute a University life model for living, learning, and working together. Specific steps:

- Link academic goals to all faculty, staff, and student activities by reducing structural barriers and blurring organizational lines between curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Provide all University members with a welcoming environment, adequate professional development, and assistance programs.
- Respond effectively to the increasingly rich mix of students attending the University by increasing programming that supports non-majority students, transforming the curriculum to be more inclusive, and building diversity among faculty and staff.

**Action 2.d:** Assess and re-imagine coherent organizational groupings that produce effective learning. Specific steps:

- Give priority to interdisciplinary and integrative approaches to learning.
- Build additional intentional learning communities to enhance inquiry and learning.

**Action 2.e:** Recruit and support students eager to engage in learning. Specific steps:

- Attract and retain a greater proportion of highly achieving students.
• Be ambitious in recruiting students from diverse backgrounds and experiences.
• Build strong articulation with University College, the Technical Colleges, and other Maine institutions to attract capable transfer students.
• Build a culture of advising, including expanded student peer mentoring and effective advising programs in all academic units.

**Action 2.f:** Recruit and support professional and classified staff members who are committed, capable, and willing to engage in continuous learning. Specific steps:
• Provide time and resources that enable staff to take advantage of University resources to develop their potential and engage in the University’s cultural enrichment opportunities.
• Provide staff development opportunities for cross-training and training that promotes dialogue and reduces traditional walls within the institution.

**Goal 3:** Build a responsive and coherent curriculum aimed at student success and regional needs. Faculty members have the primary responsibility for developing coherence, for ensuring the value and sustainability of the curriculum, and for instituting effective assessment. To achieve curricular excellence, we must:

**Action 3.a:** Develop a comprehensive first-year program for both first-year and transfer students to ensure a foundation for student success. Specific steps:
• Coordinate with Maine’s high schools to help them provide a curriculum for student success in college and university.
• Create a more effective articulation program for transfer students from Maine institutions.
• Implement a first-year program that offers a common intellectual experience and generates a sense of academic community.
• Embed enhanced reading, writing, quantitative reasoning, diversity, and technology skills in the curriculum, and ensure appropriate assessment.

**Action 3.b** Shape a general education curriculum in which the undergraduate experience reflects a conscious and clearly articulated ensemble of courses, not simply a random set driven by availability. Specific steps:
• Embrace the “Education for Life, Work, and Citizenship” report as a model for educational development.
• Ensure a common learning experience for every student by integration of general education, degree programs, and practical experience with clear learning goals.
• Clarify objectives of general education, integrate students’ learning experiences, and provide multiple paths to achieving general education.
• Ensure the curriculum addresses living in a multicultural world and in an information-rich economy.
**Action 3.c:** Enhance undergraduate degree programs. Specific steps:

- Keep focus on the distinctive USM mission to offer a limited range of liberal arts and professional baccalaureate degrees and primarily professional and applied degrees at the graduate level.
- Establish clear objectives for undergraduate programs, and assess their contribution to liberal learning, development of competencies, and responsiveness to regional opportunities and needs.
- Promulgate learning goals and core competencies for all degree programs.

**Action 3.d:** Foster graduate degree programs that align to unique regional resources or unusual regional human resource needs, as well as their potential to become nationally competitive. Specific steps:

- Emphasize cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary as well as practitioner-oriented graduate degree programs.
- Empower the Graduate Council to direct development of graduate education; evaluate how we develop, organize, fund, and manage graduate degree programs; and review policies and procedures for admission, financial support, and student governance.

**Action 3.e:** Support initiatives to develop unit-based thematic strands for the University. Specific steps:

- Focus program development on realms of inquiry and learning for which specific units exercise University-wide leadership and responsibility but have no monopoly.
- Link thematic strands to learning goals and to faculty development.

**Action 3.f:** Develop a focused plan for research and development funding that focuses on applied, industrial, and interdisciplinary research endeavors, and that interweaves research and development with the curriculum. Specific steps:

- Build linkages and interconnections across the University with external partners for assembling research critical mass.
- Reinvest indirect return in support of research and creative activity across the University; leverage research in arts and humanities, social sciences, and professional programs.

**Action 3.g:** Identify distinctive programs and build selected academic programs of excellence. Specific steps:

- Employ Faculty Senate-led University-wide dialogues to articulate guiding principles and develop appropriate criteria to identify centers of excellence.
- Build a resource investment plan that focuses on programs that serve the University mission.

**Goal 4:** Mobilize institutional resources in an innovative fashion through a more inclusive budget process leading to a clear alignment of budgets with plans and priorities. To achieve managerial excellence, we must:

**Action 4.a:** Revise institutional budgets to invest resources in support of goals and action plans required to build and sustain a culture of inquiry and learning. Specific steps:

- Align budgets with priorities, and focus resources on programs that demonstrate commitment to inquiry and learning.
- Take advantage of the University’s comparative institutional flexibility to be entrepreneurial with respect to alternative revenue sources.
- Review and rationalize instructional capacity and staffing and workload assignments.
**Action 4.b:** Empower deans, department chairs, program directors, and faculty members to be innovative, resourceful, responsive, and responsible for developing a culture of change while drawing on the intellectual and cultural heritage of the traditional university. Specific steps:

- Provide sufficient information for planning and innovative ideas.
- Utilize revenue-sharing approaches that create incentives to invest in inquiry and learning.

**Action 4.c:** Assist students, both undergraduate and graduate, with adequate financial support to accomplish learning goals. Specific steps:

- Collaborate on developing system-wide student financial aid in order to increase student access and help Maine meet its goal of increasing the number of college graduates.
- Increase institutional commitment for need-based student financial aid to position the University to become more competitive in attracting high quality students.
- Increase institution-based scholarships to recruit and retain high achieving students.

**Action 4.d:** Employ appropriate information technology in support of inquiry and learning, support services, and evaluation. Specific steps:

- Provide increased access to services electronically as well as improved access to information and data for decision making.
- Adapt technology to meet expanding needs in classrooms and support services.
- Upgrade library staffing and collections.

**Action 4.e:** Focus resources on the appearance and functionality of the buildings and campus environment. Specific steps:

- Develop a building steward’s model involving building occupants working with Facilities Management to take joint responsibility for building appearance, condition, and upkeep.
- Expand the facilities renovation fund; develop a renovation and rehabilitation schedule.

**Action 4.f:** Build collaborations to extend and sustain our institutional reach, and continue operating like a university larger than our enrollments and faculty size would suggest. Specific steps:

- Draw on regional, national, and global resources to meet regional needs, with each unit developing a partnership plan.
- Develop strategies for providing educational opportunities in workplace sites and elsewhere when appropriate.
- Become a portal for academic programs we cannot support ourselves but which are critical for meeting regional needs.

**Action 4.g:** Centralize the University’s institutional research function to provide adequate information for setting priorities and implementing plans for improvement. Specific step:

- Draw upon University information systems to generate reports in support of program reviews and priority-setting.

**Action 4.h:** Actively inform others of USM faculty, staff, and student accomplishments. Specific steps:

- Promote the value of education and USM’s reputation for excellence in providing rigorous and responsible education in all forums.
- Further develop public relations strategies that provide value to the community and continually inform others of USM’s accomplishments.
- Create and implement development and alumni plans that continually enhance and strengthen University resources.
Conclusion: An Agenda for the Next Decade

The plan presented here provides the vision by which we can succeed. We must now convert the specific steps that follow from the plan’s goals and actions into a concrete agenda of activities, indeed, of imperatives. Beginning in the fall semester of 2001, USM will undertake a work plan each year with a two-year horizon—one always looking at least two years out—toward accomplishing a set of measurable steps to achieve the actions and goals of this plan. Each work plan will identify a set of immediate steps to accomplish and assign specific tasks to senates, councils, and ad hoc committees or task forces. If we are diligent and blessed with a bit of luck, USM will be so successful as to be nationally recognized for its regional excellence.