October 6, 2014

Statement to Students:

Today we are announcing details on the first phase of a plan to transform, and strengthen USM. This plan is reflective of the world around us, which as you know continues to change rapidly – USM needs to be agile enough to evolve. We understand the importance of USM to so many people and thus are doing all we can to secure a financially sustainable future.

There will be questions about our process, such as why this as a first step? The answer is that we are bound by collective bargaining agreements with our faculty and we must follow the requirements of those agreements, which mandate that we notify faculty by October 31 of any layoffs to start the running of an 18-month clock for their payout. Additionally, the changes we are proposing affect the core of what is very important, our offerings to you – the courses provided and the faculty who teach – and it takes time and discussion within many groups for new foundations to be set. We expect this process to go on through December.

There will be future changes, including others that will also affect students. As part of phase II of this process, additional efficiencies in administration will be announced by the end of this semester and we know there are course scheduling issues, cost issues, etc. that all too often contribute to making your academic success at USM more difficult, which we will plan to address. I also want to assure those students in the programs proposed for elimination that we will honor our commitments to teach out those majors on terms consistent with NEASC standards.

While no one likes to eliminate programs or options, our choices are limited: We could ask the Trustees to raise tuition from $7,690 to $10,000 to cover the deficit, or we could close one of our campuses, or take other similar drastic measures.

But this approach, of eliminating just two programs which service 51 students of the 8125 total student body, and proposing the consolidation of others, should allow us to continue to offer 56 undergraduate majors with over 60 areas of specialization, and virtually the same number of credit hours, more efficiently, saving some $6 million towards our $16 million goal.

Greater efficiency, and reduced credit hour requirements in some majors, would make it easier for students to graduate in four years, and to experiment with more courses outside your majors – in some cases even double major.

All this could be accomplished with virtually no layoffs, outside the two departments to be eliminated, depending on the distribution of professors taking the enhanced retirement option by October 20.

We are being strategic and decisive to ensure that USM remains a vibrant, affordable and accessible university – one that serves the needs of you, our students.

Yours,

David Flanagan
President
University of Southern Maine