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May 7, 2020

Dr. Rebecca Wyke  
President  
University of Maine at Augusta  
46 University Drive  
Augusta, ME 04330-9410

Dear President Wyke:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on March 6, 2020 the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Maine at Augusta, the report of the evaluator who visited the institution's off-campus location, and the substantive change proposals to offer an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Substance Use Disorder and a Master's Degree in Cybersecurity, and voted to take the following action:

that the interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Maine at Augusta be accepted;

that the report regarding the University's off-campus instructional location in Rumford, Maine be accepted, inclusion of the location within the institution's accreditation be confirmed, and the University's general approval to establish off-campus locations within Maine be confirmed;

that the report regarding the University's plans to offer an online Advanced Graduate Certificate in Substance Use Disorder be accepted and the program be encompassed within the institution's accreditation with an effective date of March 6, 2020;

that the report regarding the University's plans to offer an online Master's degree in Cybersecurity be accepted and the program be encompassed within the institution's accreditation with an effective date of March 6, 2020;

that the University's accreditation at the graduate level be limited to the Advanced Certificate in Substance Use Disorder and the Master's degree in Cybersecurity and the institution be reminded that, should it plan to offer additional programs at the graduate level, it needs to submit a report to the Commission, in keeping with the policy on Substantive Change;

that the substantive change evaluation scheduled for Spring 2021 be confirmed and the scope of the visit be expanded to include an assessment of the above certificate and degree programs;

that, in addition to the matters specified in our letter of May 6, 2019, the report prepared in advance of the Spring 2021 visit address the University's success in achieving its enrollment and financial goals for the programs, documenting the appropriate level of graduate education, and making progress toward external validation of the programs;

that the comprehensive evaluation scheduled for Spring 2025 be confirmed;

that, in addition to the information included in all self-studies, the self-study prepared in advance of the Spring 2025 evaluation give emphasis to the institution's success in:

1. continuing its progress with respect to key student metrics, including cohort default rates and retention and graduation rates appropriate to the student population and location and mode of delivery;
2. developing and implementing the 2020-2025 strategic plan;
3. initiating its work in graduate education;
4. developing a sustainable budget model given the expected deficit in the current fiscal year.

that if the Commission approves Unified Accreditation for the University of Maine System, the schedule of reports and visits will be reviewed and modified appropriately.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

The interim (fifth-year) report submitted by University of Maine at Augusta was accepted because the University responded satisfactorily to the concerns raised by the Commission in its letters of February 9, 2016 and December 20, 2018, and addressed each of the nine standards, including a reflective essay for Standard 8: *Educational Effectiveness* on student learning and success.

The Commission commends University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) for its deliberate efforts to increase student success of its associate and baccalaureate students as measured by retention and graduation rates appropriate to the institution's student body. More rigorous recruitment, merit scholarships, more selective admissions, and online and class-focused retention and success strategies represent a comprehensive approach to the population served by the University. Similarly, the institution has developed initiatives including increased financial aid and personal financial literacy training aimed at reducing the cohort default rate, down from 22.7% in 2011 to 16.8% in 2016 (reported in 2019). Continued funding for the prison education program and the development of an Academic Services Division represent additional successes for the University.

The Commission also takes favorable note of many aspects of the University's continuing development, including a regular five-year cycle for strategic planning, the increase in full-time faculty, the cooperative work with the University of Southern Maine on developing new master's degrees, and the Fall 2019 opening of the institution's first residence hall reflecting an increase in the number of traditional-aged students. We also note the use of reserves to increase enrollment and the projected deficit of approximately \$1 million for the current fiscal year.

The University's Reflective Essay documented the strengthening of its institutional research and assessment capabilities with the goal of creating and using metrics appropriate to its academic

mission and its student body. The Commission is gratified to see the work being done to ensure that assessment is an integral and ongoing component of academic and student life.

The report regarding the University's off-campus instructional location in Rumford, Maine, was accepted and the location's inclusion in the University's accreditation was confirmed because the location is being managed in substantial compliance with the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*. We note with particular favor the "high touch service model" implemented in Rumford and the students' satisfaction with their educational experience. The University's general approval to establish off-campus locations within the state of Maine is also confirmed because of the institution's overall record in successfully managing its nine instructional sites.

The reports regarding the University's plans to offer an Advanced Certificate in Substance Use Disorder and a Master's degree in Cybersecurity were accepted and the programs encompassed within the institution's accreditation because the proposals were generally consistent with the Commission's standards and policies. We are pleased to note that University of Maine at Augusta will seek external validation of the programs through the International Certification Reciprocity Consortium and the National Security Agency degree certification respectively.

The substantive change evaluation previously scheduled for Spring 2021 is confirmed and the scope of the visit will be expanded to review the successful implementation of the Advanced Certificate in Substance Use Disorder and the Master's degree in Cybersecurity. In the report prepared in advance of the visit, we ask that the University report on achieving its enrollment and financial goals, documenting the appropriate level of graduate education, and making progress toward external validation of the programs. Our standard on *Planning and Evaluation* is pertinent here:

[The institution] identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively. The institution demonstrates its success in strategic, academic, financial, and other resource planning and the evaluation of its educational effectiveness (*Planning and Evaluation*, Statement of the Standard).

We remind you that any plans to offer additional programs at the graduate level will need to be reviewed by the Commission, consistent with our policy on Substantive Change. It is generally the case that before granting general approval at the higher degree level within the institution's range of academic offerings, the Commission expects to see developed capacity at the higher degree, success with initial programs, and, as appropriate, the development of an institutional culture supporting academic programming at the graduate level.

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Spring 2025 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. The items the Commission asks to be given special emphasis within the self-study prepared for the comprehensive evaluation are matters related to our standards on *Students*, *Educational Effectiveness*, *Planning and Evaluation*, *The Academic Program*, and *Institutional Resources*.

The Commission asks that the self-study prepared for the Spring 2025 visit include a focus on the institution's continuing progress with respect to key student metrics, including cohort default rates and retention and graduation rates appropriate to the student population, and location and mode of delivery. We acknowledge UMA's relatively complex student body, and its multiple locations and modes of delivery. Our standards on Students and Educational Effectiveness provide this guidance:

The institution demonstrates its ability to admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. 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 (5.6).

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).

As noted earlier, the University of Maine at Augusta has a five-year cycle of strategic planning. The visit associated with the comprehensive evaluation will occur at the end of the cycle for the 2020-2025 strategic plan, and we ask that the institution's success with that cycle be a focus of the self-study, documenting and assessing the institution's "demonstrable record of success in implementing the results of its planning" (2.5).

With implementation of the Advanced Certificate in Substance Use Disorder and the Master's degree in Cybersecurity, the University of Maine at Augusta will have made a significant entry into graduate education. The focus of the self-study on the institution's success in this endeavor will be informed by the portion of the standard on The Academic Program that addresses Graduate Education. We note in particular:

The institution's graduate programs have cohesive curricula and require scholarly and professional activities designed to advance the student substantially beyond the educational accomplishments of a baccalaureate degree program. The demands made by the institution's graduate programs on students' intellectual and creative capacities are also significantly greater than those expected at the undergraduate level; graduate programs build upon and challenge students beyond the levels of knowledge and competence acquired at the undergraduate level. The institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degree programs assesses the relationship and interdependence of the two levels and utilizes the results for improvement (4.24).

Students who successfully complete a graduate program demonstrate that they have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as the program's objectives (4.28).

As a final area of emphasis for the self-study developed in advance of the Spring 2025 comprehensive evaluation, we ask that UMA include a focus on the institution's success in developing a sustainable budget model given the expected deficit in the current fiscal year. As articulated in our standard on *Institutional Resources*, "The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit" (7.14).

Finally, we understand that the University of Maine System plans to propose to the Commission that it consider a substantive change request to accredit the System, to encompass the institutions within the System. Upon approval of the request, the Commission will review the scheduled visits and reports for the institutions and develop a revised schedule for the System.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the interim report submitted by University of Maine at Augusta, the report of the evaluator who visited the institution's off-campus location, and the substantive change reports, and hopes the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation in the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education in 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 and the head of the University of Maine System of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending copies of

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this letter to James Erwin and to Dannel Malloy. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Quigley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each name being capitalized and prominent.

David Quigley

DPA/sjp

Enclosures    Pp70 Procedures for Substantive Change Evaluation Visit  
                  Pp44 Public Disclosure of Information About Affiliated Institutions

cc:    James Erwin, Esq.  
       Dannel Malloy  
       Visiting evaluators