To: University of Maine System Board of Trustees and Chancellor James Page
From: Hannah Cole, Margaret Chase Smith Policy Scholar, University of Maine
Date: April 18, 2017
Subject: Transferability of Credits and Program Integration Within the University of Maine System

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Issue:

The ability to transfer courses within the University of Maine System (UMS) is important because it allows transfer students to save time and money by keeping them from taking courses that they are unprepared for and from repeating courses. Previous research indicates multiple issues relating to transferability nationally. This research discovered particular issues in Maine and suggests changes to limit costs and serve Maine students

Previous research on transferability:

Transferability pertaining to students

1. "Transfer students must adjust on several levels including psychological, academic, and environmental." In a study of transfers from community colleges, it was found that the students who leave school typically do not do so because of a lack of talent, but because of other factors that make the adjustment difficult. These include finding the courses at their new 4-year institution are a faster pace in class, lack of support, or that the course content was not aligned with their previous courses. (Lopez and Jones, 2017)
2. Success for students wishing to attain a bachelor's degree is in part due to the level of academic intensity in their first year of college, with those who do not maintain a full course load seeing a completion rate of almost one third of their counterparts who maintain a full course load. (Doyle, 2009)
3. The decision to transfer is an economic one. Many students choose to transfer to "major universities" from "local/regional institutions" due to the "higher returns to degrees granted by more prestigious universities." (Grimes, Rezek, and Campbell, 2013)
4. It is more likely for a student starting at a 4-year institution to earn a baccalaureate degree than those starting at a community college, "even when comparing students who are similar in many background and academic characteristics." (Roska and Calcagno, 2008)

Transferability pertaining to systems

1. National accreditation does not guarantee transferability for many schools. Approximately 84% of institutions look at accreditation as a factor and many of them require the credits to be from regionally accredited schools. (United States Government Accountability Office, 2005)
2. Articulation agreements are a common solution to transferability between community colleges and four-year institutions. (Buchen and Le Cornu, 2005)
3. Some states work to streamline the transfer of credits among their public institutions through legislation or initiatives that establish "statewide transfer agreements, common core curricula, and common course numbering systems, and encourage institutions and others to make transfer information available to the public." (United States Government Accountability Office, 2005)

University of Maine System Background:
Transferability issues in Maine must be understood against the backdrop of other UMS developments. A 2005 Maine state law prohibits the current seven campuses from being moved or closed and helps to ensure that higher education is available throughout the state. As the UMS worked on the integration of campuses through the One University plan, program integration became a major element. One University is intended to cut costs by "[reducing] redundancies in the system's course offerings and [increasing] campus collaborations… while making programs more attractive to students to boost enrollment."[1] If the UMS follows through to create "One University," the ability to attend multiple campuses or transfer between campuses is assumed. Program Integration has completed two rounds, with transferability as one focus.

Research Questions:
1. How can the University of Maine System develop a clear and simple process to make the evaluation of transfer credits within the system more uniform and predictable?

2. Has Program Integration helped to resolve some of the confusion and discrepancies surrounding transfer credits between UMS campuses and is the process clear and accessible to all transfer students and advisors?

Research design:
This memo focuses on the accessibility of the University of Maine flagship campus to students transferring from another campus. Research included interviews of department chairs in Chemistry, English and Psychology at UMaine, UMF, USM, and UMA. Those campuses were chosen because UMPI, UMFK, and UMM all have very small numbers of students who apply to transfer to UMaine. UMM also has a distinctly different relationship to UMaine than the other campuses as it was recently named a satellite campus of UMaine. Chemistry, English, and Psychology were selected because they each have a different structure and were all involved in the second round of Program Integration. Chemistry has a more hierarchical curriculum compared to Psychology and English. These subjects are very common within the framework of general education requirements and courses can be found at all UMS campuses, though not all campuses have majors or minors available.

School	Chem Major	Chem Minor	English Major	English Minor	Psych Major	Psych Minor
UMaine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
USM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UMF	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UMPI	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UMM	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UMA	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
UMFK	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

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[1] Nick McCrea. "UMaine System hires new vice chancellor to spearhead academic collaboration." *Bangor Daily News*, July 5, 2016.

Findings:
The UMS has developed a Transfer Equivalency System that is available online via Mainestreet. This system allows students and advisors to look up courses and their equivalents at other schools, both in the UMS and from other schools that have pre-approved transfer credits with our campuses. While the system is fairly straightforward, a couple of the interviewees mentioned that some of their students had found it confusing or otherwise difficult to use. Within the UMS, there are four types of credits that are evaluated: direct course equivalents, general education/core, general elective credit, and subject elective.[2] Looking at the template, it is understandable that those who are unfamiliar with how transferring works or have limited experience with technology could have difficulty using the system without guidance.

In addition, interviews revealed that transferability alone might not be the most pressing issue for integration among the campuses, but that the Program Integration (PI) processes need to be discussed when looking at transferability. After speaking to people who were involved in the Program Integration processes, one theme became very clear: communication. Every interviewee said that communication was lacking in several aspects. When the UMS began discussing One University, many of the faculty felt left out and unheard, and after starting Program Integration, many were concerned by the lack of structure in the process. Some of these concerns are not new and have been reported following criticism during public commentary sessions with the trustees. And following a meeting in May 2016, board Chairman Sam Collins stated, "we don't want to work in a vacuum and we need to know their concerns," referring to the faculty.[3] A factor that added to the worrisome nature of the One University plan for many faculty members was the financial state of the System and the large cuts in employment that began mostly in 2014, particularly at USM.

However, despite the struggles faculty members noted with the Program Integration and communication from the UMS, many of the interviewees were optimistic about the opportunities that could arise from more collaboration among the campuses.

For the most part, general education transferability has been sorted out and the departments have known equivalents for many courses.

The main problems with transferability lie in the unique qualities of each program. Many of the programs also have different foci, which make the course offerings and requirements different. All the departments use different teaching methods and have different environments with their students. As one faculty member pointed out, an important part of education is the discussion that happens outside the classroom with peers and mentors. Each campus wants to make sure their students' interests are represented, which means different things for each school. Some of the campuses have much larger non-traditional student bodies while some have a largely traditional college atmosphere. Each program has

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[2] "Types of Credit." *University of Maine System*, 2017.
[3] Noel K. Gallagher. "Faculty members question UMaine System's 'One University' plan." *Portland Press Herald*, May 23, 2016.

its own set of prerequisites that are necessary for a student to have a complete education in the program. As one of the interviewees pointed out, graduates represent their programs and each program has a vested interested in having its students become solid representatives.

All of the Program Integration teams discussed these issues and provided some starting points to address them, particularly the development of a common set of learning outcomes for introductory courses. However, the PI reports were published over a year ago and none of the team members have heard anything about follow up on this work.

Another concern that arose among the PI teams was that based on student populations and resources at the smaller campuses, they may not be able to offer courses of the same level as the larger campuses. But there has been no system-wide evaluation of course outcomes to know if this is the case and it was suggested that a more thorough study be done to assess what is actually being taught at each campus to have a better idea of how to move forward with integration.

<u>Policy Recommendations:</u>
While the UMS needs to be fiscally sound, it also needs to provide quality education for Maine students. In this case, quality seems to mean ensuring a diversity of programs across the campuses that cater to each school's student body and allocating resources accordingly. Consolidating certain administrative duties across campuses is beneficial and cost effective, but academic integration should be assessed on the basis of education rather than cost and should largely be guided by faculty members who work with students on a daily basis. The UMS needs to be transparent and communicative about ongoing changes, or reports of concerns could scare off prospective students from both Maine and out of state. To achieve these goals, the UMS should:

1. Conduct a system-wide academic outcomes study for some mid-level courses to evaluate the level of material that is being taught and absorbed by students.
2. Evaluate the strengths of each program by having faculty put together a detailed summary of what their program focuses on. Many of the programs have entirely different focuses (think clinical versus research psychology) and attempting to thoroughly integrate very different programs may be problematic.
3. Sort out Program Integration before the campuses establish a system-wide transferability agreement. There is no sense in having faculty and administrators put the time and effort into establishing a system that could include many classes that might be changed or eliminated by program integration.
4. Have a design for academic integration that is created with both administrators and faculty members. This will make work for the Program Integration teams more structured and clarify some of the issues that came up in the second round of PIT.
5. Make monthly public reports that provide information about updates to academic integration along with other pertinent information about One University not found in the most recent System releases over the past year.

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