Letters of Support

Dear Chancellor Pattenaude and UMS Trustees –

Please excuse the length of this message but I believe it is necessary in order for me to present you with a cogent rationale for why I believe you should reverse the University of Maine’s decision to eliminate the Department of Public Administration (PA), the program from which I received my B.A. in 1999. As a City Manager, I certainly understand the financial crunch that all of us are facing and that tough decisions need to be made in order to balance our budgets. However, I believe the decision to eliminate one of the oldest PA programs in the country is both short-sighted and unfair. Below are four areas I wish for you as Trustees to seriously consider when evaluating whether the decision to eliminate the Department of Public Administration should be implemented.

First, I am disturbed that a program that prepares future government and non-profit managers was given so little regard by University President Robert Kennedy and the Academic Program Prioritization Working Group (APPWG). We would not consider eliminating the same type of program for our private-sector business leaders (in fact, UMaine is going to enhance it under President Kennedy’s “UMaine 150 Plan”), so why would the flagship campus of the University of Maine System get rid of a program that has helped prepare so many federal, state, and local government leaders for their public roles in Maine and across the globe? There will always be a need for qualified city and town managers, state commissioners, federal policy analysts, etc. Eliminating the PA program from the University of Maine not only virtually ensures that a UMaine graduate will not hold one of these critical positions, but it also devalues the degrees that thousands of students have received in this field since the program was first offered in 1945. As it stands now, the UMaine Public Administration master’s program is the only such accredited program in the entire University system!

Second, while I am not questioning the integrity of any member of the APPWG and respect the long hours that I am sure each of them had to put in to making these tough decisions, I would like to point out the following:

• The Dept. of Public Administration was not directly represented on the APPWG. The program was recommended to be eliminated. It is the only department recommended to be completely eliminated in the entire APPWG plan!

• The College of Business, Public Policy, & Health – the College in which the PA program falls within – was represented by its Dean and a Social Work professor that works in that College. The Social Work program was not recommended to be cut. Some staff positions were recommended to be eliminated, as was one section of the Economics program but again the only department recommended to be eliminated was Public Administration (out of the ENTIRE University)!

• The College of Engineering was represented by its Dean and a Civil Engineering professor. While some restructuring of undergraduate and graduate degrees was suggested, no engineering programs (including Civil Engineering) were eliminated.

• The College of Natural Sciences, Forestry and Agriculture was represented by its Dean and a professor from Biology and Ecology. Degrees were combined, financial support of some laboratories was eliminated, and three departments were merged but no programs (including Biology & Ecology) were eliminated.
• The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was represented by its Dean and an Art professor. Four majors were “suspended” and others reduced but no programs (including Arts) were eliminated.

• The College of Education and Human Development was represented by its Dean and an education professor. While some positions were eliminated and programs downsized or “reevaluated”, no programs (including Education) were eliminated.

The above facts taken from the APPWG report reveal that many of the cuts – at least those in the College of Business, Public Policy, & Health – are being made on the back of one program: the Department of Public Administration. A little over ten years ago when I was an undergraduate, the PA program was not under the College of Business. When it merged there as part of a cost saving measure, I always found it to be an awkward fit – business operates for profit, government operates to provide service to citizens for no “profit”. I believe if the program were to fall within another College it would have been spared such a Draconian cut because it provides a prestigious, accredited program. As of now, it seems to be the “sacrificial lamb” in the College of Business, Public Policy, & Health.

Third, UMaine has a long list alumni who are in vital roles in state and local government in Maine. Please consider the following:

• 87 graduates from the PA program currently work in Maine state government

• Nearly 80 graduates of the PA program currently work in some form of Maine local government

• The former State Commissioner of Administration and Finance and current Vice President for Finance for the University of Maine System holds a Masters of Public Administration (MPA) from UMaine

• The DOT commissioner (and former commissioner), the Associate Commissioner of Corrections, and a Public Utilities Commissioner (formerly Economic Development) are all graduates of the UMaine PA program

• Since the University began tracking donations in 1975, 485 alumni from the PA program have donated a combined $1,431,898 to the University

Finally, there has been a coordinated effort for several years to create an Academy of Public Service, which would in effect combine the University of Southern Maine, University of Maine at Augusta, and University of Maine Public Administration programs. This plan would not only make all programs better and allow more citizens access to this important field of study, but it also is a viable alternative for cost saving and efficiencies gained as opposed to eliminating the program in its entirety. I urge you to consider this measure instead of gutting an entire department from my alma mater. More information on this plan can be obtained from Professor Carolyn Ball, who has been cc’ed on this message.

When President Kennedy announced the “UMaine 150” plan he said, “We must rededicate ourselves to our core principles and timely priorities.” What better core principal for our flagship campus than that of training students to be good public servants? In fact, the University’s mission statement reads, in part: “The University of Maine has statewide responsibility for those educational, research, and public
service programs associated with its designation as Maine’s land-grant university and sea-grant college.” Please note the University’s own emphasis on “public service,” the core of the PA program that it is proposing to eliminate.

It is for the reasons above that I ask you to please reconsider President Kennedy’s decision to go along with the APPWG’s recommendation to cut the Public Administration Department. Thank you for your service on the Board of Trustees and for your consideration of my (lengthy) comments.

Scott T. Morelli

City Manager | City of Gardiner
November 15, 2010

Professor Harlan Onsrud, Ph.D.
Chair, PCRRC
University of Maine

Dear Sir:

Greetings and best wishes! I’m writing to voice my opinion that the Public Administration program at the University of Maine Orono should not be discontinued. (eliminated)

In 2003 I was working in finance for Affiliated Healthcare Systems and looking to further my education. I chose to pursue the graduate certificate in Healthcare Administration offered through the College of Business, Public Policy and Health. As I progressed through the program I learned the education credits I was earning could be applied towards a Master’s degree in Public Administration. I spoke with department Chair Tom Taylor and we decided that though I didn’t aspire to a career in public administration, the degree could well prepare me to work in the area of non-profit, something I planned to do as my career with Affiliated winds down. I was accepted into the program, graduating in 2007. I've been able to apply my MPA background in my work with two non-profit organizations, the Susan G. Komen Foundation and the Gifts of Music, a local non-profit.

The people administering the PA program and instructors who teach the material are all experts in their field. They worked tirelessly to ensure that all the students in our class were well grounded in all areas of public administration. My professors, Carolyn Ball, Ken Nichols, and Ed Laverty, to name several, held us to the task and produced graduates who we’re well prepared to take their place in the field of public and non-profit administration. I will always think of it as one of the best educational experiences of my life. I’m grateful to have been accepted into the program and proud of my achievements there.

My experience aside, the BA program is the oldest public administration program in the county and that alone should be reason enough to consider keeping it going. To be the first and the longest running of anything in America is something indeed; to discontinue the program rather than build on its already excellent programs is, in my opinion, folly.

Those of us who have achieved the MPA at UM posses something of great value. Credentials that tie us to the longest running public administration program in the nation; what happens to that value when those same credentials are tied to a program that is discontinued? It disappears. Please don’t let that happen.

In closing I’ll add that our federal, state, and municipal governments, as well as our non-profits need well trained competent people to run them. I’m sure you’d agree. That need is not going to go away in the future and neither should the Public Administration program at UM. What they produce is needed and will be for years to come.

Yours very truly,

David Pilotte
11/09/2010

To Harlan Onsrud

I am writing today to ask that you reconsider the proposal to eliminate the Public Administration Department at the University of Maine as a cost saving measure. I believe the proposal to eliminate the Public Administration department in spite of strong student enrollment statistics demonstrates that the University values science students over humanities students, which I believe to be contrary to the mission of a state university. I believe also, that the state sees more return on investment in the education of Public Administration students in terms of increased economic development and other benefit to Maine’s most vulnerable citizens, than we do in educating scientists who are much more likely to leave the state after completing their education.

And thirdly, I believe pursuing an online format in an effort to increase access to a single program at USM pushes the program into a global market in which the program is not going to be able to compete favorably. Although many local students value the high quality of a classroom based education at U Maine, once that opportunity is removed, the purchasing decision moves from what is the best quality I can get in my region, to what is the best quality I can get period. If forced to pursue higher education online, suddenly all programs become more accessible and ones with greater brand recognition, such as Harvard, are going to seem more valuable in the job market than a degree from USM. I believe the proposal will drive tuition dollars and enrollments out of the state, reducing revenue more than the savings achieved by consolidating the program in Portland. If programs need to be consolidated, offering Public Administration degrees in Orono would mean that they are in the most central location for all Maine residents wishing to commute, and offer the greatest brand recognition value to students. Among my associates, a degree from the University of Maine would have greater perceived valued in the job market than would the same degree from the University of Southern Maine, regardless of whether or not the actual quality is superior. If programs are to be consolidated, the logical choice in my mind is to consolidate on the Orono campus.

Thank you for sharing these thoughts with the Faculty Senate Sub-Committee.

Sincerely,

Ann Homola, MPA
University of Maine alumna
Director, Provider Recruitment & Retention
Eastern Maine Medical Center
4/1/2010

To University of Maine’s higher administration

I am shocked and dishearten to hear the news of elimination of our department (Department of Public Administration).

How it is possible?

We are bringing this department to the international arena each and every year in deferent ways.

With the knowledge- gold standard in public administration that we have received from this department, are being disseminated through international journals, newspapers, and in medias. We are representing this department by attending and presenting research papers in conferences and other universities nationally and internationally. We are receiving global awards, which definitely reflects our department’s image in particular, and the University of Maine in general.

We are proud to be an alumni of this department, which is one of the oldest department in USA (old is gold), and also accredited by NASPAA. Professors like Carolyn Ball, Kenneth Nichols, Tomas Taylor and Khi V. Thai (Now in Florida International University) are nationally known; and now they have gone beyond national, i.e. International.

This prestigious department making us socially, mentally, and spiritually strong each and every day.

I strongly oppose this decision.

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Shakeel Mahmood
MBA, MCA, MPA(USA), PGT(Harvard), MIAM(Lond), FIBA(Lond)
Coordinator
Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (MEF)
Office of the Executive Director
ICDDR,B
GPO BOX 128
Dhaka 1000
Bangladesh
Voice # (880-2) 8860523-32/3104
Fax: # (880-2) 8823116, 8826050, 8812530, 8811568
Web: www.icddrb.org
I am writing this morning as a second year graduate student in the Public Administration program in Orono. As a non-traditional student and considerably older than the median age for students (I turn 55 tomorrow), I was welcomed with open arms by the public administration department. My experiences with the program as an undergraduate were so rewarding and I was pleasantly surprised to find that, although I have worked in non-profits my entire career, I had so much more to learn. All of my courses have been directly applicable to my work in public health care delivery and research and now economic development. Rather than proving to be a tedious process, I have relished the interactions with professors and students and have enhanced my work in this community. I firmly believe that the PA program would represent a significant loss for this region and the State of Maine. Supporting the educational efforts of dedicated students who are committed to serving their communities is so important for Maine, particularly in light of the economic challenges we face and the critical need for services and support for our citizens. Non-profit and public service organizations are often the only lifeline for people in need and, without the opportunity to train in this field, the state and we as individuals will be the loser. In addition, the training and education provided through the public administration program are developing the “new experts” in this field, persons who will effectively follow the laws and rules as they pertains to this field but will be familiar with the nuances and roads to be navigated. This can only be effectively achieved through the excellent education provided by the faculty and staff of the PA program. Although student registrations were low, the fact of the matter is that each of these graduates represent a critical asset to the state and appropriate education and expertise-building training is the key. In addition, the connections I have built through the program have already served to be an asset in my “real world” of work.

I hope that the University of Maine, an institution that I deeply respect – returning to college to reach my educational goals (goals that I have held for more than 30 years) has injected me with renewed passion and energy in my field. I hope that the powers that be will reconsider dismantling this program and will be open to creative planning to save the MPA program for future public and non-profit servants.

A last note – I have had the pleasure of learning with Professors Ball, Nichols, Taylor and Laverty as well as many of the adjunct professors, and have appreciated their depth of knowledge and commitment to guiding future PA and MPA graduates.

Thank you in advance for your attention.

Vicki L Rusbult

40 Harlow Street

Bangor, ME 04401
(207) 942-6389, ext. 3238
Ladies & Gentlemen:

Good afternoon.

My name is Hugo Alvarez. I am a 1995 graduate from the University of Maine. I received my B.A., with distinction, in Public Administration and Political Science. I then went on to graduate from Tulane law school in New Orleans, and today I am the managing partner of the Alvarez & Barbara, LLP law firm in Miami.

I could not have done any of that if I had not been fortunate enough to have such great professors like Prof. Ball, Prof. Laverty, and Prof. Taylor. I sincerely thank them for everything they ever did for me, and now I want to help them keep helping other students like myself. And please understand that of all my education, including my law degree, I am proudest of my Public Administration degree and my time spent in Orono.

Therefore, from down here in sunny South Florida, I am begging you not to cut the program.

Let me just say that my story is a bit unique, and the type of story that illustrates the greatness of both the Public Administration program and its caring professors.

My parents are from Cuba who came to this country fleeing Fidel Castro's harsh communist dictatorship. I was fortunate enough to have been born, and raised in Miami, Florida.

I was also fortunate enough to have been offered an athletic scholarship to attend the University of Maine and play football there. But more importantly, I was given an opportunity to get a top notch education. And I took advantage of that opportunity.

College for me was daunting. My parents, not being from this country, had little knowledge of what the "college experience" was all about. Dorm living and dorm food was foreign to them (and me). The weather, well, that is another story. But suffice to say that I had never once seen snow prior to my arrival in Maine, and I have only seen snow 1 time since.

After getting lost in during my first year I finally found my way. I found my way thanks to a challenging curriculum that was being taught by the many bright and energetic professors that comprise the Department of Public Administration. They challenged us and inspired us.

I often tell people the story of how Prof. Ball made us secure an email account and made us all email her and respond to her email. She told us that email would be the future, and how we will all communicate in the public sector and business world via email in the future. Not understanding the big picture, I thought the assignment was silly at the time, but I did it nonetheless. My first experience with email was at the direction of a professor who had the foresight to see the future, and ensured that we all not only saw it took, but would be prepared for the challenges that lied ahead in a changing world.

The greatness in the program for me was not only the approach to ensure that we were prepared to face challenges in the "real" world, but how we were also all taught how to think for ourselves and think critically of what was going on around us. They taught us to fight to correct the wrongs that were being committed, and improve on the things that are right.
I know times are tough. As a business owner, I feel the pain. But you will only be making matters worse by cutting Public Administration. You will be tarnishing the University of Maine's good name, and the degree of so many alums like myself.

The Public Administration program has such a storied tradition and stellar reputation. If anything, it is a program that should be highlighted and hailed as a model of excellence and used to illustrate all that is great in higher education and the University of Maine system.

Please do the right thing and please do not tarnish my degree and my many fond memories of my time in snowy Orono. Please keep the Public Administration department alive.

If you need anything else from me, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at:

halvarez77@msn.com
Tel: 305-263-7700 (office)
Cell: 305-984-8820

Thank you again for your attention to this matter.

Go Black Bears!

Best Regards,

Hugo Alvarez
Class of '95
To Whom It May Concern,

I just wanted to share my thoughts about the proposed elimination of the Department of Public Administration.

Understanding the argument that the department is small and that it does not serve a large number of UMaine students, I would like to make the argument for its continuation. The students that graduate from these programs serve a very important purpose to the citizens of Maine. Many of its graduates serve as Town Managers, State government employees, work in non-profits and generally allow a rural state such as ours to have professional managers at the helm of our municipalities, state government and our non-profit organizations. At this time of cutbacks and doing more with less it is important to produce people who are qualified to serve in these fields with the knowledge and skills that will allow these organizations to succeed. Now is not the time to discourage public service.

Financially these programs may not make sense, but the government and non-profits exists to accomplish the things that are needed but not profitable. Creating the leaders to run these organizations could be looked at through the same lens.

On a more personal note, I feel very proud and fortunate to have received my degree in Public Management from one of the first schools to offer such a program. The small size of the program and the personal attention that we received from our professors makes the program what it is and made my experience at UMaine great. It would be a real shame to loose such an asset for not only UMaine but for the citizens of the State.

Respectfully,

Justin L. Poirier
B.A. Public Management 2008
The note below was posted on Facebook.com on a group bulletin board established by current students Matt Donahue, Benjamin Breadmore, and Evan Boutlier. On facebook, these students have set up a group called, "Petition to save the UMaine Public Administration Department."

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Cheryl White Rankin I received my BA in Public Admin from UMaine, and am convinced I wouldn't have the great job I'm enjoying now without the knowledge I gained from that program. I'm now the assistant budget director at Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech). The degree develops skills in so many areas of public service. It's ...not limited to municipal management by any means, though it's a critical source of development for those interested in it. The professors in the program when I was enrolled in the early 90s were dedicated, and really challenged us to THINK and apply ourselves. There were no skate-through automatic "A+" courses. Dr. Taylor encouraged me to make some grad courses part of my undergrad study, for which I'm eternally grateful. To end this program would be a crime.
To Whom It May Concern,

I would like to express my support for preserving the Public Administration program here at the University of Maine. It would be a shame to eliminate a program which offers so much solid, practical skills. When I decided to go back to school as an employees here, I chose public administration for that reason. I wanted practical knowledge that I didn't get as an undergraduate (though I loved my experiences at Bates College). Today, you need both knowledge sets to succeed (the theoretical and practical). The MPA program is really a good balance of both.

Dara McIntire
Bates College 2003
University of Maine, MPA 2010

office: (207-581-4133) / (cell: 207-356-1622)
dara.mcintire@umit.maine.edu
http://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu
Dear Harlan Onsrud;

I am writing to you in your leadership role of the Faculty Senate of the University of Maine. I am concerned that the public administration program at UMO is being discontinued. Your name was given to me by Michael Grillo. I am currently a part time adjunct lecturer working with the Office of Professional Development teaching mental health certification courses. I am the former president of the American Society of Public Administration Maine Chapter. On July 28, 2010 the USM system Board of Trustees was presented with a letter and resolution from our society regarding the importance of continuing the University of Maine Public Administration program. I have attached copies of these documents. I also presented these documents to the Board of Trustees in person on September 13, 2010. After that meeting I was asked by the Bangor Daily news to meet with their editorial board, which I plan to do with some of my ASPA colleagues. (mostly town managers, and state government officials but others who have been active in our group). It seems that in your role we might consider inviting you to attend that meeting as well. Especially if you join our association (lol).

I am truly a product of the USM system. I am a graduate of the University of Maine at Augusta with an AA, University of Maine at Farmington with a BA, and the University of Maine at Orono with an MPA (honors). I have been employed by the State of Maine since January 2001, Served on the Waterville City Council, Waterville School Board and the Kennebec Water District. I also founded, owned and operated a Workers Compensation Claims management and vocational rehabilitation company for 14 years.

For the last 4 years I have been part of an initiative in Maine State Government called Bend the Curve. Led by Arthur Davis of the Maine Department of Labor (http://www.maine.gov/labor/bendthecurve/index.shtml), and Walter Lowell of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/btc/index.shtml) they have trained over 35 Continuous Improvement Practitioners to facilitate value stream mapping, kaizen, and other process analysis functions for various departments realizing significant savings. Additionally, I have been writing a blog on isixsigma.com that started with an article about lean government. http://blogs.isixsigma.com/archive/introduction_to_lean_government.html . [This is an example of how my learnings at UMO have contributed to innovation in State Government.] I also did some research about your professional expertise you certainly understand the metrics of measuring work. Additionally, your writing and research about the public commons of information is a critical concern if untrained public administrators try to utilize statistical and other collected demographic data for their own purposes rather for the public good. I do not claim to understand all the concerns related to GIS data, I do know that data is skewed every day to make a point and the general public has not idea anymore who to believe. If we can establish some standards for measuring work in the public sector, the computation of FTE (full time equivalents) can be accurately predicted. I realize this is just the beginning of this conversation but I believe you get the gist of my point.
I believe this is a time to innovate and circle the wagons under the flagship program at Orono, collaborating with the Muskie School, the Margaret Chase Smith Center, USM and the UMA programs to develop an innovative Program that would include a melding of the current academic programs into one Public Policy and Administration College and adding an administrative process analysis program or Lean and Efficient Government Theme that has been initiated in state government under the title of Bend the Curve. This would assure future University of Maine Public Administration graduates know how to manage and lead effective government providing managers and trained professionals to governments throughout the US and the world. There are few accredited programs in this area in the United States and as a land grant university the UM system would be one of the first to develop an accredited program in lean and effective government.

I would like to work the Faculty Senate to present a solid unified proposal to continue Public Administration in the University of Maine system. Please let me know your thoughts about this and how I might help support this effort. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely

Steve Crate
[Rehabilitation Counselor]
[Dept. of Labor]
Please note: In addition to these emails, many of our alums wrote directly to the President or Board of Trustees.