

To: Jeff Hecker, Provost  
From: François Amar, Dean of Honors  
Re: UMaine Strategic Values Statements

Date: February 15, 2019

This report incorporates feedback on the UMaine's three Strategic Values Statements from a survey distributed to Honors faculty and staff during the week of Feb. 1-8. In addition to the 4 questions suggested in the memo, I asked respondents to comment on how the Honors College currently addresses these values and how it could enhance its fulfillment of them. A common theme through many of the comments was the explicit inclusion of students in values II and III.

## **I. Fostering Learner Success**

The university is a community committed to fostering learning opportunities for all of its members. We celebrate the diversity of our community and are committed to creating a safe and respectful environment within which all learners can flourish. We create rich learning opportunities in the classroom, laboratory, studio, field, and community as well as the spaces within which students live, work, and socialize. We create academic and co-curricular pathways for success and assure that our students are prepared for successful careers and rich lives. Our faculty and staff are life-long learners and we are committed to their professional development over the span of their careers. Our community welcomes learners who do not easily fit the traditional definition of "student" and we are committed to their learning success.

*There was general agreement that this statement does a good job of capturing the paths to fostering student success and articulating the diversity of learners being served. One commenter suggested that the phrase "challenging environment" be used instead of "safe environment" as the former would emphasize the educational mission.*

*Two goals emerging from the feedback were 1) A commitment to updating classroom facilities across campus would ensure "rich learning opportunities" for all. The importance of updating of classroom floors, paint and furniture as well as new technology was stressed. 2) There would need to be more emphasis on academic disciplines, research, and theoretical models that reflect the "diversity of our community." Support for more courses, even minors or majors, in disciplines such African-American Studies, Queer Studies and so on would be important.*

*Strategies to pursue these goals included, 1) Seed grants to catalyze collaborative learning; 2) Workshops that teach faculty how to design their curriculum to help students develop their learning skills in an active learning classroom; and 3) Pushing the use of more inclusive language in the classroom and creating awareness of disparities, hierarchies, oppressive structures, et al that are associated with the employees department and/or discipline*

The university is already successful in this realm so benchmarks should aim at showing improvement: *Indicators of success* that students that feel supported by both structure of classes, resources available and emotionally supported in their classroom could include 1) increased persistence in their major/college and 2) responses on surveys that reference positive learning experiences.

*The Honors College already fulfills this value through its small, discussion-based preceptorials, commitment to student success, and encouragement of civil discourse among varied voices. The HC also offers rich learning opportunities through its thesis process and service, travel and conference activities. The core Civilizations sequence has evolved to include a wider variety of voices in its "Great Books" curriculum; student panels are used in several lecture slots but more could be done in this arena. More could be done to increase diversity in the student body to include more transfer, nontraditional, and international students: our strategic planning effort is considering these issues as it moves forward. Articulation of skills-based and service learning opportunities at an earlier point in the Honors journey is also underway.*

## II. Creating and Innovating for Maine and Beyond

At the core of the university's mission is the creation of new knowledge. Fulfillment of this mission takes a wide variety of forms. As Maine's Land and Sea Grant University we are committed to creating knowledge that impacts the social, cultural, and economic well-being of the state. At the same time, the impact of our creativity is not limited to the state's borders. Innovation is present in all aspects of our operation. Our community encompasses designers, builders, makers, and discoverers working in and across a remarkable range of contexts. We champion this work and we apply it in the service of our state, our region, and the world.

*For this value*, the list "designers, builders, makers, and discoverers" clearly emphasizes applied forms of knowledge; in that sense, it doesn't capture the "wide variety of forms [of new knowledge creation]" that the first sentences highlight. The addition of "scholars" and "thinkers" to the "designers..." list would make this a healthier strategic value for the university to strive towards. Research is not explicitly mentioned in this paragraph! This paragraph could also explicitly emphasize the valuable learning experiences for students that participate in the creation of knowledge through research and innovation. Also the impact of knowledge creation on the traditional classroom is not articulated.

*UMaine is quite successful* in supporting undergraduate research but a *useful goal* in support of the inclusion of students as knowledge creators is to support even more undergraduate research experiences with particular emphasis on first-generation and underserved students as well promoting ways to include first and second-year students in research and creative activity.

*Strategies* to pursue these goals include finding more funding for undergraduate research, encouraging faculty to enlist undergraduate students, and creating a clearinghouse or webpage for student opportunities to be listed. Courses that go beyond the textbook to provide projects and experiences for students should also be considered.

*Indicators of success* of this goal would include differential increase in the number of students being awarded grants and fellowships to conduct research and creative activity, increase in student conference participation, and for Honors, increase in percentage of students finishing a thesis.

*The Honors College* is focused on student contributions to research and is connected to many creative research efforts at UMaine, including the rigorous Honors thesis process. It has also developed and fostered the Research Collaborative model and implemented a number of instances such as the Sustainable Food Systems RC, Servant Heart RC (Sierra Leone), the Genomics RC, and the Margaret Chase Smith Recipe Collection RC to name a few. The HC seeks to improve students' access to research and creative projects earlier in their careers. Strategic planning effort is underway to more strongly integrate the HC curriculum to connect the core to the research/creative experience of the thesis and develop skills for the students to be successful.

### III. Growing and Stewarding Partnerships

As a public institution, the university partners with other entities in fulfilling its teaching, research, and service/outreach missions. These partnerships leverage the university's and its collaborators' assets to advance the cultural, economic, and civic interests of Maine communities even when a direct impact on the university's mission is not obvious. In this way, we serve as good stewards of the resources entrusted to us by the people of Maine, and by our many partners in science, industry, commerce, state and local government, and the arts.

*The strategic value* of partnerships and external relationships is represented well in this paragraph. How can we include the students explicitly in this statement? What role does the student body play in fulfilling and/or growing the university's partnerships? How involved are alumni of the university in achieving the goals of the university and its partners? The idea of "stewardship" is thoughtful, but this notion could encompass more than just "partnerships." The University serves as a "steward" over a vast cultural tradition, which it aims to impart to its students.

*One goal* that would express this value with respect to student involvement in partnerships is to enhance the University's ability expose their students to those agencies and individuals with whom it has partnerships and other agreements.

*A strategy* for the university can work toward this goal by increasing the accessibility of student-alumni mentorships, creating social networking events for students who wish to make connections with alumni and other partners, and allowing students better opportunities to complete internships at partner organizations.

*Indicators of success* in this area would be more partnerships and student involvement regarding networking.

*Some of the Honors College Research Collaboratives* are very community and stakeholder oriented, building local, national and international connections. Increasing connections with alumni to mentor and provide internships might enhance partnerships The HC currently provides students with opportunities to provide service to the community through events such as the Maine Day Meal Packout which feeds hungry people in Maine but also builds connections among students and members of the larger Maine community and provides leadership opportunities to students.

**IV.** Are there additional strategic values that should be considered or alternative ways of articulating the university's strategic values?

One respondent felt that these strategic values cover the vital aspects of the university's mission: to create an educated cohort that is equipped for their career and to meet the needs of their communities, to work to benefit the surrounding communities as well as Maine as a whole, and to foster a creative and respectful space where students and faculty alike can discuss freely.

A broader concern of another respondent is that none of these "strategic values" foregrounds the university's core teaching mission. Finally, a respondent felt that the University should have a *strategic value articulating a commitment to sustainability*, not just to the environment but to creating secure and sustainable lives for students, faculty, and staff.