

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

Focused Visit Report
September 10, 2012

Submitted to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

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1. Introduction

In its November 2, 2010 letter of accreditation, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) cited three areas to be reviewed during a fall 2012 NEASC Focus Visit.

1. Success of implementation of the common course evaluation, and using the results for improvement;
2. Success of implementation of a Faculty Governance Constitution, and assuring the effectiveness of the University's structures and processes for shared governance; and
3. Assessment of implementation of the University of Massachusetts Law School.

This report, which provides an overview of the progress in these areas for the NEASC Focus Visit team, was developed by a task group led by Provost John Farrington and included Mary Lu Bilek, Dean of the University of Massachusetts Law School, Magali Carrera, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Alex Fowler, Associate Provost for Graduates Studies and Research Development, and Richard Panofsky, Special Assistant to the Provost. In addition, individuals across the University were consulted, and they provided additional detailed information.

Beginning with an Institutional Overview, the report is organized to address each of the first two focus areas through an Overview of the specific citation of the Commission's requirements, followed by an Assessment of Progress, and concluding with the Summary Appraisal and Plans. The fourth section provides comprehensive updates to the report submitted February 2, 2010, requesting consideration of the substantive change of adding the Juris Doctor degree at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth (UMass Dartmouth). This request was approved March 19, 2010. This section shows the current status of the new program, next steps for the program, including challenges and plans to meet them, and concludes with projections for further actions. The report concludes with a summary appraisal of the institution's continuing development, with particular reference to the areas of focus.

2. Institutional Overview

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth's Mission states:

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth distinguishes itself as a vibrant public university actively engaged in personalized teaching and innovative research, and acting as an intellectual catalyst for regional and global economic, social, and cultural development.

Focused on this mission, the University envisions itself as a vibrant public university, engaged in personalized teaching and innovative research and as an intellectual catalyst for the region, and has a vision statement that reflects the aspiration to grow from a largely undergraduate institution to a regional research university, with greater diversity, increased engagement with the community, and expanded master's and doctoral programs. As summarized in the 2010 NEASC Self-Study, the University continues to optimize its intellectual engagement by creating and sustaining a climate that is active, engaged, and excited about the University's work at every level; that envisions projects being undertaken in partnership within the region and the Commonwealth; that honors our duty as stewards of "our place", but also pushes perspectives and impacts to be global, and responds to current and emerging trends; and that views change as a constant that will help the campus evolve as a vibrant public university.

The 2010 Self-Study assessed UMass Dartmouth's achievement of its mission within the requirements of NEASC's accreditation standards and projected how areas of concern were to be addressed as the institution continues to evolve. Below are summaries of the substantive changes at the institution since the time of the February 2010 NEASC Comprehensive Visit.

Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation - UMass Dartmouth has begun preliminary work to develop a new strategic plan. Chancellor Divina Grossman has initiated the process for a University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Strategic Planning Task Force to be launched in the spring 2013 semester.

The University appointed a Director of Learning Assessment to oversee the implementation of program-level assessment of student learning. As of fall 2012, all academic programs have plans that include learning outcomes mapping and assessment cycle timetables. In addition, the agreement reached with the Faculty Federation on a common course evaluation form, a long-standing objective of previous NEASC visits, has been implemented. See Section 3.2, Coordinated and Centralized Student Course Evaluation System, of this report.

Standard Three: Organization and Governance - UMass Dartmouth is part of the five campus UMass system organized under the UMass Board of Trustees, which creates general policy for the system, decides on applications for tenure and honorary degrees, and delegates broad authority to the system President, who reports directly to the Board. With the retirement of Provost Anthony Garro, Dr. John Farrington was appointed Provost in January 2012. In July 2012, UMass Dartmouth welcomed its new Chancellor, Dr. Divina Grossman. The President gives the campus Chancellors the authority for the management and operation of their respective campuses through the delegation of this authority.

The Board's Statement on University Governance confirms the concept of shared governance – the right of faculty and students to initiate recommendations in areas where they have “primary responsibility”. As outlined in the 2010 report, faculty governance, including the organization and constitution of the Faculty Senate, is embedded in the faculty collective bargaining agreement. The NEASC visiting team questioned the appropriateness of a governance structure that embeds academic governance in the collective bargaining agreement. As a result of the CIHE's recommendation in its evaluation report, work on a Faculty Governance Constitution has progressed. See Section 3.1, Faculty Governance Constitution, of this report.

Standard Four: The Academic Program - UMass Dartmouth's mission and vision, both committed to excellence in teaching, research and community engagement, provide the foundation for both the undergraduate and graduate programs. University Studies, a new general education program based on AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Progress Essential Learning Outcomes, was implemented in fall 2012. University Studies implementation has also promoted a close review and renovation of all current degrees by departments and colleges.

As projected in the 2010 report, UMass Dartmouth has moved forward with the development of new doctoral programs, including the Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in Education Leadership and Policy Studies, a DNP program for advanced practice nursing, and a Ph.D. in Engineering and Applied Science. Programs under development now include a Ph.D. in Health Psychology, a Ph.D. in Applied Social Science, and a Ph.D. in Chemistry, which results from the transformation of a cooperative program with UMass Lowell into a stand alone doctorate. The UMass School of Law received provisional accreditation from the ABA in June of 2012. See Section 3.4, Substantive Change/Focused Evaluation-University of Massachusetts Law School.

High impact/active learning opportunities continue to expand across the University. As the result of a generous donation, in spring 2012, the University dedicated the Robert and Jeanne Leduc Center for Civic Engagement in order to support expansion of service learning experiences. Also, to promote undergraduate research and to integrate faculty scholarship into teaching, the Office of Undergraduate Research was initiated in fall 2011.

Standard Five: Faculty – No substantive changes.

Standard Six: Students - A full range of student services is available through both Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Student success is the major focus of all support services. The first-to-second year retention rate improved from 70 per cent in fall 2010 to 74 per cent in fall 2011. Analysis of persistence and six-year graduation rates and plans for improvement are being developed.

In its residential component, UMass Dartmouth has offered “theme housing” for several years. Over the past year, however, Living and Learning Communities (LLCs) in the first-year living areas were implemented. All first-year students must select from among four LLC themes and are then housed with other students who share an interest in these themes. The residential staff focuses their programming on both the theme of their residence hall and the developmental needs of their residents. High priority is placed on bringing faculty and staff into the residence halls to interact with students in a less formal setting. Finally, to improve graduate student life, campus housing has been expanded and a Graduate Student Senate was formed in fall 2011.

Standard Seven: Library and Other Information Resources – The Claire T. Carney Library has expanded its services to meet the demands of its growing undergraduate and graduate student bodies and the evolution of a more research-oriented faculty. The Library opens a \$44 million library expansion and renovation project in fall 2012. The library space, now expanded by over 30,000 square feet, provides increased technologically enhanced study space through a completely renewed Learning Commons/Scholarly Commons, group study rooms, and a Digital Media Center. As part of the building plan, significant academic partners (Computer Information and Technology Services, Instructional Design, the Honors Program, and the Office of Faculty Development) are gathered together to enhance academic collaborative opportunities.

Standard Eight: Physical and Technological Infrastructure - Capital initiatives currently in various stages of planning, development, and construction include expansion of the Charlton College of Business, supported by a lead gift from the Charlton Family Trust; expansion of the School for Marine Science and Technology; expansion and renovation of the Tripp Athletic Center; a laboratory renovation program, upgrading various existing research and teaching areas; and projects addressing energy conservation, a 269 kilowatt solar photovoltaic system was installed on the Tripp Athletic Center, a 600 kilowatt wind turbine, and infrastructure repairs, particularly of the residence halls. In addition, the Massachusetts Accelerator for Biomanufacturing in Fall River, the first in the nation of its kind, will allow start-up companies to conduct research, test, and scale-up their products, or partner with other startups.

The 2007 update of the Strategic Plan calls for creating an “IT Savvy” 21st century campus community. As a result, the Strategic Plan for Information Technology 2010-2015 is now in effect. Its focus areas include: 1) Instruction; 2) Research; 3) Service; and 4) IT Infrastructure and Fiscal Planning. Since the 2010 NEASC visit, various technology innovations have been implemented including: the myUMassD Portal to assist students in navigating services as well as provide a mechanism for building community; the Virtual Computer Lab to provide 24x7 access to University supported software and available support for all students and faculty; mobile applications and enhanced mobile computing on campus; WIMAX technology to provide wireless access to faculty, students and staff within 2 miles of the campus; and, a High Performance Computing Cluster (HPCC) that provides research support in Physics, Engineering, Math, and Marine Science.

Standard Nine: Financial Resources - UMass Dartmouth has effectively managed its fiscal resources over the last ten years, successfully addressing the concerns raised during the 2000 NEASC site visit. In response to major reductions in state support, which now comprises only about 22% of the overall operating budget, the University lessened its dependence on part-time faculty and reduced staff through administrative reorganizations undertaken to improve the efficiency of services across the campus. Understandably, this was a difficult process and the University Administration continues to take steps to address concerns of faculty and staff by increasing the transparency of all budget planning and through greater involvement of faculty and staff in “big picture” issues. As part of this initiative, the University will move in the direction of allocating resources strategically across the University in such a way that aligns available resources with the University’s strategic goals.

Standard Ten: Public Disclosure – The University implemented the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA; <http://www.collegeportraits.org/MA/UMD>) program, which makes available to the public: 1) learning and educational outcomes, 2) reports on the range and impact of students’ educational engagement and enrichment activities, and 3) information to convey UMass Dartmouth’s specific emphases and qualities.

3. Areas of Focus

3.1 Coordinated and Centralized Student Course Evaluation System

Overview

After reviewing UMass Dartmouth's 2000 NEASC self-evaluation, and visiting the team's comprehensive evaluation, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) recommended that the institution "develop a coordinated and centralized student course evaluation system through one office to support planning" in order to comply with NEASC's Standard 4.30, which expects that instruction is systematically assessed and results are used to improve instruction. At that time, the Commission also recognized that the nature and composition of student evaluation of courses is determined in the Faculty Federation bargaining contract. The 2005 NEASC Interim Report summarized UMass Dartmouth's progress in addressing this recommendation, stating that the Provost had initiated conversations with two faculty groups on campus, the Center for Teaching Effectiveness and the Steering Committee of the Faculty Senate. Both groups recommended that the only realistic approach would be to address the issue at the bargaining table through negotiations.

UMass Dartmouth's 2010 *Institutional Self-Study* reported in Standard 5: Faculty that contract negotiations had concluded in February 2010 and, as a result, the development of a student course evaluation system had begun. After review of the NEASC visiting team's evaluation, in its November 2, 2010 letter, the CIHE required that during NEASC's focus visit of fall 2012, UMass Dartmouth must report on the institution's progress in:

1. implementing the common course evaluation and using the results for improvement.

Discussion of this requirement was expanded in the subsequent section of the letter:

The Commission is pleased to learn that the University has concluded negotiations on a common course evaluation form and has adopted an instrument that is ready for implementation. Through the fall 2012 focused evaluation, we anticipate being apprised of the institution's success in implementing the common evaluation form as evidence that the "effectiveness of instruction is periodically and systematically assessed using adequate and reliable procedures; the results are used to improve instruction" (5.16).

Progress Update

Through a Memorandum of Agreement dated February 2012, a faculty committee working with the Provost developed ten questions. (See Appendix 4.1 and 4.2). In the spring of 2011, the University implemented a common student course evaluation using a rating form (in scantron format) that was administered to students university-wide at the end of the semester. Departments were free to add any additional questions that they desired. For the first administration of the common student evaluation, the Faculty Federation and the Administration agreed that only questions 1 through 4 would be used in the formal evaluation of an individual faculty member's teaching. At the request of the Faculty Federation, questions 5 to 10 would require psychometrics analysis. The spring implementation revealed various administrative glitches and technical issues, resulting in inconsistent data. These problems were studied and addressed in summer 2011.

Beginning with fall 2011, and through the summer 2012 semester, the procedures for coordinating and processing the student evaluations have been standardized. All questions are sent to departments but individual faculty could request that questions 5 to 10 be excluded from their individual evaluation. No faculty member requested to have these questions excluded. Once completed, scantron rating forms from the departments are sent to the IT service center for processing. The resulting evaluation data are sent to the Office of Institutional Research (OIR) as Excel spreadsheets and combined into a university database. OIR processes these files, runs analysis (frequencies and means), and develops an Excel file of the results, which are sent to each department. Most departments seem satisfied with the format of the reports; however, some of the College of Arts and Sciences' departments are looking for the mean of all questions combined or more advanced statistics. For example, certain departments want to see lower-level course evaluations separated from upper-level course evaluations in order to better understand the effectiveness of the teaching of distinct student populations.

Additionally, all of the data has been combined into a single file in order to create college and university level reports. OIR has produced reports using spring 2011 data on the common ten questions, with an executive summary that could be used for broader campus distribution and additional appendices for internal use (See Appendix 4.3). Once the Provost approves the format and contents, reports for subsequent semesters will be published. Moving forward, data will be reported by college and department for each semester as well as the academic year.

The results of the course evaluations are used to improve instruction through faculty annual review processes. The academic deans of all colleges report that the student course evaluation data is being included in the annual review reports by faculty and evaluated by department chairs and deans. This data will also be used in tenure and promotion and post-tenure personnel actions as well. The data from course evaluations will be incorporated into program reviews as part of the assessment of how departments are ensuring that student achieve the learning outcomes of their respective majors.

In academic year 2012-2013, the administrative implementation and report format of the course evaluations will be further refined. It is now clear that as this initiative progresses, the use of scantron sheets, and their required interoffice processing, is not sustainable. As a result, in fall 2012, UMass Dartmouth will test the feasibility of a web-based student course evaluation system by piloting the *CourseEval* software in several courses. It is hoped that by spring 2014, all evaluations will use a web-based format.

Also, in the fall semester, the Provost will meet with the Faculty Federation to implement the validation of questions 5 to 10 using psychometrics, as well as the use of web-based course evaluations for all courses and timelines for processing the results. OIR will continue to evaluate the report formats with faculty and, working with the Provost, will identify office responsibility for future processing, timelines for submitting new questions, setting dates for processing, etc.

Summary Appraisal and Plans

UMass Dartmouth has substantially met CIHE's recommendation of implementing a coordinated and centralized student course evaluation system. The Provost continues to monitor the progress of this initiative to ensure that, using adequate and reliable procedures, the system is fully functional and sustainable and the results are used to improve instruction.

3.2 Faculty Governance Constitution

Overview

UMass Dartmouth's February 2010 *Institutional Self-Study* discussed faculty governance issues in the Appraisal section of Standard 3: Organization and Governance. The appraisal of the effectiveness of governance has revealed a difference of opinion with regard to the appropriateness of the current governance structure, which embeds academic governance in the Faculty Federation Agreement. As structured, several key committees responsible for shared governance are not under the purview of the Faculty Senate, but instead fall under the Federation contract. These include the Department, College, and University Curriculum Committees, the Honors Committee, and the General Education Committee. The Faculty Senate has consistently affirmed its desire to maintain the current structure, stating that its constitution and committee structures are approved by the Board of Trustees in concert with approval of the negotiated collective bargaining agreement. Among the administration's concerns with this structure, however, are that the mechanisms to amend governance structures and procedures are subject to contract negotiation and not to action by the Faculty Senate, which the administration believes should be the steward of faculty shared governance. These different perspectives regarding the fundamental structure of shared governance have led to tensions that occasionally impede effective collaboration in addressing the goals and objectives of the institution (17-18).

After review of the NEASC visiting team's evaluation, in its November 2, 2010 letter, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) required that during NEASC's focus visit of fall 2012, UMass Dartmouth must report on the institution's progress in:

2. implementing the Faculty Governance Constitution and assuring the effectiveness of the University's structures and processes for shared governance.

Discussion of this requirement was expanded in the subsequent section of the letter:

The Commission shares the judgment of the visiting team that the University's governance structure is "ambiguous" and appears "contentious" and that a lack of clarity about what is or is not permissible within the faculty contract creates a "disincentive to take action" and contributes to limited faculty engagement in shared decision-making. We understand that, at the request of the University's trustees, the institution has begun to develop a Faculty Governance Constitution and anticipates that the work of drafting the constitution and getting approval from the Faculty Senate, the Chancellor, and the Board will take at least one full academic year. The fall 2012 evaluation will provide an opportunity for the University to report on the status of the Faculty Governance Constitution and other efforts to assure the effectiveness of its governance structures. Relevant here is our standard on *Organization and Governance*:

The authority, responsibilities, and relationships among the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff are clearly described in the institution's by-laws, or an equivalent document, and in a table of organization that displays the working order of the institution. The board, administration, staff, and faculty understand and fulfill their respective roles as set forth in the institution's official documents and are provided with the appropriate information to undertake their respective roles. The institution's organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies are clear and consistent with its mission and support institutional effectiveness. The institution's system of governance involves the participation of all appropriate constituencies and includes regular communication among them (3.1).

Faculty exercise an important role in assuring the academic integrity of the institution's educational programs. Faculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise (3.10).

Assessment of Progress

Former Chancellor Jean MacCormack brought CIHE's requirement to the attention of the University of Massachusetts' Board of Trustees through UMass President, Robert Caret. Subsequently, in his April 3, 2012 letter to Chancellor MacCormack, President Caret requested that the campus prepare and submit for Trustee approval, a Faculty Governance Constitution in order to comply with the CIHE requirement and provide faculty with an independent voice that is distinct from the union. This constitution is to be presented to the Board of Trustees in February 2013. (See Appendix 4.4.)

On April 20, 2012, the Chancellor met with Provost John Farrington, Dr. Grant O'Rielly, Faculty Senate President, and Dr. James Griffith, President of the Faculty Federation to review President Caret's letter and establish the next steps for implementing a faculty constitution. Dr. O'Rielly has used the summer to begin writing the constitution, which will be presented to the faculty in the 2012 fall semester for discussion and endorsement and, subsequently, to Chancellor Divina Grossman for approval and presentation to the Board of Trustees.

Summary Appraisal and Plans

UMass Dartmouth has made progress in meeting the CIHE's requirement of implementing the Faculty Governance Constitution. The Provost continues to monitor the progress of the drafting of the constitution and its on-going review by faculty.