STANDARD 1

DESCRIPTION

Institutional Mission and Vision

MISSION AND PURPOSES

"The University of Maine at Fort Kent is a liberal arts based university offering quality baccalaureate and associate degree programs responding to the needs of northern Maine. The UMFK academic experience provides close interaction with faculty, small classes, and the use of leading technology to prepare students for lifelong learning and success as professionals and engaged citizens of a democracy."

"Our curriculum emphasizes the special challenges of rural communities in America. The University preserves and fosters an appreciation of the Acadian and Franco-American heritage and culture while welcoming students of all ethnic and racial heritages. We celebrate our proximity to the wonder of Maine's wilderness and the joys of outdoor sports. UMFK contributes to the economic, social, and cultural development of the St. John Valley and we believe that a diverse student body enriches the learning experience for all. In addition, UMFK joins the University of Maine at Machias and the University of Maine at Presque Isle working in a consortium with the goal of maximizing efficiencies of operation while enhancing educational quality and opportunity for all those served by the three campus communities" (UMFK 2003-2008 Strategic *Plan*, p. 5-6). -Approved June 6, 2005 by UMS Board of Trustees (BOT).

Originally established as a teacher-training school to provide bilingual educators for the French-speaking Madawaska Territory;



UMFK today remains deeply rooted in the culture, values, and traditions of the communities surrounding the St. John River and committed to providing affordable higher learning to a traditionally underserved rural population. In addition to its continued commitment to teacher education, the University's liberal arts, and professional studies curriculum supports a variety of baccalaureate and associate degree programs reflecting local culture and the needs of northern Maine. UMFK's emphasis is on teaching and learning through both on-campus and distance education offerings.

UMFK is a regional, baccalaureate institution within the University of Maine System (UMS) serving 1,076 students (Fall 2004 headcount). UMFK enrolls students mostly from northern Aroostook County in Maine, but with a considerable number of international students, especially from Canada (Appendix 1.02: UMFK Entering Class Diversity Table, Fall 1995-Spring 2005). UMFK is a member of the seven-campus UMS and is supported in its mission by the UMS BOT, the Chancellor, and System Office Staff. In September 2004, a new Strategic Plan for the University of Maine System (UMS) created a consortium of three small regional institutions, UMFK and system campuses at Presque Isle and Machias (Exhibit 1.01: UMS Strategic Plan, 2004). The mission of that consortium is to expand opportunities for students while reducing expenses wherever possible. The University enjoys and benefits from a remarkably close relationship with the town of Fort Kent and

communities on the American and Canadian sides of the St. John River.

UMFK is strongly defined by place. The St. John Valley was first traveled by Native Americans, trappers, and loggers, and settled in the late 1700's by Acadians and French speaking people from Quebec following the conclusion of the American Revolution and the grand deportation of 1755. Even after Maine became a state in 1820, the region remained part of the "disputed territory" leading to a bloodless war with Canada that ended with the signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842. That treaty divided a community that comfortably straddled both sides of the St. John River.

Sustained by potato farming and logging through most of the 20th century, northern Aroostook County is in a period of transition today as these industries decline. Today, winter sports and tourism are emerging as future drivers of the regional economy.

UMFK's mission and purposes are consistent with its operating authority and UMS's strategic planning goal to provide high-quality, sustainable, and affordable academic programs and services, and public outreach and partnerships (Appendix 1.03: *Institutional Performance Scorecard*, KPI 1.1-1.5). Furthermore, UMFK's mission is implemented in a manner that complies with the Standards of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.

The revised mission and vision statements and core values (Appendix 1.04) were drafted by a campus and community-wide Strategic Planning Committee between January 2002 and Spring 2003 and formally adopted by the Faculty Assembly in 2003 (Exhibit 1.02: Faculty Assembly Minutes). The mission statement was modified in Spring 2005 to add a reference to the consortium of smaller campuses established in the *UMS Strategic Plan* in September 2004 and was approved by the BOT in June 2005. The full plan is pending formal approval by the BOT in September 2005.

The University mission statement has been printed in all academic catalogs since 1995 and in the *UMFK 2003-2008 Strategic Plan* (Exhibit 1.03). The current statement appears online and will appear in the new *UMFK 2005-2007 Catalog*.

The mission of the Maine Campus Consortium created by the UMS Strategic Plan in 2004 is to provide a stronger voice for the three small institutions in the System, to achieve efficiencies in operations, and to enhance academic offerings to students while preserving the local identity and community roots of each of these institutions.

Strategic Planning Evaluation

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) assesses and revises, as necessary, the UMFK strategic plan, beginning with the campus mission statement. Assessment occurs at five-year intervals. The SPSC submits the mission for approval to the University President, the campus Board of Visitors, and, ultimately, to the BOT, who further evaluate it in the context of other UMS campus missions and of UMS as a whole. The BOT specifies that the campus mission be broad enough to allow the flexibility required by a vital, responsive university, yet limited enough to define the niche of the institution within the context of the seven institution system (Exhibit 1.04: UMS Mission Policy, Section 301).

UMS Mission Policy, Section 301 Website http://www.maine.edu/policyAF301.html

APPRAISAL

Institutional Mission and Vision

Our mission is current, relevant, clearly and concisely stated, widely understood, and embedded in the life and work of the University. The campus publications and website further reflect this mission visually as well as in printed content (Exhibit 1.03: *UMFK 2003-2008 Strategic Plan*).

The recently revised institutional mission is more succinct than past statements while continuing to incorporate the very words that faculty, staff, students, community members, and visitors use to describe the campus: close interactions with faculty; leading technology; preparing students; rural communities; Acadian and Franco-American heritage; wilderness; and economic, social, and cultural resource for the St. John Valley.

UMFK's distinct character and role was highlighted in the January 2000 League of Women Voters of Maine Report to the Legislature (Exhibit 1.05), which recognized UMFK as "one of the most pleasant surprises of the Study Group's journey through the University System. Bursting at the seams of its few buildings, the college is a beacon of hope in the community. Indeed, its absence would be devastating. It is totally responsive to the needs of the surrounding population... (and) is also an invaluable asset to those of French Canadian or Franco American descent..." (p. 9).

Location is important in part because alternative sources of college education are geographically distant. UMFK is the only nearby college for the residents of the rural, Acadian, Franco-American, and Native American communities within and surrounding the St. John Valley. The closest institutions are the University of Maine at Presque Isle and Northern Maine Community College, both located in Presque Isle, one hour (62 miles) to the South. Other United States institutions are more than three hours away. Across the river, the University of Moncton supports a Frenchspeaking campus in Edmundston, 30 minutes away. Clearly, success in fulfilling our mission depends upon how well we meet the educational needs of the region.

Importantly, the mission statement specifies institutional (e.g., faculty-student interaction, small classes) and student-outcome (e.g., learning and professional success) goals that can and are being measured to gauge how effectively the institution adheres to its mission. This is the result of a growing awareness of the importance of assessment on campus (Appendix 1.03: *Institutional Performance Scorecard*).

New baccalaureate majors include electronic commerce and rural public safety administration, both in response to identified needs of northern Maine residents.

Consistent with our mission of offering quality education with a strong liberal arts foundation, the general educational requirements cover a broad range of academic disciplines and comprise a sizeable proportion of the students' degree requirements. Since 1995, 35% of the required credits for a baccalaureate degree are general education requirements (Exhibit 1.06: *UMFK 1997-1999 Catalog*; Exhibit 1.07: *UMFK 2003-2005 Catalog*; Exhibit

1.07: UMFK 2003-2005 Catalog; Exhibit 1.08: UMFK 2005-2007 Catalog).

The University boasts a small collegial atmosphere with a low student-faculty ratio

and small class sizes. Despite recent increases in the student population (over 11% in 2003 and another 16% in Fall 2004), UMFK maintains a comfortable student-to-faculty ratio of 17:1 and average class size of 17. As enrollment has grown, especially in recent years, maintaining this small campus environment is becoming an increasing challenge that will be explored elsewhere in this study (Appendix 1.05: Enrollment Figures; Appendix 1.01: CIHE Data Form IV, Student Enrollment).

However, averages conceal inequalities across programs. The education student-tofaculty ratio is 30:1 and the average class size is 26. Additionally, in Fall 2004, certain entry level and support courses for other programs, for example Human Biology and Chemistry, experienced increased class enrollment numbers resulting in some unacceptably large class sizes (Appendix 1.06: Faculty and Adjunct Teaching Load, Fall 2004, Spring 2005); Exhibit 1.09: UMFK Statistical Abstract, May 31, 2005; Appendix 1.01: CIHE Data Form VI, Faculty Profile; CIHE Data Form VII, Student Headcount by Undergraduate Maior).

UMFK has had success, with exceptional support from UMS, in providing leading technology to support the educational mission. UMFK's networks and electronic services are advanced and farsighted. These successes are detailed in Chapter Seven, Information Services.

Strategic Planning Evaluation

The *UMFK 2003-2008 Strategic Plan* outlines three broad mission areas that will define the institution going forward:

1) a focus on the needs of rural communities throughout our curriculum; 2) celebration and preservation of our Franco Heritage; and 3) celebration and study of the Maine wilderness and natural environment.

UMFK is increasingly focused on the special challenges of American rural

Chapter 1: Mission and Purposes

communities. We are aware that these communities are commonly underserved in the areas of public safety and mental health. Accordingly, UMFK 1) initiated a baccalaureate-degree program in rural public safety administration, and 2) increased the frequency of course offering in the Behavioral Science curriculum to meet student requirement needs for Mental Health Rehabilitation Training Certification (MHRTC). This is important for individuals pursuing careers working with social service agencies.

As noted, UMFK preserves and fosters an appreciation of the Acadian and Franco-American heritage and culture by various means. Many University identifiers, including signs on campus and letterhead, are printed in French as well as English. Annual Acadian cultural events such as the Mardi Gras Fiddle Jamboree and the Sucrerie are hosted by the campus. Most importantly, a unique collection of Acadian cultural history is maintained in our Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes now housed in a new \$1.4 million, 7.584 square foot. two-story building (Exhibit 1.10: Valley Vision News Release Opening Celebration of Acadian Archives).

Valley Vision News Release Opening Celebration of Acadian Archives Website http://www.umfk.maine.edu/valleyvision/release/default.cfm?recordID=04163

Within the new consortium and within the total system, this aspect of our mission is recognized as an important niche for UMFK. However, we are challenged by what has been a weak French program over the past 10 years with only one faculty member and an annual number of majors well below that of most other programs (CIHE Data Form VII, Student Headcount by Undergraduate Major). At the same time, we note with pleasure that Fall 2004 enrollments grew dramatically and statewide interest in French programs, culminated in a visit of the UMS Chancellor to France that year to discuss collaborative

programs. All of these trends suggest cause for optimism.

Finally, UMFK celebrates our proximity to Maine's wilderness and the opportunities this provides for outdoor activities including sports. Degrees in Forest Technology and Environmental Studies are offered. The Forest Technology Program (one of two such certified programs in New England) was recently recognized by the Society of American Foresters (SAF) (Exhibit 1.11: SAF Recognition of UMFK Forest Technology Program). Fort Kent hosted the first World Cup Biathlon in 2004 with the enthusiastic support of UMFK. Maine's wooded hills and Fort Kent's twenty-two miles of groomed cross-country ski trails were recognized as ideal competing grounds for World Cup Biathletes. Cooperative agreements with both the Maine Winter Sports Center and United States Biathlon Association have been signed. Symbolically, we were delighted to present an honorary degree to noted Maine Wilderness Artist Neil Welliver in 2004. Furthermore, UMFK has been selected host site for the 2008 Conference of the Guild of Natural Science Illustrators.

Looking forward, we see an exciting Environmental Science program emerging through the consortium that will provide access to a regional program incorporating the study of Marine Ecology at Machias, Geological Foundations of the Region at Presque Isle, and Terrestrial and Fresh Water Ecology at Fort Kent.

Although it has an established track record regarding diversity, UMFK seeks to increase the ethnic and racial diversity of its student body to support its mission claim that ethnic and racial diversity is valued because a diverse student body enhances the learning experience for all students (Exhibit 1.03: UMFK 2003-2008 Strategic Plan). Admissions data reveal that since 1995, 28% of incoming students have been non-American. This figure is impressive, but the

result of a preponderance of Canadian students (Appendix 1.02).

UMFK does have non-Canadian international students, who come from Africa, Asia, Central America, and Europe as well as other parts of the world or represent cultures as diverse as those of Vietnam, Japan, or Mexico. However, these individuals comprise only 2.3% of our student body. Likewise, only 2.0% of incoming students since 1995 have been racial minorities.

While lower than we would like, the proportions of ethnic and racial minorities on campus are comparable to the proportions of ethnic and racial minorities in Maine (Exhibit 1.12: U.S. Census 2002 Data). Nevertheless, UMFK needs to continue efforts toward meeting its mission priority of recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse student body.

The institution continues to contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of the St. John Valley. This is demonstrated by our continued involvement in local school district initiatives such as the Big Brothers Program (Exhibit 1.13), The Great Maine Schools Project (Exhibit 1.14), and our record of providing educational assistance to displaced workers from local businesses (Exhibit 1.15). The community enjoys cultural events that the University hosts including numerous plays at Fox Auditorium and art exhibits in the exhibition room at Blake Library. Finally, UMFK supports community-sponsored events such as the Can-Am Crown, the World Cup Biathlon in 2004, and the International Paralympics Committee (IPC) Nordic Skiing World Championships in March 2005.

We assess our mission routinely and seek broad input at multiple levels within the University and UMS. For instance, the most recent mission statement evolved over a fifteen month period, beginning in January 2002. The statement was the product of ideas generated from the broad-based membership of the SPSC and from campuswide input sought and obtained through ongoing written and oral communications with faculty, staff, students and the community, involving memoranda and drafts, campus website, special presentations, open meetings, and workshops.

The UMFK 2003-2008 Strategic Plan calls for more systematic assessment of institutional effectiveness. This will be accomplished through an Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment Plan, 2003-2008 (Exhibit 1.16: IEAP), which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, Planning and Evaluation. While primarily focused on assessing UMFK's effectiveness at meeting mission priorities, the IEAP also plans for assessment of the mission itself. The IEAP mandates that annual academic needs assessments be reviewed by the Council for Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment (CIEA). That council, comprised of a broad-range of campus personnel, will inform other relevant planning bodies about whether the current UMFK mission is successfully addressing the educational and cultural needs of northern Maine.

PROJECTION

Our basic mission is unlikely to change

Our basic mission is unlikely to change appreciably in the near future as the System and institutional leadership remain committed to providing quality, affordable, higher education to northern Maine. The mission will undoubtedly become more tightly crafted as we work within the emerging consortium to more clearly define the niche of each of the three participating institutions. Furthermore, there is an everpresent need for UMFK to better promote its mission and accomplishments, and to better educate all Maine citizens, especially those

in other parts of the state, about the value of a diverse higher education system comprised of a variety of campuses with distinct missions that incorporate local values and culture into sound educational programs. The availability of affordable small campus environments for students who do best in that setting needs to be more widely understood.

BOT approval of our new mission statement occurred in June 2005 at a BOT meeting hosted by UMFK. We were prepared for this step in Spring 2004, but the focus of the BOT at that moment was on the *UMS Strategic Plan*.

We will continue to provide students with quality two- and four-year academic experiences. General education requirements may be modified depending on the outcome of annual evaluations of student learning outcomes, general education experiences (Appendix 1.07: National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) 2004 Report Overview), and on the BOT's mandate that we create a single requirement for the consortium institutions. Degree major programs may be modified as well on the basis of a careful assessment of regional needs over the upcoming years. We will strive to ensure that UMFK continues to respond to the needs of northern Maine as a public regional institution and as a member of the consortium.

As we continue to grow our enrollment, UMFK will need to attract and hire additional faculty consistent with our *Academic Plan, 2004-2008* and institutional priorities in order to maintain a low student to faculty ratio and small average class size making maximum use of available technology. (Appendix 1.08: *Academic Plan, 2004-2008*). Our full-time faculty should number about 50 when we reach our goal of 1,100 students.

A greater emphasis on challenges facing rural communities in America will emerge in the coming years, in particular in the Nursing and Rural Public Safety programs. Faculty and administration are currently drafting a proposal for a Center for Rural Sustainable Development (Appendix 1.09: CRSD Draft Proposal). The Center will contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of the St. John Valley by attracting research grants, by providing information to local businesses, by attracting new businesses to the area, and by developing tourism to this culturally unique area. The UMS has expressed interest in this Center as a consortium project.

Our French program will be a priority. The recent filling of a tenure-track French professor and acknowledgement of North American French studies as a signature program of this campus by the consortium are expected to result in increases in course enrollments and overall interest in French. Continued development and growth of interdisciplinary French offerings in areas such as bilingual education, nursing, and business are also anticipated. Additionally, increased collaboration between our French faculty, the French Heritage Council, and the Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes will further benefit the institution (Appendix 1.03: Institutional Performance Scorecard, KPI 1.1-1.5).

Another priority will be to attract an ethnically and racially diverse student body, faculty, and staff (Exhibit 1.03: *UMFK* 2003-2008 Strategic Plan; Priority 8). Admissions strategies will be developed to increase the diversity of the freshman student pool.

Development of new courses and a degree concentration in winter sports management to meet the mission priority that UMFK celebrate its proximity to the wonder of Maine's wilderness and the joys of outdoor sports is also anticipated in the near future. We anticipate hiring a part-time Nordic Ski Coach in 2005 to support a team in that sport.

We will continue to serve the communities of northern Maine by strengthening partnerships with community and regional organizations that currently exist (Exhibit 1.03: *UMFK* 2003-2008 Strategic Plan; Priority 1). In 2003-04 we began accelerated work with area high schools, especially the neighboring Fort Kent Community High School. Their participation in the Maine Great Schools Program and a Melmac Foundation Grant includes key involvement of UMFK personnel. Additionally, UMFK will identify areas for developing new partnerships to enhance community resources such as the Center for Rural Sustainable Development. In addition, we intend to offer master's degree programs through the consortium as soon as possible. We hope to initiate graduate courses toward a Master's in Education as early as the summer of 2006.

The assessment of mission fulfillment will continue to generate data annually as part of the IEAP and the nature of that assessment will change in the upcoming years. As described in chapter 2, one feature of the IEAP is that it is designed to change year to year in response to data that is collected and used in the assessment. Hence, the annual needs assessment against which the mission is evaluated will be modified in response to feedback. The more years that data are gathered, the better we will become at assessing what questions need to be asked to best ascertain the educational needs of northern Maine.

The CIEA will oversee assessment efforts and disseminate assessment results to the President and to other planning bodies in order to better evaluate our success in fulfilling our mission.

We will continue to sharpen the focus of our mission as we implement the consortium and as we identify our niche within UMS.

