

May 30, 2015

The University of Southern Maine

The investigation of Association concerns at the University of Southern Maine followed actions taken by the administration in fall 2014 to close four academic programs (American and New England studies, arts and humanities at the Lewiston campus, French, and applied medical sciences), to eliminate the Department of Geosciences, and to terminate the appointments of approximately fifty tenured as well as long-serving nontenured faculty members.

The University of Maine system administration did not declare financial exigency for the system as a whole or for its USM campus. USM administrators alleged the need to restructure and eliminate programs in order to close a projected budget deficit for the following academic year. Additionally, the administration argued that USM needed to become a “metropolitan university” whose mission did not duplicate that of any other University of Maine institution.

The investigating committee concluded that the USM administration not only acted in violation of the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* but also disregarded derivative Association-supported standards, in particular, Regulations 4c (Financial Exigency) and 4d (Discontinuance of Program or Department for Educational Reasons) of the *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. Moreover, its actions were at odds with key provisions of the *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, despite references to this fundamental document on shared governance in the preamble to the governance constitution of the USM.

The investigating committee was particularly baffled that, of the four programs selected for closure, three seemed to be central to the “metropolitan university” model advocated by the administration. The committee noted that the program in American and New England studies sent graduates into cultural institutions that directly served the people of Maine, while the high importance of the French program in a state with so many French speakers, the committee observed, went without saying. But the program whose closure most mystified the investigating committee was that of applied medical sciences. The committee was especially struck by the letters of local industry officials, who were bewildered and upset with the news that USM would close a program of such easily demonstrable utility in this growth area of the Maine economy. The committee cited numerous such letters testifying to the vocal and widespread support for a graduate program in applied sciences with both immediate and long-term implications for scientific research and public health. That this support was apparently

irrelevant to USM officials, advocates of the “metropolitan university” model, was deeply troubling to the investigating committee.

Also striking was the fact that these programs were cancelled in midyear and that no provisions were made for students remaining in the programs to complete their courses of study, in violation of the standards of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, the university’s accrediting body.

The investigating committee concluded with regard to USM’s financial condition that it was not facing significant financial distress. It concluded further that the administration ignored the faculty senate’s recommendations on programmatic matters, repeatedly and apparently deliberately, in disregard of generally accepted standards of academic governance in American higher education. What remains unresolved in this investigation is the role of the University of Maine system in these closures, a role that should be closely monitored hereafter.

Committee A recommends to the One Hundred and First Annual Meeting that the University of Southern Maine be placed on the Association’s list of censured administrations.