UMF Board of Visitors’ Meeting – October 30, 2015

Present: Lisa Laflin, Jerry Cayer, Mark Shibles, Ray Glass, Sharon Cullenberg, Ed Cervone, Myrna Vallette, Betty-Jane Meader, Valerie Huebner, David Levesque, Kate Foster

Guests: Wilson Hess, Joe McGinn

General: Lisa Laflin chaired the meeting, she recognized BoV members’ contributions to various efforts at UMF and throughout the System. Several members will be attending the BoV-BoT summit next week, and Jerry Cayer shared the agenda for the meeting. Lisa Laflin gave a summary of Chancellor Page’s recent visit to UMF, which focused on One University, and President Foster answered questions about how things may change in the future and what the effect may be for UMF.

President’s report: The energy plant and construction is on task, to be completed by January, when biomass will be used. President Foster had a successful meeting with the group that will do the campus master plan. On October 15 (the enrollment census date) 567 students were counted in the entering class, a 9% increase over last year, with over 20% coming from out of state.

Provost’s overview: Joe McGinn, UMF Provost, provided an overview of the academic landscape at UMF and described the strategic vision for Academic Affairs. He responded to questions asked by BoV members.

Discussion on President’s External Communications

President Foster initiated a discussion on how UMF can successfully carry out its external communications. BoV members asked several question, including the following: What is the obligation and opportunity for President Foster as communicator? Do we have a communication plan? Who is the audience: legislature, funders, students, community? Who are the best messengers besides the president?

Many suggestions were offered, including the following: Have advisors, like BoV, who broaden the perspective. Use alumni as ambassadors. Look at what other institutions do for communications. Pick our region and the state as the audience, but don’t think nationally. Collapse marketing and development into one unit. Connect with community to address resentfulness against UMF (buying up land, etc.). Create a BoV committee to think about strategy, goals, plans. Figure out what the most important things are to communicate and who the important recipients are. Focus on a few things that matter, such as alumni, who should be targeted rather than making an extensive plan. Get out positive, celebratory messages to the local public. Think about the culture of Maine. Figure out if UMF is invisible statewide and work on that. Work on a very personal basis. Communicate when you don’t have anything to sell.
What Makes an Effective BoV? with UMS Senior Fellow Wilson Hess

The body of knowledge regarding boards and established best practice for them and can be powerful. BoV roles: advise the president; advocate for university; review tuition, program changes and strategic plans; raise private funds for the university.

Questions from Hess: How do we do our business between meetings? How do we find a structure to do our work? How can we be useful to the president and let her try out ideas? What do we advocate for and to whom (bridges and buffers)? What top issues could the BoV monitor and help with?

The One University issue is particularly problematic. BoV can engage in this discussion to help the public understand.

President Hess’s advice: Be intentional about doing work between meetings. Discuss what that work is. Try to create a space in every meeting to have a discussion that is useful to the president.

Some comments during a discussion about One University: BoV should help shape One University, not just be expected to advocate for it. It’s not clear where One University is going; it’s way too general and undefined. The Chancellor needs to give a scenario about where the UMS will be in a few years. This may be an opportunity for greater definition of who each campus is, though there’s plenty of anxiety. The logic is that we’re integrating resources so we will have more to invest in each differentiated campus. The elephant in the room is the connection between UMS and community college system.

Action:

A committee of the BoV will form to advise the president on communications, but she wants first to consider how it will work with the staff already doing communications.