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Peter S. Hoff

University of Maine

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State of the University - 2003 [Streaming audio version](#)

Riding out the Storm (and emerging stronger)

The State of the University
October 1, 2003

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Across the country, 2002-03 was a difficult budget year for colleges and universities. A poor national economy presented a fiscal storm in the face of which higher education had little choice but to reef the sails and batten the hatches. States experienced budget gaps of hundreds of millions of dollars—sometimes much more. And a familiar but lamentable sequence of events set in that has plagued higher education every time there is a down economy. States cut their appropriations to higher education by 5%, 15%, or even 30%. And public universities had to slash their budgets, reducing the number of professors, courses, and services. To protect academic quality, universities turned to their revenue source of last resort, increasing tuition by 10%, 20%, 30%, and occasionally more. This is a ratcheting process that higher education does not typically recover from in good times. Each time we go through the cycle, we end up compromising quality and increasing the cost to the student. The pattern has not been good—not for higher education, not for students, and not for our nation.

In Maine, the year was difficult, but not as devastating as elsewhere. While we have grown accustomed to budget woes, cuts to Maine education funding this year were not as deep as those in other states. Although the governor and legislature reduced state allocations to the University System during the year in the face of revenue shortfalls, they managed to pass a biennial budget that held the line against further cuts. Facing increased costs for items like health insurance, library holdings, and employee compensation, the university responded by cutting other areas of the budget and increasing tuition by 7.5%. While this was not a happy scenario, it was far better than what happened in most other states.

We used these budget challenges to strengthen the university. Even though we reduced the overall operating budget by well over a million dollars, we reallocated funds to high-priority strategic areas such as the Honors College, the Fogler Library, and support for teaching and research. We also made significant progress in strengthening all "Seven Pillars" of the university that I identified in last year's

State of the University presentation. Although these steps represent progress, much more work remains.

Therefore, as I once again report to you on the state of The University of Maine, I can report that we weathered a difficult year fairly well. Our university continues to grow and improve. Our ability to serve the citizens of Maine continues to advance. While we have much left to accomplish, we are on the right course.

Even though we experienced some growing pains at the beginning of the academic year, there is a lot of good news about our university, including growth in our enrollment, our research agenda, our fund-raising, and our overall quality. However, if we are to become even more competitive, we must acknowledge that our library—serving undergraduate through doctoral education and meeting the needs of advanced study and research across the entire state—requires serious and immediate attention. Like many research libraries across the country, the Raymond H. Fogler Library faces a crisis precipitated by runaway inflation in the cost of scientific journals. Moreover, Fogler library faces severe capacity issues that compel us to develop a plan and find funding for a major expansion and renovation, including technology for the twenty-first century.

This, then, is the state of The University of Maine in 2003:

A Good Start

We opened the Fall semester with the kinds of nagging problems that annoy people, though they are typical of a growing and prospering university. Overcrowded parking lots, roads blocked by steam line maintenance, students forced by construction delays to move to temporary quarters, and higher priced soft drinks.

Even though these problems are less onerous than those caused by shrinking enrollments and major cutbacks, it was important to address them immediately and find solutions. We are adding 250 new parking spaces this year and another 300 to 400 next year. We repaved the roads and got the students quickly into handsomely renovated residences. We had actually begun work over the summer to spruce up the campus. This included new landscaping, an entrance plaza with flags, and repainting Heritage House. We did such things because we recognize it is important to take care of personal comforts and maintain a responsive and welcoming campus so we can move ahead and address the big issues—the ones that deal with high quality teaching and learning, scholarly discovery, and public engagement.

And on those important fronts, there is good news. For the sixth straight year, UMaine enjoyed enrollment growth accompanied by increases in quality. Our headcount enrollment has reached about 11,250, and our new students are better than ever. 23% of them were in the top 10% of their high school class; 67% were in the top 30%. About 74% reported that UMaine was their first-choice school—a satisfaction index that has risen steadily, up from 65% in 1996. Six years ago we set out to make sure that UMaine was the state's "college of choice," and we have succeeded.

As they moved in, the new students were greeted and assisted by hundreds of volunteers, including my wife, Dianne, and me. The volunteers swarmed over every car, moving possessions into the students' rooms at an astonishing pace that left new students and parents breathless with appreciation. When it comes to the "Maine Hello" tradition of moving in, no one does it better; and the fact that so many colleges are now imitating our welcome is, as they say, "the sincerest form of flattery."

In a year when many universities simply stopped hiring new professors, we were still able to add 26 new full-time faculty members. They come from some of the most highly regarded universities in the world, and we are pleased to have them.

We are also very pleased that our Trustees have approved UMaine's proposal for a Sport and Fitness Center. This \$25 million facility will help attract and retain the best students, faculty, and staff. It will promote health, fitness, and community ties. It will do a lot of good for the campus, and I am very pleased that the students are solidly behind it. Last year's survey, with 2900 students participating and an extremely high level of statistical reliability, showed solid support for the project and a willingness to finance it through a fee. The students told us that they wanted it "done right," and that they would rather pay a somewhat higher fee for a complete center than a lower fee for a building that was a "compromise." Work is going on right now to identify the best site on campus; architectural design work will follow soon; and the new center should be ready in 2006.

Campus life is more active than ever. The football stadium has been the site of record crowds this Fall, and the MCA "rocked" to Art Garfunkel's performance at the annual gala. Student government also has some special concerts lined up.

The Seven Pillars

A year ago I announced that we were not going to let a bad budget year keep us from advancing our priorities, and I announced the "Seven Pillars" of excellence that were going to get attention, budget or no budget. To refresh your memories, they are:

- I. Focus on Excellence
- II. Academic Programs for a Stronger Maine
- III. Research and Development for Society and the Economy
- IV. Partnership with K-12 Education
- V. The Post-9/11 University
- VI. Environmental Stewardship and a Safer University
- VII. Increase and Celebrate Our Diversity

Looking back, we see UMaine has made remarkable progress in all seven areas. I would like to report to you on some of the highlights.

I. Focus on Excellence

The Honors College was established last year, marking the official transformation of our venerable Honors Program, enrolling more and better students and expanding academic offerings. It is one of the keystones of our strategic plan, and we are very happy with the progress the new Honors College has made. Another focal point is a new emphasis on graduate study, recognizing the important contributions of graduate students to our R&D efforts and to our mission as the state's only doctoral-research-extensive university. We have enrolled more and better graduate students. Our commitment to improving graduate stipends and health benefits is starting to pay off. In addition, five years ago we founded a Center for Teaching Excellence to promote outstanding teaching and learning at the University of Maine. The center director, Sue Huseman, was so successful that she has been named Interim President of the University of Maine at Machias. This year, Virginia Nees-Hatlen has agreed to take on the role of Director for the Center for Teaching Excellence, and we are looking forward to her ideas and leadership.

II. Academic Programs for a Stronger Maine

UMaine is committed to offering an array of academic programs that respond to the needs of our students and also address the economic and societal needs of the state. This principle guides our selection of new programs and our periodic reviews of existing ones. Last year, although the New Media program had just been approved by the Board of Trustees, it immediately enrolled about 200 majors, instantly becoming one of our most popular degree programs. It speaks simultaneously to student interests and to many aspects of today's economy, including high-tech approaches to business, journalism, communication, and the arts. In the College of Business, Public Policy and Health, Dean Daniel Innis has initiated a new entrepreneurship program in response to calls from leaders in government and business. Dean Innis and Dean Larryl Matthews of the College of Engineering jointly put forward a very interesting plan, which uses training in entrepreneurship to help future engineering majors graduate with a business plan. Dean Matthews reports that two-thirds of our engineering graduates now take jobs here in Maine. As you can see, we are providing academic programs specifically aimed at strengthening our state.

III. Research and Development for Society and the Economy

Research and Development, the brightest story to come out of UMaine in recent years, continues to shine. This year UMaine achieved a new high in Congressional appropriations, with almost \$20 million coming for research. As a result, we are ramping up such areas as marine sciences and aquaculture. Overall, external research funding was approximately \$50 million, a level we have sustained for three years now, well over twice as much as in the late 1990s. We have our sights set on going higher, and I expect that will happen soon. Our new Vice President for Research, Michael Eckardt, arrived recently from his former position at the National Institutes of Health, bringing new ideas and energy to that crucial position. Dr. Eckardt's work, combined with the fact that the new laboratories funded by state bonding are just coming on line, should help propel our funded research efforts to new heights. Professors have submitted more research proposals than ever, and those proposals are stronger and more ambitious. With improved infrastructure and assistance from state matching funds, we plan to move steadily toward our goal of \$100 million in funded research annually.

I also should point out that much University of Maine research takes place in areas that one does not always think about—areas outside of science and technology. One of the best annual producers of research funds on campus is the Center for Community Inclusion, directed by Lu Zeph. Lu has been a real dynamo, not only in bringing money in to support her research, but also in getting very meaningful work accomplished to help persons with disabilities and to promote their inclusion in society. Another dynamic professor, newer to the campus, is Len Kaye, who heads the Center on Aging. As a result of his research, more new grants have come our way. Both Lu Zeph and Len Kaye are among our many socially relevant researchers working outside of science and technology, who have attracted large grants. It is also important to remember that funded research is only the "tip of the iceberg" when it comes to UMaine research efforts. Hundreds of UMaine professors carry out important high-level work without needing expensive laboratories or large numbers of graduate students. Their work often involves the library, a subject I shall return to in a moment.

Last summer's "Jobs Bond" helped us advance two initiatives. One is an addition on the Advanced Engineered Wood Composites building. It will allow us to expand our work in composites and structures research, where we are a world leader. The new "Innovation Center," also funded by this bond, will allow us to look at business, economic and technological innovation from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and will help the entire campus in many ways.

IV. Partnership with K-12 Education

The initiative begun by our Board of Visitors to strengthen our support of Maine's schools continues to grow. We recognize that responsibility for preparing teachers and helping schools extends far beyond the College of Education and Human Development and is truly a university-wide task. We have a new Master of Science in Teaching program that originated in our physics department. We have two NSF-GK12 grants that connect graduate education with the teaching of science in the schools. And some of our electrical engineers are working directly with Bangor High School. We expect these and other efforts to strengthen the teaching of science and mathematics in Maine schools and to graduate more science and mathematics teachers for those schools.

V. The Post-9/11 University

Recognizing that the world changed on September 11, 2001, and that higher education needs to change with it, we are addressing curricular issues and focusing more of our research on homeland security-related projects. Our sensor research is especially advanced, with applications such as the Gulf of Maine Ocean Observatory System, chemiresistive sensors to detect chemical and biological agents, and real-time wireless sensor systems. We have two Coast Guard contracts to develop more durable materials from composites. We are working on infrared spectroscopy and compact mass spectrometers for detecting biochemical agents, and in MEMS, microsystems and microneedles. We are looking at the rapid decontamination of nerve agents, the protection of drinking water, acoustic wave mode devices to detect viruses and bacteria, and methods for uncovering cyber terrorism on the Web. The professors behind these projects span three or four different colleges. And we are working with other New England universities through a NECOP Consortium to leverage our ability to attract contracts, to make a difference, and to make the country safer.

VI. Environmental Stewardship and a Safer University

Many of us are working for a safer, greener university. Interim Chief Financial Officer Mark Anderson provided excellent leadership in this regard, articulating the close connection between safety and stewardship in the campus ecosystem. His report last year paved the way for a new Office of Safety and Environmental Management. Vice President Janet Waldron has continued Anderson's work, fleshing out the plan that Mark sketched, hiring Wayne Maines as the office's director, and initiating a whole series of projects to conserve energy, recycle, and improve the safety of our classrooms, residence halls, laboratories, farms, remote sites, and the rest of the university. We completed voluntary safety and environmental audits of all of UMaine's off-campus sites. We found some problems and corrected them. We have a plan now for all of our new buildings to adhere to a strict code for conservation measures and efficiency. We are developing a heat reclamation system for the supercomputer at our Tech Park, and are installing diesel generation at the Franklin Aquaculture Center. Co-generation plans are in the works for the campus steam plant, and an energy conservation web site is being developed for campus. We are installing sensitive lighting options with timers in buildings and retrofitting our steam lines to stop energy loss. Our university vehicle purchases now include hybrid vehicles that are more energy efficient. Around campus you will see the attractive new recycling containers, sending the message that recycling is important for all of us. Certainly part of our educational function is to encourage students to get into the habit of recycling.

VII. Increase and Celebrate Our Diversity

Since the mid-1990s, the cadre of new faculty members coming into the university has been much more balanced in gender. And now those new professors are qualifying for tenure and promotion. For the first time, the numbers of men and women gaining promotion is reaching parity.

We had a very good year in identifying women and minorities for administrative positions. While our policy is always to hire the most qualified person, regardless of race or gender, we seek to build diverse pools of candidates, and we seek to develop a cadre of employees that reflects the diversity of our broader society. At least six senior administrative appointments (at the director, dean, and vice president levels) went to women during the past year. And a similar number of faculty, staff, and administrative positions went to minority candidates. For a university of our size and location, that is a very successful year. We intend to continue working for diversity in our hires and in student admissions, and working equally hard to create an environment for these employees and students to enjoy success and to stay in Maine for the long term.

It's the Library, Stupid.

Proud as we are to have made so much progress on the pillars of our university, we are looking at the coming year with an eye for the biggest challenges. And we need look no farther than our venerable Raymond H. Fogler Library, the state's premier research library, the heart of our campus, for that next challenge. Just as Bill Clinton, campaigning for president in 1992 recognized the need to stay focused on one issue ("it's the economy, stupid"), UMaine now needs to recognize one overwhelming challenge that will have much to do with determining how far we go as a leading research university. For us, "it's the library."

Even though Fogler Library has long enjoyed special status and relative protection from the budget cuts that have affected the rest of the university, runaway inflation and expanding program needs have put our beloved library in a precarious position.

Work to advance the library this year began in a somewhat unlikely spot, the front steps. They had become a safety hazard and, aesthetically, a serious embarrassment right in the middle of our campus. Fortunately, some friends came to the rescue. Because alumni classes provided dollars, and because some local contractors and business owners provided in-kind contributions, we were able to take the "first step" in Fogler Library's expansion and renovation.

Certainly the library is overdue for expansion. It cannot meet the demand for seating, study space, computer access, and research materials. It is not fully ADA compliant or handicapped-accessible. Approximately a third of the collection is stored in an annex building. The facility is not geared up for the technology changes that have taken place, much less for the ones that are coming. The time is now to expand and modernize the library.

The most critical challenge, however, regards Fogler Library's holdings, especially the crisis precipitated by years of rapid inflation of journal costs—with no end in sight. Scholarly journals are increasing in cost by about 15% annually, a catastrophic inflation rate that—left unchecked—will consume the entire library budget by 2008 and the entire university budget by 2035. We plan to seek funding aggressively via state allocations to help pay these escalating costs, and we expect that inevitably we will have to reallocate our budget to address the problem. But clearly the solution must include a broader strategy than simply throwing money at the journal publishers.

We have a national—even international—crisis that demands a broad and collaborative response. The awful irony many have commented on is that universities give away their intellectual property free to the journals—in fact often paying the journals subventions for the privilege of publishing. The journals then, in effect, sell the intellectual property back to the universities at grossly inflated prices. Somehow, this must stop. Universities must band together, recognize that they are in the same bind, and find solutions. Purchasing cartels, in-house refereed publications, new ways of disseminating the fruits of research, and rethinking the tenure-probationary process all may be in order. I am deeply committed to the idea that university research is vital to the creation of new

knowledge and the shaping of the future of humanity. I am not sure that our current knowledge dissemination system is the best way to achieve those aims—especially when its economic impact is threatening to eat higher education alive.

Closer to home, several things must be done. We need to make sure the decision process for which journals our library should hold is rational and fair, and makes the best use of available resources. We must invest as aggressively as possible in journal holdings without failing to continue purchasing books and other scholarly holdings. And we must ask the state to help as much as possible. I will be requesting at least \$500,000 in the state's supplemental budget to address journal inflation. I am pleased that the chancellor and leaders of other universities in the state have expressed support for such a request.

A panel of national library experts is helping us assess the issues I have presented here. They will offer advice on planning for an expansion of Fogler Library, planning for the technological advances that can be foreseen—as well as those that cannot. They will be addressing our challenges of maintaining a strong collection of books, periodicals, and journals—and weighing the merits of hard copy vs. electronic forms of those holdings. We will welcome their help and move ahead planning for our library's future.

A Vision for UMaine's Future

Finally, I would like to share some thoughts about the future of the university. What I have said so far should give you a sense of what I think is important and where I think we need to take UMaine. The annoying problems I alluded to at the start are all important in their own way. Students and employees need to know their president is aware they are having difficulty finding parking spaces and difficulty navigating the maze of new construction. They want the campus to be ready for them so they can devote their energy to the academic work of the year. They want an inviting, affordable campus, where things work.

To those issues, I have two answers. First, I hear you, I want those things too, and I won't stop working at them. Only if we attend to them can we become more focused on the big academic issues we face. Second, such problems are relative. Recently I spent two hours driving around Harvard, unsuccessfully searching for a parking space. The search for parking at universities is about as universal as the search for knowledge. I did encounter a new UMaine professor last week, who had come from another university, who told me he appreciated UMaine because "things work here." You could get copying done; you could put money on your Maine Card without a hassle; people in offices were responsive; teaching technology was not broken. Needless to say, he made my day, and I realized that—as usual—while the glass is half empty, it is also half full.

As we deal with such annoyances and ascend to the things that matter most, there are certain goals on my short list for UMaine. Certainly, we want to maintain our high academic standards—and stretch our aspirations to new heights. As Maine's flagship university and college of choice, we want to be sure our academic standards and achievements make our state proud. Our graduation rates are good, but they could and should be better. We need to work together to promote the opportunity and the likelihood that our students will get their degrees on time and enjoy great success.

We especially need to expand and elevate our graduate programs. They represent unique and valuable contributions to the state. To have great graduate programs we need to support our graduate students with better stipends and health insurance. We need a bigger, better library, not just in terms of bricks and mortar, but of the books and journals inside. We also need to strengthen our faculty by attracting more endowed chairs and professorships.

These and other steps will help make The University of Maine a place where students can find and achieve their dreams. Whether it's a place to find a parking space or earn a degree, we want to be that place. Growing since 1865, The University of Maine has become a great university. But greatness is transient unless we work to make every day more successful than yesterday. I commend the faculty, staff, and students who perform that hard and important work every day, and I challenge you to join me in taking the next steps.

President Hoff delivered an extemporaneous version of this talk at UMaine's Minsky Recital Hall on Oct. 1.

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