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UNIVERSITY SYSTEM TO OFFER NEW MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM FOR K-12 TEACHERS IN NORTHERN AND DOWNEAST MAINE

Program Will Help Teachers Achieve Graduate Degree 'Closer to Home'

BANGOR—University of Maine System Chancellor Terry MacTaggart today announced the creation of a new academic outreach program intended to help school teachers in rural parts of Maine earn a master's degree.

The degree program, a master's of science in education (M.S.Ed.), will be available through three of Maine's seven universities: Fort Kent, Machias, and Presque Isle. The actual degree initially will be granted by the University of Southern Maine, which, along with the University of Maine, currently offers the only graduate programs within the state university system.

Classes will begin in the fall and will be offered through a combination of face-to-face classes, online instruction, and videoconferencing.

"The new master's program is structured and scheduled to meet the needs and convenience of classroom teachers in Downeast Maine and Aroostook County," MacTaggart explained. "Until now, classroom teachers seeking an advanced degree through our universities had to travel nights and weekends to Orono or the Portland area to do so. The lengthy travel was time-consuming, costly, and often dangerous when the weather was bad.

"This new opportunity brings the master's program closer to home," he added. "Teachers enrolled in the master's program will work as a team, or cohort. They will conduct some of their course work in classroom settings on their local campus. Other aspects of their coursework will be conducted over the Internet and through videoconferencing."

The M.S.Ed. program requires 36 course credit hours of study to earn the degree. Courses will be offered through a specially designed schedule to accommodate working teachers: three ten-week terms will be held over the course of a calendar year.

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“Under this structure, participating students should be able to complete a master’s degree within four years,” explained Richard Barnes, a USM faculty member and director of the University System’s Regional Teacher Development Center Network. “We will offer our students a common-core curriculum with the opportunity to select additional courses based on their individual needs and interests.

Barnes added that all courses will be taught by full-time faculty from the three host universities as well as from USM and UMaine.

“This degree is much needed in Aroostook County,” explained Richard W. Cost, president of UMFK. “Despite the near-heroic efforts of classroom teachers from this part of the state, traveling to Orono or beyond – on a regular basis for a period of several years – was not practical for most teachers. Yet they wanted and needed that degree, so they literally went the distance. This is a service we should be providing to this region as a public university.”

“This provides teachers from our region a much more convenient and appealing option for improving themselves as professionals,” added Donald N. Zillman, president of UMPI. “The creation of this option demonstrates the value of collaboration and coordination among the universities of the state system. This wouldn’t be possible without extensive planning among faculty members on our campuses and throughout the University System.”

“I see this as a tremendous and tangible first step in enhancing the academic opportunities available in rural Maine,” stated Cynthia E. Huggins, UMM’s president. “Through this program, we are pooling and sharing resources to address the educational needs of both our classroom teachers and our K-12 schools. The other presidents and I are going to work hard in Downeast Maine and Aroostook County to make sure teachers are aware of this new opportunity.”

“This type of innovative opportunity is particularly valuable to working professionals, no matter what their line of work,” said Richard L. Pattenaude, USM’s president and the incoming University System chancellor. “In this specific instance, the universities are partnering to make sure our K-12 teachers have the necessary credentials to provide our communities and young people with the best education possible.”

Outreach and orientation sessions are planned for Tuesday, April 4 in Machias and on Wednesday, April 11 in Presque Isle. An additional orientation session will be held in Fort Kent, though no date has yet been set. For more information, call 780-5007 or write to Richard Barnes at richardb@usm.maine.edu.