

Week of January 27, 2020 [do not post until 2/27/20]

Trustees -

I want to start by thanking you for the confidence you entrusted in me, our System senior team, and our Presidents with your unanimous vote for unified accreditation this past Monday. Before I say more, I want you to have an opportunity to see how the nation's two primary higher education media outlets reported the news of your historic vote:

*The Chronicle of Higher Education*: see the attached PDF

*Inside Higher Ed*: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/28/maine-university-system-moves-ahead-unified-accreditation>

I find this reporting to be fair. It points out that there will be challenges ahead, and many details to work out. But I also see in these stories recognition of leadership and innovation in our work. External commentators, most considering the initiative for the first time, call out questions and concerns that we have already addressed in our Guiding Principles and our preparatory work with NECHE and U.S. Department of Education staff even before bringing my recommendation to you last fall. To be sure, as I told our faculty and staff System-wide in my message to them Friday afternoon, in many ways we're just now at the starting line. The work ahead will be difficult and time-consuming, and it's important that our Presidents and faculty leaders shape the unified accreditation model with us.

I remain both confident and optimistic that unified accreditation will be a critically important tool that allows us to better serve our students and state into the challenging future. To this point, thank you for your innovative leadership.

Tuesday Trustees Erwin and Gardner joined me and Vice Chancellor Ryan Low and other System leaders in Orono for the first review of university FY21 budgets. Presidents Boggs, Rice, and Ferrini-Mundy presented their proposed budgets for UMFK, UMPI, UMaine, and UMM, respectively, and spoke to key university and System initiatives. They also honestly identified their budget challenges. We must be realistic in these reviews, of course. Even with additional base funding directed to UMFK and UMPI in the System's allocation model and the hoped-for three percent State appropriation increase for FY21 that Governor Mills first proposed in her biennial budget last year, demographics and enrollment remain a challenge. Our relationship with online programs manager Academic Partnerships bears watching, as enrollments in AP programs to date have not materialized at the expected levels. As we honor our commitment to keep tuition affordable for Maine families by limiting proposed FY21 tuition increases to 2.5 percent, none of these universities is in a position to make significant investments because the resources to do so are simply not available.

That's why new enrollment and retention strategies continue to loom large and will remain our focus. To that end, on Wednesday Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido

reviewed Enrollment Innovation Fund proposals with me, Chief of Staff Jim Thelen, and Ryan Low. You'll recall that former Vice Chancellor Bob Neely for several years seed-funded innovative cross-campus collaborative academic program proposals with his Program Innovation Fund. The Enrollment Innovation Fund has the same goal -- to incentivize our universities to propose innovative and collaborative enrollment strategies and provide them with some seed money to implement and achieve outcomes that far exceed our investment. One promising proposal comes from UMFK and UMPI to attempt to turn around their declining enrollment of Canadian students. We will be discussing the matter further with our Presidents and addressing potential impact with you for this and other proposals in our continuing budget reviews.

Thursday was busy in and around Augusta. Along with an early meeting with Maine Department of Education Higher Education Specialist Angel Loreda (who you'll remember often attended our Board meetings as the delegate for the Education Commissioner before Commissioner Pender Makin began attending regularly) and dinner that evening with Representative Teresa Pierce and Samantha Warren to discuss our FY21 appropriations requests, I also met with Maine Attorney General Aaron Frey, a former three-term State Representative from Bangor who has a keen interest in the success of our Law School, and led a briefing for the Legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee on the adjunct faculty report that our System and the Maine Community College System recently submitted. Many thanks to Samantha for her work on the adjunct report and for successfully setting up and staffing these key meetings as we approach the most important weeks of the current legislative session.

Let me close on a more practical, sober note, regarding an issue that demands the highest fiduciary diligence for the public health and safety of our universities: our monitoring of the coronavirus.

While Maine has no known or suspected cases as of noon on Friday, January 31, the Associated Press reported a confirmed case in Boston yesterday of a UMass Boston student who recently traveled to Wuhan, China and sought medical care upon his return with flu-like symptoms. While I don't want us to over-react, with the World Health Organization's Thursday declaration of a public health emergency of international concern, and our own national government's public health emergency declaration going into effect today at 5 p.m., we must treat our need for preparedness seriously.

Early this week I asked for an update of our emergency preparedness and response planning. It is appropriate and prudent for us to review our existing emergency management, planning, and response protocols in this situation, and we are working with our emergency preparedness partners on each UMS university campus, the Maine Center for Disease Control, and the Maine Emergency Management Agency to track the coronavirus, share information about the disease, and to be ready to act if a local response becomes necessary. And with the U.S. State Department's "do not travel" advisory for China (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/china-travel-advisory.html>), we continue to assess the travel plans of University students and employees and

are in regular communication with student life and health team members, who are monitoring the situation in coordination with our university presidents. We will provide assistance and respond quickly if necessary to protect the health of our students, staff, and faculty.

As you can see, our important work continues, and I'm grateful to have the opportunity to lead it.

Dan