

Trustees,

I feel an important responsibility to continue reporting to you about coronavirus and COVID-19, the abbreviated name for the disease it causes (formed from “coronavirus disease 2019”).

While in our own planning we continue to believe that over-reaction would be counterproductive, and unnecessarily contribute to public anxiety, universities around the country, particularly where there are reported cases or widespread outbreaks, are taking serious actions, and we should be prepared to do so as well.

The University of Washington, with 50,000 students on three campuses in the Seattle region, and Stanford University each announced Friday afternoon that in-person classes were cancelled and would move online for the remainder of the terms. Seattle University and Boston-based Northeastern University's Seattle campus announced similar moves. In New York City, Yeshiva University cancelled classes for a week after a student tested positive for the virus earlier this past week.

As you know from my first report to you on this matter, in my *Week of January 27* message, we've been planning diligently and prudently for more than six weeks. We continue work on continuity of instruction plans in case the spread of the virus interrupts in-person classroom instruction. We've taken limited but responsible actions thus far to restrict university-sponsored travel in line with US State Department and CDC travel advisories, and to that end, we've assisted 21 UMS students with transition out of study programs in China, Italy, and South Korea, respectively; the students are returning home or traveling to other countries, but not returning to any of our campuses. One faculty member has been and remains in China, teaching in a UMS program remotely from there. Given the high incidence of COVID-19 spread in the Seattle area, we are preparing notice that we will prohibit university-sponsored travel there until further notice. We do not intend to otherwise restrict travel within the US unnecessarily, but will be assessing daily whether doing becomes prudent, and discussing the appropriate guidelines so that such decisions can be made consistently across our universities, from which nearly all UMS-sponsored travel originates.

Dozens of UMSers are working almost around the clock to advance our planning, preparedness, and communications, led by our System-based team of Chip Gavin, Ryan Low, Dan Demeritt, Robert Placido, David Demers, and Jim Thelen, along with incident response and planning teams on every campus. I continue to host telephone conference call updates to which all Maine higher education institutional leaders are invited; our Friday afternoon update call included not only all UMS institutions and the Maine Community College System, but also Bowdoin, Maine Maritime Academy, Husson, Bates, and the University of New England, among others. We are all important resources to each other as we address this public health matter -- it affects us all similarly. And I've had first contact directly with the Governor on coronavirus as well, opening an important channel of communication to ensure coordination should any quarantine or closure decisions become necessary.

Our regular work goes on continues too.

Of most significance at present, as we develop our FY21 budget for your consideration later this spring, our supplemental budget appropriations -- both the three percent FY21 E&G and Law School special base funding -- were approved in committee Monday at the State House, essentially on a party-line vote. Before the vote, we were asked about why taxpayers should cover collective bargaining (to which we explained we were only asking the State to help us cover less than half of our contracted increases and were seeking to minimize impacts to students, programs, and services) and what the implications would be if the funding didn't come through (devastating, especially to our small campuses). As noted, the Democratic majority supported both the E&G and Maine Law requests, with the two Republicans present voting against. There was a similar vote on the 3 percent appropriation proposed for the Maine Community College System, though their \$5M request for the Maine Quality Centers was unanimously supported. Our early college language change was unanimously supported.

I don't think it's necessary to read anything into Republican opposition here to our appropriation requests. Across the legislative committees considering the Governor's supplemental appropriations proposals, Republicans are generally voting against most of them.

[Confidential Board information redacted.]

A brief note on unified accreditation, still our most transformative initiative underway. In short, work continues on planning for and preparing a substantive change application to NECHE, which we expect to submit sometime in late May. Our planning committees are in the drafting stages, and we're providing NECHE a brief report of the work to date this coming week, a copy of which will be posted on our public unified accreditation website (<https://sites.google.com/maine.edu/unified-accreditation/home>). Jim Thelen will provide an update on current progress at your full meeting at UMS next Monday.

Let me close with some aspirational news. With thanks to Robert Placido and Dan Demeritt for the idea and work to pull it together, as well as to our Presidents for their participation, I will be hosting the first episode of *The Presidential Tour* this coming Tuesday evening. *The Presidential Tour* is an interactive college success series that will be live-streamed on YouTube and Facebook, specifically tailored for parents of Maine high school students and their children. This Tuesday's premier episode, "Paying for College," will broadcast from our flagship campus in Orono, where I will be joined by three financial aid experts from our campuses and the Finance Authority of Maine, who have amassed nearly ninety years of experience helping students and families pay for college. Successive episodes will be hosted by a university president and feature students from Maine and campus experts discussing a specific student success segment. Our experts and students will also take questions. You can see the promotional YouTube video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aq7m1VwRr2k&feature=youtu.be>

I look forward to discussing our work with you in person next weekend at USM.

Regards,  
Dan