

Trustees -

This has been perhaps the most momentous week in our System's history. And the incredible challenges we faced required the public leadership our universities displayed through it.

While I have not generally provided a weekend update before the Sunday call to order for a normal bimonthly Board meeting, with our now-shortened agenda for meeting only tomorrow, this weekend is different, to say the least.

I'll be brief and get right to it.

As you know, early Wednesday afternoon, at nearly the same time the World Health Organization declared the Coronavirus a global pandemic, UMS announced that, effective March 23, its universities would transition all academic instruction from in-class or in-person meetings to online or other distance modalities to the maximum extent possible. Labs, clinicals, music, art, research and related learning that all presumptively require in-person work in university facilities may proceed in exceptional circumstances, though even in these areas work is underway to introduce CDC social distancing protocols and transition as many aspects of the work and learning to remote modalities. Relatedly, we asked our students in our university residence halls to depart with whatever personal and educational belongings they need to complete the semester's requirements off campus. Though public health requires that we empty our residence halls as much as possible, students with extenuating personal circumstances -- essentially where not being able to live in our residence halls on campus would effectively make it impossible for the student to continue their academic progress -- will be allowed to remain on a case-by-case basis as determined at each university.

These decisions were not made lightly, nor unilaterally. Beginning last Sunday evening, I led several discussions with our Presidents, with our decisions evolving according to the constantly changing public health situation. The timing of our decision-making was important too -- we were facing the prospect of thousands of our students leaving for personal Spring Break travels all over the United States and internationally, to return for classes resuming on March 23 with no way for us to know which or how many of our students could have been exposed to the virus. With that knowledge, we could not risk causing the virus's introduction or contributing unknowingly to community transmission with our students' return from Spring Break, much less risk the strain to our health system that would ensue.

While Bowdoin College was the only Maine institution to announce similar plans before we acted, it was not lost on me that UMS -- as Maine's largest collection of higher education institutions and the most significant public entity outside of state government -- needed to exercise public leadership with its actions. I consulted regularly with the Governor's office and the leaders of Maine's other higher education institutions leading up to our decision. The cascade of events since Wednesday should make clear by now that, while we had no good or easy choices in front of us, we made good decisions. We acted responsibly to protect public health. By acting when we did, we were on the leading edge of actions that we hope contribute

to "flattening the curve" (see <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/science/coronavirus-curve-mitigation-infection.html>) of virus spread through the pandemic. Indeed, to that end, we have also begun discussions with the leaders of Northern Light Health to coordinate the sharing of resources and expertise to serve Maine.

The focus of nearly all work taking place now and through the foreseeable future in our System is on supporting our students, faculty, and staff through the transition and continuing to protect public health. The scope and breadth of all of this work, led at the university level by our presidents now in coordination with my System team, is too vast to detail for this summary report to you. But without diminishing anyone's contributions to the effort, I do want to call out for your attention some of the work and some of the people leading it.

UMS CIO David Demers and UMS Executive Directors of Public Affairs Dan Demeritt and their teams have created a dynamic, robust, and constantly updated public webpage through which we attempt to inform our communities of the latest information. It is a tremendous resource and a model of transparency and accountability to our stakeholders. If you'd like to know anything about our current efforts, please visit the site here: <https://www.maine.edu/health-advisory/community-guidance/>.

Every university has launched its own Emergency Operations Center (EOC), led by campus-based Incident Commanders and responsible for coordinating all actions associated with the pandemic and public health at each university. With more than 30 people meeting every morning to foster collaboration, the primary incident commanders at the campuses who deserve our gratitude are Ron Saindon, USM; Laurie Gardner, UMF; Joe Szakas, UMA; Roland Lacroix, UMaine; Marnie Kaler, UMM; Fred Thomas, UMPI; and Leslie Kelley, UMFK. At the System level, UMS General Services Officer Chip Gavin, UMS Risk Manager Gretchen Catlin, and UMS Director of Safety Management Jeremy Sales lead a System EOC, which convenes daily and is leading a statewide COVID-19 Response Virtual Summit today as I write with the Maine CDC and Maine Emergency Management Agency. Their collective work ensures our public health, and we are indebted to them all.

With the US CDC and State Department extending its Level 3 travel advisory to the entire globe, we have recalled all students traveling internationally. Gretchen Catlin and Mary Norment at UMS, Orlina Boteva at UMaine, Emily Zider at USM, Linda Becky at UMF, and many others have been instrumental in helping our travelers around the world, even to the point of assisting with booking flights back through UMS when airline reservation lines were overwhelmed.

Our faculty and students across the System deserve special mention. They will bear the full brunt of our necessary academic transition. Through these challenging times, we don't want to lose sight of the fact that our faculty and students are now called upon to innovate and adapt their teaching and learning modalities and traditions. We are all working to support them. We will continually look for ways to recognize and even celebrate their innovations and adaptability at appropriate times ahead.

Let me close with a special note directed to our students. Life has thrown them the proverbial curve ball, upsetting the celebrated traditions of spring on our university campuses. Fearing that our May graduation ceremonies may not be able to occur, a group of UMaine students organized a small farewell gathering through social media that quickly morphed into an informal "Coronamencement" on campus in Orono this past Friday afternoon. UMaine Vice President of Student Life and Inclusive Excellence Robert Dana attended to recognize the students' creative expression in the face of tradition lost. The New York Times reported on the event here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/13/us/Coronavirus-college-commencement-ceremonies.html>.

My wish through these trying times is that all of our students continue to learn with us as they prepare for their lives beyond the challenges of today.

Regards,

Dan