

Week of July 13

Trustees -

Recognizing that we're together for the day tomorrow via Zoom for your Board meeting, I'll share just an abbreviated report of a few matters from this past week.

But before I do, I want to note the passing of civil rights leaders C. T. Vivian and Congressman John Lewis. With my work in public service before coming to UMS, I had the privilege of meeting and working directly with Congressman Lewis on a number of occasions in Atlanta, Washington, and my home state of Connecticut. Lewis's perspective on the trajectory of race relations and the civil rights movement over nearly 60 years, from his early days with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee to his last days in the United States Congress, was always calmly focused on progress -- progress made, and progress still needed. His passing is a great national loss, and is an appropriate time to note for you that we continue our own work to root out bias and inequities in academics and admissions. I pledged that we would do so in my [June 5 message](#) to the UMS community and make an initial report to you of our efforts at your September meeting. To that end, UMS Director of Learning and Organizational Development Megan Clough is facilitating discussions with Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido and Chief Human Resources Officer Carol Corcoran, along with our university Chief Academic Officers and other Human Resources leaders, to develop a proposal for the presentation you'll hear on this matter in September.

The priority we give to the work of identifying and rooting out systemic bias wherever we find it cannot and will not be diminished even as we take on other important challenges looking ahead to fall.

I note just a few other matters for you this weekend.

On Friday, we received the official letter from the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) that confers unified accreditation, which I've attached for your review here. Given our receipt of the letter only two days ago, it's not in your Board materials, but UMS Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen will be reviewing the letter with you tomorrow as part of his update on unified accreditation. While the conferral of unified accreditation (effective July 1, 2020) does not by itself solve budget challenges or lead to more market relevant, cost effective collaborative academic programs between our universities, it nevertheless represents achievement and the culmination of several years of work with NECHE and U.S. Department of Education staff for UMS to have the flexibility to address both in ways that best serve our students and state. Every solution we explore for our problems going forward will consider, first and foremost, how we can take full advantage of the opportunities that unified accreditation presents for us now.

Finally, we're actively engaged in discussions spearheaded by your fellow Board member and Maine Department of Education Commissioner Pender Makin to consider whether pre-service educators in our UMS teacher programs could serve as "teacher avatars" in K-12 classrooms this fall. Working in this way, our teacher education program students could gain valuable knowledge and skills in an extremely authentic setting by supervising and managing classrooms while the classroom teacher zooms in remotely with the instruction/lessons. We would work with Maine DOE to provide training for these students and assign mentors within the schools where they'd work to provide additional support and to liaison with the professors in the program. While there are challenges to be overcome and details to work out before we can move ahead -- chief among them ensuring the health and safety of any students who can participate -- this represents another opportunity to collaborate in service with the State of Maine in proactively managing the pandemic's impact on our education ecosystem.

Enjoy the remainder of a hot summer Maine weekend. I look forward to seeing and hearing from you more tomorrow.

Regards,
Dan