

Week of July 6

Trustees,

After no message last week over the 4th of July holiday weekend, I'll get right back to it here.

Nearly all our leadership energy is directed at planning to resume as much in-person instruction and operation as can be safely managed this coming fall. That is both a reality and necessity for the time being. At the same time, we continue to look ahead at how we can make the University of Maine System more resilient in the face of not just the ongoing pandemic, but also considering the juxtaposition of innovations and disruptions in the 21st century higher education environment, how best to use the new tool of unified accreditation, and the possibility of new Alford Foundation investments that we continue discussing with that Foundation's leadership. We don't need to give in to pessimism in the face of our very real challenges. There is still opportunity for transformative change and innovation in UMS's future, all to better serve our students and state.

But relative to fall planning, to give you a sense of the complexity and challenges we are facing, consider the reporting from the Portland Press Herald and Bangor Daily News over the last week, focusing as they did on [student expectations about having face-to-face instruction available to them this fall](#) and [our faculty's collective concerns about teaching in person](#).

On a course-by-course and even department-by-department basis, our modality planning is itself complex and multi-faceted. Working with our academic leaders, and maintaining regular discussions with our faculty union leaders as well, our presidents and I have asked our faculties to consider using appropriate mixes of online, remote, in-person and in-person hybrid, and individualized instruction modalities when we return this fall. To better understand how our teaching modalities will work this fall, it may help to clearly explain each here:

- **Online** is mainly asynchronous -- that is, not live, accessed at the user's convenience -- with exercises, recorded lectures or modules of explanation, chat rooms, and interactions between students and faculty members and between students through the online learning platform, as one example
- **Remote** is mainly synchronous -- that is, live as the instruction is occurring -- as a learning experience with classes occurring at regular intervals using formats such as Zoom but that may also include peer-to-peer interactions, discussion groups, and coaching sessions, and, importantly, that includes an in-person aspect through connecting regularly for discussions of material with faculty and peers
- **In-person/hybrid** or "**hyflex**" is learning that usually occurs in the traditional classroom setting, but, with COVID-19 upon us, social distancing requirements may also involve staggered in-person attendance in class mixed with **online** and **remote** components, meaning students may be able to attend a class altogether or, to reduce in-class density, students may have an assigned day to to be physically present in class, with other classes live-streamed, recorded, or included in notes on the online learning platform
- **Individualized instruction** includes field experiences, independent studies for research, clinical experiences, thesis work, or dissertations, to name a few; it is typically a faculty member working with from 1 to 4 students at a time for supervised work, in person

Currently planned fall instructional modalities at the University of Maine, for example, include eight percent online, 26 percent remote, 23 percent in-person/hyflex, and 35 percent independent study/field experience/clinical/thesis/dissertation, and eight percent not yet known. But as we are attempting to infuse at least some component of in-person interaction and learning in all but the purely online asynchronous modality, as much as 84 percent, if not more as course planning continues to evolve, of UMaine's instructional modalities may have in-person interaction.

I continue discussions with all of our presidents and our System COVID-19 planning teams to find ways to safely offer as much in-person instructional interaction as possible. We do so attempting to balance the competing realities that our students want as much of the normalcy of in-person instruction as possible even as an informal survey of just over 250 UMaine faculty, taken before we [announced our initial COVID-19 testing plans](#), found that just half of responding professors wanted to return to the classroom, with 57 percent saying they felt uncomfortable doing so. Further complicating our planning is the reality that, at any given time through the fall semester, we must be prepared for the possibility that a proportion of students may be in quarantine or self-isolation, either for having a positive COVID-19 test or for having been exposed to someone who does. If students have been exposed to the virus, we must discourage and likely disallow attendance in an in-person class. Thus, it becomes critical that our faculty and students are prepared for asynchronous online, synchronous remote, hybrid, and individualized modes of instruction, sometimes simultaneously for the same course -- and all the while ensuring that appropriate supports are available for our students, faculty, and staff in an unprecedented time.

I continue to appreciate the goodwill our faculty have displayed. Even as our faculty work in the own programs and departments, our System HR and Labor leaders -- notably Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido, UMS Chief Human Resources Officer Carol Corcoran, and our labor team of Dori Pratt and Susan Cameron -- continue discussions with AFUM faculty union leaders on COVID-19-related issues, such as requests to pause the tenure clock, continuing instructor-only use of student evaluations, de-emphasizing scholarly expectations in the face of increased focus on teaching quality and student learning, etc. These discussions have been both cordial and productive, and we do not anticipate any notable conflicts.

Unanticipated concerns pop up from all directions. This week, grave concerns arose in the higher education community from the Monday announcement from U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement that international students would not be granted student visas if their college or university was fully online in the fall (reported in the Bangor Daily News [here](#)). This is a consequential matter: UMS enrolled more than 620 international students last fall. But given our plans to offer face-to-face and hybrid instruction that includes in-person instructional opportunities, we do not believe the University of Maine System's international students who want some face-to-face instruction will be affected. Still, those who seek fully online programs are at risk of losing access to their programs, and for that reason we expect to fully support calls from the higher education community to relax or waive the ICE requirements, and we've already engaged the Maine Congressional delegation for this purpose.

We'll be together next week for the July Board of Trustees meeting. I'll preview the highlights we expect to discuss there in my message next week. Meantime, I wish you a productive week ahead.

Regards,

Dan