

Week of June 15

Trustees -

I write this morning with an abbreviated report, recognizing both that we rest briefly this weekend to welcome summer and celebrate Father's Day and that we'll be together this coming week for your ASA and FFT Committee meetings as well as your special Friday meeting to consider our first iteration of the FY21 budget.

I start with an issue to which our country seems to be awakening as never before -- the scourge of racism weighing down our collective history and too many of our institutions, not to mention our friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Following a message I shared with the UMS community on June 5, which I entitled an [Imperative for Change](#), I and several of our Presidents wrote to our communities again at the end of this week just past to [recognize Juneteenth](#). Juneteenth, observed in some fashion now in all but three states, but not yet nationally, calls our attention to the last recognition of freedom among those formerly enslaved in our country.

Too little attention has been paid to Juneteenth and racism more broadly, and simple ignorance is no excuse. We can be hopeful that our national conversation is building toward a consensus that it is not enough for any one of us to claim that we are not racist, or for us collectively to say that our universities are not racist. Instead, we need to work actively to be *anti-racist*, a concept popularized by Ibram Kendi, an author, Professor, and founding director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University in Washington, D.C. To be anti-racist means to confront every day the crippling vestiges of centuries-long racism, and the hard work to do so is explored in Kendi's book *How to Be an Antiracist*, a [Common Read](#) project of the University of Southern Maine even before George Floyd's horrific death at the hands of Minneapolis police officers last month.

An example of such efforts is the work our Chief Academic Officers will undertake. They are beginning discussions about a review of our academic and admissions practices to identify and root out bias, including in developmental courses, standardized tests, hiring and tenure review processes, and other areas. They and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido will produce a draft report with recommendations as the summer progresses.

It is vitally important work, and we must keep our focus on it in everything that we do.

Switching gears, we've not lost our focus on adult learners and our microcredential efforts either. Aply led by Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment

Rosa Redonnett, we are moving forward in concert with the Maine Community College System to sign with Concentric Sky to use its Badgr platform for our microcredentialing efforts.

According to Concentric Sky, Badgr is used by over 10,000 organizations in 38 countries, delivering verifiable digital credentials to more than ten million users around the world. Here, the platform will allow UMS and MCCS to develop and share badges and other microcredentials, helping to support all of our students and connect them with a variety of learning opportunities.

I would be remiss if I didn't discuss at least briefly our fall planning, as other institutions of higher education continue to announce plans for resuming operations in the fall. I and our System coordinated planning teams continue to work with our presidents and their emergency operations and planning teams and our faculty on a nearly daily basis, readying an announcement by the end of the month of our plans for safely resuming as much in-person, on-campus operation as possible. As I've told you before, testing looms large, and we are working to finalize arrangements with testing partners for as much testing as we can responsibly manage, with our testing plans guided by our Science Advisory Board and health outcomes modeling for how to minimize the risk of virus transmission to the greatest extent possible.

One calendar note of significance: I will lead the presentation via Zoom to NECHE this Tuesday afternoon of our request for unified accreditation. Joining me will be Board Chair Jim Erwin, Vice Chancellors Ryan Low and Robert Placido, Presidents Joan Ferrini-Mundy, Becky Wyke, and Ray Rice, and Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen, with our other presidents invited to attend the presentation as well. I will report next week about how our request and presentation are received, and we can expect an early indication of NECHE's decision before the end of the week.

Finally, closing as I did last weekend's update when I shared news about collaborations underway between the University of Maine and Northeastern University's Portland-based Roux Institute, I wanted to call your attention to similar discussions underway for academic collaborations between the University of Southern Maine and Northeastern, exploring potential "4+1" degrees in the fields of Artificial Intelligence, Bioinformatics, Biomedical, Nanotechnology, Precision Health, and Robotics. And taking advantage of USM's Maker Innovation Studio (MIST) Lab and Dubyak Center for Innovation, as well as the Maine Center and University of Maine School of Law specifically, further discussions will occur for joint research, technology transfer, and product development.

I'm grateful to Presidents Ferrini-Mundy and Cummings for leading these discussions with Northeastern to create new degree pathways for our students and the State of Maine through the Roux Institute.

Best wishes for a good week ahead. To all fathers, Happy Father's Day!

Sincerely,

Dan