

Week of May 25

Trustees -

Spring marches on. So does our unified accreditation initiative and planning to make our fall operations as safe as possible, along with other work over the past week that I'll summarize here.

I'll start with a highlight.

On Thursday morning, with thanks for our Government and Community Relations Director Samantha Warren's organizational work to bring it all together quickly, the University of Maine System hosted Dr. Jill Biden on a virtual visit that showcased the University of Maine's work as a public research university to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. With UMaine's President Joan Ferrini-Mundy and Vice President for Innovation and Economic Development Jake Ward as my co-hosts, I welcomed Dr. Biden via Zoom -- see a screenshot attached -- and then let Joan and Jake introduce a number of presentations, including:

*Through UMaine Assistant Professor of Microbiology Dr. Melissa Maginnis, we highlighted the work of the Science Advisory Board that's been stood up to advise us through the pandemic.*

*Jake introduced Dr. John Belding, Director of UMaine's Advanced Manufacturing Center, who explained how AMC has been developing COVID-19 related prototypes (aerosol boxes) and evaluating mask sterilization techniques.*

*Dr. Jennifer Monti, of MaineHealth, followed to discuss how UMaine's partnership with Maine's largest healthcare system before and during COVID-19 helped to catalyze taking the concept of an aerosol box to protect frontline medical staff as they intubate or transport patients to nationwide production and distribution in a matter of weeks.*

*Jesse Lupo, the owner of Mossy Ledge Spirits in Etna, Maine, discussed how UMaine helped his distillery shift from producing spirits to now more than 4,000 gallons of sanitizer, which local small businesses need to reopen.*

*Turning to our students, Aileen and Aimee Co, sisters and both Ph.D. students at UMaine, discussed how the suspension of their research due to COVID-19 led to new opportunities, for Aileen, to coordinate the statewide distribution of in-demand hand sanitizer and, for Aimee, 3D printing ventilator attachment prototypes. UMaine undergraduate computer science student Colleen DeMaris explained a code she's written that will allow anyone with a 3D printer to*

*produce their own touchless thermometer, a critical breakthrough given commercial supply shortages.*

The presentations outlined above, which we managed to share with Dr. Biden in just under 45 minutes, were a wonderful illustration of the value, reach, and public service that UMaine's research enterprise, in collaboration with other partners through the System and state, provides for all of Maine.

As my Chief of Staff and UMS General Counsel Jim Thelen reported at your recent Board meeting, and will again tomorrow at your summit with Board of Visitors members from our universities, we are nearing the first finish line with the unified accreditation initiative that your January 27 unanimous vote charged us to pursue. With another round of draft comments incorporated from NECHE President Barbara Brittingham, final drafting and editing from Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido and our faculty senate and assembly leaders on a charter and protocol for a UMS Faculty Governance Council to provide shared governance for multi-university programs, and some final coordination and editing polish from Kim Jenkins (UMS Director of Organizational Effectiveness), Samantha Warren, and Rosa Redonnett (UMS Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment), Jim will, in the coming days, be finalizing the UMS Substantive Change application for all UMS universities to unify their institutional accreditations in the System. In a move that is both symbolic and important to demonstrate our unified commitment to the effort, Board Chair Jim Erwin and I will join every President in signing the transmittal letter that conveys our unified accreditation application to NECHE.

It's not too much to say this is a watershed moment in the System's history. Discussed since the System's formation in 1968, authorized since 1986, and only now coming fully to fruition as a basis to organize and coordinate our resources and academic programs between our universities, unified accreditation will be an even more important tool to help us recover from, respond to, and find opportunity in the disruption visited upon us by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

I chose my words -- the *first* finish line -- carefully above. It's true. In many ways, for all our work to date, the real work of unified accreditation will begin only after NECHE's initial approval, which we expect by the end of June. We will continue reporting on the significance of these efforts and the work it permits us to do in the coming months.

You are well aware from my many recent reports that a significant focus of our work every week now is our continued planning to ensure that we can safely return to our campuses in the fall with as much in-person instruction and presence on campus as possible. The planning is multi-faceted, considering how the availability of testing and use of PPE and social distancing influence how we schedule and offer our fall courses, fill our residence halls, offer dining services, and manage student life and activities, with the overall priority of maintaining the health and safety of our faculty, staff, and students and broader communities paramount -- and with all of this quite obviously dependent on the resources available to us in a time of tremendous budget uncertainty, both this year and next.

The availability of testing will be key. Our Science Advisory Board and UMaine are reviewing the potential to establish a certified testing and processing lab in Orono, which could be done with the expertise and lab infrastructure already in place and only modest additional investments for lab certification and staff. We've broadened our discussions with potential external partners, such as Anthem, our new student health insurance provider, and The Jackson Laboratory, which recently partnered with UConn and the State of Connecticut for COVID-19 test processing in a model that merits consideration here in Maine.

And we continue discussions with Maine Commissioners Jeanne Lambrew (Department of Health and Human Services) and Heather Johnson (Economic and Community Development) not only about testing, but also about the extent to which we can assist the state by developing our own safe return guidelines, which is the basis of the work we've organized with public and private higher education leaders throughout Maine, with the goal of releasing the guidelines in the coming week.

Finally, not a week goes by without financial planning, both regarding our budgets and the potential for future investment. Vice Chancellor Ryan Low and I, along with Samantha Warren, provided a Zoom update on our financial position to members of the Legislature's Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and separately Ryan, Joan Ferrini-Mundy, and I had a high-level check-in with Alford Foundation leadership to discuss the ongoing potential for future investment from that crucial long-time UMS partner.

As always, the work is challenging, the future uncertain. But we are rising to meet the challenge, and planning deliberately to be prepared, come what may.

Hope to see many of you tomorrow for the BOT/BOV Summit.

Regards,

Dan