

Week of August 10

Trustees,

Let me start this week with transparency and accountability as our safe-return fall plans come nearer to implementation.

We continually monitor news from other parts of the country that includes worrisome stories of universities abruptly reversing course for fall in-person instruction and scattered virus outbreaks at schools that have already returned. Fortunately, Maine's prudent, disciplined, and thus far [successful efforts to blunt virus transmission in the state](#) have created a window of opportunity for UMS to begin implementing our careful planning for a safe return to our campuses in the coming weeks.

I've reported various details to you through the summer after we announced our [Together for Maine](#) fall safe return plan on July 1. You'll recall our basic initial testing plan was to test out-of-state and residential students and other special populations before their physical return to campus, along with ongoing surveillance testing through the fall. This week, on the recommendation of our Scientific Advisory Board, [we announced an expansion of testing](#) to add a second round of testing within 7-10 days after an initial test for those in the out-of-state, residential, and special population cohorts. And, recognizing the importance of being transparent about our efforts to safely return, we've launched a public dashboard that will report and update our testing results on a daily basis. You can see the dashboard live [here](#) by scrolling down the webpage to our daily testing results.

We also confirmed and [announced this week](#) calendar adjustments for the 2020-2021 academic year that are intended to reduce the amount of travel away from and back to our campuses through the year. In sum, while we're honoring Labor Day and Indigenous Peoples' Day this fall, we've eliminated any further fall break days and will end in-person instruction and all but essential residence hall operations at Thanksgiving. The spring semester will begin a week later (on January 25) so we can eliminate the traditional Spring Break week and the travel away from campuses that would otherwise occur. To that point, understanding the increased risk of virus transmission from travel and contact with people outside of Maine, we will continue to limit UMS-sponsored travel outside of Maine except for special circumstances reviewed and approved in advance.

All of this is in addition to the Herculean efforts of campus-based academic and operations leaders, faculty, and staff over the last several months to prepare lower density hybrid course instruction options that blend in-person instruction with various remote, online, and synchronous/asynchronous teaching and learning modalities -- not to mention additional work to prepare our facilities for social distancing, additional cleaning, and improved ventilation, while we also develop strategies to manage the communal enforcement of our face covering requirements.

We know from the science of this that face coverings are critical to limiting virus transmission. At the same time, we're learning from experience that not only diligence and discipline are required, but patience too. Just this week, I led our monthly meeting of System Presidents in a hybrid format, with half of our group together in a large conference room at the University of Maine, socially distanced and masked, interacting with the other half of our colleagues from around the state via Zoom -- much like a good portion of our fall instruction will occur. I well appreciate that none of us would choose to have our faces covered, muffling our voices, as we try to be as engaged with colleagues and students not physically present as with those who are. And yet we must maintain this discipline and respect for each other's health and well-being if we expect to navigate our pandemic teaching, research, and operations while minimizing the risk to public health by doing so.

We continue other work too, of course. Trustees who were able to participate in this past Thursday's Executive Committee meeting heard our initial thinking on responding to the State of Maine's request for plans to manage a possible 10 percent reduction to our state appropriations in this and the following two fiscal years. I am stressing to our Presidents that, even as we will aggressively advocate with the state to maintain our present funding levels or at least minimize any reduction, their plans to manage cuts of this magnitude need to be realistic, and need to be developed within the framework of opportunity that unified accreditation presents overall to reduce the costs of our operations and offer our academic program more strategically and efficiently throughout the state. You'll hear more of our thinking in the coming weeks as the state curtailment process for FY21 continues, and our revised FY21 budgets coming back to you this fall will be responsibly adjusted to these realities.

Trustees participating in Thursday's meeting also heard our confidential update on discussions with the Alford Foundation, which I've reported to you previously in summary fashion. UMS Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen will continue to be the lead to maintain confidential legal discussions with Alford Foundation counsel toward reaching agreement for a transformative new investment in student success and retention, System-wide engineering, and the Maine Center (along with the Alfords' legacy interest in Division 1 Athletics at the University of Maine). We expect to identify comprehensive strategies to leverage new Alford investments to secure additional private (both individual and corporate) philanthropic funds, as well as additional state and federal capital and grant funds that meet match commitments we expect to make and further the mission and purpose of these critical System programs and initiatives. I look forward to further discussions with Trustees in the coming weeks as we finalize these new commitments.

Finally, to wrap up discussion of Thursday's consequential Executive Committee meeting, I want to thank here our System Title IX staff and counsel -- Liz Lavoie, UMS's Coordinator of Title IX Services; Nina Lavoie, Senior Associate General Counsel; and Sara Mlynarchek, Assistant General Counsel; along with Kai McGintee, our outside legal counsel at Bernstein Shur; and Jim Thelen coordinating the effort as General Counsel -- for their work since May to bring our System policies into compliance with the U.S. Department of Education's new Title IX regulations, which went into effect this past Friday. In doing so, I want to acknowledge the

concern expressed by Trustees Eames and Riley. While we respect our legal obligation to comply with these new rules, at the same time we are sensitive to the national debate about the extent to which complainant and victim rights are balanced against respondent rights in the rules. I'm confident that our legal and Title IX teams across the System will do their best to maintain that balance properly in their compliance efforts.

I close this week with good news. Associate Vice Chancellor Rosa Redonnett and I met this week with Jason Judd, the Executive Director of Educate Maine, to plan for the coming year. Jason alerted us that UMS will be recognized at the Educate Maine Symposium in December with the Weston L. Bonney Educational Leadership Award, which will commend UMS for our leadership during the pandemic, and specifically for our focus on our students and the citizens of Maine throughout.

Through every challenge, as long as we keep our focus on our students and what best serves their and the State of Maine's interests, we will be successful.

Regards,
Dan