

Week of October 12

Trustees,

Along with a brief summary of the past week's activities, I'd like to update you on a few items that have been before you recently.

Our work to engage our retiree community more proactively continues, both regarding our own outreach and through Aon, with whom, as you know, we've partnered to support our retirees through the transition to supplemental retiree health insurance through a national exchange that Aon administers.

The bulk of our retirees and their dependents should have received our letter and "FAQs" earlier this week, which, along with my September 30 letter to the Maine Legislature, is [publicly posted](#) on the Chancellor's Office webpage.

While Aon has been hosting informational webinars for some time, we've entered a more active engagement period now as the enrollment transition period has begun. As of the beginning of this past week, Aon had hosted 222 appointments (covering just over 300 retirees and spouses/dependents) and facilitated 59 enrollments -- both positive numbers, we're told, relative to where we are in the transition period. An additional 287 appointments were scheduled to occur over the last week, and more than 360 appointments are scheduled for the week ahead.

Through our partnership with Aon, each appointment represents our commitment to make sure every single retiree is individually supported through this transition.

Knowing how important this matter is to you, we will continue to update you on the transition through the fall. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact my office if you have questions.

With the news and excitement of last week's Alford gift announcement now more broadly understood, we're rolling up our sleeves already to organize how we will plan and manage the initial stages of each funded initiative. The University of Maine will manage the \$90 million Division 1 athletics gift and \$20 million match fundraising, in coordination with the System's capital projects and planning team as facility improvements and construction are planned. For the Alford Foundation's \$150 million to be invested in three Student Success and Retention initiatives, a System-wide College of Engineering collaboratively led by the University of Maine, and further development of the Maine Graduate and Professional Center, along with our own 10-year \$150 million match commitment, we will organize our efforts around a traditional grant management/Principal Investigator model, with an Executive Leadership Group, Principal Investigators, and Initiative Leads to begin planning work as soon as this coming week. The real work to successfully launch these initiatives and ensure they have System- and state-wide impact can now begin in earnest, with our faculty and university leaders engaged from the beginning.

On Wednesday our Presidents and Law School Dean Leigh Saufley met via Zoom with me and our System leadership team for our monthly Presidents' Council meeting. Our university Chief Academic Officers joined the first half of the meeting, during which we discussed a number of issues that will be at the heart of our work to take full advantage of unified accreditation, chief among them assessment, System-wide faculty governance, and strategically coordinated academic program planning (as we've started with Education and Nursing). Work to plan for upcoming reports to and visits from NECHE regarding these issues, including the significant effort to prepare a comprehensive Self Study in advance of NECHE's Fall 2022 visit to confirm unified accreditation, will require a leadership plan and teams of faculty, staff, and other stakeholders across the System not unlike what we will organize to manage the Alford initiatives. That work too, already informally underway, will begin with more deliberate and organized effort and intention.

On Thursday, with thanks to President Becky Wyke for hosting me through the day, I visited the University of Maine at Augusta along with my Chief of Staff Jim Thelen [as part of the "Keep It Up" tour I kicked off in the County last month](#) to see how each of our universities have managed their enrollments, classes, facilities, and student and faculty support this fall. I'm impressed everywhere with the resilience I see from our students and faculty, along with the staff who have made everything work this fall -- from testing, to new facility configurations to support distancing, to student supports and IT, it's their work that is keeping us together safely. Though it will always be grounded in reality, we have cause for growing optimism that we may be able to maintain our planned in-person academic operations safely to Thanksgiving.

In doing so, we will continue reaching out to Mainers wherever they are. Beyond traditional students, you're well aware of the priority efforts we've made to engage adult learners, with Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment Rosa Redonnet leading those efforts. Just this week, Rosa and Dan Demeritt have been working to explore ways to align the adult degree completion and traditional student marketing campaigns with consistent messaging, including through TV spots and other advertising that will roll out during the year. Complementing those efforts is a comprehensive new website for adult learners that went live this week. I invite you to visit the website [here](#) if you'd like to further familiarize yourself with these important efforts.

I hope the past week has been positive for you. As I did with Augusta this past week, I'll be visiting Machias and Farmington in the week ahead. Best wishes for a productive week wherever it takes you.

Regards,
Dan