

Week of February 1

Trustees -

We're already two weeks into the Spring 2021 semester. Before I share some thoughts about the week just past, let me first remind you of the Trustee confirmation hearings scheduled over the next few days.

As the Board office shared on Friday, three Trustee-nominees (Beth Dobson, Roger J. Katz, and Margaret Rotundo) will have virtual hearings Monday afternoon, February 8, at 1:00 before the Legislature's Joint Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. Wednesday, February 10, at the same time, the Student Trustee-nominee, Irene Neal of Fort Kent, will have her confirmation hearing. Please consider watching the hearings on YouTube [at this link](#).

We began our Phase 6 testing this past week -- the expanded testing protocol intended to test everyone who comes to campus to learn, teach and research every week. Every member of our UMS community who has worked tirelessly over the last month to prepare this ten-fold increase to our asymptomatic COVID testing is to be lauded for their hard work. But despite our best efforts, we experienced challenges. On Monday, the first day of expanded testing, technical scanning problems reading the "QR" codes on test sample tubes and lack of capacity to efficiently accept testing consent forms electronically -- problems which occurred primarily at UMaine and USM where we are ramping up testing operations with our new testing partner, Shield T3 -- led to excessive wait times for those being tested. And regrettably, nearly a quarter of the 2,700 test samples we collected were impacted by the scanning problem. I immediately and transparently acknowledged the problem with [a message to our campus communities](#) on Tuesday, and we released [a public statement](#) the same day that detailed the improvements to be immediately made. USM and UMaine paused their testing briefly to ensure the problems were fixed, and we were able to make arrangements both for easily accepting electronic testing consent forms through a user-friendly test scheduling and check-in "app" and switching to a more easily readable linear bar code for the test sample tubes. We're expecting a better testing experience this coming week, and I remain deeply grateful for the yeoman's work our testing, IT, and communications staff are doing to keep their campus communities safe through our COVID testing protocols.

Next I'd like to highlight several important and positive items across our System, starting first with research.

The University of Maine learned this week that it jumped 8 places, from 154th to 146th, in the federal government's latest annual HERD research rankings. Before getting into a bit more detail about the significance of the move, here's some context.

The HERD rankings come from the annual [Higher Education Research and Development Survey](#), which is the primary source of information on R&D expenditures at colleges and universities in the United States. The survey collects information on R&D expenditures by field

of research and source of funds and also gathers information on types of research, expenses, and headcounts of R&D personnel. The survey is sponsored by the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), which exists within the National Science Foundation and has a mandate to collect, interpret, analyze, and disseminate objective data on the nation's science and engineering enterprise.

The annual survey rankings are based primarily on total research expenditures at the nation's colleges and universities. UMaine's move up the rankings this year is based on its overall measured research expenditures moving from \$106.7 million in the 2018 reporting period to nearly \$130 million in the 2019 reporting period (which considers data collected from November 2019 through June 2020). The significance of this jump is all the more notable when considering that UMaine's research expenditures were roughly \$79 million in both the 2015 and 2016 reporting periods before jumping to \$99.5 million in the 2017 reporting period, \$106.7 million in 2018, and this past year's \$129.9 million.

The latest HERD survey ranked nearly 650 institutions, both public and private. Among public institutions, UMaine's ranking for overall research expenditures was 102nd out of more than 400, positioning UMaine in the top quartile when judged against either all institutions or only publics. If colleges and universities with medical schools or teaching hospitals -- which tend to generate outsized research expenditures -- are not considered, UMaine's position is 119th out of more than 630 institutions ranked (up from 128th in both 2017 and 2018), and UMaine now ranks 144th, out of more than 540 institutions ranked, for non-science and engineering research.

And UMaine's research enterprise is growing at a faster clip than its peers.

Among six peer research institutions, UMaine closed its rankings gap with the University of New Hampshire (which dropped from 134th in 2018 to 141st in 2019) and the University of Vermont (which has a medical school and dropped slightly from 143rd in 2018 to 145th in 2019) and moved well ahead of the University of North Dakota (which stayed at 153rd from 2018 to 2019), the University of Idaho (which stayed at 152nd from 2018 to 2019), the University of Rhode Island (which moved up from 156th in 2018 to 151st in 2019), and the University of Texas at Arlington (which moved up from 155th in 2018 to 150th in 2019).

Of these, UMaine's research enterprise is on the highest growth trajectory, proof that UMaine's strategic pursuit of growth in research is working. The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) has asked that UMS, as part of its unified accreditation self study under way, report on how the expansion of UMaine research within the University of Maine System will serve the State of Maine overall, and research rankings improvements such as these surely give us a foundation to do so. And with the opportunities, under unified accreditation, to support graduate students and faculty around the System interested in research, and under the Harold Alfond Foundation's grant, to support the expansion of research learning experiences at all System universities, the continued growth of UMaine's research enterprise serves the entire System.

Serving another part of the System's mission, you'll see [reported in this morning's Maine Sunday Telegram](#) good news from the University of Southern Maine. USM announced late this week that it has reached a major milestone in its campaign for the [Promise Scholarship Program](#), which serves first-generation USM students with significant financial need. Over the past three years, more than \$8.8 million has been raised for Promise, including over \$7.5 million needed to endow the USM Promise Scholarship in perpetuity. The Campaign's success enables the University to support up to 100 Promise Scholars every year, with personalized scholarship awards that bridge the financial aid gap and help students graduate in four years with little or no debt.

USM works with more than 30 nonprofit partners and community colleges to identify, cultivate and refer talented and deserving candidates to apply to USM and to the Promise Scholars Program. For those fortunate enough to be awarded a Promise Scholarship, USM also provides a robust academic, personal and peer support system to help Promise Scholars overcome financial, academic, and cultural barriers, remain in school, and successfully earn their degrees.

To date, the program has shown remarkable success, particularly in light of the unprecedented challenges faced by students during the pandemic. During COVID, every single Promise Scholar was retained from spring to fall semester, a testament to the highly engaged Promise staff, including program coordinator Daniel Barton, who promotes personal and academic resilience through high-touch supports. In the aggregate, USM's first two Promise classes (enrolled in 2018 and 2019) achieved an impressive 93 percent retention rate, and 75 percent of them qualified for merit scholarships based on their success. This past fall, USM welcomed its third cohort of Promise Scholars, who represent high schools all over the state of Maine.

We should take great pride in the work our universities are doing across the entire spectrum of higher education, from expanding access to first-generation students all the way to expanding knowledge and economic growth from cutting-edge research and development.

Finally, we can celebrate the well-deserved recognition afforded this week to Leigh Saufley, Dean of the University of Maine School of Law and former Maine Chief Justice, and Joyce Taylor Gibson, Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at the University of Southern Maine and former Dean of Lewiston-Auburn College. Saufley and Gibson are the 2021 inductees to the Maine Women's Hall of Fame, which is dedicated to women whose achievements have had a significant statewide impact, have significantly improved the lives of women, and whose contributions provided enduring value for women. A virtual induction event is scheduled for March 20, 2021. You can read more about Dean Saufley and former Dean Gibson in the [statement we released on Friday](#) to celebrate their achievements.

I hope you enjoy the remainder of the weekend. For the football fans among us, may your favorite team -- or player -- have success in tonight's Super Bowl.

Regards,

Dan