

Week of February 15

Trustees,

While the challenges and stress of operating in the pandemic are ever-present, constantly warranting our focused attention, I'd like to use this weekend's message to reflect on some positive events occurring in our System recently.

Garnering the most attention was the University of Maine Athletic Department's [announcement this week](#) of its facilities renovation plan, which will be generously funded, in large part, by the Harold Alfond Foundation. Reflecting [Harold Alfond's](#) legacy interest in UMaine athletics and student-athletes -- indeed, with his more than \$7 million in contributions during his lifetime, he is the single greatest benefactor to UMaine Athletics -- you'll recall that \$90 million of the [\\$240 million gift to the University of Maine System](#) announced by UMS and the Alfond Foundation last October is to be used to renovate and modernize existing facilities and build new ones in the UMaine athletics complex. Together with at least \$20 million in additional funds that UMaine will raise, [the \\$110 million plan](#) will enhance the excellence of Maine's only Division I athletics program, strengthen gender equity, and provide a preferred destination for high school sports championships, large academic fairs and competitions, and community events.

To better understand the transformative scope of the \$110 million plan, which is expected to be built out over the next several years, consider that the largest previous capital project undertaken for the UMaine athletics complex over the last 20 years was the \$15 million renovation, in 2011, to what is now the New Balance Fieldhouse (which was first built in 1926) and Memorial Gymnasium (built in 1933). No project since has exceeded even a million dollars, and before that only the construction of the Shawn Walsh Hockey Center (for \$3 million in 2005), the addition of new football field turf and the field hockey and Mahaney Complex (for \$3.5 million in 2008), and renovations to the lower bowl and mechanical systems of the 44-year-old Alfond Arena (for \$4.8 million in 2010) passed that threshold.

While these renovations are taking place at the University of Maine in Orono, the completed facilities will truly benefit all of the University of Maine System and Maine's people. Early discussions are underway between UMaine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy and our other university presidents about how other System university athletic teams, athletes, and students might benefit from UMaine's transformed athletic infrastructure in the coming years, both for intercollegiate competition and recreational and co-curricular sports and activities opportunities. The benefit to student recruitment is obvious but bears noting too: high school students and their families who participate in activities, community events, and educational and athletic competitions in our stunning new facilities will be more likely to consider matriculating within our university system.

The work to launch the Student Success, College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Sciences, and University of Maine Graduate and Professional Center initiatives funded by the remaining \$150 million Alfond investments continues. A resolution to confirm how we intend to

manage the overall project, which we call UMS TRANSFORMS, will be back before you at your March Board of Trustees meeting. UMS Chief of Staff and General Counsel Jim Thelen and UMaine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy, who are leading the overall project, will be offering an informal one-hour Zoom briefing to be scheduled yet before the March 22 Board meeting. Trustees with questions about the projects will be welcome to join the briefing, though no public meeting will be scheduled for that purpose and there will be no expectations regarding attendance and quorum requirements for the briefing.

I'd like to turn now to a good-news story that hasn't yet received enough attention. With my own focus on criminal justice reform during my public career in Connecticut, it's a story in which I take particular pride.

Our University of Maine at Augusta [announced last week](#) a \$941,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to expand its Prison Education Partnership program. From the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's [2020 call for proposals](#), the grant program that will now support UMA is intended to "provide support to prison education providers and to organizations that analyze and support that work who seek to expand or stretch in this moment of pandemic-generated crisis and national reckoning on questions of race and justice—and beyond."

The work to make higher education opportunities accessible to incarcerated students is not new to UMA. Although prisoners lost access to federal Pell grants in the mid 1990s, UMA began providing educational opportunities at the Maine State Prison in 2006. Funding for the program at that time started with the Doris Buffett Sunshine Lady Foundation (whose benefactor, Doris Buffett, died this past August at age 92).

UMA's Prison Education Partnership program was able to expand to four other state correctional facilities when UMA was selected, in July 2016, as [one of 67 colleges and universities in 27 states](#) -- and the only one in Maine -- to use federal Second Chance Pell funding for that purpose. The goal of that program, which was expanded again in 2018 with bipartisan federal support, was to test whether a greater number of people in prison would participate in high-quality education programs if they had greater access to financial aid to pay for such programs.

All evidence to date suggests success in meeting that goal.

In the Fall 2020 semester, 82 students were enrolled through UMA at five correctional facilities, and there is a similar enrollment this spring. UMA's high-quality college courses are available both in-person and online via Zoom now at the Maine State Prison, the Maine Correctional Center, Bolduc Correctional Facility, Mountain View Correctional Facility, and the Southern Maine Women's Reentry Center. UMA's full-time and part-time faculty teach courses at these locations with the same academic standards regardless of a student's incarceration status. Available courses include college writing, literature, biology, math, psychology, sociology, art history, gender studies, as well as advanced coursework in human rights, history, social science, restorative justice, writing, and literature. UMA's Centers across the state provide

student support services in addition to guidance and re-entry support as students transition back to their communities.

The two-year Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant will allow UMA's program to fully integrate higher education opportunities at all of Maine's state corrections facilities, including through supporting a director to coordinate the Prison Education Partnership program; obtaining technology needed to continue educational programming when onsite instruction is not possible (as experienced during the pandemic), and expanding the availability of humanities-based courses and extra-curricular lectures and similar activities through a partnership with the Maine Humanities Council.

My compliments and thanks to UMA President Becky Wyke and all involved for advancing this important work in Maine.

Finally, a piece of interesting news with UMS connections that you may have missed.

This week [marked the passing](#) of 99-year-old Bernard Lown, a 1938 graduate of Lewiston High School who finished a bachelor's degree in zoology from the University of Maine. For those who missed it, the significance lies in Lown being one of Maine's few Nobel laureates. Lown went on from Maine to medical school at Johns Hopkins University and eventually became a world-renowned cardiologist in 1962 for inventing the first heart defibrillator, a device that made open-heart surgery possible. He was also an outspoken social activist. He founded a group called Physicians for Social Responsibility and, in 1980, along with six other physicians that included Dr. Yevgeny I. Chazov, a Russian cardiologist and personal doctor to then Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, co-founded International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, which garnered the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for its work campaigning against nuclear testing and the nuclear arms race.

At least one other Nobel laureate has direct UMS ties. Dr. Jeffrey Hall, who with two other scientists [shared the 2017 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine](#) for their discoveries of molecular mechanisms controlling the circadian rhythm in fruit flies, was an adjunct professor at UMaine from 2004-2008 and a Libra Professor of Neurogenetics from 2008-2010.

In closing, I note that I'll be testifying to the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs in support of the Governor's proposed budget appropriations for UMS on Tuesday. A few Trustees will be involved in our initial university budget presentations later in the week, which are directly intertwined, of course, with the state's own budget.

Finally, I note that you've been asked to attend a special meeting on Wednesday at 11:00 a.m. to consider approval of USM's capital projects for a new student success center and residence hall. This is proof that serving as a Trustee is time-consuming and important work, and I'm grateful for your service to Maine's public universities and our students and state.

With that, I'll wish you a good and productive week.

Regards,  
Dan