

Week of March 1

Trustees,

With four of the Board's standing committees having met over the past week -- ASA and HR/LR on Monday, FFT on Wednesday, and Investment on Thursday -- involving all of the Trustees, including most Trustees for two or more of these meetings, I'd like to start by acknowledging your service to Maine's largest and most impactful public education system. I am grateful for your commitment to public service and leadership.

Turning to service at the System level, I announced new Vice Chancellor titles this week for two senior leaders in the University of Maine System. I've added the title Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation for Joan Ferrini-Mundy (who will continue as the flagship president) and changed Jim Thelen's title to Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer. I also switched two key direct reports between Jim and Vice Chancellor Ryan Low, and updated the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs position description to better reflect Robert Placido's strategic data focus in unified accreditation and distinguish the System-level coordination for research that will be Joan's responsibility with her additional title. Robert's data-driven management, focus, and coordination of academic affairs across the System will be critical to our success in unified accreditation. I've made these changes based on Section 4(B)(2) of the [System's Charter](#), which authorizes me to delegate any powers and responsibilities to members of the Chancellor's staff as I deem necessary.

As you know, the System's statewide mission is to advance teaching, research, and public service. While UMaine's research stature is growing, with the goal of achieving [Carnegie "R1" \(very high research activity\) status](#) as soon as possible, too little attention is paid to how research is supported, encouraged, and coordinated across the System. And now, with unified accreditation, we are asked to report to the New England Commission of Higher Education in our Fall 2022 Self Study on our plan for strengthening the funding model for research and increasing research funding and doctoral-level education at the University of Maine.

I've made these changes now because it's my judgment that we could be more impactful and influential as a System as a catalyst that grows the Maine economy and develops a talented workforce prepared for the R&D environment with intentional coordination and support beyond the flagship for the research and graduate work happening at our universities. Although some of our institutions have some specialized research and development infrastructure, the University of Maine as the flagship has a robust and comprehensive infrastructure that already serves institutions across the System. In a time of limited resources and unified accreditation, rather than standing up additional parallel research infrastructure anywhere else in the System, we need to coordinate across institutions and ensure that the UMaine infrastructure is accessible and supportive to all. I believe that research-oriented faculty at our smaller universities need better support and connection to the flagship's research enterprise, including through formalizing the research affiliate faculty programs already underway following proposals from

both Joan and UMA President Becky Wyke. Much more can be done with intention and strategic planning for our research and development enterprise.

I do not believe it is appropriate to ask President Ferrini-Mundy to address such matters on an informal basis. That's why I'm formalizing these responsibilities with the additional title Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, which I expect will complement and build on her responsibilities as president of our flagship research institution.

With Jim Thelen having served through my time as Chancellor thus far as my Chief of Staff and the System's General Counsel, the new title, Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer, better reflects the work he does to facilitate so many of our Board and System initiatives. He'll continue to function as my Chief of Staff. Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives, Jeff St. John, will begin reporting directly to Jim, with a dotted-line report to Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Robert Placido to reflect the preeminence for academic affairs matters in the unified accreditation environment. Jim will also take on oversight of Human Resources, while our Director of Community and Government Relations Sam Warren will switch reporting to Vice Chancellor Ryan Low. At the same time, Laurel Hyle, Deputy General Counsel and Chief Compliance Officer, has ably stepped up with day-to-day management of the General Counsel's office, giving me confidence in asking Jim to keep his primary focus on our most important strategic initiatives.

These changes do not require creating any new positions, but rather give a new intention and strategic focus to our existing leaders. They are meant to strengthen and amplify our collective effectiveness as a cohesive university system in the unified accreditation environment. And the enhanced focus on research comes at a time of impactful growth, as Trustees heard this week in the presentation at the FFT Committee of the FY 2020 draft [Maine Economic Improvement Fund Annual Report](#) that details more than \$92.4 million in investments in Maine and its universities leveraged from the State's \$17.35 million in MEIF investments.

The Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF), established by the Legislature with leadership from Trustee and then-legislator Jim Donnelly in 1997 and with further growth and support in the early 2000s from Trustee and then-legislator Emily Cain, positions the University of Maine System as the center of statewide efforts to leverage economic development through targeted investments in university-based research and development. The R&D investments and external grants and contracts obtained by leveraging MEIF funds support hundreds of faculty, staff and students working at UMaine, the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine at Machias. MEIF is used to support research and development (R&D) in the state's [designated seven targeted sectors](#), and the MEIF Small Campus Initiative awarded grants in FY20 to Maine Maritime Academic, the University of Maine at Fort Kent, and the University of Maine at Farmington too.

In all R&D areas, including the MEIF sectors, UMaine's drive to advance as a modern 21st century research university [increased R&D expenditures in 2020 to \\$165.1 million](#), a 66 percent increase over four years and an all-time high. UMaine researchers also generated a record

\$125.2 million total external funding during fiscal year 2020 in support of R&D activities and increased federal funding for research initiatives by 27 percent over the previous year.

All of this should make clear that we have tremendous opportunity ahead to advance our statewide research mission: the right leadership, a growing research and economic development impact, and a strategic intention to coordinate all of our research assets and strength across the System in focused service to the state, nation, and globe.

I'll close by noting that the pandemic continues to require dynamic management in ever-changing circumstances. With the Governor's Friday announcement of [new civil guidelines](#) to ease certain group size limitations and travel restrictions through the course of the spring, recognizing the possibility of more outside activities in better weather as more in our population receive one of the COVID vaccines, we'll be re-evaluating everything from commencement planning to summer activities to sponsored travel and intercollegiate athletic competition. At the same time, following the [public announcement last week](#) of our goal to become Maine's most vaccinated workforce by voluntary participation, we also [announced Friday](#) that we'll provide up to two hours of administrative leave for any faculty or staff member to get vaccinated during working hours to ensure no one in our community loses paid work time just to get a vaccine. We'll do everything we can to stay science-focused and committed to getting through the pandemic safe and healthy.

I'll start my spring visits to our universities around the state this coming week. I'm looking forward to hearing directly from our presidents and their faculty about their ideas for how we can incentivize and foster the innovative types of faculty collaboration that will be at the heart of our successes with unified accreditation in the future. More on that to come.

Best wishes for a good week ahead.

Regards,
Dan