

Week of June 21

Trustees,

Before we review some highlights from the last week here, I wanted to first look ahead to let you know that I will not be providing an update next Sunday morning, July 4th, so that my staff and I can take full advantage of the holiday weekend before returning to work for the second half of the calendar year.

Our work over the last week culminated, of course, with [your passage Friday morning](#) of the System's FY22 operating budget. Since so much of our final work to present that budget to the Board for approval revolved around the state budget work done by the Governor and Maine Legislature, I'll start first by summarizing the significant actions in the Legislature over the last week. It's fair to say there is strong support in the Legislature and from the Governor for increasing the State's investment in Maine's public universities. As your adoption of the budget Friday demonstrated, we used that new investment first to support Maine's students by not increasing our in-state tuition rates for the coming year.

Members of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee unanimously voted late this past week to support the Governor's proposed three percent funding increase for UMS for the next two fiscal years (and for the community colleges and Maine Maritime as well). An additional targeted annual appropriation of \$1.5 million will support Maine Law's temporary relocation to 300 Fore Street in Portland. Together, these investments increase our State E&G base appropriation by about \$7.4 million in FY22 and \$14 million in FY23 (over FY21 base levels). Without these increases, we could not responsibly hold in-state tuition flat in the coming academic year.

Acknowledging the strong growth in early college enrollments, there was also unanimous support from the Appropriations Committee for increasing the annual appropriation to the Maine Department of Education from \$4 million to \$5.5 million for reimbursing UMS and MCCS for the early college courses we provide Maine high school students at no cost to them. (You can read more about Early College at UMS [here](#). UMS waives full tuition charges for students taking

UMS early college credits and receives reimbursement from the MDOE at essentially half the cost of the waived tuition.)

Finally, legislative appropriators agreed to increase the statutory minimum annual award amount of the need-based Maine State Grant for the first time since the 1990s, raising it from \$1,000 to \$2,500 for full-time students (though the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) has been able to fund \$1,500 awards for several years). With Sam Warren at the lead and numerous others in support, UMS championed this investment over the past two legislative sessions. You can read testimony [here](#) from University of Maine at Farmington student Tawnee Roberts about what this increase will mean to low-income students like her.

The Appropriations Committee is expected to vote out a final budget before this coming Wednesday, June 30, when the full Legislature is scheduled to return to enact it, along with considering veto overrides. One of the Governor's vetoes included LD 1253, which as passed would have added a faculty and non-faculty member as voting trustees to the UMS Board. Consistent with concerns raised by Trustee Riley in [testimony against the bill](#) on behalf of the Board, the Governor rightly (we believe) pointed out the concerning conflict of interest in having active employees serve on a board that makes decisions that set their salaries, collectively bargain with the employees' labor unions, and otherwise directly impact them. You can read her veto letter [here](#). We will be urging the Legislature to sustain veto, which is the expected outcome.

Appropriators have yet to negotiate the Governor's proposed allocations of more than \$1 billion in federal relief from the American Rescue Plan. From those funds, as I've reported previously, the Governor proposed to include \$35 million to UMS for investments to build critical human and physical infrastructure for Maine's economy, including through paid internships and at centers and laboratories that directly support the state's companies and strengthen our heritage industries and dependent rural communities.

My thanks to Sam Warren and everyone across UMS -- Trustees, System and university leaders, and even our faculty, staff, and students at times -- who worked with Sam on testimony

and other legislative advocacy to get us to this point. As I said, the support of the Governor and Legislature have been critical to our ability to hold tuition flat this year. With another three percent increase in FY23, it's of course tempting to look ahead. But we're in no position at this point to say that we could responsibly hold tuition rates flat in future years, especially considering that our costs and the need for strategic investments in new programs and capital improvements will indisputably increase over time. Expanding on that point, the current and future aggregate of costs and need for new investments that come from successfully concluding our ongoing collective bargaining negotiations, further implementing unified accreditation, and identifying and pursuing new markets, modalities, and educational efficiencies together mean that the need for budget discipline and tough decisions are critical and will remain with us for the foreseeable future. All of this will weigh heavily on our thinking as we look ahead to the visioning and strategic planning work that we're expecting to be charged with at your upcoming July Board meeting.

Let me close with two good-news items, one from UMaine and one from USM.

Board members will recall that a portion of the Harold Alfond Foundation's transformational \$240 million investment announced last fall will fund new student success and retention initiatives to be piloted at UMaine and expanded to other System universities. The first such initiative -- Research Learning Experiences -- is being rolled out now.

We know both intuitively and empirically that experience is the best teacher. That's the idea behind the UMaine Research Learning Experiences pilot that's being launched this fall. UMaine will be providing [eye-opening, hands-on learning experiences](#) to 600 first-year students and returning sophomores beginning before the first day of the fall semester. The [Fall 2021 pilot](#) includes an immersive welcome week before the start of classes that invites hundreds of students to find their people, their place, and their passions at our flagship research university. Students will continue through the semester with a one-credit tuition-free, small-group exploratory learning project as well. The [UMS TRANSFORMS](#) student success team and academic and university leaders from across Maine will observe these innovative university engagements in first-year research and exploratory learning experiences with the goal of making similar, mission-aligned opportunities available to every student entering the University of Maine System.

(For even more background, you can listen to UMaine President and UMS Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation Joan Ferrini-Mundy and UMaine Senior Jon Donnelly (Trustee Donnelly's son) discuss UMaine's RLE pilot on the George Hale-Ric Tyler radio show on [June 18](#). Jon will be a peer mentor in the RLE course [Inspire the Future with Design](#). He is a rising senior who graduated from Brewer High School. He's studying Computer Science and works in the ASAP Media Lab, a commercial wing of UMaine's New Media Department that employs students to work with clients on innovative digital solutions to real-world problems. Vice Chancellor and President Ferrini-Mundy is co-teaching the RLE course ['Reason why?'](#) with Natasha Speer; the course will challenge students to use data to develop and test claims about how people learn mathematics.)

Finally, this past Tuesday USM President Glenn Cummings and the USM Foundation announced receipt of a \$5 million gift from the Crewe Foundation to support the future construction of a proposed Center for the Arts on USM's Portland campus. The gift will benefit a signature program of excellence, the USM School of Music, as well as the university's visual arts program. This is the largest gift ever given by the Crewe Foundation, the legacy foundation of singer/songwriter and producer Bob Crewe, who is best known for his work with The Four Seasons and whose life and musical influence were featured prominently in the 2005 Broadway show and film "Jersey Boys." The Crewe Foundation's contribution, which was presented by Crewe Foundation co-leaders Dan Crewe, Bob's brother and business manager, and his daughter, Reid Crewe, is also one of the largest cash gifts ever received by USM or its Foundation.

The proposed Center for the Arts, a decades-long dream of USM and the arts communities, would provide space for the visual arts and a new home for USM's renowned School of Music, allowing both academic and performance programs to move from the Gorham campus to a prominent location in Portland. The Center would also serve one of the crown jewels of the ongoing Portland campus transformation, bringing students and the community together in a celebration of the arts. Dan Crewe has been a champion of the USM School of Music since he first attended a performance on the Gorham Campus 30 years ago. (To read more about the historic gift, Bob Crewe and the Crewe Foundation, and the proposed future Center for the Arts, please see either this [Portland Press Herald article](#) or the university's [own release](#).)

As we look ahead to the July 26 Board meeting, we'll be ramping up our planning efforts and strategies to ensure safe and healthy operations this fall. Even with many vaccinated, vaccines widely available, and the pandemic easing, we won't let our guard down. More on that in the weeks ahead.

For now, enjoy summer's march through the week ahead to the 4th of July holiday.

Regards,

Dan