

Week of August 2

Trustees,

I'll be relatively brief this morning.

With the start of the fall semester only weeks away, and preparations to do so safely in high gear, the ongoing pandemic and worrisome COVID-19 delta variant necessarily keeps our focus on those actions that allow us to responsibly and safely welcome our students, faculty, and staff back to our campuses and university communities.

As I previewed for you in last weekend's update message, we [announced this past Wednesday](#) that UMS will require COVID-19 vaccines for any students who expect to have on-campus, in-person experiences this fall and that we are in discussions with our labor partners for similar requirements for our faculty and staff as soon as possible. Vaccination will not be required for anyone learning or working fully remotely, and in all other cases, we will carefully consider exemptions for those with sincerely held religious beliefs against vaccination and those whose doctors advise against their receiving a vaccine for medical reasons.

You'll recall too that we've been encouraging UMS community members to voluntarily provide proof of their COVID vaccinations with our "This is Our Shot, Maine" campaign, even with our student-athletes involved as recently as this week (with particular thanks to [UMaine-Farmington basketball player McKenna Brodeur](#), '22). I'm happy to report that, since mid July, the number of UMSers who have voluntarily provided proof of full COVID vaccination has more than doubled, from 5,000 to nearly 11,500 based on our most recent data, including just over 41 percent of all those expected to come onto our campuses this fall, as well as 51 percent of our residential students and 71 percent of our full time faculty and staff.

As encouraging as those numbers are, with the current science of COVID telling us both that COVID-19's delta variant can spread even among vaccinated individuals but that vaccinated individuals have better than 99 percent odds of avoiding serious illness, hospitalization, or death, conditioning in-person, on campus experiences on being fully vaccinated if reasonably possible is, quite frankly, the most responsible decision we can make to protect the public health and safety of our entire university communities. As important as providing knowledge, research, and public service are to the State of Maine and our students, faculty, and staff, we do so as research, learning, and working communities, with communal responsibilities to each other's health and safety. Considered from that vantage point and responsibility, *we could make no other decision*, and I appreciate your support and understanding for our doing so.

I'll close with a word about your recent charge for me to begin strategic planning for the University of Maine System as a whole.

We expect to come to your regular September Board meeting, as charged, with recommendations for the process and timeline we will follow to complete a UMS strategic plan

that meets the requirements of your [July 26 resolution](#). At this early stage, I expect to ask Jim Thelen, as Vice Chancellor for Strategic Initiatives and Chief Legal Officer, to lead a strategic planning executive steering group and consider arrangements for both a dedicated internal project manager as well as external consultant support. For all the important strategic work already underway -- implementing new collaborative efforts to improve educational efficiency, improve academic quality, and fully realize the benefits of unified accreditation and strengthening our research enterprise notably among them -- I accept your charge as being among the most important work we will do in the coming years.

I hope you have a good week ahead.

Regards,
Dan