

Week of July 12

Trustees -

This past week, as others like it when we're nearing a regular full Board meeting, you demonstrated your dedication and commitment to advancing public higher education in Maine through your work for the Board's committee meetings, with the Academic and Student Affairs and Human Resources/Labor Relations committee meetings on Monday and the Finance, Facilities and Technology committee meeting on Thursday. Simply put, thank you for your service.

By far our biggest step forward this past week was our [announcement](#) Friday of our basic fall return strategy regarding COVID testing and vaccination. In sum, we'll be requiring COVID return testing and quarantine for unvaccinated members of the UMS community, while those who verify full vaccination status with our [voluntary vaccination tracker](#) before August 20, 2021 won't have to do the arrival testing and quarantining practices planned. Also, in line with the State of Maine's own announcement this week, as of July 26 those who've verified full vaccination status will no longer be required to wear face coverings in our facilities. Finally, we publicly stated our intention to require a COVID vaccine when the FDA confers full approval on one, which is likely to be the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

Our vaccine encouragement campaign continues full throttle. Friday's announcement included mention of weekly drawings for \$1,000 "Shot Clock" scholarships for students and prizes for employees who submit their proof of vaccination, and we're [literally counting down](#) the days, hours, and minutes until August 20, when the fall return will be in high gear.

With all this, we were pleased to see a big jump in voluntary vaccination verification after our Friday announcement. More than 1,100 individuals voluntarily uploaded their vaccination cards, bringing our total confirmed vaccinated population numbers as of late yesterday to nearly 6,200, which includes 2,619 employees -- which represents just over 61 percent of our regular full-time workforce -- and 3,472 students.

We've put in place all of these strategies with full appreciation that, no matter how badly we want it to be, the pandemic simply is not over yet. But we also know beyond reasonable doubt that the COVID vaccines are [safe and effective](#), making the ongoing pandemic in effect a pandemic of the unvaccinated, [as noted this week by the federal CDC](#). With the [acknowledged severity and current spread of the Delta variant](#), including in Maine, along with the current reality that the 18-to-24 age group has lower rates of getting vaccinated when compared to older age groups while having the highest rates of COVID-19 cases, including severe cases, we are committed to our vaccination and return strategies to continue prioritizing the public health and safety of our campuses and communities at the same time we're maintaining academic progress and momentum.

Also this week, the New England Board of Higher Education (also known as NEBHE, or colloquially as "NEH'-bee") [announced](#) a new collaboration in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont to develop a plan to streamline and unify transfer for both in-state public and independent colleges and universities. NEBHE will begin exploring the development of a transfer guarantee that will ensure associate degree holders' acceptance at participating public and independent four-year institutions in these states. Students, who meet eligibility criteria and are covered under the Guarantee, will be able to transfer as juniors and be academically prepared to successfully complete a bachelor's degree.

In addition to UMS, NEBHE's partners in the new collaboration include the Maine Community College System, the Maine Independent College Association, the Community College System of New Hampshire, the University System of New Hampshire and the New Hampshire College and University Council, as well as the Community College of Vermont and the Association of Vermont Independent Colleges. The eight-month planning grant will lay the foundation for building stronger partnerships between community colleges and four-year public and independent institutions in the three states; developing a unified guaranteed admission transfer system for community college students; promoting transfer into liberal arts programs; and increasing the number of community college transfer students who earn a bachelor's degree.

(For those not familiar with NEBHE, it is a 6-state compact created in 1955 by the state legislatures in Rhode Island, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont to promote collaboration and public policy among the higher education institutions in those states. As Chancellor, I am a Maine delegate to NEBHE's Board, along with Maine Department of Education Commissioner and UMS Trustee Pender Makin (through her delegate Deputy Commissioner Daniel Chuhta), State Senator Mattie Daughtry, and State Representative Rebecca Millett, and others. NEBHE has long been most known for its Tuition Break program, started in 1957 to provide tuition discounts to students from resident states who enrolled in programs at an institution in another member state if that program was not available in the student's home state. With recently relaxed standards by which programs can be offered through NEBHE's tuition discount programs, there are now more than 1,200 programs offered at reduced rates throughout the 6-state region.)

And finally, for context in case you are wondering about our own history and work on transfer, I note that UMS has a long history of collaborating and partnering with the Maine Community College System specific to transfer. Through *AdvantageU*, which has been in place for many years, qualified Maine Community College students, upon completion of an associate degree in liberal studies, are guaranteed admission with advanced standing (junior status typically) to one of our universities. Through the block transfer agreement signed in 2016, students who have completed the UMS-MCCS General Education Transfer Block at any UMS or MCCS institution currently accredited by NECHE will be regarded as having completed the General Education requirements at every other UMS or MCCS institution (except for up to eleven credits of

additional General Education coursework to be specified by the receiving institution). At the program level, all of our universities have many transfer agreements with the Maine Community College System across the majority of programs. And finally, we have a “reverse credit transfer” agreement with the MCCA, through which a student who transferred to UMS from an MCCA institution and meets the residency at MCCA for a degree can “reverse transfer” coursework they are taking within our institutions to the MCCA to get their associates’ degree.

More significant news came from Congress this week.

As you are likely aware, the earmark process has returned to Congress this year after a decade-long hiatus. It is now called Community Funded Projects in the House and Congressionally Directed Spending in the Senate. Within UMS, the process of selecting what projects to put forth for our delegation’s consideration and then developing and coordinating the submissions is being led by UMaine President Joan Ferrini-Mundy in her Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation role, with critical assistance from Sam Warren. Projects chosen by members of Congress are then put forth to the relevant appropriations subcommittee for possible incorporation into their spending bills. While there is no guarantee all earmark projects will be included, given the influence of our delegation in Washington and their coordination through this process, we are optimistic that the projects listed below have a high likelihood of being funded.

House members were able to each submit 10 projects each of no more than \$1 million, and we were appreciative that in May, Congresswoman Pingree selected one of our submissions, a climate change coordination center at UMaine (\$990,000), and it was further advanced by the committee through inclusion in their budget bill.

This past week, Senators Collins and King released their first round of project selections. Unlike their colleagues in the House, Senators were not limited to a set number of projects or amounts. A number of projects we submitted or that were directly solicited by our Senators were selected to advance in this process, including:

- \$10M for the UMaine Green Engineering & Materials Factory of the Future
- \$2M for a UMaine led project to strengthening local and regional seafood systems and the dependent rural communities
- \$2M for UMaine’s development of wood-fiber insulated panels for modular construction and retrofit applications
- \$300,000 for a partnership led by UMaine with government and tribal entities and private landowners to plan for, mitigate and manage Emerald Ash Borer, a highly destructive wood-boring insect that threatens the ash trees that are culturally and traditionally significant to Maine’s indigenous peoples, who use them for basket making

- \$292,000 for a UMaine pilot project through which business students will provide specialized consulting services (like product development and market research) to Maine's small agriculture producers

You'll likely notice that all the projects I just listed are at UMaine. That's because the promising projects we put forth on behalf of our other universities sought funding through the Senate's Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Our Senators' selection for earmarks for that have not yet been announced, but we hope VCRI Ferrini-Mundy will have good news to share at the upcoming BOT meeting. We continue to be grateful for the incredible engagement and support of Senators Collins and King and Representatives Pingree and Golden, who are true partners of and champions for our universities.

I'll close this week with thanks to my colleagues UMA President Becky Wyke and UMF President Edward Serna, who each hosted me and our other Presidents and Vice Chancellors for campus showcase tours and our monthly presidents' council meeting this week. The attached picture of our group at UMA was taken as part of a review of UMA's Unmanned Aerial Systems Education and Research program by program director Daniel Leclair. Along with our other colleagues who regularly participate on Presidents' Council but did not journey with us on the campus tours -- and with apologies to Vice Chancellor Ryan Low who took a well-deserved vacation this past week -- I think this is a strong UMS leadership team.

Best wishes for a productive week ahead.

Regards,

Dan