Week of September 27

Trustees -

I'd like to open this morning by lauding some well-deserved recognition that our work and people have received recently.

We learned this past week that, following a nomination by UMS employee Elizabeth Simonds, a member of the Air National Guard unit in Bangor and an Associate Project Manager in Facilities Management and Capital Planning, UMS has been selected for a prestigious [Above and Beyond Award](https://www.esgr.mil/Employer-Awards/Above-and-Beyond-Award) by the Maine state committee of the [Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve](https://www.esgr.mil/) organization. The Above and Beyond Award is presented by state ESGR committees to recognize employers at the local level who are deemed to have gone above and beyond the legal requirements of the federal Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act by providing their Guard and Reserve employees additional, non-mandated benefits such as differential or full pay to offset lost wages, extended health benefits, and other similar benefits.

We feel a mix of pride and responsibility in our support of veteran students, and this particular award recognizes that our support extends to our employees too. It will be my honor this coming Wednesday to meet with representatives from the ESGR organization to accept this recognition on UMS's behalf.

One of our most dedicated and long-serving employees was also the subject of well-deserved recognition this week.

Each year at its annual meeting, the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) recognizes individuals and organizations who have distinguished themselves through their commitment to advancing Maine’s economy and quality higher education with their Business at Work for Maine and Education at Work for Maine awards. The individuals and organizations who are recognized help make Maine a better place to work, learn and live.

To be considered for the Education at Work for Maine award, individuals must have promoted higher education, college access or financial literacy to Maine citizens by encouraging and/or providing assistance for students/employees to attain higher education through educational programs, scholarships, mentor programs, counseling, and volunteer programs or have made (or inspired others to make) special contributions to increase college access, higher education or financial literacy for the citizens of Maine.

This fall, unbeknownst to her, and along with Maine Community Colleges System President Dave Daigler, I cosigned a letter of support for Rosa Redonnett and her Maine Community Colleges System counterpart Janet Sorter to be recognized with FAME's Education at Work for Maine award this year. Serving now as our Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Success and Credential Attainment, Rosa has a long and dedicated track record in student affairs, first at USM and later with the System, and as FAME's Director of Education Martha Johnston said to Rosa and Janet in an email announcing the award, Rosa's collaborations with Janet Sorter at MCCS have benefited countless numbers of Maine students over many years. It is a wonderful and well-deserved award for Rosa.

Rosa and Janet will be publicly honored at FAME's annual meeting, Showcase Maine, later in November. This marks the third year in a row that UMS people and programs have been recognized with FAME's Education at Work for Maine award -- last year's award was presented virtually to UMaine's Pulp & Paper Foundation for playing an integral role in the transformation and revitalization of the Maine forest products industry, while 2019's award went to Ron Milliken, longtime Director of Financial Aid at the University of Maine Farmington, and UMF's Financial Literacy Peer Education Program, which Ron helped to found.

You'll recall from this past Monday's Trustees meeting that our presentations on strategic planning and unified accreditation noted the complementary purposes and work that will occur with each in the coming years, and particularly the timing and alignment necessary between NECHE's planned Fall 2022 site visit and comprehensive evaluation of unified accreditation and our strategic planning work. A first piece of the puzzle fell into place this week when we confirmed with NECHE that our Fall 2022 comprehensive evaluation site visit will occur from Sunday, October 2, 2022 through Wednesday, October 5, 2022. Also this week, as Associate Vice Chancellor for Accreditation and Strategic Initiatives Jeff St. John reported to you Monday, we sent a [message to the UMS community](https://conta.cc/3FfQGky) to call their attention to the [posting online](https://www.maine.edu/unified-accreditation/2021/09/23/self-study-review/) Thursday of the first draft of the UMS Self Study report to seek their comment and input over the coming weeks.

As you've heard us say before, the self study report that an institution prepares in advance of a comprehensive accreditation review serves both as a basis for self-analysis as well as a foundation for NECHE's evaluation of our unified accreditation work against its [Standards for Accreditation](https://www.neche.org/resources/standards-for-accreditation). The process of preparing the self study encourages institutional self-improvement, as it helps us to clarify our specific objectives, to assess realistically our success in attaining them, and to develop means of enhancing our institutional effectiveness. When I start my fall campus visits later this month, I'll be calling on our university communities to consider what we're learning about our quality and effectiveness in the self study process to serve as a foundation for the strategic planning work we're launching. We look forward to this work, and to working with the Board's ad hoc strategic planning committee, in the coming months.

Finally, as always, I feel a responsibility to continue reporting on our progress in working through the ongoing pandemic.

There have been various [public reports](https://1019por.com/news/074470-more-than-1000-umaine-system-students-must-get-vaccinated-by-oct-15/) over the last few days that as many as a thousand students were not yet compliant with our COVID vaccine verification and testing protocols. But with steady work from our colleagues across the System and our universities, in the days since those reports we've already reduced that number down to less than 700. As of week's end, our vaccination verification rate among our fall in-person population stood at just over 88 percent, including 90.1 percent of non-residential students and 97.2 percent of residential students. Our testing positivity rate stood at just under 1.5 percent -- just one-third of the State of Maine's overall testing positive rate, with only 55 positive tests over the last 14 days from nearly 3,700 tests -- and six of our eight academic units (counting the law school) had zero percent positivity and only one or no active COVID cases as of Friday. The media have [now noted](https://www.centralmaine.com/2021/10/01/as-covid-19-surge-continues-maine-college-campuses-remain-virtually-immune/) our relative pandemic success compared to the state and country's continued challenges with the Delta variant surge, and to this I can only say that we are continuing to follow the science, relying primarily and heavily on the efficacy of the COVID vaccines and continued face coverings in all indoor spaces. Simply put, the science works, and it will continue to be our guidepost for as long as the pandemic lasts.

Best wishes for a productive week ahead.

Regards,

Dan