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COVID-19 President_Community Message to Alumni, Partners and Friends_March 20, 2020

Joan Ferrini-Mundy

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- BDN interviews President Ferrini-Mundy about possible fall opening**
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- 38 students in nursing to graduate early to address needs during pandemic**
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- Media report Zillman Art Museum designated by \$1.3 million naming gift**
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Community message to alumni, partners and friends, March 20

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Dear University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias alumni, supporters, Board of Visitors members, friends, and family,

In the midst of this terrible pandemic that is affecting all of us, I know that many of you are following what is happening at the University of Maine and our regional campus at Machias. We are working to have an active online presence and to communicate regularly from my office and those of other members of the cabinet, and through the University of Maine System. See links and addresses at the bottom of this message.

Even with all of our efforts at communication, I want to be in touch with you directly as this busy week comes to a close to let you know how things are going at the University of Maine. Thank you for your messages of support and encouragement. Please be assured that, in spite of this virus that is transforming our lives in unprecedented ways, we at the University of Maine have planned and continue to plan every day. We are making important decisions in as timely a manner as possible, and supporting our students in all the ways we can. We will come through the significant challenges together.

The vision, support, and leadership from University of Maine System Chancellor Dannel Malloy and his team, in consultation with all of the UMS presidents, has been outstanding. And Governor Janet Mills is deftly leading our state with new decisions and announcements daily aimed at our health, safety and economic stability.

Teaching and learning in new ways – and a different kind of university life

It was March 9 when Chancellor Malloy asked all UMS faculty to prepare to teach remotely by March 23. That date was pushed back slightly to March 25. I am proud to say that we will be ready for this at the University of Maine and at Machias, and our faculty have been remarkable. Together, we are offering almost 3,200 course sections this semester. I am confident that our students will be well served and will learn in new ways. I know, too, that there will be challenges, ranging from lack of broadband access, to unexpected health and family demands that will need to become the first priority of our faculty and our students, to first-time users of online instruction needing assistance. We are a community of learners and we will get through this because of an abundance of resiliency, ingenuity, generosity, and compassion.

Like Broadway, right now much of the campus is “dark.” But in many cases, good alternatives are in place. The Fogler Library building is closed, but the library is operating with online and remote services — an incredible resource to our students, faculty and communities. The New Balance Student Recreation Center, the University of Maine Museum of Art, the Collins Center for the Arts, and the rest of our public facilities are not open. But the staff in those facilities are working remotely, with projects and efforts to bring content to the public virtually, and to ensure we will be ready to open again as soon as possible. University of Maine Admissions has put in place virtual accepted student tours, in partnership with faculty and students across the campus. All campus buildings have signs on the entrances providing health and safety protocol guidance. Research labs have moved to “remote research” when possible, with small numbers of staff coming in to sustain the most critical functions.

Black Bear Athletics

Black Bear Athletics, along with collegiate athletics nationwide, is seeing significant change. For our men's ice hockey and women's basketball teams not to be able to finish their playoff games after their great seasons was a terrific disappointment. Yet there is also some good news, with this week's announcement by the Hockey East Association that UMaine goalie Jeremy Swayman has been named the Hockey East Player of the Year, and head coach Red Gendron has received the Bob Kullen Award as Bauer Coach of the Year.

You may have seen in the press that members of the UMaine men's basketball team are self-isolating after possible exposure to the coronavirus at playoff games at the University of Vermont. They are all currently healthy and we offer them our positive thoughts.

All of higher education is different now, so it is not surprising that there will be no spring athletic events of any kind. The NCAA has declared a recruiting “dead period” through at least April 15. Nonetheless, our coaches are finding ways to build their teams and to stay flexible as we learn more about what will be possible later this spring, and through the summer and fall.

Life at UMaine now, helping in Maine, and moving forward

Even though we are on spring break, the campus feels especially quiet and very peaceful — and that will be our new normal for weeks to come. But that quiet belies the busyness and activity that define universities, and that is still very much alive here at UMaine. We are still in operation. Next week, faculty will be teaching their courses, exams will be given, students will be accessing counseling and advising, performers will still be practicing wherever they may be, and athletes will be continuing to train and develop. Some of our students are still living on campus, all for very good reasons. Researchers are analyzing data and preparing their next proposals.

We are seeking out the class of 2024 and working to be sure that our current students can register for their fall classes. At the time of this writing, we have generated 16,271 combined transfer and first-year applications for UMaine — the largest first-year applicant pool we have ever had. Before COVID-19, more than 130 of our students had offered to visit their former high schools to speak about their UMaine experience. The “visit every high school” initiative has garnered immense support from our student body, as well as high schools across the state that are interested in having one of their own come home to share the opportunities at UMaine. The current COVID-19 challenge has postponed or canceled a majority of these events this year, but the initiative will continue, with the goal of creating a yearly tradition. Please encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to take a look at UMaine and UMM. These are great places for learning, research, and community.

And there is so much good to report. A volunteer group of faculty, led by the Associated Faculties of the Universities of Maine (AFUM), put their names on a list to help other faculty “go online” with their classes. Scientists in our labs are conferring with the state and health communities about how to help with COVID-19 testing. Faculty economists, virologists, and epidemiologists are turning to work that will help us understand this crisis and its impact in Maine. Our experts in advanced manufacturing are working now to determine how to help in producing needed supplies as this health crisis unfolds in Maine. University of Maine Cooperative Extension provided personal protective equipment suits and facemasks to the Penobscot Nation Police Department.

Just today there was press on more creative work by UMaine Extension to help Mainers. A new online Farm Product and Pick-up Directory was posted yesterday to give restaurants and other food providers information about what is available from our state's farmers. Other new resources from UMaine Extension include online educational resources focused on children's learning at home during this crisis.

The groundbreaking for the Ferland Engineering Education and Design Building will still happen on April 28 — virtually! I've congratulated our folks on “breaking new ground” by designing what I know will be a wonderful virtual event that celebrates this very important step for the future of engineering and education in Maine. We are already planning how to honor the achievements of our graduating seniors in an appropriate way, considering creative alternatives should it be the case that we are unable to hold an on-campus commencement in May. Watch for a decision on this no later than April 15.

Facing challenges together

Students and staff are already encountering significant financial and personal hardship as this pandemic evolves. As part of our commitment to minimizing the impact of our students' transition off-campus and online, we have begun reimbursing them for room and board on a prorated basis, and we continue to pay those on federal work study, even if they are unable to work remotely. Yesterday, Chancellor Malloy also announced that all regular employees will continue to receive their normal pay for their normal work hours through April 4, even if they are unable to work full-time during that time, as a means of enabling people to attend to the range of challenges so many of us now face.

The UMaine Undergraduate Student Government is providing funds to help the Black Bear Exchange's food pantry and to help students with their needs precipitated by this crisis. Most of our individual colleges have some kind of hardship fund resources available that they are deploying as needed. At the University of Maine Foundation, the Student Crisis Fund is open and we welcome your contributions. Information is online: our.umaine.edu/crisisfund.

Early estimates show the short-term revenue loss to our two campuses from COVID-19-related actions are in excess of \$12.5 million. In the coming months, we will undoubtedly need to call on your generosity and your voice as a champion for public investment so our universities can continue to provide affordable access to quality education and research learning that will be so necessary for Mainers to rebuild their lives and our economy.

The very best of Black Bear nation is coming through at this very difficult time. Watch our website for more news and updates, including stories of the specific ways we are coming together to help each other and our communities. I know that there are significant challenges and uncertainties ahead, and we will take them as they come. We should all be proud of the University of Maine and its people at this extraordinary moment for all of us.

I wish good health for you and your families and friends. Thank you for being a part of the University of Maine community.

Sincerely,

Joan Ferrini-Mundy
President

- umaine.edu/coronavirus
- umaine.edu/health-advisory

UMaine and UMM COVID-19 email and information line: umaine.alerts@umaine.edu; 207.581.2681

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