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Dannel p. Malloy

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Matthew Revitt <matthew.revitt@maine.edu>

We Have a Lot of Work Ahead of Us

1 message

Chancellor Dannel Malloy <chancelloroffice@maine.edu>

Fri, May 15, 2020 at 5:56 PM

Reply-To: chancelloroffice@maine.edu

To: matthew.revitt@maine.edu



May 15, 2020



UMS Community,

In the face of the unprecedented challenges that continue to swirl all around us, I believe one of my most important responsibilities is to continue communicating with you -- about the nature and depth of the crisis we're still facing, of course. But also to recognize the hard and thoughtful work that you and your colleagues are doing every day to make sure that our universities can weather the ongoing storm for as long as it

lasts.

With the benefit of hindsight, perhaps we'll say someday that it was easier to manage the near-sudden onset of the pandemic than it will be to plan for the uncertainties ahead. Faced in mid-March with the stark possibility of a mass introduction of the virus in Maine when tens of thousands of our students would have returned from Spring Break travels around the country and world, we moved with a nimbleness rare in the academy to empty our campuses and transition thousands of course sections and hundreds of thousands of credit hours to online and other distance modalities. These actions were critical both to ensure public health and maintain academic progress. We quite literally didn't have time to stop and complain about our lot; the pandemic demanded an immediate response. I couldn't be prouder of how we worked together to serve our students and keep our communities safe.

No one would claim that we managed everything perfectly. We didn't. But we did our best to protect public health, and we did our best to get our students through the semester.

That, in and of itself, deserves congratulations.

Typically, the semester's end and Spring's march toward Summer would have us thinking

about off-contract summer work and a more relaxed pace for a few months. We'd have no reason to think the coming fall would be anything but normal, and the Board's May meeting, this coming Monday, would see a new fiscal year budget adopted that reflected a basic stability and normalcy in our ongoing operations.

These are anything but normal times, however. And I want to be honest with you about the scope of the challenges that lie ahead of us still.

While the grit and resilience of our students, faculty, and staff got us successfully through the semester from an academic standpoint, the pandemic's financial impact has been devastating. Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Ryan Low will report to the Board Monday that we face a nearly \$25 million loss in our current year operations ending June 30. We've remained committed to our employees through these difficulties, preserving student employment through the semester and providing options for faculty and staff to work remotely or take leave or furloughs without any net loss of pay or benefits. With the benefit of expense reductions, approximately \$9 million in federal relief funds, and significant additional reserve transfers, we will be able to close out our fiscal year.

There is simply no certainty to be had for adopting a FY21 budget. To give us as much time as possible to understand what the next academic year's operations may look like, we will delay proposing an initial FY21 budget to the Board until late June, and even then we'll have to make conservative assumptions about matters that will only become clear as fall approaches. Though the Board will approve a budget by the end of June, we expect to need to make revisions to the budget closer to fall, as there will be significant uncertainty about state appropriations, the pandemic's impact on retention of existing students and new enrollments, and the corresponding effect on residence hall occupancy and dining and other auxiliary revenues. With severely depleted reserves by then, there will be no painless solutions should material reductions occur in any of these areas.

And yet we will forge ahead. Within our community exists tremendous organizational, planning, and scientific and intellectual horsepower to address all of the many facets of the pandemic's impact, now and into the foreseeable future. From the chemical engineers, facilities management, nursing faculty, students, and graduates, and countless other UMSers already serving the State of Maine's public health effort, to the UMaine and USM scientists and public health experts who are collaborating to incorporate the most up-to-date knowledge of virus testing and public health strategies into our planning for how we can safely resume operations this fall, it's literally true that we're all in this together. Even beyond our UMS community of universities, we're working with the leaders of the entire higher education sector in Maine, representing more than 87,200 students, faculty, and staff and \$1.7 billion in annual expenditures in the state, to craft guiding principles for how our institutions can safely welcome students, faculty, and staff back to our campuses in the fall.

These are trying times, no doubt. But they are also times for innovation and cooperation. Let's take what we've learned from the crisis semester just concluded to imagine higher-quality in-person instruction with hybrid or flex options for synchronous online or remote participation -- blended instruction and learning modalities that may increase the scope of face-to-face instruction that we may be able to safely offer. I encourage you to keep thinking about this through the late spring and summer months. We'll need your good ideas and engagement to plan for what some in higher education have called a public health-informed fall semester, balancing as much social, community, and educational interaction as can be safely managed with the testing, social distancing measures, PPE,

and related public health resources available to us.

For the time being, we'll continue our work remotely. In line with State of Maine public health guidance, we'll invite some employees back to campus starting June 1, the guidelines for which have been posted to our [UMS Health Advisory](#) website earlier this afternoon. Our System and university leaders and your supervisors will reach out for this purpose in the coming weeks.

As difficult as these times are, it will be innovation in teaching, learning, research, and public service that will see us through. That's been the hallmark of modern public higher education in the United States, and I hope we seize this moment, in the spirit of Maine's *Dirigo* motto, to lead through however long the pandemic affects us.

Sincerely,



Dannel P. Malloy
Chancellor

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