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Office of the President

Maine Memo – June 10

June 10, 2020 [President's Messages](#)

Today I wish to speak to the continuing unrest in our nation, in Maine, and in the University of Maine communities following the brutal killing of George Floyd and its heartbreaking aftermath. I am reaffirming my commitment and the commitment of our university communities to the core values of inclusion, diversity, and anti-racism, and I am outlining some actions I intend to pursue at the University of Maine over the coming weeks and months.

The protests occurring across the world in solidarity with the United States to decry racism as embedded so deeply in our societies and systemically in our institutions once again raise our collective consciousness to confront a fundamental problem for society. Racism, simply put, cannot be tolerated and must be countered with active, intentional anti-racism at the University of Maine and in our communities. Every one of us must examine our own personal attitudes, implicit biases and beliefs, and enact alternatives.

As the president of an institution of higher education, founded in the land grant movement of the mid- to late 1800s, I believe that knowing our history and acknowledging it is important. The University of Maine sits on the homeland of the Penobscot Nation. While land grant institutions were being formed following the first Morrill Act of 1862, segregation primarily in the U.S. South led to a second Morrill Act in 1890, which required any state that denied admission to African Americans as a policy in admissions to establish at least one land grant institution for African Americans before being eligible for certain federal funding. The resulting formation of institutions constitutes the core of America's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

For a time in my work at the National Science Foundation, the HBCU funding program was within the unit I led. I am interested in establishing formal partnerships for UMaine with HBCUs and with Tribal Colleges and Universities, and preliminary efforts are underway in my office to do so.

The University of Maine did not espouse segregation policies. Our first African American graduate was [Ada Viola Peters in 1927](#), a native of Bangor. Ms. Peters went on to be a professor at Tuskegee University in Alabama.

In their book "Challenging Racism in Higher Education: Promoting Justice," M.A. Chesler, J.E. Crowfoot, and A.E. Lewis discuss the depth of racism's legacy in institutions of higher education, and note that it "pervades the curriculum,

pedagogy, structure of departments and disciplines, formal and informal relationships among participants, and decision making about hiring, promotion, and retention (p. 19).” In his June 5, 2020 Imperative for Change memo, University of Maine System Chancellor Dannel Malloy acknowledges this pervasive, structural racism and commits to instituting UMS-wide reviews of practices and data in the areas of admissions, instruction, assessment, and student support, and also notes the need for examination of leadership diversity and hiring practices.

We are moving forward with related actions at the University of Maine, including:

- Participating in “George Floyd, Anti-Black Racism and #BlackLivesMatter,” a virtual panel discussion on June 11 as part of the UMaine Alumni Association webinar series. I’ll be joined by Dean of Students Robert Dana, and alumni Shontay Delaloe, Jojo Oliphant and Jean Point Du Jour. Registration is [online](#).
- Convening a President’s Advisory Roundtable on Race
- Establishing a President’s Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Turning to anti-racism as an ongoing focus in the Division of Student Life, with leadership retreats, weekly discussions, virtual town meetings and a full complement of campus-focused initiatives through the Office for Diversity and Inclusion.
- Examining our academic areas. For example, the Higher Education Graduate Program has outlined action steps that include examining the curriculum to ensure that readings in all classes reflect the voices of black and other underrepresented scholars, integrating core courses with social justice-oriented assignments directed toward creating change in higher education, and organizing a fall teach-in focused on understanding and dismantling racism/white supremacy in higher education/student affairs.

I thank you for your pursuit of excellence and for your commitment to inclusion for the University of Maine. Watch soon for details about our fall planning and pandemic updates. For today though, the pandemic I have chosen to address is racial injustice and how critical it is for the University of Maine to take its part in this conversation. Please let me know how you would like to help and what ideas you have.