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University President memo on Martin Luther King Day

Joan Ferrini-Mundy

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Maine Memo — January 18

1 message

UMaine President's Office <umaine.president@maine.edu>
Reply-To: UMaine President's Office <umaine.president@maine.edu>
To: UM-EMPLOYEES@lists.maine.edu

Mon, Jan 18, 2021 at 9:55 AM



MAINE MEMO



From Joan Ferrini-Mundy

President of the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias

Education must also train one for quick, resolute and effective thinking. To think incisively and to think for one's self is very difficult. We are prone to let our mental life become invaded by legions of half truths, prejudices, and propaganda. At this point, I often wonder whether or not education is fulfilling its purpose. A great majority of the so-called educated people do not think logically and scientifically. Even the press, the classroom, the platform, and the pulpit in many instances do not give us objective and unbiased truths. To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction.

These words, written by 18-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. in the Morehouse College campus newspaper, are as relevant today as they were almost 75 years ago. Maybe even more relevant. As we celebrate Dr. King's legacy today, we find ourselves thinking about the role of higher education in our turbulent times and what higher education owes the future generations passing through our lecture halls, laboratories, athletics and arts venues, and now our Zoom screens.

The incredibly abhorrent events of January 6, intended to desecrate our U.S. Capitol and to harm our elected leaders, beg the question about higher education's place in shaping a future in which such incidents never happen again. We believe that the answer is in a young Martin Luther King Jr.'s wisdom: it is the job of education to equip those who participate with the tools to distinguish truth from falsehood. And we would add that we must provide the forum for developing the skills to engage in civil discourse that draws on evidence and rests on logic.

The plague of racial injustice in our nation is ongoing. Over hundreds of years — and sadly, even through today, Black, Brown and Indigenous people have been subjected to discrimination, other indignities and even death. Structural racism is unfortunately endemic in our society and its institutions. In what we say and do as leaders in higher education, we have a responsibility to examine our own institution and make the changes that will make a difference.

How do our words, accompanied by actions, hold us accountable to our students, community and each other? We must focus on how well we are executing on those responsibilities at the University of Maine and our regional campus in Machias. With the release today of the [Findings and Recommendations Report](#) by the President's Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, we have a road map to consider in our quest to make inclusive excellence foundational. We have an important way forward to ensure that the Black, Brown and Indigenous people in our communities can pursue their dreams to the fullest at our universities.

The report is hopeful and hard-hitting. It recognizes what we have in place and makes clear that we have more to do. We urge you to review it and keep in mind Dr. King's challenge to higher education.

With gratitude and hope for a future marked by equity and inclusiveness for all people everywhere.

Sincerely,

Joan Ferrini-Mundy, President

John Volin, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

Robert Dana, Vice President for Student Life and Inclusive Excellence, and Dean of Students

Chris Lindstrom, Vice President for Human Resources

Susan McKay, Co-chair of the President's Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Director of the Maine Center for Research in STEM Education and Professor of Physics

Jeffery Mills, President and CEO of the University of Maine Foundation

Daniel Qualls, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Head of Campus

Ken Ralph, Director of Athletics

Christopher Richards, Vice President for Enrollment Management

Kody Varahramyan, Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School

Jake Ward, Vice President for Innovation and Economic Development

Kimberly Whitehead, Vice President and Chief of Staff, and Co-chair of the President's Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Joanne Yestramski, Interim Vice President and Chief Business Officer

The University of Maine recognizes that it is located on Marsh Island in the homeland of the Penobscot Nation, where issues of water and territorial rights, and encroachment upon sacred sites, are ongoing. Penobscot homeland is connected to the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations — the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Micmac — through kinship, alliances and diplomacy. The university also recognizes that the Penobscot Nation and the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations are distinct, sovereign, legal and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and self-determination.