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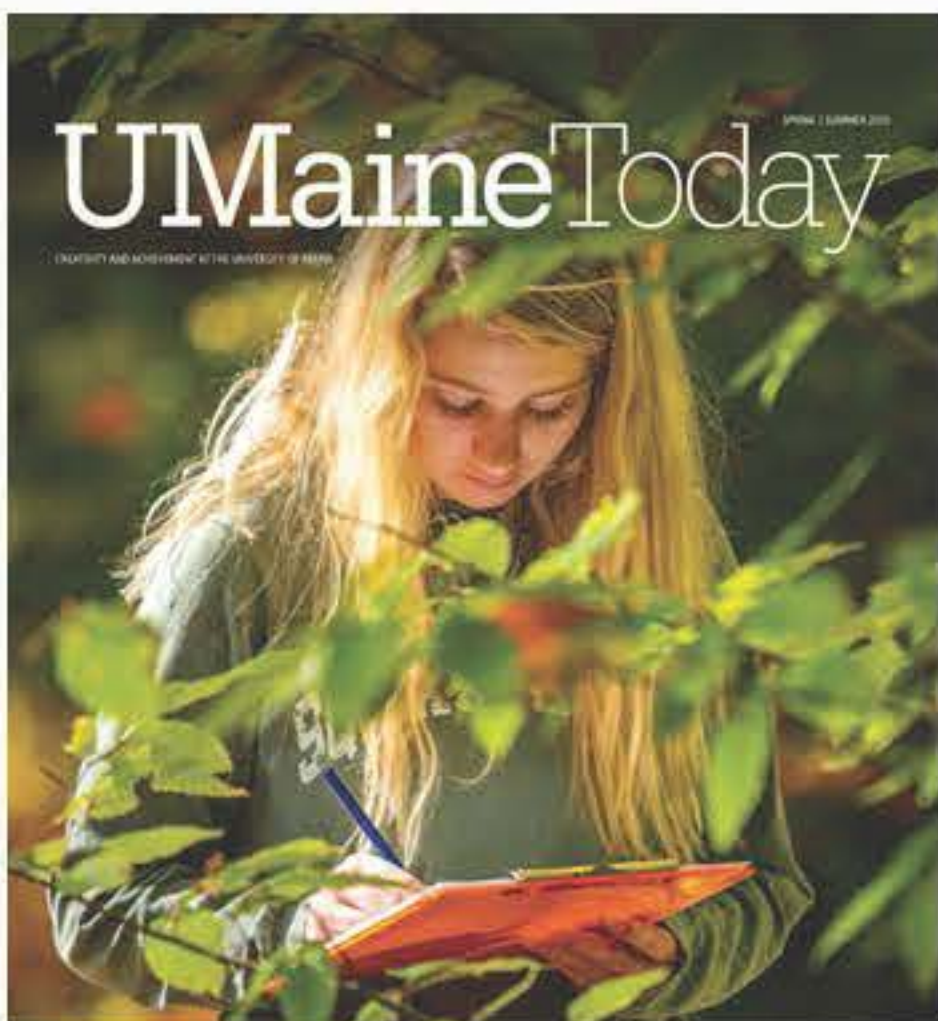
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## UMaine Today



## UMaine Intermedia program promotes COVID-19 vaccination with art

March 23, 2021

University of Maine intermedia students are creating and sharing art that advocates for COVID-19 vaccination and equitable distribution of doses.

In an awareness campaign led by Intermedia MFA Program Director Susan Smith, about 20 graduate and undergraduate students have been developing various media that reinforce the hardships of the pandemic and encourage spectators to help bring about its end through inoculation.

The effort, known as "Creativity vs. COVID," builds on another campaign launched by the Center for Artistic Activism and Universities Allied for Essential Medicine called "Free the Vaccine for COVID-19," which includes a traveling exhibit touring several universities. UMaine's [Innovative Media Research and Commercialization](#) (IMRC) Center is the first stop for the exhibit, which is on display through April 16.

"We are in a unique position as artists to be able to present what's happening around us and confront an issue in a different way than just reading it on the news or looking at the statistics," Smith says.

As part of the UMaine campaign, 10 intermedia students are creating animations evoking imagery from "Free the Vaccine for COVID-19," including a bird equitably distributing vaccines — the campaign's logo. They will use projectors to display their work, collectively titled "A Shot in the Dark," on the front of Fogler Library and front of New Balance Field House at 8:30 p.m. April 2.

Other student projects for outreach effort include promotional buttons distributed at the Wabanaki Health Center on Indian Island and stickers offered at COVID-19 testing sites on campus. Some students also have created a postcard campaign titled "The Outbreak Diaries," in which community members will be asked to share their experiences during the pandemic with Intermedia Programs and the community.

Smith says their work will be incorporated into the Center for Artistic Activism's exhibit at the IMRC alongside graphic designs, parody music videos and other work created by artists worldwide as part of "Free the Vaccine for COVID-19" and other global outreach projects. They also will join conceptual COVID-19 masks crafted by Smith's students in fall 2020. The exhibit, including the additions will be a part of Maine Impact Week before travelling to other institutions. Its next destination is the University of Maryland.

Artwork has the ability to humanize death and hospitalization statistics and connect with community members through shared understanding, suffering and yearning to end the pandemic, Smith says. She says she hopes her students' work will help alleviate any trepidations people have about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, for increasing vaccination rates can help curtail the pandemic.

"Art, whether it'd be a poster or costume, has a real accessibility for messaging that for fliers and brochures, it can be hard to bring," Smith says. "It's just a good way to visualize the data and humanize the statistics."

Participating in the multipronged outreach effort has taught intermedia students multiple lessons. Those who are creating animations to display in April learned how to use video and design programs, as well as various technical skills, Smith says. All her students also learned how to collaborate with their fellow artists, and the importance of creating art for a community that can affect people's lives.

"The experience of doing something for the common good is very different than doing something for a gallery or exhibition," Smith says. "I think the most important thing has been learning to situate their work within a community."

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