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# University of Maine, Creating the Future: Installation Address, Robert A. Kennedy

University of Maine

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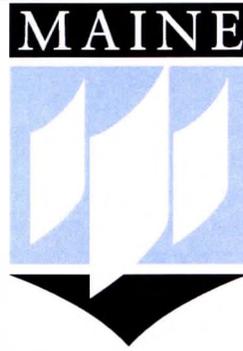
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# creating THE FUTURE

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

Installation Address • Robert A. Kennedy • September 23, 2005

Thank you very much for coming today.

I sincerely thank all who have spoken before me this afternoon, including the video comments from Governor John Baldacci.

Being here today is a humbling experience, and I want you all to know that I am sincerely grateful for this opportunity. It means a great deal to me to share this day with my family. I'm delighted that my four sons (Caleb, Alex, Bryce and Curran) could be here, along with my daughter-in-law, Heather. And of course Mary, whom I hope you all know. Although I'm biased, I know that Mary truly is a great faculty member. One of my delights is how often students approach us and, without knowing me from Adam, inform me of what a wonderful teacher she is. I am deeply appreciative of all she has done to support me and our family. It's certainly true that without her, I would not be here today.

Last July, I had an experience that I would like to share with you. I was one of 47 people attending a Harvard institute for new presidents. Within just a short time—after listening to the others talk about their institutions and their challenges—I concluded that I was the luckiest president there. I am blessed to be at a university in a wonderful state, where we enjoy broad-based support, and where I am surrounded every day by students and colleagues who make this a great place to live and work.

I've been at UMaine for a little more than five years, and, if there is one thing that stands out to me, it is the overwhelming sense I get from so many people of true affection for and dedication to UMaine.

I'm reminded of this frequently, but one of the most compelling examples occurred recently when an alumnus presented a check to a University of Maine Foundation staff member in my presence. This man, an accomplished professional who graduated from UMaine about 20 years ago, and now resides on the West Coast, literally had tears in his eyes as he reflected on what UMaine had meant to him. He had a duty, he felt, to help others as he had been helped.

Within the state, UMaine's reach is pervasive. We are connected in some way to every county and every community. Through our outstanding Cooperative Extension operation, our research centers, the Division of Lifelong Learning, and other outreach and engagement activities, UMaine is truly a statewide resource.

*My goal is to make this next decade one of the best in UMaine's 150-year history.*

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We are proud of what UMaine is, and that pride is reflected back to us from so many constituencies:

- Our students. They are hard working, they are bright, and they are our future leaders. They are at the center of our community life, and they consistently demonstrate to our faculty—many of whom have taught elsewhere—that they are as talented a group as might be found at any institution in this country.
- Our faculty. The greatest community of scholars in this state and equal in quality to any of the fine universities that I've been associated with, our faculty are the lifeblood of this university, and their contributions make UMaine the great university that it is.
- Our staff members. These incredible, committed, hard-working men and women are indispensable to our organization, and their great campus citizenship makes a tremendous impact on our students and our community.
- Our alumni and other friends. This group, especially, made an indelible impact on me during my time as interim president. I have been moved, many times, by their expression of what UMaine means to them, how their time here changed their lives, and their belief that UMaine is uniquely vital to Maine's future. Through their seemingly endless forms of support and incredible generosity, these wonderful people are a critical factor in our success.

- Elected officials and community leaders, many of whom (including the Governor and Sen. Snowe) are alums. This is a group to whom we owe much. State and federal government support is vital—now more than ever—and UMaine enjoys that support to a greater degree than ever before. It would be difficult to imagine a Congressional delegation that works harder and more effectively for its state university than ours. We have also been blessed with effective, hard-working, local legislators—past and present—who have worked every day to make UMaine stronger.

- There's one other group I'd like to mention and thank, and that is our retirees. I'm told that many are here today, and I'm very thankful for that. This is an energetic, committed group that loves UMaine and does a great deal to help, providing a vital link to our history and traditions. I am proud that our faculty and staff have recently initiated a campus tribute to this dynamic group. We will soon create a walkway or wall to recognize all UMaine retirees, people who have given so much to this institution.

Then there are the thousands of other people who appreciate UMaine for any number of reasons—because it provides access to high-quality performing and visual arts, or because it is home to exciting Division I athletics, or because we have the state's largest library, to name a few examples. A university like this is a wonderful resource, and I am delighted that UMaine is important to so many people.

While we do appreciate the present, we must anticipate the future keenly. The world changes quickly, and as emphasized by former Bowdoin President Bob Edwards when he spoke earlier, the highest calling of higher education is to meet those changes through adaptation, innovation and leadership.

At UMaine, we have an opportunity; indeed, we have started the process of establishing a new model for how a public university, especially Maine's land-grant university, can serve

*Helping students succeed is a top priority at the University of Maine.*



the needs of the state and its citizens. This new model aspires to capture—to actualize—the spirit and the intent of “the people’s universities” put forth by those visionaries whose ideas revolutionized American higher education nearly 150 years ago when they suggested that the university and community share an intricate bond.

This new model involves being responsive and flexible enough to adapt to changing societal needs, while capitalizing on our individual and collective strengths. It also means greater collaboration with other institutions, and taking a leadership role in creative efforts to pool resources and expertise.

The new model builds on our strategic plan from 2000. That plan—which emphasized the creation of an Honors College, interdisciplinary programs and collaboration across Maine’s diverse institutions—has been a driving vision for me and for UMaine for the past several years. We must focus our planning and our work on maintaining the momentum we have established with regard to this contemporary and meaningful approach to our historic mission; we are already well on our way.

Consider the Graduate School of Biomedical Science, which started to take shape a year ago. The support for this initiative—because it is good for the state and for UMaine—has been tremendous. In one year, we have secured the first-ever state funding—\$1 million—for competitive stipends for graduate fellowships. We have also gained the support and collaboration of several of the state’s research institutions. Voters will be asked in November to approve \$1 million dedicated to establishing Camden Hall in Bangor as the central headquarters for the school, which will have programs and resources on this campus and in communities across Maine. That’s the essence of the new model for a land-grant university that I referred to—programs that involve and depend on UMaine’s leadership and strengths, certainly, but that also tap the expertise and resources of research and education institutions across Maine as well.

Maine does not have a publicly funded medical school. I’m optimistic that the Graduate School of Biomedical Science will provide the framework that will help us compete for funding in the biomedical research arena—by far the largest and fastest-growing source of federal research funding. Moreover, it will put our scientists in a position to apply their skills and their creativity to improving human health globally, and especially, locally. This state has its share of health concerns—many of them particularly acute in this region—and scientists associated with these research programs will be poised to help address those concerns.

Future collaborations will involve other state institutions. Just this week we formalized a joint Ph.D./Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree with the University of New England. UNE President Sandra Featherman deserves our thanks for her leadership and vision, which have been critical factors in bringing this agreement to fruition. These collaborations with other educational and research institutions, and the integration of UMaine across the state, exemplify the new and unique model for a land-grant university that I believe UMaine can achieve.

This collaborative model works, and it can be replicated in other areas. Maine has many resources—educational institutions, research facilities and natural resources. By working together to find creative approaches for sharing—and thus maximizing—those resources, we can accomplish our collective goals, efficiently and effectively.

It is equally important that we continue to apply this approach to the way we develop academic structures within our own campus framework. We’ve done this very effectively in



*The Graduate School of Biomedical Science will provide the framework to compete for funding in the biomedical research arena.*



the past with the creation of entities like the Climate Change Institute, the Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center and the School of Marine Sciences. These initiatives bring together faculty members across disciplines, providing them with not only an increased pool of resources, but a rich and stimulating intellectual community in which to work. In addition, they provide great opportunities for our students.

Along similar lines, several members of our faculty—including Jonathan Rubin, Bahman Baktiari and Jim Acheson—recently examined our capabilities in policy studies. It turns out that we have more than 90 faculty and staff members engaged in teaching, research and outreach related to policy studies, from marine and health policy, to international affairs, to political science and public administration. There are more than 80 courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels that currently have a public policy component. These are critical areas—now more than ever—in which UMaine has tremendous expertise, but we need to find ways to better leverage our policy research capabilities. This initiative has great potential, and we are excited about what it could mean for UMaine’s future and our ability to better serve the state’s needs. Expect to hear more about this in the near future.

In each of these examples, UMaine is uniquely positioned to participate and lead because of its graduate programs. These will continue to be a point of emphasis for us. In Maine, as in the rest of the country, graduate education will be increasingly important to innovation, business development, and solving the many challenges we face as a society.

UMaine is in a position to contribute, through partnerships, creative planning and mobilization, to solving some of the state’s most urgent problems. It’s not just our scientists and engineers who will contribute—many of you have heard me say that we have the ability to solve the technical problems associated with technology—but it is solving the social, ethical and policy issues that require the most creativity. In those areas, UMaine’s faculty has enormous capabilities. It is through this collaborative approach—the new model—that UMaine will find its way to an exciting future. We have so much going for us now, and I believe we are on the way to accomplishing extraordinary things that will have untold benefits to society.

When I talk about statewide integration and infusion, I do so carefully. I appreciate the central role that UMaine plays in the University of Maine System and I am thankful that the system’s strategic plan amplifies that role. We are the state’s flagship university, but we also respect the important roles played by Maine’s other public universities and community colleges. I am honored that many of my fellow college and university presidents are here today. Maine affords great access to higher education, and that is something that should make us all feel proud.

When students arrive at UMaine, they find a great many things: a beautiful campus, a supportive community, a safe environment, and a range of activities and organizations that includes something for every interest. It is a place to explore the arts and culture, to grow in mind and body, and to be part of a community that embraces diversity and all that is good and interesting in the human condition.

But our students really come here for one overriding purpose—to learn. And we are here, first and foremost, to teach. UMaine has some extraordinary teachers and scholars, people like Sandy Caron, Paul Roscoe, Eric Landis, Susan Brawley and Kim McKeage—all of whom have been recognized widely for their outstanding teaching.

*Graduate education will be increasingly important to innovation, business development, and solving the many challenges we face as a society.*

Take for example Malcolm Shick, who teaches Biology of Marine Organisms for first-year marine science majors. Malcolm believes that scientists and artists can learn a lot from each other, and he has creatively integrated music, art and literature in his teaching. At the same time, he gives those students opportunities to stretch their imaginations, gain deeper understanding, and develop as people.

At UMaine, our students and faculty members benefit from having the opportunity to work together closely, and to forge relationships that benefit both. Students often tell me, especially as they are about to finish their time here, that they appreciate, more than anything, the close working relationships they have had with their professors. We are fortunate that UMaine is of the size and structure that promotes undergraduate research, and other important avenues in which our students and faculty members interact for mutual benefit.

While teaching is central to all that we do, its close relationship to our growing research enterprise keeps the UMaine academic experience on the frontiers of new knowledge.

At UMaine, we have some of the world's leading experts in their fields. Their research and scholarship lead advances in science and engineering, in the humanities, in education, and in business.

For example, there's Rosemary Smith, a bioengineer who is one of the Laboratory for Surface Science and Technology scientists leading UMaine into the hot fields of nanoscience and nanotechnology. A professor of electrical and computer engineering, Rosemary is involved in biomedical microdevices research. She is a leading researcher in MEMS, or microelectromechanical systems, which have biomedical applications ranging from health diagnostics to drug delivery. Microinstrumentation is the next big technology on the horizon, and it's happening here.

I am proud of many things at this university, but none more than the excellence, creativity and humanity of our faculty.

I would like to speak specifically for a moment about research, an area in which UMaine is growing quickly. We owe the people of Maine a debt of gratitude for helping make this happen. Their vision, and recognition that university research is a vital force of economic development, has made possible much of the infrastructure necessary for our continued progress.

We want to do more, and we need to do more. The state recognizes that university research has value. The current challenge is to make the case that a greater state investment is needed, and that it will pay off. At UMaine, we are developing ways to establish the framework for a commercialization entity that will help us be even more effective at the important applications of UMaine research through things like licensing, patenting and technology transfer.

Consider this: Right now, there are more patent and intellectual property activities going on at UMaine than all of the other research institutions in Maine combined.

That is remarkable enough, but even more impressive is the likelihood that we will be able to do even better in the future. Developing our commercialization capabilities will be key, as will our Innovation Center. That facility will provide structure for our students to learn how to develop and market their ideas, and we are exploring ways to extend this resource by making it available to students at other statewide institutions.

*We have real opportunities to contribute to Maine's health and quality of life of its citizens.*





We are also integrating innovation into our curriculum, having created an undergraduate concentration in that area, led by Professor Hemant Pendse. Chemical and Biological Engineering Professor Darrell Donahue and two faculty colleagues—Margo Lukens from English and Liz Downing from music—are team-teaching the first course in this new sequence this semester. When was the last time that you heard of a course—like innovation engineering—taught by a chemical engineer, a music teacher and an English professor! These creative programs with unique and innovative faculty combinations enrich the education experience for our students and broaden the intellectual horizons of our faculty.

I am proud of our research achievements, and I especially appreciate the role research plays in economic development. To use a popular term, UMaine is an economic engine, but it is also much, much more. We need to diligently guard against the perception that this university is all about research and development. In reality, its essence is to establish a foundation for our students in the liberal arts, to help them develop communication skills, and to promote creative and analytical thinking, along with ethical, moral, social and cultural sensibilities—those attributes that help the truly educated solve the world's most vexing problems.

I really want to emphasize how strongly I feel about our students. I spend as much time as I can interacting with students. That contact energizes me, as it does all of our faculty. Our students demonstrate excitement and commitment, and they personify the promise of the future. I certainly can identify with students, parents and the importance of all that college has to offer—three of my four sons are college students!

The energy our students devote to their studies, and, in many cases, to jobs, volunteer work and campus activities, is incredible. It is inspiring to the rest of us, and it really serves to fuel much of what we do as a community.

One great example of excellence in all areas is Kim Corbitt, an outstanding student and basketball player who graduated in May. I remember her coach, Sharon Versyp, telling me how driven Kim was to do well both in basketball and in her studies. But if it was a choice between academics and basketball, Kim made it very clear that her studies came first. Kim was not only the America East Player of the Year last year, she was the conference's top student-athlete in her sport, a biochemical engineering major, and the winner of UMaine's M Club Dean Smith Award for academic and athletic achievement. Kim is an assistant coach now, and she's beginning work on an MBA. We are very proud of Kim, and we look forward to her contributions as a coach and a role model.

We are also blessed at UMaine with a hard-working and creative student affairs leadership team. This group constantly seeks new ways to improve the student experience, and they have done great things for our students and the community. UMaine is truly student-centered, and it is in the midst of a dramatic transformation in this regard. It really started a few years ago, aided by outstanding student leaders like Jonathan LaBonte and Matthew Rodrigue, and it continues today with the support of dozens of student leaders, including Kate O'Brien and Julie Ann Scott.

This kind of leadership has resulted in initiatives like the Memorial Union improvements, which have made a tremendous difference in our campus life. It continues with the current exciting projects that will update our dining facilities and lead to the construction of what will be a magnificent student recreation center. It's more than just buildings, though.

*Any organization, no matter how large, is all about its people.  
And our people are our strength.*

Large numbers of our students show their leadership and commitment in important ways, like participation in Alternative Spring Break activities, when they give up their vacation to work on projects that improve the lives of people who need help the most. These tremendous students follow in the footsteps of people like Jeff Mills, Trish Riley and Sam Collins, the president of the great Class of 1944.

To help ensure that all our students can be part of this culture that will lead the future, I am pleased to say that we are forming a Student Retention Task Force, chaired by Associate Provost Sue Hunter. This group will take a top-to-bottom look at everything we do, and everything we can do, to help our students make progress, stay with us and graduate. Success in this area can have a tremendous effect on the university, but its most important benefit will be to the students themselves.

These are exciting times at UMaine. Most of you know that I tend to be an optimist. But it is much more than that. The University of Maine is poised to move forward quickly and dramatically.

A key will be the long-term, ambitious fundraising campaign that we have begun developing. And I really believe this—it will help transform UMaine.

Any organization, though, no matter how large, is all about its people. And our people are our strength. I've been fortunate in my career to work at several outstanding universities. Some have more resources than we have at UMaine; some have less. But not one of them can touch us when it comes to the quality of the people who make up the faculty and employee base, the student population, our wonderful alumni and other friends. That is the biggest reason I'm so excited and optimistic about UMaine and its future. When it comes to this most important characteristic, we're already world-class.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a humbling experience. I follow in the footsteps of the great leaders who have made UMaine what it is. Presidents like Abram Harris, Charles Allen, Arthur Hauck and Win Libby, all familiar names to generations of UMaine people. And those former presidents who are active members of our community: Fred Hutchinson and Peter Hoff, both of whom have left indelible marks on this wonderful university, which is a better place because of their service.

I believe in UMaine today, and I believe in its traditions. The Alumni Association helps preserve those traditions, and it is important that all of us appreciate the value of keeping alive those things that have made UMaine great for 140 years.

Today—as the Chancellor challenged me—I promise to all of you to serve as a capable steward of those traditions, and to help with the creation of new ones. I will work tirelessly to make this university an academic beacon of hope and prosperity for the people of this great state. I join with my colleagues throughout this university in celebrating the remarkable privilege of shaping and changing the culture through our students' development and, ultimately, their contributions.

I accept this responsibility, and I eagerly look forward to continuing to meet the challenge.

I've recently started a new tradition of my own. As Mary pointed out, one of my hobbies is landscape gardening.



*Leadership sets a tone — and a pace — that our students can see and feel,  
motivating them to be active participants, to be the best they can be.*



Shortly after moving into the President's House on campus late this summer, I bought and planted a couple of new trees—but one, a ginkgo that you can see outside The Maples building, has special meaning for me. Its symbolism—in addition to being a tree that I remember from my days on the UC-Berkeley campus—is that, in addition to being beautiful, it is slow-growing. It will mature over the next several generations. And much of what we do in universities involves activities that we won't see completed. We are laying the groundwork for the future—of our students, of our state and our society.

Nothing symbolizes college life like the beginning of a new academic year, and that renewal, like the planting of a tree, is what makes a university's mission so special. I plan to plant and donate a tree to the campus each fall. This will be my way of bringing in each academic year with a long-lasting, perhaps symbolic, memento. The trees will grow as the new students progress through their time with us and, like those students, they will continue to grow for a long time thereafter.

It will be many years before the trees reach maturity, as it will be a long time before those students fully realize their potential.

To me, that exemplifies being a university president—one who plants the seedlings, with high hopes for lasting success. That is my ultimate wish for the University of Maine—that what we accomplish together will help this university be stronger and better long into the future.

I firmly believe that the University of Maine is one of this country's great academic treasures, and I am certain that our best days are ahead. I am humbled to be this university's president, and I am grateful for your support.

My family and I thank you for coming today, and thank you for being a part of this occasion, which we will always remember.



*The University of Maine—creating the future.*