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## UMaine President Annual New Academic Year News Conference

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## **Annual New Academic Year News Conference**

**Sept. 1, 1998**

**Orono, Maine**

Thank you for joining us this morning.

It's a tradition at the University of Maine for the President to hold a news conference at the beginning of each academic year. The purpose of the news conference is to share observations on the incoming class and the school year that began yesterday.

I am particularly proud to be here today to express my enthusiasm and optimism about the students, faculty, and staff of the University, and about the University itself. We are, in fact, entering a new era -- an era of enhanced excellence, of greater focus, and of expanded value and relevance to the state of Maine and its people.

As I enter my second year as President, I am pleased with the direction in which we are headed. Let me start with our incoming students, the Class of 2002. We greeted 1,451 new students when classes resumed on Monday, a 23 percent increase over last year's entering cohort of students. They arrived with an average SAT score of 1,088 -- virtually the same average as last year's incoming class. That SAT score is 82 points above the state average and 71 points above the national average. Our students' SAT scores consistently and significantly exceed the state and national averages. We are very proud of that fact.

However, SAT scores are just one measure of quality. There are others, such as class standing. Twenty-two percent of our incoming students finished in the top ten percent of their high school graduating class. Forty percent finished high school with grades that placed them in the top 20 percent of all graduates.

Virtually all of our students participated in student government, community service activities, performance arts, athletics, and other co-curricular and extra-curricular activities as high school students. Those experiences are important. They lay the foundation for the new or expanded opportunities and learning experiences our students will encounter here -- all of which enrich the value of their education and position them for a bright and fulfilling future.

Again this year we have seen an increase in the number of the state's high school top scholars who have chosen to attend the University of Maine. We are delighted that 81 of Maine's 1998 high school valedictorians and salutatorians will be joining us this fall, assisted by our Top Scholars scholarship program. These students are among Maine's best and brightest, and could have attended just about any college or university they desired. We are pleased that they have chosen to stay in Maine and attend their home state's flagship university.

Speaking of choices, 70 percent said the University of Maine was their first choice of schools. They recognize the great value we offer -- an excellent education, the broadest range of learning opportunities found anywhere in the state, and affordability.

Looking at the student body as a whole, we anticipate a total of 9,100 will enroll for the fall semester. That means our overall enrollment this semester will be 2 percent or 213 students, larger than it was last year. While our incoming class is much larger than the one we greeted at this time in 1997, we graduated an even higher number of students during the last academic year -- 1,563 in all.

Of this year's student body, 79 percent are undergraduates; the remaining 21 percent are graduate students. Eight-four percent of those students are from Maine; the rest come from approximately 40 other states and 80 nations. The mix of in-state and out-of-state students enriches the community and the learning experience of all.

That's particularly important in today's society and economy. Those experiences are even more important to our students given the social and economic conditions they will experience later in life.

That's the profile of our student body. Allow me to speak briefly about other aspects of the university that deserve attention.

We have 43 new faculty members joining us this academic year. Their enthusiasm, fresh perspectives, scholarly credentials, and experience as teachers enhance the university and the learning experience of our students. They give us a total of 610 faculty members, easily the largest collection of teachers, scholars, and researchers found anywhere in Maine. That's just one of many distinctions we hold as Maine's land-grant and sea-grant university.

We also are welcoming Dr. Eric Brucker, who joins us this semester as dean of our College of Business, Public Policy, and Health. Dean Brucker succeeds Dr. Virginia Gibson, who had been serving as interim dean since the retirement of Stanley Devino in 1996. Both Stan and Ginny did a great job raising the College and its business school to national prominence. With Eric's arrival, Ginny is preparing to return to the faculty, where she has been a highly-regarded teacher and expert in management information systems.

Additionally, this semester we will be moving forward with several initiatives undertaken last year. One such project is BearWorks, the comprehensive action plan we proposed last year to guide us in our decision-making. A revised version of that plan will be released very soon, and will be distributed widely on-campus and off. We will have more to say on that topic in the near future.

Our new stadium project is nearly complete. In fact, the first-ever varsity contest, a field hockey game, will be played there later today.

This facility will serve varsity athletics as well as recreational activities for our entire student body and university community. Furthermore, it will be a unique state resource for a wide variety of functions. This facility -- which was built completely with privately-raised funds -- will be dedicated on September 12. We are excited about the stadium and grateful to those citizens whose generosity made it possible.

Elsewhere on campus, Fogler Library is undergoing the first phase of an extensive renovation. As many of you know, Fogler is the state's largest library and, it's fair to say, the most important building on campus. It serves our campus community as well as the needs of libraries, businesses and industries, researchers, policy makers, and citizens across the state and beyond. Additional renovations will be undertaken to maintain Fogler Library's role as one of the state's most valuable resources.

Furthermore, our new advanced engineering wood composites laboratory will be completed later this year. This one-of-a-kind facility will give students, professors, and other researchers unique opportunities to apply and advance the cutting-edge research of Dr. Habib Dagher and his colleagues here on campus. This facility is a great example of the partnership that can exist among the university, the state, the federal government, and private industry, all of which contributed funds to make this important facility possible.

Speaking of research, soon we will receive over \$3 million in new funds from the state to support our university-based research efforts. That money will be used to support our scientists and engineers as they work to strengthen our state's economy -- in traditional Maine industries such as agriculture, forestry, and commercial fishing, as well as in high-tech industries involving sensors, computer science, and composites. This new research money will also be used to match millions in federal funds that will be made available to the university to support and expand our research efforts. Whether it's developing space-age materials or developing new ways to preserve and market Maine-based food products, university research is critical to the state's future. It creates jobs, new technologies, new products and uses, and new businesses and industries. University research also generates millions and millions of dollars in economic activity right here in the state. We are extremely proud of our status as Maine's research university, and of the work taking place in academic disciplines across campus to improve the educational experience of our students, and to improve Maine's economy and quality of life.

An important component of the state's investment in university-based R&D; is the \$20 million R&D; bond proposal that will appear as Question #1 on the November ballot. Along with the other developments I have mentioned this morning, passage of this bond proposal would give us even more reason to be enthusiastic and optimistic. I plan to do my part over the next two months to help the public understand what passage of Question #1 means to the university's research capacity -- and to Maine's future.

As you can see, we have much to celebrate as the new school year begins. We are, indeed, entering a new era -- one of enhanced excellence, of greater focus, and of expanded value and relevance to the state of Maine and its people. We look forward to it with great enthusiasm and a sense of pride in knowing the contributions the University is making to our state and its people.