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Maine Memo – April 15

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Dear members of the University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias communities,

In turbulent times, the strengths of a community are key to its response, flexibility and resiliency. And that's exactly what we've seen at the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias as we experience the coronavirus pandemic. I continue to be inspired by — and proud of — our students, faculty and staff who have stepped up to complete the academic requirements, deliver the coursework, and meet the needs of our community and the state. All while our personal lives are in more upheaval than anyone ever thought possible. Yet our community is strong.

Putting Current and Future Students First

Faculty, staff and administrators — all of us remain focused, every day, on our students, their experiences and their learning under these uncertain circumstances. We are focused on how we can support them now and over the summer, and how we are planning for the fall as we welcome the newest members of our communities at UMaine and UMM.

- On Thursday, April 9, the University of Maine System received initial guidance from the U.S. Department of Education regarding allocations and use of federal CARES Act funds. In federal CARES Act funding, \$7,603,694 million is being allocated to support the University of Maine and \$293,556 to support the University of Maine at Machias. Half of these funds, (the \$7,897,250 million total) must be disbursed as direct emergency grants to students. I am in meetings with Chancellor Dannel Malloy and the presidents of the other System universities developing plans for timely distribution of the funds. University guidance on CARES Act distributions and adjustments in students fees will be available by April 21. I have had discussions with Sen. Collins about the CARES Act funding, and we are grateful for her support and the support of her colleagues in the Maine Congressional Delegation.
- Now more than ever, it is clear that the campuses have a full-scale focus on fostering learner success and doing all they can to help our current students be able to continue their education at UMaine and UMM. We have kept students connected and worked hard to ensure they are not adrift in this challenging period. With information provided by the University of Maine System IT experts, we have been able to contact thousands of students. When they return, we also will need to meet them where they are, always remembering what we have been through, together.
- Across the university, advisors, deans, faculty, student life professionals and others are making direct calls to students to check on how they are doing. At UMM, a campus-wide Student Call Out Campaign organized by Academic Services continues. The goal is to get in touch with every student by April 24. In another initiative, Tora Johnson, chair of environmental and biological sciences and director of the GIS Service Center, created an [interactive online map](#) populated by students, faculty, staff and alumni submitting their locations and photos.
- This week we reached out to all students at both universities with a brief survey to ask how things are going, and to get feedback. You can find the survey [online](#). We are synthesizing results as they come in and feeding them to all who can use them to adjust their efforts in the remaining weeks of this semester, and in the future.
- With all coursework now being offered remotely in response to the coronavirus pandemic, Maine Day 2020 on Wednesday, April 29 is an instructional day for classes and labs. UMaine faculty are encouraged to consider some recognition of the tenets of the UMaine tradition in labs and classes held that day. Those include service and engagement, community inclusion and solidarity, environmental sustainability and institutional history. Note, too, this year's theme: Out of this World. The Division of Student Life, 581.1406, coordinates the annual Maine Day events.
- We are planning for a Recognition Week for 2020 graduates at UMaine starting May 4, and UMM is considering a virtual celebration. Both universities plan to hold in-person Commencement celebrations when health and safety guidance from the federal and state Centers for Disease Control and Prevention deem it safe to do so. And in their planning, UMaine and UMM are actively seeking input from students.
- Admissions offices at UMM and UMaine have been involved in online Q&A sessions and virtual tours to help prospective students and their families learn more about both universities. Enrollment Management and the Division of Student Life set up a very successful UMaine [Parent and Family Facebook Group](#). And a campus-wide think tank a couple weeks ago yielded some amazing feedback, and new ideas for recruiting and retaining students. From the [Virtual UMaine](#) offerings, made possible through a collaboration between Enrollment Management and Marketing and Communications, to active efforts by Board of Visitors and Alumni Association members to reach out to accepted students and their families, student recruitment innovation and advocacy are priorities.
- Current students from Maine and across the Northeast are assisting Enrollment Management in hosting online meetings with prospective students from their home states. Direct invitations are sent electronically, giving students the opportunity to ask questions and get information in a peer-to-peer format with someone who will be a potential classmate.

Helping the State of Maine

As the state's only public research university, UMaine is leading and engaged in many initiatives to help our state. The outstanding innovation, technical expertise, selfless volunteerism, leadership and vision that are making a difference. Just some of the countless ways UMaine has stepped up. Among the examples:

- UMaine is providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for health care workers, including [the production of what are now barrels of hospital-grade hand sanitizer](#) going to those on the frontlines in Maine's COVID-19 battle. The UMaine Process Development Center and the Department of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering are leading the production effort in direct collaboration with the Maine Emergency Management Agency and Maine distilleries.
- UMaine Advanced Manufacturing Center is working hand-in-hand with the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership, Maine hospitals and Maine manufacturing partners to build, test and start production of two variations of an "aerosol box" meant to protect frontline medical staff as they intubate or transport patients who may be sick with the disease. This adds to the dozens of Maine companies who have adjusted their manufacturing to make PPE and other products to support the pandemic.
- Research regular: Professors Kristy Townsend and Melissa Maginnis and their students are compiling regular updates [to help Bangor Public Health & Community Services Department navigate the pandemic](#). Those updates also are available on the [UMaine coronavirus website](#).
- Emera Astronomy Center director Shawn Laatsch is [collaborating with Berkeley Open Infrastructure for Network Computing researchers](#) to provide access to the planetarium's visualization computer cluster to accurately model important coronavirus proteins to guide the design of novel vaccines and antiviral drugs for COVID-19. Emera's planetarium is the second in the nation to join this effort.
- The newly launched website, [Community Learning for ME](#), is a cross-organization initiative led by the Rural Aspirations Project with the UMaine College of Education and Human Development as one of many partners. The website is a "volunteer-driven, grassroots effort designed in community for community as a resource to support parents and teachers while school is not in session due to COVID-19." It provides live learning sessions in science, literacy, and the arts for all ages, as well as providing curricular and mental health support for both parents and teachers as they juggle the challenges of remote learning. Faculty in the college have volunteered to provide sessions on parent mental health, supporting students with special needs, and supporting teachers facing technological challenges in remote teaching, among others.
- Kelley Strout, interim director for UMaine's School of Nursing, has been working with the University of Maine System and other state universities to offer surge response staffing to local health care organizations. Two weeks ago, a survey went out to allow any of the 1,600 nursing students and more than 300 faculty and adjunct faculty across the System to opt-in and become surge response staffers.
- As of April 14, University of Maine Cooperative Extension's [Maine Farms and Seafood Product Directory](#) connecting local farmers to consumers had 393 farms/producers participating. The directory's interactive map has been viewed over 96,000 times since its launch in response to the pandemic.

What's Next?

I wish we could predict. We do not know when we will be able to be together again, or under what kinds of changed conditions. We are following Governor Mills' executive order to "stay healthy at home" and limiting our work here at the university to what is essential. What I do know is that the ingenuity, flexibility, resilience and adaptability that we are seeing now, among all in the community, can become part of our foundation going forward. Here is what we can say:

- The University of Maine continues its planning for summer and fall classes and activities. Summer will be fully online and remote, and we are now collectively looking at the multitude of programming we traditionally have offered for learners of all ages in the weeks between the spring and fall semesters to determine next steps.
- We are planning, as we always do at this time, for the great renewal that comes to universities with the start of the fall semester. UMaine and UMM are operational and will continue to be. Learning and courses are happening and great discovery, our researchers will continue to build new understandings and make great discoveries; and we will be even more fully engaged in our extensive public service mission based on all we are doing now. As UMS spokesperson Dan Demeritt noted in a Portland Press Herald story this morning: "Maine students and families can trust Maine's public universities will be open and operational in the fall. We plan to offer face-to-face instruction on our campuses, but will adapt as needed. We will meet our students where they are and deliver the resources and support they need to succeed."
- A new class of students will join us in the fall, we will offer our undergraduate and graduate courses and labs, conduct research that benefits Maine and beyond, and provide the community engagement that impacts learners of all ages.
- In this challenging time, we are making discoveries that will inform our path forward. At the University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias, we need to be talking about how we define tomorrow in the post-pandemic world AND set our course. To that end, we have launched the [Define Tomorrow to Set Our Course](#) initiative. This community-wide brainstorming activity seeks your ideas about where we could grow, where we could reorganize, how we might generate additional revenues, how we might reduce costs through new approaches or disinvestment, and what priorities we should consider pursuing in the post-pandemic world. I hope you will participate.

And two final community notes:

- Two major initiatives are underway to document this period in human history. Fogler Library is asking students, staff and alumni to help preserve the story of this unprecedented time in our community. The COVID-19 Community Archive Project will document the actions, thoughts and reflections of the UMaine community as they navigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. A story is [online](#). The Alumni Association's next magazine will focus on first-person stories by UMaine alumni and members of the Class of 2020 about how they experienced and responded to the pandemic. The print and digital versions of the magazine will be published in July.
- Tune in this Saturday, April 18 at 4 p.m. when the 1993 Men's Ice Hockey National Championship game will be rebroadcast statewide on WWII in Bangor and WPXT-CW in Portland. It also will be shown on the [Maine Black Bears Facebook page](#). Fans in southern Maine also can catch the game on Sunday, April 19 at 1 p.m. on WMTW-ABC. More details are [online](#).

Please continue to stay at home and use social distancing. It's important that we maintain the CDC protocol that must continue to guide our actions.

Share this:

Office of the President | 5703 Alumni Hall, Suite 200 | Orono, ME 04469 | Tel: 207.581.1512 | Fax: 207.581.1517 | umpresident@maine.edu

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