



Matthew Revitt <matthew.revitt@maine.edu>

Celebrating Commencement During the COVID-19 Pandemic

1 message

Chancellor Dannel Malloy <chancelloroffice@maine.edu>

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Reply-To: chancelloroffice@maine.edu

To: matthew.revitt@maine.edu



UMS Colleagues -

Our core mission is to transmit and expand knowledge through our teaching, research, and public service to the State of Maine. When our faculties confirm that a student has met the requirements to earn an academic degree in a particular field of knowledge, we joyfully celebrate with commencement exercises, caps and gowns, and colorful academic regalia, all rooted in centuries-old English academic tradition. Honoring these traditions in our own times is a noteworthy rite of passage to which our students rightfully look forward as each academic term nears its close. That these celebrations of academic achievement should occur is beyond question.

And yet, none of us could have foreseen even just a few weeks ago how the sudden onslaught of the global COVID-19 pandemic would make celebrating these traditions in the normal sense a serious threat to public health. It is with a sober sense of responsibility that our Presidents and I have therefore decided that we cannot proceed with our planned in-person commencement exercises in early May.

I want to be very clear, though: All UMS universities and the Law School will be awarding degrees on schedule and recognizing the academic achievements of our graduating students. While traditional in-person commencement exercises are not possible during the pandemic, each university will determine an appropriate alternative celebration that

balances the need to protect public health with the joyful recognition of our students' academic aspirations and achievements.

Our universities will be communicating directly with their students over the next two weeks about planning for alternative commencement celebrations.

Knowing the disappointment that comes from having to communicate this difficult decision, I'd like to share, in closing, an uplifting reflection on the very best of what we do in higher education. The following poem was written by John Masefield, Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom from 1930-1967, for the 1946 inauguration of the Chancellor of the University of Sheffield in the aftermath of World War II. To paraphrase Masefield below, our work to bring thought into the world goes on, and we will celebrate the academic achievements that come from it, pandemic or not.

There are few earthly things more splendid than a university.

In these days of broken frontiers and collapsing values, when every future looks somewhat grim and the dams are down and the floods are making misery, when every ancient foothold has become something of a quagmire, wherever a university stands, it stands and shines; wherever it exists, the free minds of all, urged on to full and fair enquiry, may still bring wisdom into human affairs.

There are few earthly things more beautiful than a university.

It is a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know, where those who perceive truth may strive to make others see; where seekers and learners alike, banded together in the search for knowledge, will honor thought in all its finer ways, will welcome thinkers in distress or in exile, will uphold ever the dignity of thought and learning, and will exact standards in these things. They give to the young in their impressionable years, the bond of a lofty purpose shared, of a great corporate life whose links will not be loosed until they die. They give young people that close companionship for which youth longs, and that chance of the endless discussion of the themes which are endless, without which youth would seem a waste of time.

There are few things more enduring than a university.

Religions may split into sect or heresy; dynasties may perish or be supplanted, but for century after century the university will continue, and the stream of life will pass through it, and the thinker and the seeker will be bound together in the undying cause of bringing

thought into the world.

To be a member of these great societies must ever be a glad distinction.

Sincerely,



Dannel P. Malloy
Chancellor

Office of the Chancellor
University of Maine System
[15 Estabrooke Dr.](#)
[Orono, ME 04469-5703](#)
rowenac@maine.edu



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