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Letter from UMaine Provost: Spring is Coming

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Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost

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Spring is Coming

1 message

UMaine Provost <umprovost@maine.edu>
Reply-To: UMaine Provost <umprovost@maine.edu>
To: UM-EMPLOYEES@lists.maine.edu

Tue, Mar 16, 2021 at 8:15 AM

"So, I was on Zoom the other day..."

Yes, it sounds like the start of a bad joke. Instead, that has been our reality for more than a year.

The challenges and hardships we have faced individually and as a community have been unprecedented. Yet, our individual and collective humanity has often prevailed, and so has our resiliency. Faced with the new challenges and the unknown timeline of a global pandemic, universities nationwide came together immediately to tackle the problems that were arising every day, and began to work on solutions. The initial primary focus was on students and their success - making sure that they could continue advancing on their educational path. Faculty Senates, University Administrators, and Unions worked collaboratively to find solutions to meet our students' needs, both in terms of mental health and academic goals. At the same time, they worked on ways to assist faculty and staff through extending tenure clocks, supporting flexibility in teaching modalities, increasing support through instructional design to succeed in these new modalities, and allowing a large percentage of employees to work remotely for more than a year.

"Yes, but..."

The pandemic has not been the same for everyone. Many staff have continued to come to the university every day to ensure that all the processes we put in place to face the new challenges could run smoothly. They have continued to prepare and serve food in the cafeterias, to clear the sidewalks and parking lots of snow and ice, and clean and sanitize all nooks and crannies to make the place safe for all. Many employees, faculty and staff alike, whether they have been working from home or on campus, care for young children, older relations, or family members with compromised immune systems. Many in our community have had to face extraordinary trials to continue to do their job. We can certainly imagine that, even after the pandemic is largely behind us, there will be ongoing and lingering consequences that need to be addressed individually and as a community.

The good news is that, as long as we continue to stick to what we know works (wearing masks, washing hands, social distancing) and as vaccines become more available and people take advantage of them, we can look to a coming fall that includes maximizing in-person instruction. There will be constraints, and we will need flexibility on everyone's part to make this happen safely, efficiently, and successfully. Yet, we owe it to ourselves and to our students to do everything we can to create a campus full of vitality this fall.

At UMaine we look to reinvigorate all of the hard work that the university community did on [Strategic Visioning and Values](#) and on [Student Success initiatives](#), integrating them with [Define Tomorrow](#) ideas and the new [UMS TRANSFORMS](#) initiatives. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these exciting projects, which are all essential to the success of one of our most crucial goals: to significantly increase student success and retention as well as student enrollment. This will allow us not only to help address future budget challenges, but more importantly to increase access for more students across Maine to attend the state's flagship university and to graduate in four years.

As I write this today, I feel I have been part of the UMaine community for years and have been through a difficult period with close colleagues and friends. On the other hand, it has just been a little over half a year; I have yet to meet most of you in person, and most of you may not even recognize me if we cross paths around campus. And yet, going through this shared difficult time together, you have found many ways to make me feel like a part of the Black Bear family. When you have gone out of your way to get to know me, share your views, give me the benefit of doubt in impersonal Zoom meetings, I thank you for doing it. I look forward to continuing to work with you all as we begin to emerge from this global pandemic and lead UMaine to the next stage of success.

Best wishes,

John

John C. Volin
Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
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