



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

March 15, 2021

Dear UNE Community,

It is hard to believe that a full year has now passed since our UNE community temporarily transitioned to online instruction and remote work in response to the then-newly declared global pandemic. It was on March 13, 2020 (a Friday, the 13th, no less, and a day I'll never forget), that I made the difficult decision to send students and employees home. Little did we know at the time that one year later our lives would still be so disrupted by the virus.

It has been a difficult year, for sure – a year of fear, anxiety, isolation, uncertainty, upheaval, sacrifice, and, for far too many, a year of profound sorrow and loss.

Despite these challenges, our community of students, faculty, and professional staff has demonstrated extraordinary courage, resilience, commitment to one another, and dedication to carrying forward our mission.

By making sound decisions informed by science and by fortifying our resolve to work together, we quickly and successfully pivoted to fully online instruction last spring, resumed on-campus instruction in several health professions programs by the summer, and opened our campus for residential living and hybrid instruction, including in-person classes, in the fall. Through thoughtful planning by administrators, faculty, and professional staff and the cooperation of the student body, we successfully made it through the fall semester and now we are well into the spring term without any major outbreaks of the virus on our campuses. And while the majority of colleges and universities are currently struggling with significant decreases in the number of students who elected to continue their studies in the spring semester, at UNE our fall-to-spring retention rates are actually even better than last year. In short, I could not be prouder of our community, and I am asking you to be vigilant just a while longer.

Given the current rate of vaccinations, plans are underway for a normal fall semester with regular campus activities, pending appropriate guidance from the federal and Maine CDC as well as our own UNE medical and public health experts.

UNE will keep all current safety protocols in place through the end of the spring semester, and will reevaluate which measures, if any, can be relaxed this summer term. As we make changes to our protocols, we will communicate them to you. Please continue to monitor your email and the UNE Onward plan for updates.

As our family members, friends, and many in our own UNE community get their vaccines, and as the CDC relaxes some guidelines, it is tempting to let our guard down. Nor'easters, we must resist this urge. Our success during the past year is due in no small part to the strict safety protocols we put in place, and the extremely high compliance we have seen on our campuses.

We have made it this far, and we have done it together; this is not the time to see our security blanket – sewn together through hard work and sacrifice – unravel at our feet. Please join me in renewing your commitment to tightening up those stitches: continue to wear your mask, keep your social distance, and practice good hand hygiene. We are almost there.

Sincerely,

James D. Herbert
President