



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

May 4, 2020

Dear UNE Community,

I am writing to let you know that our Committee on Contingency Planning for AY 21 has been hard at work exploring if, how, and when we will be able to safely welcome students back to our campuses. Based on the committee's findings and analysis to date, I am happy to report that the University of New England will reopen our Maine campuses in time for the fall semester.

As we embark on this process of reopening, I ask you to bear in mind our mission to prepare our students to thrive in a rapidly changing world and to use their UNE education to improve the health of people, communities, and our planet. It is with this mission as our guiding principle that we will reopen our doors – doors framed on one side by our embrace of adaptability and trimmed on the other with our commitment to education for the betterment of humanity.

For students enrolled in our on-campus programs, the UNE mission cannot be fully enacted without critical face-to-face interaction. UNE's emphasis on hands-on learning is a distinguishing feature of our on-campus programs and is essential to our students' well-rounded education and career preparation. Our on-campus students thrive as part of our exceptionally close-knit, highly supportive community, which simply cannot be fully duplicated remotely. Moreover, the importance of hands-on learning is paramount to UNE's health care professions students, including those who will become tomorrow's health care professionals. As Maine's top provider of health care workers, UNE has a responsibility to bring our health professions students back to campus to continue their training, enabling them to complete their programs on time and join a workforce that desperately needs them.

Although there continues to be much that we do not know about the novel coronavirus, we are learning more every day, and we have now reached a point at which I am confident in our ability to resume on-campus operations by this fall. Reopening, however, will not come without modifications and accommodations that, just a few weeks ago, we never envisioned the need to implement.

Nor will reopening come without the acknowledgement of some degree of risk. We know that until a vaccine becomes available, no one is guaranteed immunity from the virus. However, what I can guarantee is that every decision regarding the safety and wellbeing of our students, faculty, professional

staff, and the broader communities in which we operate, will be made with guidance from leading health experts at the national and state levels and from our own highly regarded UNE scientists and public health professionals. Every reasonable and appropriate effort will be made to mitigate risk to the fullest extent possible in our campus settings.

Under the leadership of Governor Janet Mills and Maine CDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah, Maine has successfully enacted initiatives to flatten the epidemiological curve of the coronavirus outbreak. These measures, in combination with Maine's relatively low population density, have helped the state to weather this storm far better than many others across the country. Consequently, the University of New England is better positioned than institutions of higher education in larger cities to bring our students back to the campuses that mean so much to them and that are such vital components of their college experience.

The University is currently developing a robust plan of risk mitigation that introduces several modifications to the campus experience. We are exploring the role that social distancing may play in both academics and student life, with the goal of taking all reasonable precautions and adhering to CDC guidelines. We are also looking carefully at protocols around cleaning and sanitation and how those efforts may be enhanced when students return.

In addition, we are making detailed preparations for any and all circumstances that may arise should students test positive for the virus. With our vast health expertise, we will develop a plan that includes testing as it is available, appropriate contact tracing, designating a residential space to isolate students who may test positive and who need to remain on campus, and providing health care services to any student who becomes ill with COVID-19. We are also developing plans for faculty and professional staff to return to campus that will continue to place a high priority on their health and safety.

For those students who cannot immediately return to campus due to increased risks associated with underlying health conditions, we will offer a parallel online track, enabling them to stay on track with their coursework remotely until such time that they can safely rejoin us back on campus. These same online alternatives will be available should there be students who are temporarily unable to attend in-person classes due to the virus.

Because some of our health professions programs begin classes over the summer, we are developing a process to bring those students back to campus prior to the fall so that they may receive the necessary hands-on training needed to proceed in their programs. I expect that the processes we develop in anticipation of the return of this student cohort will help inform our plans for the fall and will ensure that every appropriate safety measure has been thoroughly considered and enacted.

Of course, no one can predict with certainty the course of this pandemic. We will therefore continue to develop contingency plans in the unlikely event that our region was to experience a viral resurgence severe enough to curtail our planned reopening.

The Committee on Contingency Planning and I will spend the coming weeks and months preparing the finer details of the plans I have referenced, and I have every confidence that our students, faculty, and professional staff will be able to adapt to whatever changes lie ahead. If the past several weeks have taught me anything, it is that UNE is grounded in innovation, adaptability, and concern for others.

By embracing technology, welcoming the challenges of teaching and learning in an ever-changing world, and keeping our eye towards the betterment of all through the education we provide, we live up to the UNE mission. And of that, I am very proud.

I thank the committee members for all of the hard work they have performed thus far and for the work that is yet to be done. I am also deeply grateful to the faculty and professional staff not only for all of the extra effort required to salvage the spring semester but also for the upcoming work they will do to prepare for a successful reopening in the fall. I will keep you updated as plans unfold, and I very much look forward to seeing you on campus in the fall.

Sincerely,

James D. Herbert
President