



June 2, 2020

Sustaining Higher Education and Sustaining Maine:

A Framework for Reopening Maine's Colleges and Universities in Fall 2020

Introduction

Earlier this spring, at the sudden onset of the worst global pandemic in a century, higher education leaders in Maine demonstrated their commitment to the health and safety of their institutions and communities by sending their students, faculty, and staff home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 — without an order from civil authorities to do so. At the same time, with the resilience and goodwill of students, faculty, and staff alike, utilizing digital resources and virtual instruction modalities with a nimbleness and scale previously unthinkable, Maine's colleges and universities continued to foster the critical thinking, learning, public service, and research environments that produce Maine's next generations of civically engaged citizens, leaders, innovators, and drivers of the Maine workforce and economy, conferring nearly 13,000 certificates and degrees on time to their graduates this spring.

And yet, if they can safely do so, our students overwhelmingly prefer to return to the in-person learning and social communities at the heart of a higher education's pursuit of knowledge, skills, and personal growth. Likewise, our faculty and staff thrive on the type of interaction with students and their research communities that is greatly enhanced if campuses are open in-person, again if it is safe to do so. And for so many Maine students and families, especially first-generation college students, having access to the community and resources of a college campus can be life-changing.

It is beyond dispute that the continued operation of Maine's higher education institutions is fundamental to the fabric of Maine's civic and cultural health, economy, and the building of a 21st-century workforce. Therefore, the leaders of

Maine's colleges and universities have convened to propose a series of guiding principles — factors they will consider — for deciding when and under what conditions they can safely welcome students, faculty, staff, and visitors back to their campuses for the 2020–21 academic year that begins this fall. These principles also will guide their decision-making and actions to confront any resurgence of COVID-19 cases that may occur during the academic year.

The safety and health of Maine's students, faculty, staff, and our institutions' partner communities are of the highest priority. At the same time, we recognize that no institution can guarantee that there will be no COVID-19 cases on its campuses or at instructional, field, and research sites. Thus, our principles call for intensive education for our students, faculty, and staff about their community and civic responsibilities to combat the spread of this virus through screening and testing, good hygiene practices, acknowledging symptoms, social distancing, PPE use, isolation and quarantine where necessary, and other mitigation measures if the disease appears on our campuses.

Underlying these considerations will be the extent to which, in partnership and cooperation with the state's public health authorities, Maine's higher education institutions can develop or identify adequate screening, testing, isolation, and quarantine resources; propose science-based adjustments to quarantine and group size-limit standards appropriate to the higher education environment; and continue to expand access to sufficient broadband and digital learning environments and modalities to improve the quality of virtual learning as needed to enable our students to continue learning.

Maine Higher Education Is Critical to the State's Economic and Civic Health

Maine's 38 colleges and universities educate more than 72,600 students and employ more than 20,000 regular and student employees, generating \$2.2 billion in annual revenue. With the multiplier effects of spending by our students, employees, and visitors, our institutions generate an estimated \$4.5 billion in output, more than 31,000 full- and part-time jobs, and \$1.7 billion in labor income, supporting employment across Maine in 125 sectors and more than 100 industries. Maine's higher education sector has substantial presence through its physical operations, facilities, and education sites that serve as a distributed set of workplaces in all of Maine's counties, and in towns and cities throughout the state. Our institutions are integrally connected to our partner communities, towns, and cities, enhancing their economic, intellectual, and cultural vibrancy through the advancement of knowledge, support of the arts, and graduation of Maine's civic and workforce leaders.

Our institutions are fully committed to partnering with the Governor, Legislature, and public health authorities to ensure that, if our shared hope of returning students, faculty, staff, and visitors to our campuses in the fall can be realized, it is done in alignment with the state's public health guidelines and emergency orders, or other science-based standards unique to our higher education communities intended to protect public health. We offer here principles that are unique to the higher education sector and its distinctive characteristics, situated within the current and evolving context of the ongoing pandemic in Maine. During this difficult period, we aspire to sustain a national identity for all of Maine higher education as a high-quality, student-centric, safe, and flexible enterprise.

We have campus communities in higher education that are larger than many towns in Maine. Many of our institutions are residential and, thus, have all of the services that are required to support

living and learning communities, ranging from health care to dining to recreation to athletics fields to cultural convening spaces. Instruction occurs in large lecture halls, small seminar rooms, laboratories, studios, field research sites, prisons, clinical settings in hospitals, K–12 classrooms, and more. Other of our institutions are primarily nonresidential, serving as resources to communities and groups of learners who are fully engaged in the Maine workforce while continuing their educations. And our institutions form the backbone for the continuing reskilling, professional development, expert credentialing, and career shifts for Maine's workforce, including adult learners, veterans, professionals across fields, and technical specialists.

More than 7,600 Maine residents begin their higher education at our institutions each fall, with another 4,200 starting each year from states across this country and internationally. Roughly one-third of our 72,600 students come to Maine from elsewhere to pursue their studies and research, and many of them join our workforce in Maine, in settings on our campuses and well beyond.

In addition to the direct impact of Maine higher education's \$2.2 billion in annual revenue and \$4.5 billion in annual output that economists calculate,¹ the faculty, staff, researchers, and students across our higher education enterprise also play key roles as partners who bring expertise, innovation, technical workplace skills, and added capacity to the preK–12 education system, hospitals and the health care system, state government, the state's agriculture industry, and private industry, ranging from fisheries to forestry to manufacturing to finance. In short, the health and capacity of Maine higher education is essential to the health of Maine.

Maine higher education institutions worked swiftly and decisively, early in the pandemic, to move students off campus and pivot wholly to remote modes of teaching and learning for our

¹Bailey, M., Crawley, A., & Gabe, T. (May 2020.) *Economic Contributions of Colleges and Universities in Maine*.

students. Foremost has been the goal of keeping everyone safe while maintaining the educational, research, and public service enterprise. Although our campuses physically closed, and our labs, libraries, and lecture halls emptied, we continued to educate our students. We sustained the core of our missions during this period and estimate that 10,000 course sections were made available to students online or remotely with just over two weeks of planning. Across all of Maine higher education on an annual basis, more than 12,800 students are awarded associate, bachelor's, master's, JDs and Ph.D. degrees. They are ready to enter the workforce in Maine and beyond — and thousands already serve as the foundation of that workforce. And, as in other sectors, the economic impact thus far of COVID-19 on the Maine higher education has been enormous. Estimates of the losses to Maine higher education may be in the order of \$75 million in the current fiscal year.

State higher education leaders are fully engaged in the extensive national dialogue and planning for the safe reopening of higher education across the nation.² That dialogue prioritizes coordination with states; safety; understanding risk, and both mitigating and accepting aspects of it; open communication; and continuing preparation contingent on multiple scenarios, informed by science, and constant data collection and monitoring. We also are engaged in statewide planning and discussion, including with the Maine CDC. The U.S. CDC emphasizes the needed relationship to state planning: “IHE plans should be designed to complement other community mitigation strategies to protect high risk populations and the health care system.”³

The principles presented here are offered to guide Maine public health authorities and higher education institutions alike as they together prepare plans for reopening as safely as possible.

Guiding Principles for the Reopening of Maine Institutions of Higher Education

Our institutions commit to the following principles as we pursue individual institutional plans in the coming weeks, in preparation for fall and the entire 2020–21 academic year. These principles will guide all of us, but implementation will be unique to each of our institutions, suiting the particular needs and contexts of our student populations, our infrastructure, our partner communities, and our distinctive missions.

1. In-person, on-campus experiences and other learning modes. We will give the strongest consideration to making in-person, on-campus experiences available in Maine institutions as widely as possible for the fall 2020 term and the 2020–21 academic year, in accordance with any civil orders that may be in place, and the implementation of further health and safety guidelines as warranted or appropriate.

2. Flexibility, responsiveness, empathy, and science. Maine higher education leaders will be adaptive and flexible, and informed by data, science, and changing circumstances as we plan for multiple contingencies and revisit decisions over time, always with the health and well-being of our students, faculty, staff, and visitors, as well as the communities in which we are located, foremost in mind.

3. High-quality learning in the pandemic context. Students in Maine institutions will be able to continue their education at the highest levels of quality, with a variety of choices that meet them where they are, with the goal of providing quality access. We will use the pandemic itself as context for learning. Online options, remote learning arrangements, and other innovations in instruction will be expanded with high quality to meet evolving needs of students, faculty, and staff.

²Report of the Higher Education Subcommittee Reopen CT, the ACHA Guidelines, ACE Recovery 2020, APLU, MICA, etc.

³<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-ihe-response.html>

4. Continuing our missions for Maine.

Maine higher education institutions will continue the extensive research and development, outreach and public service, and state and community leadership it has provided through the course of the pandemic and beyond, to address pandemic-specific challenges and to play a major role in revitalizing the Maine economy.

5. Partnering to address health.

We will partner with Governor Mills and her administration, health care organizations in

Maine, regional and local communities, and others to collectively ensure higher education has adequate and essential capabilities and resources for testing, contact tracing, isolation, quarantine, and vaccination.

6. Transparent and continuing communication.

We commit to transparent and timely communication and engagement with the public in Maine about the higher education sector's plans and actions in the coming months, and their potential impacts.

Considerations in Planning and Implementation

Using these six principles as a guide for decision-making about fall 2020 and the 2020–21 academic year, a number of more detailed factors may be considered for planning and implementation. Building on these common principles, planning and implementation will be unique to each of our institutions, considering their distinctive missions, the particular local needs and contexts of our student populations, our infrastructure, and the resources existing in our partner communities.

Many helpful guidelines and considerations for higher education reopening already exist, notably proposals released publicly by our counterparts in Connecticut and Massachusetts, as well as the National Governors Association, in recent days and weeks. These frameworks and others like them have already been studied by Maine higher education emergency and crisis planning groups, and will prove useful in our continued planning.

We offer here select key considerations that are being discussed and addressed in the detailed and institution-specific planning that is underway. This is not a checklist, but rather a list of topics that each of our institutions is discussing. All institutions have agreed to use these considerations as a framework and foundation for planning and decision-making, with periodic consultation and collaboration across the sector. Each institution is currently pursuing these considerations and more as part of detailed planning efforts, tailored to specific institutional characteristics.

1. In-person, on-campus experiences and other learning modes: Factors to consider

- Calendar and scheduling adjustments, including phased return to campus options, adapted course scheduling options, and adjustments to semester breaks and end dates
- Varied returns by student groups (e.g., lab course participants, performing arts, first-year students, graduate students, athletes, students from different geographic areas, part-time students, residential vs. nonresidential students, etc.)
- Equitable treatment of students, faculty, and staff from vulnerable and high-risk populations, including appropriate work and study accommodations that protect health and support distancing and work-life balance.

- Differential openings of various campus operations depending on function, aligning with state guidelines for the most analogous sector (e.g., business and commercial sectors) as appropriate or establishing new standards appropriate to the higher education environment
- Social distancing, where feasible; safety and cleaning procedures for all spaces and facilities: teaching, research, residences, dining, athletics, gyms and fitness facilities, performance venues, administrative buildings, field facilities, libraries, etc.
- Face covering protocols consistent with state guidelines; establishing supplies of essential PPE; signage, bathroom usage, sanitation, Plexiglass barriers, and other safety guidance
- Remote and virtual options, where feasible, for student organizations, clubs, performances, and recreation
- Remote options and/or safety procedures for major events: orientations, student recruitment, convocations, commencements, speakers, and performances
- Study abroad programs and travel policies: flexibilities and adaptations

2. Flexibility, responsiveness, empathy, and science: Factors to consider

- Institutional plans including multiple contingencies on schedule determined by institution
- Capacity of campus student and employee health services, as well as community health care for monitoring, testing, contact tracing, and surge situations
- Collaboration with state and other partners, including public health authorities, for consistency in monitoring, and data collection and reporting
- Emergency operations committees for COVID-19 contingencies
- Faculty, staff, and students prepared for rapid adjustments/pivots as disease scenarios evolve in Maine by region and in our partner communities
- Contingency planning for partial or full closure and restarts, if needed, at various points in the academic year, as faculty, staff, and student needs and circumstances change
- Financial contingency plans and estimation processes that consider ongoing COVID-19-related revenue shortfalls and expenditures

3. High-quality learning in the pandemic context: Factors to consider

- Striving to provide students who may not be ready or able to fully return in person with equitable access to learning opportunities
- Meet students where they are, and build processes for regular communication and formative surveys
- Quality of online, remote, or distance learning options, and use of such tools as hybrid, flex, flipped classroom, virtual reality, and others, including for laboratory courses, project-based learning, studio courses, athletic preparation (as appropriate to individual institutional circumstances), and performances that meet objectives for student learning
- Access to libraries and technology for all Maine higher education students and continued library support statewide
- Using pandemic, community responsibility, and safe mitigation content in learning and experiential opportunities for students
- Varied technology needs of students, faculty, and staff
- Timely and effective health education to students, staff, and faculty to ensure optimal infection control practices

4. Continuing our missions for Maine: Factors to consider

- Engage students, faculty, and staff in public service and partnerships consistent with public health and safety, and institutions' missions to support the people and economy of Maine
- Redirect research and instructional capacity as appropriate to address pandemic-related challenges, while sustaining the broader research missions of the institutions
- Role of higher education in sustaining Maine supply chain for services, food, materials
- Supporting needs in the Maine workforce (e.g., accelerating nursing graduates)
- Guidelines for research restart and recovery, public outreach and partnerships, and redeployment of labs and facilities to assist the state
- Help prepare Maine's future workforce for its role in Maine's economic recovery

5. Partnering to address health: Factors to consider

- Potential for public and private partners, resources, and capacity for widespread screening and testing of students, faculty, and staff beginning at reopening
- Recognize the links among the availability of testing, the need for more stringent social distancing, and other health mitigation protocols
- Institutional capacity to participate in testing, contact tracing on campus, and processing
- Resources, strategies, personnel, and technologies for contact tracing, isolation and quarantine protocols, space, and support
- Relationships and mutual plans with regional health care facilities
- Policies on privacy, data collection, planned information requests to faculty and staff
- Different risk levels for different groups (students, faculty, researchers, facilities staff, etc.)
- Workforce return for administrators, faculty, and staff: guidelines for office behavior, stay home if symptomatic or ill, face coverings, remote meetings as possible, staggered shifts, etc.
- Coordination with community resources, including health care and city/town governments
- Recognition of financial pressures faced by staff, students and families due to loss of employment during the pandemic

6. Transparency and communication: Factors to consider

- Partner with Maine CDC and state government to conform with guidance, and build checklists and processes that take into account the distinctive needs of the higher education sector, as well as the wide diversity that exists in the scale, mission, and circumstances of Maine colleges and universities
- Engage with civic and business leaders in host communities and region during development of institutional plans
- Campus dialogue and education efforts
- Solicit and respond to questions from faculty, staff, students, communities, parents, and others

Thorough and detailed checklists in such relevant categories as residence halls, laboratories, academics, dining, event venues, and others have been developed by many universities and national organizations (ref.), and our institutions are consulting those documents as relevant, given that a one-size-fits-all approach is not workable with the diversity of the institutions in Maine.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Maine's higher education institutions recognize their critical place in the state as we seek to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for a future that is forever changed by this experience and the uncertainties — and perhaps even opportunities — we will face together in its aftermath. Partnership of Maine higher education with the state of Maine will be essential in moving forward. We seek the chance to work across our sector, and with regional and state leaders to pursue the following recommendations:

- Include Maine's higher education institutions in evolving partnerships and funding arrangements for comprehensive screening and testing to enable rapid assessments of all returning higher education students, faculty, and staff in fall 2020.
- In cooperation with state public health authorities, establish general public health quarantine and group size limitation guidelines appropriate to higher education institutional environments (e.g., classrooms, research labs, clinical and performance spaces, etc.)
- Make higher education-appropriate adjustments to the 14-day self-quarantine requirements for visitors from out-of-state that are contingent on sufficient testing protocols as we prepare to welcome students from Maine, and national and international locations to our campuses in late August and early September.
- Define Maine's higher education sector, with its facilities and human capital, as a part of Maine's infrastructure for the purposes of early availability of vaccines to all in this sector.
- Establish a Joint Maine Higher Education Public Health Task Force, with higher education and state leaders, that will continue to report on the higher education sector status.
- Accelerate partnerships that include higher education in putting statewide broadband capability in place by the end of calendar year 2020.
- Provide a legal safe harbor as part of this collaboration, transparency, and prudence in higher education planning and communication.⁴
- Work with higher education, accrediting bodies, and state agencies to provide flexibility in licensure and credential requirements to build large, rapid-response pipelines of nurses, teachers, and social workers to address the current and future needs of Maine's economy.
- Continue reciprocity for health care professionals, specifically mental health providers, to continue through academic year 2020–21, thereby allowing remote students to have access to campus health care providers via telehealth.
- Continue permitting flexibility in course instruction delivery and degree requirements for academic year 2020–21.

Maine's higher education sector values the critical role it plays for Maine, and commits to doing its part to ensure the health, prosperity, and future of the state through the civic and economic benefits of higher education.

⁴Report of the Higher Education Subcommittee Reopen Connecticut (May 2020)

Sustaining Higher Education and Sustaining Maine:

A Framework for Reopening Maine's Colleges and Universities in Fall 2020

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James D. Herbert, President, University of New England
Laura Freid, President, Maine College of Art
Laurie Lachance, President, Thomas College
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Institutions of Higher Education in Maine

Bates College
Beal College
Birthwise Midwifery School
Bowdoin College
Capilo School of Hair Design
Colby College
College of the Atlantic
Empire Beauty School-Maine
Husson University
Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts
Maine College of Art
Maine College of Health Professions
Maine Community College System

- Central Maine Community College
- Eastern Maine Community College
- Kennebec Valley Community College
- Northern Maine Community College
- Southern Maine Community College
- Washington County Community College
- York County Community College

Maine Maritime Academy
Northeast Technical Institute
Purdue University Global-Augusta
Purdue University Global-Lewiston
Saint Joseph's College of Maine
Seacoast Career Schools-Sanford Campus
Spa Tech Institute-Westbrook
The Landing School
Thomas College
Unity College
University of Maine System

- University of Maine
- University of Maine at Augusta
- University of Maine at Farmington
- University of Maine at Fort Kent
- University of Maine at Machias
- University of Maine at Presque Isle
- University of Maine School of Law
- University of Southern Maine

University of New England