



making UNE such a special place for our students, and such a rewarding and welcoming place to work each day? UNE is a mission-driven institution, and it's important for each of us to periodically pause and reflect on our roles in supporting and advancing our noble mission.

As you think about that, I'd like to take just a few minutes to name some of the accomplishments that I'm most proud of from last year... accomplishments that have propelled our community forward in the face of some incredibly challenging headwinds.

- To begin, our undergraduate faculty concluded the framework for a new unified curriculum and are now forging ahead with its implementation.
- We launched an inaugural Innovation Celebration to showcase research, collaboration, and entrepreneurship from across the University.
- We launched new undergraduate majors in special education and criminology, and a minor in computer science. And we launched northern New England's only doctorate in nursing practice anesthesia.
- Under new leadership, our College of Professional Studies — UNE Online — underwent reorganization, re-energized existing programs, and launched new ones.
- Our Student Affairs team reorganized itself into three "hubs," one for graduate and professional students, one focused on community life, and a third dedicated to student health and wellness. They also launched a project to enhance student resilience through enhanced counseling services and mindfulness training workshops.
- We continued to promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging through several initiatives. This included adding new student affinity groups, such as our own Hillel chapter.
- Our student athletes excelled on the field and in the classroom, with our men's hockey team winning the conference championship and making it to the national "frozen four."
- We resumed our study abroad programming at our Tangier Campus and elsewhere, and forged a new partnership with the University of Iceland in Reykjavik.
- UNE researchers continued to conduct world class scholarship. We received a major grant from the National Institutes of Health Centers for Biomedical Excellence — or "COBRE" — that reflects the continuing growth and maturation of our biomedical research programs.
- Our College of Dental medicine obtained approval from its accreditors for expanding its class size, and renovations to its facilities are nearing completion.
- We made terrific progress on the new building that will house the College of Osteopathic Medicine in Portland — the Harold and Bibby Alford Center for Health Sciences — and will be breaking ground shortly.
- We completed several key leadership searches, including welcoming new leadership in the College of Professional Studies, the Westbrook College of Health Professions, and the College of Dental Medicine, and recruiting a new provost, who will officially join us in October.
- Our student outcomes, including job placement rates, board pass rates for our clinical programs, and our exceptionally low student loan default rates among alumni, remain exceptionally strong.
- Last week we learned that UNE was again named by *The Princeton Review* as one of the nation's best institutions of higher education in its annual college guide, an honor achieved by less than 15% of colleges and universities nationwide.

- We continued to receive many other external accolades and recognitions for work, including from NECHE, the University's regional accreditor, which issued a glowing report on our five-year self-study.
- And we are about to welcome the largest and most diverse new class of undergraduates in our history, bucking the trend of declining enrollments among our peers both in New England and across the country.

I am very grateful to every member of the Northeast faculty and professional staff for your hard work in realizing these positive outcomes. Such accomplishments don't happen by accident. It really does take a village, and every one of us has an important role to play in our success. Thank you.

Building on this momentum, we have much work ahead for the coming year:

- We will complete searches for a new senior vice president of finance and administration, and a new associate provost for diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- The undergraduate faculty will complete their implementation of the new core curriculum.
- Our biomedical researchers will prepare and submit a new COBRE proposal to the National Institutes of Health, which, if funded, will bolster our biomedical research program for the coming decade.
- We have many initiatives underway to enhance undergraduate student success with the goal of improving our retention, progression, and graduate rates.
- We will begin a number of construction projects on the Biddeford Campus, including new signage and wayfinding and updates to the infrastructure in the Girard Marine Sciences Center, while we plan to repurpose the space vacated by the move of COM to Portland.
- We will continue our work to develop new academic programs, while updating and refining existing ones. And of course, we will remain ready to act on whatever unanticipated opportunities may arise.

* * *

Since I arrived to UNE in 2017, I have stressed the importance of distinctiveness in the higher education landscape. What makes UNE stand out among other colleges and universities? What's going to make the difference in encouraging a student to choose us?

I asked each academic unit to examine what specifically distinguished it from similar programs at peer institutions and to envision how it could become more distinctive. I essentially asked you — *what is your part?* Most of you took this challenge seriously. You crafted plans and then you acted on them, and your programs have flourished, or at least held their own in an incredibly competitive higher education climate. That is a noteworthy achievement.

But this project isn't a one-and-done affair. It requires continuous effort, combining ongoing monitoring of workforce trends, self-reflection, planning, and execution. And it must happen at every level — from individual programs to the University as a whole.

Toward this end, this summer we launched a revision of the "About" page on the UNE website to better express six attributes that, taken together, make our community the truly unique place it is. These include:

- A deep sense of purpose
- An outstanding return on investment
- A marriage of experiential learning outside the classroom with active learning within the classroom

- An extraordinarily welcoming community
- Inspiring campus locations
- And a robust Marketplace of Ideas.

I invite you all to check out that page. It really articulates what makes UNE such an extraordinary institution.

I'd like to take a moment this morning to elaborate on that final attribute — the marketplace of ideas. When I think about UNE's part in the landscape of higher education, I see a real opportunity for us to distinguish ourselves as an institution that really embodies this value.

Because it should be at the core of the mission of all universities, and yet it is under attack from both within and outside the academy.

I want to begin by asking a simple question, one to which the answer may at first seem readily evident: Why are we here?

With apologies to anyone who isn't a Star Trek fan, if we were the crew of the Starship Enterprise, our mission would be clear: "To explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before." And that mission would apply whether you were the captain, an engineer, a science officer, or a newly minted cadet. If we were a police department, our mission would be to serve and protect -- from the chief all the way down to the dispatcher taking your call when you dial 911.

So, I'm going to ask again:

Why do all of us—humanities faculty, research scientists, medical professionals, business people and technologists, athletes and coaches, office workers, marketers, groundskeepers, security officers, a2t2BDC BT0 TceeE.r ydo all of a be w uy makmwsTJETEMC /P Lang (n-US)MCID og (n-t-US) If we weu@aais under at

with someone who has different beliefs or perspectives when we can't even agree on what we're talking to each other about in the first place.

I don't need to remind any of you that we live in troubled times. Climate change is accelerating even faster than experts predicted just a few years ago. The COVID pandemic disrupted every aspect of our lives, and its ripple effects will continue to be felt for years to come. The unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine has upended the international consensus against wars of territorial conquest. So called "culture wars" in our society, over issues ranging from firearms, to abortion, to the legitimacy of elections, to what is taught in public schools, to how we understand race and how we best combat racism, tear at the fabric of American society. Conspiracy theories abound. Our country is arguably politically and culturally more polarized than at any time since the Civil War. Each of our major political parties has moved farther to the extremes, straining the center and making compromise all but impossible. Faith in our civic institutions has plummeted, threatening the American democratic project itself.

So that's the world we live in. And to paraphrase the "*What's Your Part?*" campaign: it's a world that could use some help.

And that is, perhaps, the most critical reason the academy must defend itself as a stronghold of viewpoint diversity and open discourse. Effectively addressing our many global and societal challenges requires promoting genuine good-faith dialogue across lines of difference.

Arriving at innovative solutions to our problems requires surfacing the widest possible variety of ideas, and then sorting and refining them through the process of experimentation and critical discourse. And putting innovations into practice requires that we forge the will to act, which in the case of public policies, depends on engagement and compromise across political and cultural divides.

Since antiquity, universities and their precursor institutions, dating all the way back to the Greek Lyceum, have served this purpose, holding what I can only describe as a sacred role in society: to foster the exchange of ideas and critical discourse on important, controversial topics.

Discourse without diversity of ideas — that is, discussions limited to those who already share our perspectives — may feel good, but will invariably fall short of fostering the breakthroughs we need on important problems.

More recently, cognitive psychologists have demonstrated that we all have biases in our thinking. None of us have a god's eye perspective on truth. Like perceptual blind spots, it's difficult to see, much less correct for, one's own biases. The best way to correct for bias is through engaging thoughtfully with

gender. And students at institutions as prestigious as Yale Law continue to use the so-called heckler's veto to shout down and silence speakers with whom they disagree. And most disturbing of all, some pundits have tried to justify the indefensible: The attempted murder less than two weeks ago of a novelist because his work offended their religious sensibilities.

Fueled by social media, such attacks on open expression have given rise to a stifling sense of fear and intimidation. Indeed, several recent polls have demonstrated the rapid growth of self-censorship on college campuses. Students, faculty, and professional staff alike live in fear that a heterodox opinion or even a decontextualized comment could invite self-righteous mobs to call for their head.

And let's not fool ourselves into believing that this doesn't happen at UNE. I've had a number of students reach out to me to share how they bite their tongue and remain silent out of fear of retribution by peers or professors.

Given the times in which we find ourselves, it is more important than ever that universities recommit themselves to their role of encouraging discourse across differences — that is, to fostering a robust Marketplace of Ideas. And as I noted before, building this marketplace depends on our actively encouraging and promoting diversity of perspectives and ideas within our community. Moreover, in 30 years, the ideological diversity of our community is not the same as it was in 1985. Diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, and the like are very important in their own right. But they simply cannot serve as proxies for ideological diversity.

We must foster an environment in which civil, robust discourse is not merely tolerated, but encouraged. We must empower our students with the tools to articulate their ideas, even when doing so is uncomfortable. We must stress the importance of genuinely listening to others, especially those with whom we are inclined to disagree. We must encourage the art of holding ideas tentatively and changing one's mind based on evolving evidence and reason. We must inculcate, in our students *and in ourselves*, an appreciation for context, nuance, ambiguity, uncertainty, and perplexity. We must encourage curiosity. And we must do all of this in a way that is civil, respectful,

I encourage you to explore these resources and to join the effort to distinguish UNE as an exemplar of what a university is supposed to be by promoting robust, respectful discourse, both inside and outside the classroom. We have much more work to do foster a truly robust Marketplace of Ideas at UNE.