

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back! I hope everyone is settling into the spring 2025 semester. It has been so cold it seems hard to call it Spring, but that is looking to warmer and longer days ahead.

Thank you to everyone who attended and participated in JanJam 2025, including the President/Cabinet Q & A session.

Overall, the two days were filled with robust conversation and presentations true to this year's theme of "Show Your Work!" Several presentations involved exciting cross disciplinary projects that featured faculty and staff collaboration integrating multiple disciplines to understand and address complex challenges. The AI presentations by the co-lab strengthened our understanding of the role of AI in future learning and pedagogy.

Thanks to OAA and Associate Provost Avilés for the work and effort put into this important event of renewal and reinvigoration. Be sure to see the recap in the Provost's report or visit the JanJam 2025 SharePoint where OAA has posted the presentations from both days

For the last several months the presidents and the chancellor have been meeting regularly about the goals the trustees have set for USNH. A week ago, we met for a day in a retreat to brainstorm how we plan for the long-term sustainability of the system and how we respond to some of the latest executive orders out of Washington. This week we will have a half day retreat adding in the provosts and financial officers from each campus and the system.

A good way of thinking of these discussions is: given what is going on in higher education (and our world and nation for that matter) and the changes in how our society views us and the emphasis on cost and impact (inside and outside the classroom), how do we best *continue* to adapt.

One of the elements of these discussions is how to differentiate each campus while at the same time developing a mechanism to share courses among the campuses. Also, we have been discussing what the system structure should look like, how facilities could be potentially repurposed, and developing an online portal for the whole system.

I think a significant opportunity exists for us based on the interdisciplinary and cluster learning pedagogy we have. The open laboratory approach of working on integrative challenges that affect our society, and our future lends itself to creating partnerships that could lead to COOP programs and expand our internship placements. Northeastern has done well in building on COOP experiences and I think the 96-credit applied bachelor's degrees lend themselves to a fourth year with one semester being a COOP and one an

intensive integrated liberal arts educational experience. Granted this means in some respects we are moving to a more applied education, but that is critical in an environment where students are expected to have immediately applicable skills upon graduation.

I am also excited about the possibility of using the summer for more bridging, head start, certificate and non-credit courses. We live in a beautiful area, so taking greater advantage of it seems an asset. Hopefully we will run an experiment this summer in the cybersecurity area to test some of these ideas and I know others are planning in-person and online experiences.

During a session at JanJam 2025 we had the opportunity to address questions from faculty and staff related and unrelated to these discussions. There were many great questions. One question dealt with what cluster learning is. The CoLab has detailed this pretty well, but I wanted to add my own views. So, in response I noted:

Clusters/Cluster learning puts an organizational and learning emphasis on understanding, integrating, exploring, and developing skills across disciplines so as to be able to grasp a holistic picture of how disciplines interact such that we gain new perspectives and solutions to the multidimensional challenges of our day and the exciting opportunities for the future.

During that session we previewed a chart that gave an overview of net tuition over the last two decades that showed a peak in 2012 and then a ramping down for the next decade. Clearly if we follow that path, we will be smaller and have less faculty in some areas, but I believe there are ways to anticipate future events and prepare. We indicated that even with all that, we had managed to keep a positive or breakeven margin over the last decade thanks to all of us working together. It has not been easy, and it has been hard on everyone, but we have been successful.

One of the most challenging areas in this higher-ed environment are the humanities, but we have a great program in interdisciplinary studies that gives us the opportunity to think about how we bring these disciplines together to create a new concept we might call the integrated liberal arts. Built around the library this could forge some uniqueness, partnerships, with more applied disciplines, and a holistic vision of what a student needs to apply the synthesis, written and oral, historical, political and analytical skills of the humanities.

My thoughts on this always go back to the book *The Hedgehog, the Fox, and the Magister's Pox: Mending the Gap Between Science and the Humanities* by Stephen Jay Gould. An example of this approach outside the humanities is Art. You find it in visualization of data, product design, creative visualization of space and design, and digital marketing, etc.

The years ahead, as in the recent past, will be challenging as we focus on meeting the trustees' targets but that is why we are engaging in systemwide discussions and why I am

sharing with you our plans for going forward. It is why we need to explore 96-credit degrees, develop a COOP program, experiment with summer programs inclusive of certificates and stackable modules, pull our humanities and arts into a unique integrated liberal arts model, rethink Gen-ed and follow through on creating clusters, schools, multidisciplinary departments or whatever we want to call them. We've learned a lot over the last decade, and we know how to do this! But we've got to move...fast. As I have more information, I will share it with all of you.

You may remember me mentioning during the JanJam 2025 Q&A that we continue to see more and more students joining us with higher incoming GPAs. That progress is evident in the [fall 2024 President's List and Dean's List](#) published recently which notes the 922 undergraduate students making the President's List (grade point average of 3.7 or better with at least 12 credit hours during the semester) and 376 students making the Dean's List (grade point average between 3.5 and 3.69). The credit for that goes to our amazing faculty and staff who are so dedicated to student success.

Over the break we implemented a change to our counseling, Title IX, and conduct areas. Due to a grant, we were able to create an Office of Student Advocacy and Well-being and chose Matthew Toms to lead it. We are linking these functions together in this way not because these offices haven't been doing excellent work independently, they have been, but because we need to create a seamless system if we are ever going to be able to get ahead of the growth in issues across the board we are experiencing and the difficulties we are having in hiring and financing further investment. We will be trying new approaches, including implementing an online counseling effort 24/7 to supplement the counseling center's excellent work. More to come on this.

On that note, the new Office of Student Advocacy and Well-being (OSAW) ([LINK TO DEEP DIVE](#)) in Speare 202 is now up and running! More than 30 PEMI (Peer Educator/Mentor Initiative) Ambassadors, who are trained peer educators, mentors, and advocates have joined in this effort. PEMI Ambassadors are conducting prevention and well-being-oriented education and awareness raising events and initiatives around campus. Stay tuned for more from this amazing group of student leaders! Stop by the office and visit the OSAW Zen Den where they quiet their minds and relax their bodies.

While you're walking across campus, I highly encourage you to stop by Hyde Hall. The renovation work is nearing completion with the most visible transformation when you walk in the door to see the ceiling-to-floor windows looking down on the new Finance Lab with the eye-catching ticker and high-energy activity of the students below. This is our second major renovation to match our cluster model goals.

The semester continues to progress at lightning speed. Next week is Winter Carnival, with Ski Day being held Wednesday, February 12 at Tenney Mountain. Ski Day is a great way to interact with students and colleagues while having some fun. I hope everyone will be able to participate if not on skis, then in other activities on the mountain and in the lodge.

Lastly, I wanted to address some topics that are top of mind for all of us both at the federal and state administration level. At the federal level, over the past few weeks, new potential changes or executive orders have appeared that could significantly alter the policies under which institutions such as PSU operate.

At the top of the list are federal policies that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, immigration, and grant funding. At the state level, much discussion is taking place about budget and funding for state institutions, including higher education.

As the details on implementation, implications and impact emerge so does uncertainty, concern and confusion for many within our community.

I want to assure you that USNH leadership, which includes PSU leadership, the appropriate campus offices and the system's legal counsel are working closely to evaluate how these changes might affect our students, faculty, staff, and programs. This includes assessing potential impacts on federal funding, campus policies, and other processes. As we gain clarity on these policy changes may or may not bring, we will communicate updates and provide resources.

PSU, along with all institutions within the USNH system, is steadfastly committed to our mission of teaching, service, and protecting academic freedom and rigor while fostering a culture of belonging. These values are central to who we are as a university and will guide us as we navigate this evolving landscape.

As we maneuver through the coming days, weeks, and/or months, I encourage the continued support of each other and respect for the viewpoint of all among us as we move through turbulent times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Don Birx', written in a cursive style.

Don Birx
President