



UMB News

Face to Face with Chancellor Perman

August 7, 2020 | By [Alex Likowski](#)

The year 2020 began with great promise and opportunity for the Aug. 6 guest of the weekly web-based program, *Virtual Face to Face with Dr. Bruce Jarrell*. After tearful goodbyes here at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), the University System of Maryland (USM) embraced former president **Jay A. Perman, MD**, as its new chancellor on Jan. 6.

But just six weeks into the job, USM's 12 institutions and three regional higher education centers, with 172,000 students and nearly 40,000 faculty and staff, were all caught in the surreal grip of a pandemic the likes of which almost no one alive has ever seen.



UMB Interim President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS reacts to a humorous point made by USM Chancellor Jay A. Perman, MD

The relentless energy for which Perman was famous at UMB must've come in very handy indeed in March and April, as every USM institution experienced a torrent of changes — restrictions on travel, clinical placements, research, in-

person didactic learning, and the imposition of telework and new safety procedures.

Throughout the summer, Perman and the USM institutions' presidents have been faced with the equally difficult judgment calls about whether and how to reopen things, about getting back to the kind of teaching, learning, researching, and just working on campus that everyone had come to expect.

In late July, Perman issued two very important statements. The first was an explanation to the USM Board of Regents of his approach to education this fall. Most courses will be taught online, but preparations should be made to provide at least a very limited amount of in-person instruction where it may be critical to a student's

education, Perman told the regents on July 22. All the while, he stipulated, USM institutions would follow the science and changing conditions surrounding COVID-19, and be ready to take an “exit ramp” out of in-person instruction entirely.

Clearly aware of the controversy surrounding in-person learning this fall, Perman explained why a one-size-fits-all strategy would be shortsighted and “would not serve the public good.”

“It shouldn’t be a dialogue about open or closed, online or in-person. I ask our institutions and the public to understand that we’re not taking the easy way out. We’re thinking through this. We need to rely on distance learning to the absolute degree possible, but it’s not for every condition,” Perman said. He added that students who live in vulnerable communities, or in rural areas without access to broadband internet service might be better off on campus than at home. Also, the education of students in certain fields of study may suffer with an online-only approach.

“I mentioned earlier that I do this President’s Clinic, and I do it with telemedicine and virtually online. And I look at the students, fourth-year medical students, third-year medical students, nurse practitioner students, PA [physician assistant] students. Is it good public policy that they should have no opportunity as they finish their education to have experiential learning, particularly because we’re in a pandemic?” Perman asked rhetorically.

The second announcement, issued July 31, was a requirement that everyone — students and employees — returning to campus must be tested for COVID-19 at least 14 days before they arrive, and provide proof of a negative result.

The very first question from the audience came from a Frostburg State University student who had just learned that UMB would provide help in testing that university community, as well as the other system institutions.

“The governor of Maryland, Governor Hogan, did in fact assist UMB at setting up a testing lab,” explained UMB Interim President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**. “We have been feverishly at work to get all of the aspects of that lab up to full capacity. Our plan is to provide support in the way of testing. The testing would be at or nearby your own university and then the specimens would come to UMB, and then we would turn them around and get a result back to you and the university. There’s hopefully a turnaround time that’s under two days,” he said.

The hourlong program included questions and comments on a wide variety of topics, from the lasting impact of teleworking and remote learning, to plans to enforce social distancing or withdraw from in-person classes should the pandemic surge. To view the entire program, use the video link at the top of this page.

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