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Jarrell Updates University on Two Dean Searches, Core Values Month

March 23, 2022 | Jen Badie

In his first in-person Q&A, president fields questions about telework and COVID-19 boosters.

University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) President Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS, highlighted the University's search for two new deans, its updated core values, and the status of COVID-19 during his first in-person President's Q&A.

"It's nice to be here in person. I've been coming in pretty much every day, and it just feels very good to me to be here. I feel like I connect with people again," he told the crowd of about 70 in the Health Sciences Research Facility III lobby on March 22.

He added that while COVID-19 levels are low, the University, which recently lifted its mask mandate and restrictions on gatherings, continues to keep a close eye on the situation.

(Watch video below.)

Jarrell updated the community on the dean searches for the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM) and the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law during the hybrid event, which was also watched by about 50 people on Webex.

Four candidates recently appeared at town halls for the UMSOM dean position; town halls are planned in the coming weeks for the Maryland Carey Law dean job.

"We don't have a deal until we have a deal, but I hope soon to be able to announce a new dean of medicine, and that'll be a very exciting time," Jarrell said.

Jarrell also spoke about UMB's updated core values, which will be celebrated in April as Core Values Month: Respect and Integrity; Well-Being and Sustainability; Equity and Justice; and Innovation and Discovery.

"It's not just about what we stand for, it's how we behave. And so there will be a major initiative to talk about how do we live up to these core values? And I think that's a wonderful way to look at this," he said.

Jarrell highlighted several other initiatives related to the core values, introducing the director of the new Office of Sustainability, Anna Borgerding, MA, whose team has put together a strategic plan on how to approach and promote sustainability at UMB.

"There are a number of things on that list that I think you should be aware of about how we're going to reduce our fossil fuel use, how we're going to get more electric cars, and how we can reduce our greenhouse gases," said Jarrell, adding that he'd like to see the University's fleet of cars be all electric.

He also provided an update on the work of the 1807 Commission on Slavery and Racism, a group of leaders outside of UMB tasked with evaluating research into the names of University buildings and providing recommendations, as necessary, on the appropriate reparative actions UMB should consider.

Jarrell said the commission received a report on the names, but it was deemed unsatisfactory.

"We don't have an answer for you yet, because the results were not conclusive, not reliable," he said. "We're in the midst of looking for a second research organization to look at the names on our buildings and give us additional information."

Jarrell then took wide-ranging questions, which he and other University leaders answered, from audience members in-person and online, touching on topics such as COVID-19 vaccines and trials and telework.

An audience member asked when it will be time for another COVID-19 booster.

"This is a very valid question that I think most of America is thinking about," said Wilbur Chen, MD, MS, professor of medicine and chief of the adult clinical studies section at the Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD) at UMSOM. "My best projection is that we will probably have to have some sort of booster in time for the fall/winter. Think of it like something that coincides with a flu shot."



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Jarrell, who participated in CVD's Moderna vaccine trial, asked Chen to talk about the needs for current trials. Chen said the National Institutes of Health is planning studies for additional booster doses that address COVID-19 variants such as Delta.

"We're still looking at healthy volunteers. We still want to continue to look at older adults, children, people who have underlying medical conditions, because that's where COVID hits the hardest," Chen added.

There were several questions about the University's telework policy. Results of a Staff Senate survey indicated that many employees want to telework as much as possible.

"We've taken the approach that the University isn't all-knowing and all-seeing on this, that it needs to be the individual school to determine what makes the most sense in that school," Jarrell said. "We have and will continue to rely on the schools to make this determination about what's in the best interest of them and their workers."

He added that there is an appeal process in place for employees. Dawn M. Rhodes, DBA, MBA, senior vice president and chief business and finance officer, called the telework policy flexible.

"The way it is being implemented in your specific unit may be what you're frustrated with. But your frustration shouldn't be targeted at the policy because it does allow for a broad range of agreements," she said.

Roger J. Ward, EdD, JD, MSL, MPA, provost, executive vice president, and dean of the Graduate School, also pointed out that the telework policy issues are not unique to UMB, because "higher education is grappling with what we have learned through COVID."

"We're working through a fundamental shift and change in the way we always worked. And that is going to have an impact on our culture and the way we engage with our employees. So I just encourage people to be patient, to exercise some grace," he said. "We are trying to, as quickly as we can, be a model institution as it relates to the flexibility we extend to employees to telework. We have to find our way, because our culture is important. We have to come up with policies and practices that are consistent with those core values."

Jarrell ended the event by thanking several key members of the University's COVID-19 response who were in attendance before audience members were treated to an ice cream social.

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