November 21, 2008

Dear Friends,

Since my last communication to you about University finances, the world has changed dramatically. The effects of the current global economic crisis are being felt by everyone in every institution, from the world’s largest banks and corporations to state and local governments, to families, charities and small businesses, and, of course, to higher education, both public and private. No one is immune.

Yet neither is there reason for panic. Over the past several weeks, I have read in the newspapers and in emails from other presidents about especially dire conditions at universities and colleges across the country. Thanks to the foresight and prudence of my predecessors and of leaders in the UNH faculty and staff, the circumstances we now face, while serious, are less worrisome than they might otherwise have been. We have dealt already with many of the issues with which others have only begun to grapple, issues like energy costs, maintenance of adequate financial reserves, health insurance premiums, and budget management. That is the good news.

Real challenges remain, however. There are intense pressures on all our sources of revenue: declining support from the state, increased competition for scarce research dollars, erosion of the market value of our endowment, and strains on the budgets of families seeking to pay tuition and fees. The deepening recession will only add to these pressures. Thus, we must do now what UNH has always done: Summon the courage to look adversity unblinkingly in the eye and forge ahead. We will make a strong case to the state that supporting higher education is critical to the economic future of New Hampshire. We will do all we can to unleash the potential of our faculty and staff to seek extramural research support. We will redouble our efforts to create a culture of philanthropy at UNH and seek additional help from our alumni and friends. And we will ensure that UNH remains an attractive, accessible and affordable institution of choice for our students.

Protecting and enhancing our traditional revenue streams will not be enough, however. Working through the Central Budget Committee and other established mechanisms of institutional governance, we will also continue to scrutinize our expenses, all of which must be aligned with our missions and our markets. We will also do our best to “think outside the box” and develop new sources of revenue. If there is any silver lining to this current layer of economic clouds, it is that we are already in the midst of an institution-wide strategic planning process, one that is positioning us to think in new, bold and imaginative ways.
I will continue to report as we make progress on these fronts. Please look for these periodic communications on UNH Today. (If you do not receive UNH Today, you may subscribe at http://www.unh.edu/unhtoday.) In the meantime, I thank you for your hard work, your support and your patience as we work through these challenges.

May you and your loved ones enjoy a safe and happy Thanksgiving holiday.

Mark W. Huddleston
President