Dear Campus Community,

We’ve been sheltering in place for two weeks now and fully on-line for one. It’s already been a long road for us, and it may be longer yet.

I’m engaging in deep reflection today about where we’ve been and where we are going. Many of you may not know a lot about me on a personal level but I’m trying to make sense of COVID-19 just like you are. I write this on a Sunday when in my personal faith tradition we begin the countdown with Palm Sunday on the path to Easter Sunday. It is a time that is filled with-reflection on sorrow and anticipation and hope. For me, there have been great parallels with my faith season and with the journey of our campus and community with COVID-19. We are living with simultaneous realities like sorrow and hope, anticipation and fear. Regardless of your personal belief system and in deep respect to whatever they may be, I think that you would agree that it is a particularly poignant and powerful time in our country and on our campus.

It has become increasingly clear that many of us are at different places on that COVID-19 road. Personally, many of our lives have changed – the rhythm, the routine, the familiar. By now, we may know someone who now has the virus or has a family member infected with it. On campus, some units, particularly those whose primary work revolves around direct contact with students are feeling a deep sense of loss, of grief, and are hard hit by the personal stories that are told by some our students about their lives and their struggle to just make it. These units served our students well during the early days of COVID-19 and perhaps foreshadow what we are all feeling. Other units, while grieving as well, are already looking forward, trying to make sense of the changing landscape and its implications. It sometimes feel like being out on that great lake of ours, the waves bobbing us up and down, and tossing us to and fro. This is probably the new normal for all of us.

I have my feet in both realities, the today and the tomorrow. I feel the same sense of loss about the today when I look at the events and showcases and performances that have been cancelled but which reflect the culmination of the work of all on our campus – faculty, staff and students. I feel it when people tell me the stories of our students or
when they tell me themselves. My heart breaks just like yours at the realities of our shared today.

Yet, I know that the tomorrow will be with us quickly and that we need to be planning for a future that may take one of many possible paths. We need to be ready and to make the most that this crisis brings to us. In the midst of great chaos, there sometimes are opportunities that exist that can strengthen our future if we can but see them and move toward them. When units try to make this shift, they do it with the same heavy hearts that all feel and yet they are trying to ensure our future---the future that we all deserve. Please recognize that when we do this work, we do it with the best of intentions and deep caring for our campus as a whole.

I write this because it is helpful if we acknowledge where we each are on this pathway, and that we provide support and empathy to each other no matter where we are on our own journey with COVID-19. I also write this because sometimes, even when it is terribly hard, we will need to push forward and claim our best future even when the pushing is difficult. We must fully acknowledge the challenges of today and fully prepare for the realities of tomorrow. It is present and future thinking right now, not one or the other.

Please continue to be safe, and well, and kind as we continue that that on the COVID-19 road.

Renée