Dear Campus Community,

We have begun a new era in the history of the university this Monday. I want to thank all of you for your patience, kindness, and willingness to embrace these challenging circumstances. I heard many stories of feelings of loss of connection with our students and colleagues, uncertainty about how this will all work out, the stress of the rapid change, as well as the new experience of juggling and managing family and work in the same space, both the joys and stressors of this new environment. I appreciate all that you are doing to make this strange new world work.

I did want to let you know what has been happening behind the scenes.

- We’ve worked to get connected to as many students as possible and help to move them out of the residence halls. We are down to a handful who cannot relocate for a variety of reasons. We’re working with students who don’t have access to technology to figure out ways to have them be able to access classes. The student affairs, EDI, and IT team members have been rock stars.

- I along with Jeff Kahler have reached out and had conversations with our U.S. Senate and local State Senate offices to let them know what the impact has been on our campus and how we are managing supporting students and employees in this new environment as well as the costs and struggles. There seems to be some federal dollars which may come our way but we’ll need these to begin to offset the costs associated with reimbursing housing and meals for those students who have vacated the residence halls.

- UW System has been working to provide guidance on the multitude of new human resource issues surrounding the bills and leaves that the both they and the federal government have enacted.

- There has been a great deal of dialogue at the UW System level about what the future might look like and they will be having each campus participate in an exercise to do some scenario/what-if planning.
• The big unknown right now is what will happen with fall enrollment. Face-to-face recruiting has been suspended, international students face increasing challenges, and there is much speculation in the higher education press about what students’ attitudes will be toward college (e.g., it is speculated that more students may take a gap year).

• The trajectory of COVID-19 is also up for speculation. The Atlantic Magazine has many interesting articles forecasting various scenarios
  https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2020/03/coronavirus-social-distancing-over-back-to-normal/608752/ and

The virus has yet to peak and when it may do so is uncertain. I don’t think that we have seen the worst yet. And there is the real possibility that we will go through several cycles of outbreak and remission.

• Positively, our campus is currently solid in terms of financial capacity to withstand this in the short term, meaning to end of this fiscal year. Comparatively we are in better shape than some UW institutions. If there is one thing I’ve learned is that straightforward communication about where we are is important. I want to be as transparent as possible. I promise that if our situation changes, you will hear it from me first and we will work TOGETHER to address it. Right now the rumor mill is beginning. To that end:
  o You may have heard rumors and speculation from your colleagues around the UW System of pending layoffs at various campuses. I can’t speak for those campuses, however, we are NOT in that situation at this time and we are grateful for this. However, there are many fiscal challenges ahead and I want to be honest with all of you about that reality. We want to keep our best resource, our people, and to keep as many people employed as possible. We will work hard to do this to the best of our ability but limited within the inherent challenges of COVID-19.
  o It does mean that we need to be very vigilant about our spending. I need your help on this. You can expect some cost-savings and conservation spending policies to be shared soon and it is all designed to conserve our fiscal stability. Please help. We will need to be proactive to protect and craft our own future.
  o **Believe me, the best thing that we can do to preserve our future is to serve our students well now.** It’s true, however simple it may sound. I know for our faculty and instructors it places an extra responsibility and stress when it’s already been stressful enough. You are our students’ point of stability when everything in their physical world, in their social
structures, and in their routines have experienced upheaval. They will turn to you in a way they may not have before. Please let us know how we can help you help them. For our support staff, it means being attentive, responsive, and flexible.

- We continue to be in regular contact with the Douglas County Health Department and monitoring the situation as it evolves. COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving pandemic with all the uncertainty that comes with it.

- There seem to be a hundred little issues that pop up every day that need to be solved. It reminds me of the arcade game “Whack a Mole” – you think that one is solved and then another one pops up. Thank you for your patience. We’re bound to have some things fall through the cracks and make mistakes but your understanding goes along way. Our campus is fortunate to have terrific people who are burning the candles at both ends to make things happen for the best of our students and employees.

In closing, I find the empty campus truly strange and rather eerie. I walk the halls of Old Main and it’s quiet. I look out on the Quad and it’s quiet. The lights are off. The sidewalks are empty. I water the plants in the office and check the mail and look forward to better days. It feels like one of those dystopian science fiction stories that I sometimes read. What does give me hope is that fighting spirt that is our campus and the extraordinary behavior that arises when the going gets tough. We are small but mighty. We are Superior. Be well, and be safe, and know that you are appreciated.

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