Dear Campus Community,

This coming Saturday would have seen the commencement ceremony for our seniors who are graduating. Thanks to you and your efforts, most of our seniors are graduating on time and on schedule. For our first-generation students in particular, I can’t help but reflect on what this means for them and for the generations that come after them. It is that powerful ripple effect that we should celebrate...toss the pebble in the water and the reverberations last for a long time. Thank you for all that you have done to make that possible under the most difficult of circumstances! You may never see in your lifetime the ultimate positive effects that occur in all of their individual lives but know that YOU have made an indelible difference for our students with your commitment, focus, creativity, adaptation, leadership, role modeling and service.

We learned at the end of the day that the Wisconsin Supreme Court has struck down Gov. Tony Evers' order shutting down daily life to limit the spread of coronavirus. According to news reports, Republicans who brought the lawsuit had asked the justices to side with them but to stay the court’s ruling for about a week so legislators and Governor Evers could work out a new plan to deal with the pandemic. The justices declined to do that and had their ruling take effect immediately. There is no other plan being offered.

Local counties and health departments have the ability to implement their own policies and we are already in active conversation with ours to determine what this might look like. As of now, our telecommuting policy is in effect and we will not be bringing people back to campus until we coordinate with our local health officials and believe that we can do so as safely as possible. We think that it will be much later in the summer until we determine what a safe return to campus will look like. The science about the virus is concerning, what we know is changing rapidly, and your safety and the safety of our students and community are the foremost consideration in our minds. I gently ask again for your patience here as we work hard to obtain clarity through focused partnership with our health officials.

We also learned today that the Blueprint that was unveiled by President Cross at the Board of Regents meeting last Thursday will be considered at several listening sessions
scheduled across the state next week. That is the latest information being conveyed in the Chancellor’s and Provost’s meetings with UW System, but like many things, that may change. The conversations that are occurring at many levels are varied and intense as you can imagine. On our campus, those in governance and other leadership roles are talking to each other in earnest and are in active conversations with those who are involved at the Board and System about this topic.

I know it feels especially chaotic and threatening on top of what is already going on and that it may feel that you have little control over what is happening. Take a deep breath and be assured that we are pursuing all options to advocate for our campus on these topics and we will keep communicating as these topics evolve. We will let you know how you can best assist these efforts and learn more as details emerge.

Gratitude Moment: Please take that time at the end of this semester to reflect and celebrate. What has happened has truly been extraordinary. I have heard it from the lips of students that they will miss us, that they miss you. There is no greater testimony as to the value of what we do than to know we’ve made a difference in the lives of our students.

Be well and safe, as always.

Renée