Dear Students and Campus Community,

We just completed a historic semester for all of us here at the university and across the country. Saturday, May 16 marked the graduation date of one extraordinary Yellowjacket Class of 2020, a remarkable class for a remarkable time that will never be forgotten! I speak for myself, and I’m sure for all of you, that no one could have anticipated the challenges presented to us and corresponding flexibilities required of us by COVID-19. To think back on all that has been accomplished - wow! It is impressive. I simply can’t express enough my gratitude for everyone’s immediate and tireless responses and for hanging in there and getting through. All of you truly are Superior!

This summer gives us the opportunity to look both back and forward as to what comes next. I wanted to tell you how we are preparing for a phased reopening of campus and the timeline and decisions that we are going to make about how the fall semester will look.

If there was one thing that was made clear from student, faculty and staff surveys that we’ve conducted recently, it is that we miss being together in the same space! Classroom discussions, hallway conversations, hanging out with friends, competing on the field or court for fun or sport ... you know what I mean. It is the personal connections that we make on this campus which make being here so special.

While understanding the longing that we have to be together, we must recognize that we are in an incredibly fast moving and dynamic situation with an enormous amount of uncertainty. Wisconsin and the surrounding states are “reopening” as I write. What is unknown is what effect this reopening will have on our population. We are still learning
much about the virus -- how it works, how it spreads, and most importantly, how to mitigate that spread. We know it’s already in most nearly every community. We may even know someone who has had it. Recently we learned about one of our UWS community members who recently received a positive COVID-19 antibody testing result. The person experienced symptoms back in February 2020 before the illness was on the national or local radar and before medical facilities were doing any COVID-19 testing at all. It is clear that due to telecommuting and many weeks of quarantining, there is absolutely no risk to anyone on the campus at this time. Their immediate family members tested negative but, nonetheless, this reminded us again of all that we don’t know about COVID-19. Every time we learn something new like this, we immediately check it out with public health and other experts. They have assured us that there are no active risks to campus. But this situation does remind all of us that we don’t know when COVID-19 entered our region nor are we sure of its future path. And there is literally new information emerging every week about this illness. The question, therefore, is not how to stop it from entering, but how to reasonably minimize risk. We do know more than we did back in March, and in consultation with our health officials, UW System, guidance from the CDC and other organizations, we have some guidance for a roadmap ahead.

The answer to the question you are wondering about: Will UW-Superior be open this fall? We intend to offer a full complement of educational offerings so that our students can start and continue their education this fall. What I can’t tell you yet, however, is the mix of in-person versus online instruction that will comprise those offerings.

Here’s what we do know:

- We know that regardless of modality, we will always have students on campus and in the residence halls. The residence halls continue to provide a living space for those who cannot return home for a variety of reasons; for those who need access to specific educational resources and opportunities; for those who need a safe space, and more.
- We know too that there will be some students who want to pursue their studies with us who cannot be here. Some of our international students may not be able to be with us because of visas or travel restrictions; our students with underlying health conditions that put them in jeopardy with COVID-19 may need to remain isolated to minimize risk; other students may not be able to be here because of family or other reasons related to COVID-19 but do not want to fall behind on earning their degree.
- We know that there are students who need access to campus facilities because their program requirements necessitate use of labs and other specialized equipment. We have a group looking at these courses and how we can offer them safely.
- We also know that there are students and employees who are understandably uncertain about the prospects of returning and working on campus unless safety measures are in place.

The array of students and their circumstances means that this coming year we will likely be offering some mix of face-to-face and online offerings. You have to realize that this spring, thrusting classes online at the last minute, was necessary but clearly not
representative of what can happen with a little planning. The preparation over the summer will address these shortcomings.

Regardless, it won’t be a normal semester next fall, really, the entire academic year. Not here. Not anywhere. No college or university is unaffected. COVID-19 is not forecasted to disappear and a vaccine, if there ever is one developed, won’t be available for some time. COVID-19 has not just disrupted but fundamentally changed the way we must all behave.

Thus, there will be changes in the way the campus operates and in student life. We know that fall classes which exceed our physical distancing space capacity may need to be offered online. Physical distancing may mean fewer numbers of students in face-to-face course sections. Dining will be offered, but how meals are accessed may be adjusted. Student involvement, events, and recreation may change as activities or facilities access are scaled back accordingly or moved virtually to mitigate transmission risk. Support services may need to remain accessible online to reduce the close interaction typically associated with these activities.

A campus presence of students, faculty, and staff means that we need to look at how our workspaces are organized, how our cleaning protocols minimize risk, masking requirements, and more. We need to keep our vulnerable populations as safe as possible. All of these aspects of campus life are being examined. For some of our faculty and staff, that means that they may be continuing to work from home, if that is possible. Everyone will be asked to take steps to keep the campus as protected as possible, such as staying home if they don’t feel well.

To be prepared for this enormously complex situation, we’ve assembled a Campus Recovery Team and there are several sub-teams of people who already are and will continue working over the summer in conjunction with UW System’s Emergency Response and Recovery Team and our local health officials and experts.

Here is the work of some of the teams:

- Instructional Excellence and Continuity – analyzing scenarios and planning for how we would operate as changing circumstances require us to adapt. Here’s what we are working to ensure: that our students will have the highest quality learning experience possible no matter what modality we are using. We will offer students a Superior experience in learning. Period. There is work right now and over the summer to apply what we’ve learned from our faculty and our students and to deliberately design our courses so that students have this remarkable experience---courses that are high quality, have cutting-edge content, are clearly organized, that make maximum use of technology to enhance learning (no matter the mode), and that provide a culture of care and personal attention for which we are known. We have shown time and time again that students are not just a number here at UW-Superior, and we will continue to deliver on this promise. Thank you to the 170 students who completed our survey last week to give us feedback – there are things that you have told us were problematic and that we know were too.
• Resumption of In-Person Campus Operations - which is planning for a phased return of employees, perhaps beginning early summer, and the necessary space and safety protocols as some employees return to campus.
• Athletics – working with our athletic conference peers and the NCAA to determine how to safely conduct a season of athletic competition and the necessary practice, conditioning and travel that goes along with it.
• Student Affairs - which is planning and coordinating campus dining and residence hall safety measures, adapting student programming to the changing conditions, and ensuring the availability of medical, counseling and wellness services.
• Student Support Services – examining how to deliver student programming that supports student success such as supplemental instruction and tutoring, disability services, and the supports and personal care of our diverse student and campus communities.
• Facilities – along with an assessment of classroom, performance, and studio spaces, assessing things such as air handling, room configuration, sanitation and supplies.

Finalizing these plans will happen during the summer when we can better gauge the local, state and national situation. The environment changes daily. We are looking at no later than the end of July to finalize what on-campus classes and activities may be offered. All of these plans will be in consultation with UW System, state and local health officials, and athletic conference membership.

We all want certainty, but in the face of this unprecedented level of uncertainty, it is not just possible to provide it at this time. I know that it is exasperating. We’re balancing everyone’s desire to be in person as much as is possible with our need to provide a safe environment for all of our community. We will continue to provide updates with as much information as we can throughout the summer months.

The one consolation is that we are not alone in facing these challenges, for every other college and university around the world is, too. Students want to learn. Faculty want to teach. Our staff believe in and want to support our students and a high-quality university experience. Which is all the more reason that we need to find a way to keep education accessible. The future of our community and our world depends on us finding a means. Because of the innovative, hard-working, and caring faculty and staff, because of the dedication of our students, and because of the support of our friends and alumni, I believe that we are in a better position than many. We believe in a culture of care. We have a long history of being creative. We’re tenacious. We’re Yellowjackets.

To our students: I hope that you will think about the good experiences you’ve had here in classes, with faculty, with professional instructors who work in your fields of interest, with advisors, coaches, student employers, student organizations, events, residence hall staff, the people who help you in offices, and your friends. Can you really imagine yourself being anywhere else? We hope not because we need you here too. YOU are the reason we are here.
To our employees: You make the difference. You are the reason that our students thrive in ways that they can’t even imagine when they first walk through that door. We are committed to your health and safety as we continue serving them.

While we must change, we will continue to do great things -- Superior things -- together. Please be well and be safe.

Renée