Dear Yellowjacket Academic Affairs Community:

Thank you for the excellent work that goes on every day for quality teaching and learning on this campus. Now that we are almost done with the academic department personnel season, I want you to know how very impressed I am with the caliber of our instructor community and the demonstrated ongoing commitment that you have to making UW-Superior a top-flight teaching and learning institution. I am also excited at the caliber of leadership that we have across our Academic Affairs division at this time in all Academic Affairs related units (broader than academic departments) and trust in the enormous years of experience, expertise and excellence of our leaders. And the staff that we have across the division who provide day in and day out excellent service and work is astounding. We are truly lucky to have each other.

Today I am writing to you about the growing outbreak of coronavirus. I know that all of you as engaged citizens and thoughtful individuals have been following the global reality of the coronavirus and its emerging presence in various venues within the United States. As the Chancellor’s message confirmed, there is only one confirmed case in Wisconsin (in Dane County) and now at least one presumptive case in the Twin Cities. Globally the response to this coronavirus has continued to escalate as it has spread around the world. This is a serious situation that may become challenging to manage.

As is our responsibility, campus leaders on Chancellor’s Staff and I have been engaged in deep level Continuity of Operations (COOP) planning. Dean Nick Danz and I have been focused on planning related to academic departments in Academic Affairs and I have been specifically also focused on the other units led by members of the Provost Leadership Team (PLT). COOP plans involve taking steps to ensure that our basic primary functions in academic (teaching, scholarship, advising and service) can continue uninterrupted over a period of time should this be necessary to protect health and safety of our campus community. It also involves planning for all non-academic departmental units who are critical to our community engagement, outreach presence and programming, our library, our research centers, our institutional research and sponsored programs, our professional development centers, and so many other key functions. We’ve been consulting with UW System, other institutions within UW and reviewing existing UW-Superior plans. This
email focuses around the plans in Academic Affairs specifically and other division leaders will be in touch with their areas with their own planning process.

In this process of preparation at the leadership level, we’ve learned several critical things. No university can afford to simply stop its daily operations for long. We have a legal obligation to ensure that our students can progress in their academic plans and that students stay on track for graduation. We also have an obligation to ensure that essential operations can continue in an effective manner. The outbreak situation is unlike our typical snowstorms or floods or weather related to a couple of days of cancellations or closures. If we end up having to nimbly respond to coronavirus, we will likely be looking at several weeks or potentially a month of interruption. We cannot pause or stop our operations for this long without serious financial and enrollment implications. It is critical that we develop effective plans to continue our primary operations despite a longer required interruption of daily routines.

As we’ve learned and thought about the potentials of this situation, it has become clear to us that our instructor community and our non-instructional units must be directly involved in inventory and planning efforts. This is so our campus can be immediately responsive and nimble to what could be a rapidly changing environment.

We have spring break coming next week—a time that often involves travel by students, faculty and staff—on both public and private business. Spring break is also a time of a break from the regular routine of classes and office hours for faculty and instructional staff and can signal a different routine in all non-instructional areas as well. As such, it provides a great window of opportunity for preparing in the event of a pandemic emerging and occurring here in the Northland. Much could get done next week in the thought and planning for the potentials around this situation.

Today and tomorrow, critical Academic Affairs leadership teams (Provost Leadership Team and Department Chairs) will be briefed on the Continuity of Operations plans and their roles in it. There are multiple levels to these plans as the primary functions are different in different units or departments. From there, numerous inventory and planning requests will be communicated to our instructor, unit staff and support services communities.

The basic layers of the Continuity of Operations plans for all areas of Academic Affairs involve:

- Inventory of “what is” to assess and identify pending decisions
- Preliminary plans for alternative scenarios of temporary closure
- Identification of resources/needs to help instructors and all Academic Affairs staff meet the challenge
- Identification of decision points by administration or outside regulatory agencies that might help meet the challenge
- Establishing ongoing flow of communication between instructor community, Academic Affairs community and administration to ensure adequate responsiveness and support

Some of these layers are already done. Some of the layers will need to be done now to prepare. I am fully prepared to provide timely support, resources, assessment, coordination, analysis and decisions as this situation evolves. All divisions at UW-
Superior are engaging in this kind of pandemic planning so this is a coordinated response across the campus. For Academic Affairs, I have organized the preparedness work around two areas: (1) Continuity of Operations plans for Academic Departments; and (2) Continuity of Operations plans for All Other Provost Leadership Team Units.

**Continuity of Operations Plans for Academic Departments**
The critical topics that the Continuity of Operations plans related to academic departments involve are:

- Continuity of instruction plans to ensure uninterrupted continuation of instruction across the campus;
- Academic advising continuity plans in collaboration with the Center for Academic Advising
- Research/scholarship continuity plans to protect progress on ongoing activities during interruption
- Community engagement continuity of operations plans (AS-L, internships, field work, practicums, placements, community-based research, etc.)
- Accreditation implications (HLC and discipline-based accreditations)
- Communication plans
- Travel plans

**Continuity of Operations Plans for All Non-Academic Department Provost Leadership Team Units**
The critical topics that the Continuity of Operations plans involving non-academic department units involve:

- Continuity of operations related to programming or events in Center for Continuing Education (CCE)
- Assessment of pending large-scale events that are related to Academic Affairs
- Assessment of research/scholarship needs in research centers and ensuring continuity of operations plans
- Assessment of access of core resources to students, instructors and community such as the library
- Building of effective collaborations between divisions such as student success, athletics, administration & finance, HR, EDI, student support service centers, and others
- Assessment of community engagement implications
- Identification of professional development opportunities and supports
- Identification and planning around critical grants or sponsored research deadlines and capacity to continue to submit
- Planning around ongoing institutional research functions
- Other topics to be identified

Once there is input from the Provost Leadership Team (including the Dean’s Council members) and department chairs, more detailed information will be shared to the entire Academic Affairs community on these matters. I intend to have ongoing regular briefing meetings with Provost Leadership Team and department chairs as this situation evolves. I pledge to keep you informed every step of the way. You know me. I believe in regular, deep communication.
For now, I want to reassure all of you that I and many others are working long days and nights to plan well for this situation should it emerge. We hope it doesn’t but it is wise to be prepared for it in advance. We all need to be prepared to step up to help, to be positive and supportive of each other and to be flexible in order to keep our campus operating despite the possibility of interruption for health and safety reasons.

We are 100% committed to the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff and to coordinating closely with local agencies on the appropriate responses to the coronavirus should it emerge in our community.

We are also mindful that this preparation phase will involve added workload and we will all have to work together on managing this the best we can. We need to keep our operations flowing while we also prepare ourselves for the potentials of the coronavirus. It may not emerge as strongly as is anticipated but if we can ease one burden, reassure one student, have a plan for one more scenario, or prevent one more illness or endangering lives, I believe deep in my heart that all the preparedness and work is worth it without question.

Dean Nick Danz and I, along with other leaders, are also completely committed to providing coherent, clear, consistent and caring leadership during this time of preparation and, if needed, operation of the university as related to Academic Affairs. We will all be learning fast and, as co-learners, we need to support each other as we all learn. Learning is hard work as we know and it requires a supportive attitude and environment in order to progress.

We are confident that our instructor and Academic Affairs community can and will meet this challenge using all the knowledge, skills, capacities and resources that we have available. We will do our best to provide effective leadership and support during this time.

Thank you, in advance, for your patience and your commitment to our students, institution and region.


“Courage is a word that tempts us to think outwardly, to run bravely against opposing fire, to do something under besieging circumstances, and perhaps, above all, to be seen to do it in public, to show courage; to be celebrated in story, rewarded with medals, given the accolade, but a look at its linguistic origins is to look in a more interior direction and toward its original template, the old Norman French, Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with a community, a work; a future. To be courageous is not necessarily to go anywhere or do anything except make conscious those things we already feel deeply and then to live through the unending vulnerabilities of those consequences. To be courageous is to seat our feelings deeply in the body and the world: to live up to and into the necessities of relationships that often already exist, with things we find we already care deeply about: with a person, a future, a possibility in society, or with an unknown that begs us on and always has begged us on. To be courageous is to stay close to the way we are made…On the inside we come to know who and what and how we love and what we can do to deepen that love; only from the outside and only by looking back, does it look like courage.”
Best always,

Maria

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