March 9, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

*I am taking this opportunity to reiterate important messages sent out today by WSU Interim Provost and Executive Vice President, Bryan Slinker.*

The more COVID-19 spreads, the more urgency there is for WSU to prepare to teach out the Spring semester using a variety of distance methods as one of several responses to mitigate the impact of this disease (as a reminder, please monitor the WSU COVID-19 website for the latest developments).

As explained below we must continue to teach out the semester. Also, note that each of our campus locations has its unique context in relation to the spread of COVID-19, which means WSU as a system may not operate in lockstep in implementing such measures at all locations. Also, by their very nature, some of our programs, for example the health sciences in Spokane, are already much more invested in online teaching normally (and using in many cases a different set of tools), and so may be on a different pathway than the rest of the system. Also, health professions students in clinical training have very different issues to deal with, and those colleges are planning accordingly.

To continue to teach out in the face of the disruptions that will soon reach us, we will have to band together as a community to help each other through this. We cannot duplicate fully the face-to-face experience when switching to distance methods, but we can do a very good job for most things. Creativity will be in much demand to find substitutes for at
least some labs and other types of experiential learning. And flexibility will be also in much demand. These are not normal times, but I have confidence in our community's ability to rise to the occasion to deliver quality instruction with a variety of alternate methods, even if doing so will not duplicate exactly what was expected from our normal methods.

This flexibility may need to be also applied to quizzes and exams, perhaps using alternate exam styles. Exams can be proctored online, as done by Global Campus. Who pays for these on short notice is unclear, but know that this is an option (at $20 per exam) if you feel you cannot use alternate formats or an honor system (and I would expect that our students would rise to the occasion if we did so). We also need to be sensitive that not all students may have ready access to broadband or modern devices and be prepared to support them as best we can; this also includes students who have disability accommodations, which must still be followed.

Again, if we are unable to teach face to face, either because faculty must remain home on a plan worked out with their leadership and HR, or students who must not come to campus, or perhaps by university decision to limit the spread through social distancing measures, a variety of distance methods is the only way we have to meet our obligations to help our students make academic progress. Further, in order for students to receive their full financial aid under Federal guidelines, they must remain enrolled and engaged in learning activities for a full semester. We thus cannot simply cancel the semester and call it good. Nor do we have the option of assigning massive numbers of X or INC grades.

Fortunately, Federal financial aid rules have been relaxed due to COVID-19 so that the normal restrictions on substituting distance teaching methods for students enrolled in face-to-face instruction have been lifted. Switching to alternate forms of instruction will require us to ensure academic integrity and quality, operating within the spirit of federal guidelines, all the while being as flexible and creative as we can in response to unprecedented circumstance.

Academic Outreach and Innovation (AOI) has provided a large number of face-to-face and online training sessions the past few days and will continue these multiple times each day (and when you get the chance, thank them for going the extra mile). Thank you to those who are availing yourselves of these sessions—there were 160 in attendance over this past weekend. Regardless of your campus location, please learn to use, or refresh you understanding, of the alternative teaching methods that are already supported at WSU. We should use only those methods already supported. And learning them by the end of Spring Break, while starting to build your toolkit for alternate labs and such, is crucial if we are to do right by our students and meet our mission this spring while we respond to the limitations imposed by this public health emergency.

As a reminder:
• AOI trainings are scheduled for 8 a.m., noon and 4 p.m. daily, through Zoom and in Spark 102. Watch for messages about additional times for training on weekends and evenings. No registration needed.
• Help can also be found at the Learning Innovation's Tool Kit for Extended Campus Closure webpage.
• If faculty would like to work individually with an AOI staff member they can email aoi.li@wsu.edu.
• Note also that AOI will begin to offer training for students as to how to most effectively engage in distance learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous.

Finally, if COVID-19 takes significant root in our community, it is possible that some of us may not be able to engage, even remotely. This is another area in which we have to anticipate banding together to support each other. We do this already at a small scale; if a colleague cannot make it to some classes, we help them. It is likely we will find ourselves in these situations yet this spring, perhaps at a larger scale than normal. So please be thinking about contingency plans to help each other, and perhaps record lectures well ahead so they are still available even if you are not.

Finally, there is growing harassment and other forms of social stigmatization toward Asians, or those who appear Asian. This is unacceptable. Please help mitigate this and proactively foster inclusion and thoughtfulness in how our community supports, rather than divides, as we navigate the fear and anxiety that attends this disease.

We thank you for your patience and engagement as we navigate together these uncertain and anxious times. While we develop a sense of urgency to prepare it is also critically important that we remain calm, and make decisions based on fact and guidance from public health agencies. And thank you for all you will do together as we respond.

Bryan Slinker
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President
Washington State University

Sincerely,

Daryll DeWald
Vice President for Health Sciences, Chancellor
WSU Health Sciences