Dear Faculty,

Classes begin on Monday, and the start of the academic year is upon us. I know that many of us are beginning the new academic year with mixed emotions and a sense of uncertainty. Despite the challenges we face, I appreciate the dedication so many of you continue to show to our core mission of providing our students with the best possible education through teaching, research and creative activity, and service to our broader communities. I am grateful to each and every one of you. We’re continuing to develop responses to the evolving situation, and I have included some updates below.

Many of you have experienced the additional challenge for the past several months of juggling additional child care responsibilities with your teaching and scholarly obligations. While we cannot address all of the challenges and upheavals that this health care crisis has caused in your lives, we would like to help where we can. Last week we administered a survey on care needs for parents affected by the decision of NPS and OKCPS to begin the school year in a remote learning environment. There were a total of 2,277 responses from faculty, staff, and students on all three campuses. Faculty, staff, and students indicated they expect several challenges related to unanticipated care for school age children including financial, family health/safety, childcare availability, and work-life balance. The Provost's Office is working with Human Resources, Legal Counsel, and other offices to determine resources to most effectively address these concerns. You can find an initial list of resources on the OU Together website. We anticipate communicating additional information and resources within the next week.

As you complete preparations for your classes in the fall and post your syllabi, I would like to bring to your attention to a temporary, university-wide attendance policy for students for the Fall 2020 semester located here. The basis of this policy is promoting community health by encouraging students to stay home when they are feeling ill or have been exposed to others with symptoms of COVID-19. This policy ensures that students are not penalized due to absence from class and does not require formal documentation from healthcare professionals for student absences. Faculty should continue to work with students who are unable to attend class and can find guidelines for instructional continuity within the Instructional Faculty section of the OU Together website. Faculty should also attend to any college, department, or unit policies regarding attendance that may reflect accreditation requirements or other considerations.

Over the course of many years, the Student Government Association has requested that OU declare an instructional holiday on the Friday before the OU-Texas football game. This year, in order to promote the health and safety of our community, the SGA has put forward a different request, that election day be declared an instructional holiday. In keeping with the tradition of offering students a fall instructional holiday, Tuesday, November 3 is being designated as the
2020 Fall Student Holiday, subject to final review by Student Congress. Classes will be held as usual on the traditional OU-Texas holiday, Friday, October 9.

Finally, with the start of classes and the rising population on our Norman campus, we are developing a phased plan that allows for maximum flexibility in responding to the evolving situation related to COVID-19 at OU and in our larger community. Included in this plan is a set of guiding principles to ground us in our assessments of emerging trends in health and health care capacity and possible instructional responses. We anticipate communicating more details within the next few days.

As always, I and my team in the Provost’s office are here to listen to and support you in every way we can. Please feel free to continue to reach out to us directly with any questions or concerns.

Warm wishes,

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