Dear faculty,

We are midway through the Fall 2020 semester and have much to celebrate. We’ve recently witnessed the inauguration of UND’s President Armacost, had a first virtual look at the renovated Gershman Graduate Center, and held the groundbreaking of our Nistler College of Business and Public Administration. Also, a UND student video for the NDUS COVID-19 Healthy Habits on Campus competition was selected as the best submission among all NDUS institutions. Our generous alumni continue to support our students who are experiencing hardships due to COVID-19 with gifts to the Open Door Scholarship and the Angel Fund.

I want to acknowledge faculty as well for their continued dedication to providing quality education and their flexibility in engaging with students in-person and remotely. While we celebrate and recognize our positive work, we must also continue our vigilance on safety measures. UND is communicating and collaborating with the City of Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, Grand Forks Public Schools, and Altru to promote health and safety behaviors and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our broader community. UND continues to monitor COVID-19 cases on campus, in Grand Forks, and the state and are concerned as the number of new cases across the state moves in the wrong direction. It appears that the positive cases reported by UND staff, faculty and students have been contracted outside the classroom, indicating our safety measures in the classroom are effective. Please continue wearing face coverings, washing your hands, and maintaining appropriate physical distance from others.

To keep you informed, I provide the following updates:

1. Spring Semester 2021:
   1. As you plan your spring 2021 semester courses, please plan for the same reduced seating capacity (see the spreadsheet of COVID-19 classroom seating capacity posted on the VPAA website) and modify your teaching with a hybrid/hyflex model as you have this semester.
   2. UND has had internal discussions with senate leadership, deans, and the President’s Executive Council on potential changes to the spring semester 2021 calendar. At the Oct. 14, 2020 NDUS Cabinet meeting, it was decided that there will be no adjustment to the spring calendar across the NDUS system. As such, UND’s spring semester will start on Jan. 11, 2021, spring break will occur March 15-19, 2021, and finals will be conducted May 10-14. We will monitor the COVID-19 cases closely in the spring and can adjust our delivery methods if necessary.
   3. Over 200 faculty are engaged this semester with TTaDA’s assistance in revising or developing online courses or modifying on-campus courses to
incorporate hybrid/hyflex models. If you would like assistance in preparing your courses for the upcoming spring semester, please check out the resources available on TTaDA's web pages or contact TTaDA at 701-777-2129.

4. All textbook adoptions for Spring 2021 are due Oct. 31. All adoptions must be made using Follett Discover (located in your Blackboard). Please watch for instructional emails on the adoption process from TTaDA.

2. Starfish Midterm Progress Surveys: As part of our ongoing student retention efforts, please complete the Starfish midterm progress surveys for your students. The surveys are now open for completion and need to be submitted by Oct. 18, 2020. Please be sure to include any concerns or kudos you may have for students, and, if you have no concerns or kudos to share, please be sure to submit the survey with the default of “no feedback.” Feedback at midterm is helpful for advisors in working with students who may be struggling and in celebrating those doing well.

3. Faculty Survey: UND is participating in the Colleges & University Teaching Environment Survey (administered at no cost to UND by Indiana University) to capture the experiences of instructional staff due to COVID-19. This will provide UND information about faculty experiences, how they’ve adjusted to the challenges of COVID-19, and what additional support UND can further provide to faculty. All instructional staff will receive an email to access the survey on Oct. 20, and will have until Nov. 20 to complete it. Please note that the survey requests that faculty upload a sample syllabus, but this is not required to complete the survey. We encourage you to complete the survey with or without uploading a syllabus. UND will receive the data file of our participants' responses which will help us to better support faculty.

4. Task Force: You recently received an email invitation to nominate yourself or others to serve on the “Task Force on the Future of Education at UND” co-chaired by John Shabb (Associate Professor, Biomedical Sciences) and Jeff VanLooy (past Chair, University Senate and Associate Professor, Earth System Science & Policy). The goal of the Task Force is to create a framework for developing short and long-term strategies to shape an academically and fiscally robust environment that satisfies the educational needs of the next generation of UND students. The UND Task Force will convene in December 2020 and complete the bulk of its work during February and March 2021. UND faculty, staff, students, and administrators are welcome to submit nominations. Complete the Task Force At-large Nomination Qualtrics Survey by Nov. 1 to nominate yourself or another person. Multiple nominations are permitted, but each has to be submitted separately.

5. CARES Funding: Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) funding has allowed UND to improve the air quality and air flow in many buildings on campus. While most of the work can be completed without system disruptions or during off hours, the replacement of air handlers will result in longer system shut downs and minor disruptions to classroom and office access because the work has to be completed within a certain time frame per CARES funding requirements. Any planned disruptions will be communicated to all faculty and
staff who teach and/or have office space in the impacted areas. In addition, should any classrooms be disrupted by this process, facilities staff will work with the registrar to provide an alternative teaching space for the short time frame of disruption.

6. The U.S. Department of Labor Executive Order 13950: Many of you are aware of President Trump's recent Executive Order, “Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping,” which sets forth the policy of the United States “not to promote race or sex stereotyping or scapegoating” and “prohibits federal contractors from inculcating such views in their employees in workplace diversity and inclusion trainings.” UND, like other institutions of higher education, is examining the implications of this Executive Order. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs released FAQ's which may be of interest to you: https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/faqs/executive-order-13950. UND continues to monitor the interpretation of this Executive Order and supports efforts at UND to create a more equitable, inclusive, and diverse campus community.

7. Faculty Lecture Series: Please join us for a Faculty Lecture by Associate Professor Steve Morrison from the School of Law on Oct. 21, 2020, at 7:30 p.m. at the Chester Fritz Auditorium. The lecture, “Modern American Policing: Past, Present, and a Roadmap for the Future,” will be presented in hybrid format, with the opportunity to attend in person (face coverings and physical distancing will be required) or on-line, live-streamed at UND.edu/academics/provost/lecture-series. The Faculty Lecture Series is organized by the Chester Fritz Distinguished Professors Faculty Lecture Series Committee and celebrates the scholarship and creative activity of our faculty and our ongoing commitment to learning.

I’ll close with an appreciation to faculty for updating Digital Measures with your research and creative activity. Doing so allowed us to highlight your important scholarship in its many forms as we submitted our data as required to the Chancellor as part of NDUS’s Goal 5: Research Excellence and Innovation.

If you have any questions or encounter any challenges, please reach out to your department chair, college dean, or me. We’re here to support you.

Be safe,

Debbie Storrs
Interim Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs