Dear faculty,

I hope your 2021 spring semester is off to a good start. I have confidence it will be a promising semester for many reasons, not the least of which is that we now have a vaccine that can help protect our staff, faculty and students against COVID-19. More information will be forthcoming on how and when UND employees can sign up for vaccinations provided through the City of Grand Forks. UND and other NDUS institutions are strongly encouraging all staff, students and faculty to get vaccinated. In the meantime, and even after individuals are vaccinated, we will continue to expect members of the campus community to follow safety protocols which currently include: physical distancing, wearing face coverings/masks, washing hands, and ensuring low density gatherings in classes and other events.

Our plan is to transition from our current spring 2021 operating status, which includes reduced class capacities with hybrid and online course delivery and overall limited campus density, to more opportunities for individual and in-person activities in summer 2021 (e.g. in person summer internships). Summer 2021 classes will be delivered hybrid (with COVID-19 reduced seating capacities) and online. As we expect vaccinations to be available to all campus members well before the start of fall of 2021, our plan is to return to more typical operations including in-person classes with typical class sizes, in-person internships, in-person events and other in-person learning experiences. The transition plan to move from our current status to a more normal fall term will be possible with increased vaccinations, the mitigated spread of COVID-19 and is based on the advice of public health experts. Our UND Pandemic Team meets regularly, monitors the city, county, state and national COVID-19 situation, and will adjust our plans as necessary.

Below are more specific details of relevance to faculty and what to expect this spring, summer and fall:

1. **COVID-19 testing:** UND is now offering both BinaxNOW rapid testing and PCR testing for COVID-19. Faculty can greatly increase our testing by encouraging students and colleagues to test throughout this spring semester. Students who test for COVID-19 will receive a voucher for a local business and new face coverings. More details are available on the UND testing site: [https://und.edu/covid-19/testing.html](https://und.edu/covid-19/testing.html)

2. **Tenure extension:** In spring 2020, the university provided all tenure-seeking faculty with the opportunity to extend their tenure/promotion clock by one year in recognition of the “exceptional circumstances” associated with COVID-19. Though this extension was substantial and met the needs of many faculty, the ongoing impact of COVID-19 is more difficult to judge. The adjustments to teaching, human subjects research, travel for professional responsibilities and other activities related to tenure and promotion vary significantly across disciplines and individual scholarly work. Faculty who can document
a need for an extension to the tenure clock due to COVID-19 can use our existing policy to request an extension. Please review and have a discussion with your chair if you are considering such a request. Requests require the chair, dean and provost’s approval.

3. **SELFIs:** Fall 2020 SELFI evaluations are now available for your review to assist in improving students’ learning experiences. Although required, SELFIs are only one method of providing feedback on effectiveness in the classroom, and other forms of data must be used in annual evaluations. Department chairs and evaluation committees have been asked to consider that the unique COVID-19 context may have impacted SELFI scores in unusual and unreliable ways when conducting annual evaluations.

4. **Spring 2021 finals:** All spring final exams must be delivered online for the health and safety of students and faculty. Please be sure to schedule your final exam according to the date and time allotted for your course. One way to provide students flexibility while ensuring your exam times do not overlap with other scheduled exams is to allow students access to the exam across multiple days, including your scheduled exam time. Please be sure your students are aware as soon as possible of when and how they are to complete their final exams.

5. **Summer and fall 2021 classes:** A small working group that includes University Senate Chair Liz Legerski and other university leaders has been formed to establish protocols and metrics for safely opening the campus. Again, our plan is to deliver all Summer 2021 classes both online and in person with in-person classes having reduced classroom capacity (just like we are doing this spring). The plan is to offer our Fall 2021 classes in person and online with all in-person classes at regular class capacity. We will continue to monitor the situation and inform you of any adjustments to these plans.

6. **S/U Grading decision:** The Senate Executive Committee reviewed S/U grading outcomes from spring 2020 and fall 2020 and decided not to modify our established S/U grading policy for spring 2021. Our regular S/U policy is available for undergraduate student consideration.

7. **Study Abroad:** Due to international restrictions, there will be no study abroad opportunities for students in the summer 2021 term. Our plans are to provide fall 2021 study abroad opportunities for students and faculty. More details to come!

8. **Internships:** Beginning summer 2021, students can participate in virtual and in-person internships and should follow college/school policies for approval. Student interns are required to follow CDC guidelines for COVID-19 and UND policy. Student interns should wear face coverings at internship sites, regularly wash their hands, avoid large groups, etc., regardless of internship site protocol.

9. **Summer camps:** All summer 2021 student focused camps will be offered virtually rather than in person. This allows us to continue with lower campus density over the summer as we plan and move toward more in-person campus events, camps, and classes in the fall.

10. **UND Care Toolkit:** Many of us are experiencing challenges as a result of the isolation, stress and uncertainty associated with the current pandemic. With funding from CARES via NDUS, Dr. Melissa Quincer of the Northern Prairie Community Clinic (NPCC) worked with colleagues and graduate students to provide a series of behavioral and mental health resources for all NDUS faculty, staff and students. Please visit the UND Care Toolkit site for more information. Throughout this spring semester, NDUS will provide training and short videos for faculty to effectively respond to students who have mental health concerns. In the meantime, please provide your students with support,
engagement, and feedback regardless of your course delivery method. And, remember to take care of yourself. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a great resource if you need professional and confidential support (use the password: VillageEAP).

11. Task Force for the Future of Education at UND: On Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2021, from 3-4 p.m., the Task Force on the Future of Education at UND is hosting a virtual seminar with special guest Chancellor Mark Hagerott. This engaging session will include Chancellor Hagerott’s expert address on “Human Vitality in the Age of Digital Machines” and a question and answer session. Prior to this session, feel free to read Chancellor Hagerott’s article *The Pandemic is Accelerating Digital Transformation: What Could be the Downside for Humanity? And What to Do?* Here is the link to the seminar.

12. CARES funding: We anticipate additional CARES funding in the amount of $8,980,342 sometime during the spring 2021 term. A good portion of the funds will be directed to students, similar to the distribution of the first round of CARES funding. The Pandemic Group, the Provost and Deans, the Senate Executive Committee and the President’s Executive Council will discuss anticipated expenses that can be addressed by these anticipated funds (e.g., COVID-19 testing and vaccination personnel costs, PPE, etc.).

Thank you for your efforts and the sacrifices you have made to meet the needs of our students and help them continue their education despite these difficult times. I am proud of our resilience and the empathy we have shown for each other. As we all prioritize students’ persistence on their path toward their educational and career dreams, please be sure to take care of yourself, including taking full advantage of UND resources to help you meet these challenges. TTaDA is available to help with course-related questions or concerns, advisors are able to help direct students to resources as needed, UIT is available for any technology issues that arise, and the UND CARES Tool Kit website and our EAP are great for self-care needs. If I can be of any support or answer any questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out.

Be well,

Debbie Storrs
Interim Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs