Dear faculty,

Now that we are ending the fifth week of the semester, I wanted to share my appreciation for your work to ensure quality student learning despite the unique challenges this fall.

I’ve heard positive comments from many students about their classroom experiences and the flexibility provided by faculty, particularly when students need to be quarantined. For example, just recently a dean shared an email from a student who informed his professors of the need to quarantine (with a toddler) while attending synchronous online classes. The student described how all of his professors responded, “quickly with caring sentiments and more than fair accommodations for upcoming course and test work.” The student said, “Their kind words and understanding attitude have made this trying experience more bearable and even a bit inspiring.” Another dean shared a student’s email in which she wrote, “I wanted to make sure that you are aware of how accommodating and understanding my instructors have been with my situation. I honestly feel that they are invested in my success and have been going above and beyond to assist me as well.” These students’ comments are typical and reflect the great care and commitment that our faculty have for students and their success. It’s also why UND’s retention rate increased this year, increasing by 3% to a rate of 81.39%. A sincere appreciation to all our faculty!

With ten more weeks of the semester to go, here are a few updates and reminders:

- **Finals:** Like exams throughout this semester, all final exams should be online given COVID-19 class capacity. Please remind students in your courses and be sure your students know how to access the exam, what the process will be to take the exam, your expectations regarding exam security—including proctoring if applicable, and what day and time they should plan to complete their final exam. If you have questions about proctoring options, please contact TTaDA or visit TTaDA’s Exam Security Website. As a reminder, you can find the schedule for all final exams here. Please be sure your exam times are not extended beyond the allocated time as they may run into other scheduled final exams.
- **Class schedules:** Again, thank you for providing students with flexibility on how they can engage in your classes. As the semester progresses, please be sure to communicate to students how and when they are expected to engage so they can adjust their work schedules. A few students have shared that their professors have made last minute changes to instruction which made it difficult for them to participate because of employment obligations.
- **Campus activities:** Many of us are teaching and working remotely, including students, which can diminish a sense of belonging and engaging in the UND community. Please consider attending and encouraging your students to engage in fall events, many of which are virtual and some of which are in-person. For example, the Writers Conference has a great lineup of poets, authors and photographers scheduled every Thursday this semester.
There are several in-person (with appropriate physical distancing and face coverings required) music concerts, including a Chamber Orchestra Concert on Oct. 8 at 8 p.m. at the Chester Fritz Auditorium, and the Bards & Allegro Concert on Oct. 11 at 2:30 p.m. at the Chester Fritz Auditorium. On Oct. 5, please virtually join via the UND webpage and FaceBook live to celebrate the inauguration of President Armacost at 2 p.m. On Oct. 21, please hold your calendar and join us for the Chester Fritz Distinguished Professors Faculty Lecture at 7:30 p.m. at the Chester Fritz Auditorium. This will be a virtual and in person event. More information will be forthcoming. Stay engaged and connected!

- The decision on whether to continue classes completely online after Thanksgiving break will be made and communicated by the President by Oct. 1. The decision will be shaped by our COVID-19 rates, hotel isolation/quarantine capacity, and our contact tracing abilities. You will be notified as soon as a decision is made. We ask that you wait until then to alter your classroom instruction plans if needed. At the same time, both President Armacost and I continue to support decisions of faculty to determine how to deliver courses and ask that you work with your department chairs and deans to request any changes to delivery method and communicate any changes to students.

- International Travel: Interim State Health Officer Dr. Paul Mariani lifted the 14-day quarantine order for those returning from international travel. Individual countries may have their own restrictions that impact travel; faculty are encouraged to check with their destination’s Ministry of Health for the most up-to-date information.

- Hotels for quarantine/isolation: UND has reserved several hotels (Econo Lodge, Roadway Inn, Days Inn, LaQuinta, Hilton Garden, and Ramada Inn) in the Grand Forks area to quarantine/isolate students. Most of these hotels have upgraded their network to accommodate high bandwidth needs of students to attend classes virtually via Zoom. If you receive complaints or concerns from students about the hotel network, please reach out to CIO Madhavi Marasinghe, marasinghe@und.edu.

- Task Force on the Future of Academics at UND: While much of our attention and time has focused on ensuring safety on campus in light of COVID-19, we cannot afford to simply focus on the present. In fact, the pandemic has revealed the urgency for all institutions to consider adjustments and innovations in order to thrive. As such, under the direction of President Armacost and me, Professors Jeff VanLooy and John Shabb have agreed to co-chair a task force to consider future-oriented questions regarding our academic programs, including how and when we offer them. The task force will consider both short term and long term actions that will strengthen UND’s position in the higher education market and to ensure we continue to serve the state, region and beyond. Be on the lookout for more information on how faculty can engage with the task force.

- 2020 Census: I encourage all faculty to take a few minutes to complete the 2020 Census. The deadline for the Census is Sept. 30, 2020, and everyone who resides in the U.S. is eligible to complete it. Go to the 2020 Census website to be counted! Participating in the Census is important as it determines how federal funding is distributed to communities including education funding, health programs, housing programs, food security programs, highway construction, and much more.

- Online Course Development Workshop: A workshop is scheduled today (Sept. 24, 2020) from 2-4:30 p.m. for faculty who have signed LOUs for online course development. Faculty should complete this Qualtrics Survey to help TTaDA determine needs for online course development. Once you register, you will receive the Zoom link.
Hybrid/Hyflex Course Modification Workshops: Two workshops will be offered for faculty who have signed LOUs to develop hybrid/hyflex courses for Spring 2021. The workshops are scheduled for Monday, Oct. 5, from 9 to 10:30 a.m., and Thursday, Oct. 8, from 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon. Participating faculty need only attend one workshop. To reserve your place, please complete the Qualtrics Survey to help TTaDA determine needs for hybrid/hyflex course development. Once you register, you will receive the Zoom link.

The number of COVID-19 cases at UND and number of students in quarantine/isolation are moving in the right direction. Please encourage your students to continue to practice safety measures on and off campus — including wearing face coverings, physically distancing, washing hands often, and participating in testing opportunities. If you have any questions, please reach out to your department chair, dean or me so we can assist.

Stay safe and continue be kind to yourself and others,

Debbie Storrs
Interim Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs