

March 18, 2020

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

We are educators who inspire students to become the professionals who will be leaders, in our Valley and beyond. We all share a love of knowledge, creativity and discovery in thought. The passion that defines us as educators is fueled by our very unique talents and curiosity. Each time we write, invent, research, publish or create, we do so with the intention of sharing our insights with students and society. And we share what is most meaningful to us, our discoveries or ways of interpreting the world, because we sincerely believe in the power of teaching and learning. Our words in the classroom, lab, studio, field, or farm, are the sparks that ignite the future of our students.

As your provost, every day I walk a path illuminated by the light of the love of poetry—it's there, pulsating and shining, in my heart, coexisting beautifully with the love of family, friends, art and life itself. This love of poetry anchors me, and allows me to nurture the deep commitment I have to supporting you, the faculty, to shine brightly in the firmament of your lessons.

I started this message with the love of poetry because, in challenging times like these, it's good to identify where our North Star is shining.

I know that you have been going through a wide range of emotions—from disbelief to hurt or frustration, and mostly anxiety. The class you envisioned in the classroom, on the farm, or in the lab, is now in the virtual world.

I understand firsthand how the past few weeks have been exhausting and riddled with unease. Available information changes both swiftly and dramatically, and just as we are adjusting to a new normal, more changes come our way. The fluidity of the situation exacerbates our distress, and our routine has been upended in such a way that it's difficult to find a space untouched by the news of the day. I understand these feelings because I'm experiencing them with you—both as your provost, trying to provide you with the needed tools to transition to the virtual world, and as a husband, trying to support my wife in juggling two boys at home while she is planning engaging and meaningful lessons on the value of philosophy.

In the past week, I have been inspired by your creativity and generous help to fellow faculty in all areas dealing with the virtual world, and I'm deeply touched by the resilience of our Bulldog teaching community.

I have heard from many of you about your worries about delivering quality, engaging lessons. Likewise, I have heard from many who are anxious about being on camera, the weakened connection they might have with students, and the possibility of not delivering an impactful lesson. From the students, I've heard worries about doing well in a virtual world: "I'm a visual learner and need a personal connection." "I don't do well in online classes." "Will my grade go down; will I pass, and will I graduate?" "Where is my support system now?" "I don't have WiFi at home." "My home is too noisy, and I don't have my own room." ...are some examples.

When I taught in the classroom, I always endeavored to be transparent with my students about the circumstances influencing the delivery of my lessons: my students celebrated with me the birth of my sons, and they grieved with me when my mother passed. I tell you this to make a suggestion: Level with your students so they understand you, and, in turn, ask them how they're doing. A conversation about the current situation will build bridges of understanding, and forge a stronger sense of belonging.

In years to come, because of your earnest efforts and heartfelt vision, I'm certain that your students will remember your reassuring words, passion for your field, and flexibility in the face of such duress.

Now, more than ever, I'm heartened by how we navigate the waters of uncertainty by supporting each other.

What are our goals for this semester?

- To provide the best possible lessons, within the circumstances.
- To keep working together as the proud university educators that we are.
- To keep communicating with one another.
- To see our students through this tough time in their lives.

Even with the voluntary order from the City of Fresno to shelter at home, know that you will still have access to your office. And know that you can still reach out to the Center for Faculty Excellence for support. An Instructional Designer will be available for questions as we begin our virtual education journey: Friday (3/20), Monday (3/23), and Tuesday (3/24) from 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. at 559.278.6892.

I want to keep open our bridges of communication, and let you know that, as always, I'm here for you.

Saludos cordiales (y virtuales),

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