

Greetings, all

Another tumultuous week: check. Was it Sisyphus who was doomed to perpetually push a boulder up a hill? I know a lot of what we are doing feels Sisyphean right now, but I know we will get through this and come out stronger than ever. If you make it through this whole post, you'll get the reward of some poetry and good news at the end 😊!

Here are a few updates on our "climb":

1. Student Affairs colleagues continue to work on our compliance testing requirement, with roster updates and clearing students through Health Services. Thank you for continuing to monitor your rosters and making the right decision for your class on how and whether temporary shifts in modality are warranted based on your teaching and learning requirements. Be in frequent communication with your chairs and your students as we get through the next week. It may take us a bit more time to achieve equilibrium with the remaining students who are not yet compliant. Yes, it has been messy. But for the students we know tested positive, we are fortunate that they could remain in their respective homes until they are through the quarantine period.
2. We continue to collaborate across Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and Environmental Health and Safety on whether and when a vaccination point of dispensing (POD) may be implemented on campus as we edge closer to phase 1b in the state plan. Stay tuned.
3. Technology: IT continues to work with limited staff to get laptops to all faculty and students. We have the inventory, and we are getting them into your hands as quickly as possible. We are also working on video challenges with cable interface hiccups, projection challenges, and just the normal things that go wrong in any given semester. I received some good feedback from faculty in my office hours today on how patient and responsive our IT partners have been, but also some areas for improvement on how quickly we get information to faculty on timelines to solutions. We are working on it.
4. The IT/Academic Affairs ad hoc technology working group will certainly be identifying areas for improvement as we move forward as well. Many thanks to the following faculty and staff who have volunteered to collaborate with Patrice and others from outside Academic Affairs. One of their tasks will be to identify needed investments in instructional technology supports for faculty:
 - Andrew Besmer, Computer Science
 - DeAnn Brame, Dacus Library
 - Adam Keath, PESH
 - Jason Tselentis, Design
 - Kimarie Whetstone, WOOL

- Lindsay Yearta, Education Core
5. The Ad Hoc Personnel Policies working group will convene soon as well, under the leadership of Peter Judge, to start looking at improvements to student course evaluations, from instruments to implementation to utilization in faculty evaluation. We look forward to seeing their progress on this and other outstanding items from the Task Force on Tenure and Promotion.
 6. Policy work continues at a furious pace, as we endeavor to ensure our Policy Repository has been updated to mirror Faculty Bylaws updates and to keep pace with changing practices on campus. I am working with Adolphus Belk to keep him apprised of work in ALC and to clarify which policies may need review and/or inputs from Faculty Conference standing committees. We are seeking inputs from Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Promotion on Grievance Policy updates, for example. ALC members are working closely with HR on personnel policy updates needed to clarify procedures for SACSCOC, and Tim Drueke is working closely with Kelly Costner on the policies that Academic Council oversees relating to curriculum. This is hard work, ya'll, even if we weren't also navigating a pandemic. Many, many thanks to all the hands and eyes supporting this daunting project.
 7. After we have hit our milestones for some of the policies that needed work to ensure we have addressed areas of non-compliance relating to SACSCOC standards, we will again turn our attention to discussions about Summer Salary – for summer 2022 considerations.
 8. A working group to explore a Winter Term proposal will get going soon under the leadership of Jack DeRochi.
 9. Two program proposals are going to CHE next week: a proposal for a Master of Science in Athletic Training and a Bachelor of Design. This is exciting and crucial work to keep our program portfolio vital and responsive.
 10. Retention news: preliminary Fall to Spring retention numbers look strong, with an increase of a few points compared to this time last year! This is no small feat, folks, and I give all the credit to the faculty, staff, and administrators who are devoting so much energy, creativity, and compassion as you respond to the individual needs of the students whose learning and growth you nurture and advance every day.

I can't close without some poetry. Whether you've spent your life dwelling in it as I have or it's an occasional (or rare) dalliance for you, I'm sure we can all appreciate the power of the words of youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman, shared with the nation and the world at this Wednesday's inauguration. Here are a few compelling lines, with a riff on the eponymous *Hamilton*. From "The Hill We Climb" :

For while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us
This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves
So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

author a new chapter /offer hope and laughter

Adrienne