

August 4, 2020

Subj: Reopening the University – Message 11

Dear Faculty and Staff Colleagues,

We hope the University-wide town hall last week addressed concerns about plans for the fall semester. Though we did not say so explicitly, the questions you submitted in advance determined the issues we covered during the session. More than 3,700 people watched live, and many others have viewed the [video recording](#).

Up to now, our weekly messages have focused on material preparations for the fall—outfitting classrooms, installing equipment, developing schedules, etc. Equally important, though less visible, are the substantial efforts being taken to ensure we are prepared to meet the human and emotional needs of our students, faculty, and staff members during a semester sure to be filled with unexpected circumstances and new challenges. Here is a brief update on two of these efforts.

Expansion of Child and Elder Care Benefits

For the past two months, the [Working Group on Schools and Childcare](#) has been closely following local school district developments, assessing the local childcare market, and exploring ways to support Notre Dame parents and caregivers, including graduate students, during the ongoing pandemic. In doing so, the working group surveyed parents to assess their concerns and needs, benchmarked peer universities and corporations to uncover best practices, held focus groups to identify key concerns, and recommended a number of steps Notre Dame should take in light of the challenges parents and caregivers are facing.

The Working Group provided a set of recommendations to address needs related to child care and schools. Their work provided a compelling case for Notre Dame to introduce a number of important benefits for full time faculty, staff and graduate students through December 31, 2020. We will evaluate the additional needs for the spring semester once we have a clearer sense of what schools will be doing. We will:

- Expand eligibility for emergency child and elder back up care ([Bright Horizons](#)) to graduate students.
- Temporarily increase the number of uses of emergency backup child and elder care (Bright Horizons) from 15 to 30.
- Raise awareness of existing resources that help Notre Dame caregivers connect with local providers (Bright Horizons/Sittercity).
- Create a 10-day paid time off (PTO) bank for full-time staff members who are child or elder care providers to utilize if they cannot work remotely.
- Encourage flexible work arrangements for staff members and graduate students with caregiving responsibilities.
- With the permission of their deans, grant faculty members and graduate students who are caregivers the permission to temporarily teach remotely on short notice, if quarantine requirements for their children or others in their care arise.
- Create a web-based hub for trusted connections and the exchange of helpful information around child and elder care.

More information will be forthcoming about these policies later this week. We thank the working group, representing faculty, exempt and non-exempt staff and graduate students for their diligent efforts to meet the needs of our Notre Dame community in these challenging times. We offer our special thanks to Bob McQuade and Maura Ryan, the co-chairs of the working group.

Assessing and Addressing the Needs of Assistant Professors

COVID-19 has upended many faculty's research plans. While we are concerned about the impact on all faculty, we are especially sensitive to the needs of those who are not yet tenured. We are also aware that the needs and impacts vary widely across disciplines and time in rank. Marie Lynn has asked the deans to work with department chairs to determine, person by person, the impact of COVID-19 on the research programs of assistant professors and make suggestions for how the university might best support them during this challenging time. The provost's office will collate this information and use it to outline a series of policies directed at addressing the needs of assistant professors.

Caring for Each Other

The [Emotional Support and Well-being Working Group](#) is a team of faculty experts from the Department of Psychology and the Mendoza College of Business, as well as undergraduate, graduate, and professional students and staff members from units across campus. This group was formed to help address the feelings of anxiety, isolation, burnout, stress, and sadness many are experiencing due to concerns about the coronavirus, political divisiveness, and social and racial injustice. Starting this week, the University will initiate several new services to address these needs.

- A website dedicated to promoting emotional support and well-being resources (toolkits, workshops, articles, programs) from Notre Dame and from external expert sources.
- Toolkits designed to help people reach out to one another and tips on how you can help someone who reaches out to you.
- An expansion of Notre Dame's [greeNDot](#) program to include bystander training focused on recognizing someone who may need assistance or support.
- In-person and tele-health and tele-therapy services.
- The COVID Response Unit hotline (574-634-HERE) will of course continue to serve as a 24/7 source of support, resources, and referrals, especially for those experiencing heightened stress or anxiety.

Concluding Thoughts

For the past several months, we have worked together to reopen our campus for in-person instruction. Thanks to your teamwork and commitment, we are ready to do so next week. Reaching this point has not been easy, and we could not be more grateful for your efforts to make it possible. Despite our plans, preparations, and protocols, we know we will stumble at times and will need to be agile in our response to changing circumstances. We continue to welcome your feedback.

Marie Lynn had the opportunity to attend the first Welcome Week mass this morning, which included a reading from Matthew 17:3 where Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." Our decision to come together in person is difficult and complicated. But, it will allow us to better serve our low-resource students, provide more assurance to our international students, help us support our graduate students advancing in their programs, ensure that those who are struggling have access to support resources, and provide critical teaching opportunities around the racial justice issues that have so long plagued our nation. We are HERE to face these challenges together, as individuals with individual needs and as members of a community we care about deeply. Indeed, it is good for us to be here.



Please remember:

- Wear a mask.
- Practice physical distancing.
- Wash your hands often.
- Complete your daily health check.

Yours in Notre Dame,

Marie Lynn Miranda, Provost
Shannon Cullinan, Executive Vice President