

Dear Faculty, Staff, and Students,

As we plan our fall quarter during these days of continued, increasing cases of COVID-19 in both Arizona and Illinois, we are ever mindful of the challenges we face. Some of us have called this time the “gray days” of the pandemic, as we are beyond the early days, but nowhere is the end of the pandemic in sight as we continue to navigate our future. This fall will be like none other; we postponed the White Coat ceremonies this fall and moved them to Spring 2021, the Faculty and Staff Recognition Dinners have been moved to next year, and fall student orientations and activities will be online and in small groups. Even some of our community outreach programs are being delayed until it is safe to return to these activities.

Campus life this fall will also be unlike other years. While many of our students and faculty are eager to return to in-person classes, this upcoming fall will be a combination of hybrid options, from classroom learning in small student cohorts, to online classes that have live interaction with faculty members. Laboratory classes will be in smaller groupings separated by plexiglass panels or at least six feet from other students and much further from their faculty. Students will meet with their faculty members through technology and not congregate before or after class to meet with each other or their faculty member. Everyone will be required to wear a face mask, and entry and exit points to campus facilities will be clearly marked. All faculty, staff and students are required to do an online daily health screening prior to coming to campus. All our facilities and classrooms have newly revised, occupancy capacities posted, based on social distancing standards. We have modified our classrooms to have fewer chairs, less tables and also have limited the number of available seats in our auditoriums. Our enhanced cleaning protocols have been in place since March, 2020 and will continue into the future.

The Response Team has spent the past months planning for the safe, gradual return of additional students, faculty and staff on campus. The Response Team members responsible for campus readiness and academic scheduling have met with colleges and programs to establish academic schedules and the use of campus facilities. This upcoming week, they will facilitate the final plans which will allow all the Academic Deans to work with their faculty to finalize the fall schedules. Many faculty members have been working with their administration to facilitate the process and help us with a smooth transition back to campus. We continue to plan for a gradual return to campus, and there is not yet a set date for more faculty and staff on campus.

While many students, faculty and staff are eager to return to campus to bring greater normalcy back to their routines, I also have heard from members of our community that they are fearful of returning due to underlying health conditions, age, elderly family members, or their school-age children who are studying from home. I understand this fear and the uncertainty COVID-19 has created in all of our lives. Please remember, Midwestern University has programs and accommodations available for any faculty, staff or student with these concerns; please discuss these concerns to your supervisor, who will advise the Human Resource Department or the Dean of Students.

### Daily Student Self- Health Screening

- Beginning on Monday, July 27, 2020 all students who are authorized to be on campus must complete the COVID-19 screening through the daily reminder e-mail, or by adding a link to a secure website on their phone. There are approximately eleven questions, that if successfully answered, will provide you entry throughout the day to all campus facilities. Instructions on how to add the link to your phone will be sent to all students this weekend.
- Please complete the daily Self-Health Screening prior to arriving on campus, and avoid any unnecessary travel should you be unable to complete the questionnaire due to COVID-19 like symptoms.

### Update on the Diversity and Inclusion 5-Point Plan

- The Colleges and Departments of Midwestern University have actively embraced the charge to listen, discuss and carefully examine our practices and policies. Impressive work is taking place in many of the task forces and student groups. Each week I will highlight a college or department plan that exemplifies how we are committed to greater diversity and inclusion by eliminating bias, stereotypes, and mitigating attitudes and behaviors that adversely impact our community.
- The Midwestern University Colleges of Pharmacy have created seven Task Forces that are comprised of over 120 faculty, staff and students. The Task Force on Curriculum has discovered that while the colleges teach cultural competencies in the first year of education, there is less integration in the following years. This is already being addressed and recommendations are being sent to the Pharmacy Curriculum Committee. The Task Force on Community Outreach and Service to minority communities has many new initiatives and it has been suggested they seek approval to become a permanent college committee; the Admissions Task Force has engaged incoming students to help identify why they decided to attend Midwestern University and how we can better engage minority students. The Task Force on Research is considering ways to improve the delivery of health care to minority and underserved communities.
- Over the past year, our Arizona College of Optometry has actively sought ways to increase the diversity of its applicant pool. In conjunction with the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry, AZCOPT joined ASCO's national campaign of outreach to underserved and minority undergraduate students. From just that single effort alone, the College's applicant pool of interested Black candidates increased by almost 18%. In alignment with that work, AZCOPT is developing outreach efforts to Black student associations at undergraduate institutions. The College is also creating coursework and training that addresses implicit bias in healthcare delivery, which can affect case diagnoses, and bringing in industry leaders to speak with students about their experiences as Black and minority graduate students.
- My sincere thanks to all members of the Midwestern University for their commitment to our 5 Step Plan to bring greater diversity and inclusion to our community. The things we accomplish in the near future will carry on and will become established procedures, as well as an even bigger part of the Midwestern University campus culture.

## COVID-19 Update

- Over the past week, we have had one member of the Illinois faculty and staff test positive, and 5 students test positive for COVID-19, three from the Downers Grove campus and two from the Glendale Campus. Fortunately the students have been off campus and have not been in contact with colleagues or faculty and staff. Please join me in wishing them all a speedy recovery.

What we have lost over these long “gray pandemic days” is the comradery and energy we get from a lively and active community. In the past, the fall quarter was one of renewal, the “going back to school” feelings that began when we got our first pencil case and headed to kindergarten. This year, we have to focus on that spirit of renewal and remember our new and returning students need all of us to work together to meet their needs and expectations. With the help of all faculty and staff, we can make the fall quarter special for everyone by coming together to teach and mentor our students on campus, online or via Teams meetings. We are a strong community, driven by our excellence to educate and care for each other.

Be well.

Dr. G.