Students and colleagues,

As we come to the end of July, back-to-school energy is almost palpable. Some staff and faculty members returned to on-campus offices yesterday, and some students will return to campus in the coming days. Others are preparing to begin the year in their home offices and elsewhere. Wherever you are, I hope you are as excited as I am to begin another academic year.

With the first day of classes quickly approaching, we have several items of business to discuss. On that note, I have a few updates to share with you today:

For those students who will return to campus soon, I have a favor to ask: The University of Minnesota, UMN Morris, and our campus partners are working hard to implement recommended public health measures within our community. Student behavior will be one of the most important keys to our success in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in a manner that limits transmission on our campus. In that spirit, I am asking all students to closely monitor your potential exposure to COVID-19 in the 14 days prior to your arrival on campus. Avoid group gatherings where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Wear a mask. And practice good personal hygiene, including hand washing throughout the day. If you believe you have been exposed to COVID-19 before your arrival, get tested. We know that individuals with no symptoms, but who have COVID-19, can be a source of infection. Do your part. Stop the spread.

**COVID-19 Testing and Contact Tracing**

I know the topic of testing and contact tracing once school begins weighs heavily on many of your minds, so I’d like to share with you an overview of how this will work on campus. As you know, the safety, health, and wellbeing of our students, faculty, and staff are the foundation upon which all decisions are being made at the University of Minnesota Morris. We continue to practice health and safety protocols as outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), including working with local health care systems to provide access to COVID-19 testing for our campus community. This testing is part of Minnesota’s response to the pandemic.
Our Return to Campus site instructs anyone with symptoms to contact their health care provider immediately. We are working with Stevens Community Medical Center (SCMC) to provide COVID-19 testing for students who are showing symptoms or have been in close contact (closer than 6 feet) for 15 minutes or longer with someone diagnosed with COVID-19. Students should contact Health Services with concerns about significant exposure; faculty and staff should seek medical resources from their regular healthcare providers.

If a member of the UMN Morris community tests positive for COVID-19, they will be instructed by public health officials to isolate themselves for 10 days after symptoms first appear. Those who have been notified of their exposure to COVID-19 may be instructed to remain in quarantine for at least 14 days or until directed otherwise by health care or public health professionals.

While it may be concerning to learn of confirmed positive COVID-19 cases on campus, it is up to everyone to respect individuals’ privacy and HIPAA regulations. Students, faculty, or staff members – or others – who may have been exposed to a confirmed positive case (in close proximity for 15 minutes or more) will be notified by health care or public health officials. Names of those testing positive or exposed will be not released, per HIPAA and FERPA rules.

We know that members of our community will contract COVID-19, and we are prepared for that eventuality. We are developing plans in the event that one or more individuals become sick, which will include options like moving courses to remote learning environments. Spaces have been reserved on campus for residential students to quarantine or isolate. And we remain committed to providing an effective learning and research environment for our students, faculty, and staff while we all take steps to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

It remains vital that all of us do our parts to slow the spread of COVID-19 by practicing basic, but critically important, prevention measures. These include physical distancing, frequently washing hands with soap and water, minimizing how often we touch our faces, monitoring our health and, above all else, staying home if we feel sick. These simple actions are some of the best tools we have to prevent the spread of COVID-19 on our campus and in our community.

**Cougar Intercollegiate Athletics Update**

Following the July 30 announcement from the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference
(UMAC) that conference members have voted to modify the timing of conference competition and championships for fall sports classified as high-risk by the NCAA Sports Science Institute (SSI), and in keeping with our commitment to keep the health and safety of Cougar student-athletes, coaches, program staff, officials, and fans at the forefront of our decisions, the University of Minnesota Morris will postpone Cougar Athletics fall competitions in football, men's and women's soccer and volleyball. UMN Morris hopes to pursue competition in these sports during spring semester.

Cougar men's and women's golf, classified as low-risk sports by NCAA SSI, will continue to compete this fall, with conference championships conducted as planned. Men's and women's cross country may compete in regular season competition and conference championships as planned, provided accommodations and modifications can be made to move all regular season and conference championship events to a low-risk classification in conformity with the adjustments outlined by the NCAA SSI. Competition for golf and cross country will be limited to conference members only, in alignment with an earlier decision by the UMAC member institutions.

Decisions regarding UMAC and Cougar winter sports including men's and women's basketball, men's and women's indoor track and field, and women's swimming and diving will be made at a later date. Any further decisions regarding Cougar athletics in the upcoming academic year will continue to be driven by available guidance from local and state public health officials and the NCAA SSI, and are subject to change.

**Campus Events Guidelines for Fall 2020**
As we approach the fall, I know many of you are wondering about on-campus events and programming. An engaged and engaging campus community is a hallmark of the Morris experience, and we expect to have a fun, educational, and stimulating fall semester. Events will take place on campus and virtually--where possible--offering options to connect from wherever you may be. The Office of Student Activities, Conferences, and Events has shared new guidelines for planning safe events, informed by guidance from the Minnesota Department of Health. Please review the guidelines, and contact Senior Director of Student Activities, Health and Wellness David Israels-Swenson if you have any questions.

**Racial and Social Justice Scholarship**
Earlier this summer I mentioned the creation of a campus scholarship in memory of
George Floyd and to commemorate the events of summer 2020. I am pleased to report the Racial and Social Justice Scholarship was recently finalized. This scholarship will support students who demonstrate a commitment to anti-racism, racial justice, or social justice. Preference will be given to students who will enhance the diversity of the University of Minnesota Morris’s student body.

**Early Retirement Incentive**
The Board of Regents has approved a Retirement Incentive Option for eligible employees. While the key parameters for the program, such as the incentive offered and the program eligibility, will remain the same as that approved by the Board, the University is providing a seven-day review period on the [administrative policy](#) and support document to determine if any portions are unclear or if the documents need to include more information to help you evaluate this opportunity. The final policy will be published early next week. Faculty and staff, I invite you to provide your input before the end of the review period, August 2.

**Board of Regents Special Meeting**
The Board of Regents met this week and approved the University’s recommendations for:

- MTest COVID-19 plans for all campuses (a synopsis of the UMN Morris plan is explained above)
- Board policy changes related to sexual misconduct and new federal Title IX regulations
- Board policy updates on student fees

For more information about the meeting, please see the [full press release](#). The Board is next scheduled to meet September 10-11, 2020.

**K-12 Schools and University Parents**
As you may know, Governor Tim Walz has announced the [Safe Learning Plan](#) for 2020-2021. I recognize the impacts this decision may have on members of our campus community, as we all are affected by issues regarding childcare. As a parent, I want to first acknowledge the efforts made by those of you navigating parenthood while working from home these past few months—I know it has not been easy. I will remind everyone that our current operational status allows those of you who must continue working from home to do so, which may help those needing to arrange care for school-aged children this fall. Your supervisor should have been in touch with you to discuss your options and make plans accordingly. If your situation has changed or you need to discuss this further, please contact your
supervisor to discuss your options and make plans accordingly. Ours is a
family-friendly campus, and we will work together to make sure that our families are
well cared for as we continue to pursue our shared goals for this campus. Thank you
for your efforts to support one another and to practice patience.

Good News and Success Stories
Although the fall semester is still a few weeks away, some of you are already at
work. Incoming students participating in our Gateway and STELLAR programs have
already begun connecting and working on fall courses, reminding us of the
excitement and energy new students inject into our campus community each fall.
Please join me in welcoming these incoming students to our community, and others
as they make their way to campus, both in person and virtually, in the days and
weeks ahead.

As we all continue working our way toward the fall semester, I want to thank you
again for all you do to support the health and wellbeing of our community. Please
continue to take good care, and look with hope, as I do, to the start of another year.
This fall promises to be an exciting one. I can’t wait to welcome you, wherever you
are.

Michelle