



OFFICE of the PROVOST

Update from the Provost

Colleagues:

As we look to May, we are hearing discussions about reopening the state, about the status of the fall semester, about graduation without commencement, and a host of other topics. It is good to be thinking ahead, but we also have work to do in the present in order to prepare for the future. The UWF community has performed amazing feats to keep this complex institution moving. The latest example is the work performed to get CARES funding into the hands of students. Given the complexities connected to this federal funding, this is no easy task. I have long carried a quote with me from military theorist Carl von Clausewitz that seems quite appropriate for higher education at the moment. Clausewitz wrote that “Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult.” While we are not at war in the military sense, COVID-19 is an enemy to be defeated. War, however, never leaves even the most basic institutions untouched.

Many articles are emerging about what higher education will look like in the near and distant future. We have experienced paradigm shifts over the last few years, and we know firsthand how factors beyond the university’s control can push us to refocus and recast how we go about accomplishing our core mission. The other side of that change paradigm, of course, is working consciously to preserve the best of what existed before even while we adapt to the new reality we face. Ginni Rometty, IBM’s former CEO, views the pandemic as a call to refocus on the “value of adaptability” and the need to make sure that we all continue to embrace “the propensity to learn.” This is natural for us, but is crucial as we look to summer, fall, and beyond.

President Saunders has established a work group to plan for reopening campus. We will not be able to restart “normal” operations overnight. Thus, we will work toward a phased start-up. We do not know when our restart will take place, but we need to be prepared, and I wanted to let you know that planning is taking place.

Thank you for your continued perseverance, hard work, and commitment to carrying out the work that we are here to do—providing opportunities for students to plan and work toward their own futures, just as we should plan for UWF’s future.

Best regards,

George

May 1, 2020