Provost Remarks

Hopefully, you all had a chance to read the community message I sent out a few weeks ago. I wanted to set the tone for the academic year by emphasizing that academic excellence remains our goal as a university and that we are on a path of incredible momentum, thanks to the continued hard work of our students, faculty, and staff.

Move-in

Move-in went quite smoothly. We retained the staggered move-in structure that we adopted during the pandemic to smooth the increase in population density on campus when we were concerned about the spread of Covid. Though we were less concerned about Covid transmission this year, we found that this staggered approach reduced congestion, density, and anxiety aligned with the move in process. Parents and students reported a more relaxed move in process, and I personally witnessed this as I toured the campus on first year move in day.

Registration

I was able to speak to many students that Sunday and was pleased to learn that nearly every freshman was able to register and obtain the courses they needed -- despite the additional students enrolled. I want to thank Terry Murphy and the deans for working to add additional sections and instructors to ensure that we could accommodate all students and provide optimal "overcapacity" to ensure that students could easily drop and add courses without having to completely rework their entire schedules.

Convocation

We had a wonderful convocation ceremony on August 27, and I want to thank those who were able to join us for this event. The students enjoyed their first academic ceremony, along with a day of service.

New Faculty Orientation/New Academic Leadership

I also want to highlight that we held a two-day orientation for new faculty and new academic leaders in the days immediately prior to the start of the academic year. The first day combined both cohorts in sessions designed to provide them with need-to-know information regarding the university and essential resources that are available. The second day provided more specialized orientation to each cohort -- for faculty, the focus was on university resources available to support their teaching and research activities, and for the leaders, focused conversation and skills training on effective leadership in an academic environment. I want to give a special thanks to Emily Hammond and the faculty personnel team who stepped up and ensured a seamless orientation despite several covid-related absences.
IT Update

Since IT was migrated over to the provost division, Geneva and her team have been hard at work filling the gaps and prepping the campus for the year. This included workstation Refreshes as well as classroom technology preparation and all of the enterprise IT work behind the scenes. We received several complimentary notes from the faculty regarding what they perceive as service level improvements, and I know Geneva and her team will continue to deliver excellent service. In a future faculty senate meeting, I would like for Geneva Henry to provide a report on the work her team has done over the summer and in the first weeks of this semester.

Data Privacy Task Force Update

You may recall that in February, President Wrighton sent a message the community regarding a data analytics pilot project that occurred on campus during the Fall 2021 semester. In light of privacy considerations raised as a result of this project, the President charged me with convening a policy committee comprising students, faculty, and staff, to develop core principles and make recommendations regarding data policies and protocols at the university. The recommendations from this group, the Data Privacy Task Force, were submitted in late June for the administration’s consideration.

I am grateful for the work of the Task Force and the collaborative effort undertaken to identify core principles and additional actions as we continue work to develop a Data Governance Policy.

I would like to provide an update that I will share with the community following the Faculty Senate meeting.

First, the university will adopt the Task Force’s recommended three core principles regarding the use of university data for analytical purposes. These principles are:

- GW should protect individuals’ privacy consistent in a manner with the institution’s legitimate use of personal information and data, and comply with applicable laws;
- Programs analyzing university data should be discussed in an open and transparent way so as to ensure that any costs to privacy are evaluated alongside the benefits of the use of personal data; and
- GW should clearly, transparently, and regularly communicate about the ways in which it uses personal information.

In addition, since the formation of the Task Force, the university has already undertaken several structural changes to better align the IT infrastructure and office with the academic mission of the university. These changes include:

- The establishment of a new Vice Provost for Libraries and Academic Technologies to oversee the IT enterprise;
- Relocation of IT to the Provost Office;
- Relocation of the Office of Ethics, Compliance and Risk to the President’s Office; and
- Relocation of the Data Governance Team to the Provost’s Office.

The university is considering several additional steps to advance the goals of the core principles. These include but are not limited to:
• Establishing, in consultation with the faculty senate, a new Data Governance Policy to provide guidance on data analytics projects that use university data;
• Constructing a new review process for university data analytics projects that includes approval and sign off by senior university leadership;
• Inviting Student Association participation in data governance through the established channels (i.e., regular meetings between SA leadership and the president and provost); and
• Refining the university’s Privacy Notice to include data analytics projects in order to improve communication and transparency.

Through the careful implementation of these measures, we expect to create a more collaborative and more transparent environment that allows the university to realize the benefits of data analytics while protecting the privacy interests of our community members.

Staffing Updates

Regarding the School of Nursing dean search, we had a group of candidates on campus in late July and early August to meet with stakeholders. We aim to have a decision in the coming days.

We also have been interviewing candidates for the vice provost for budget and finance. We are very close to finalizing a decision here as well, so once again, stay tuned.

Academic Planning and Priorities

An update on academic planning and setting academic priorities for the university.

In the spring, President Wrighton and I conducted an academic planning exercise with the deans. We met numerous times to discuss academic priorities and to begin identifying themes and opportunities for university-wide initiatives that will distinguish the George Washington University from our market basket schools. We organized these themes and ideas into a digestible document, and the deans met with their faculty and advisory boards to discuss potential options. We subsequently reconvened to begin discussing which ones could be pursued.

Through all this discussion, we identified some emergent themes. And I want to congratulate all of my deans for working collaboratively in service of this greater mission. As I am fond of saying to provosts across the country, I will line up my deans against any other institution. We have amazing deans who are phenomenal leaders of their units.

First, we quickly realized that there were some general aspirations shared by all ten schools. Everyone was interested in building a world-class faculty. We are an academic enterprise. We are a mission-based organization. Faculty are essential to all aspects of our mission – teaching, research, and patient care. And if we aspire to preeminence, then our work begins with attracting and investing in building a world class faculty.

There was also universal agreement that we need to attract the most qualified and diverse students to build our incoming classes, and that we need to double down on cross-disciplinary engagement.
The impact of the pandemic also drove the deans to want to think more intentionally about online instructional offerings and conceiving what the classroom of the future might look like.

Over the summer, the deans and Board of Trustees held retreats to, among other things, discuss the academic priorities that will endure and serve as the foundation for comprehensive planning down the line. We want academic initiatives that could prove transformational – and here, I mean this in several senses. I want these priorities to provide an opportunity to transform the world and change lives. But those transformed lives should include the lives of our faculty and students who participate in these activities, as well as the beneficiaries around the world.

I am pleased to report that we have identified a set of established priorities that we might all commit to for the advancement of the university. There are ones that we have fully committed to as an institution and that we have already committed to fund. In addition, we have a set of new commitments that we intend to fund and support during FY23.

**Our established priorities are:**
- Academic medicine
- Penn West Equity and Innovation District

**Our new commitments are:**
- Equity and social justice
- Sustainability and climate change
- Data science, computing and society

**Our goals are:**
- Enhance GW’s global reputation
- Leverage GW’s strengths and competitive advantages
- Position GW for leadership and impact in key areas of global importance