April 2020

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Our world today is different, with many once-familiar things turned upside down. Between now and when we return to normal, or a slightly altered version of normal, we are facing the difficulties and opportunities that lie ahead for our society and our university with resolution and purpose.

We are ensuring the University of Colorado’s four campuses continue to deliver on our mission in teaching and learning, research, service and health care. Our approach is three-pronged: triage, stabilization and transformation. Our goal is to ensure CU serves its students and remains a leader in our state, nation and beyond. As you can appreciate, there are thousands of issues and details to consider.

Our triage began March 11, when we were the first public university in the state to announce a move to remote teaching and working, limiting events and generally reducing the presence on our campuses. Our imperative was to protect the health and safety of our campus communities. We shifted commencement ceremonies to virtual formats and are planning special events for our 2020 graduates down the road.

We provided some flexibility for students by beefing up pass/fail options, increased support for remote learning and enhanced our capacity for virtual mental health appointments to help students who are particularly stressed or scared.

We also helped with the state’s early response, making experts from the CU Anschutz Medical Campus and Colorado School of Public Health available as resources to the governor and his team. Faculty are helping supply and test personal protective equipment. Our medical researchers are also testing antibodies and therapies for COVID-19.

As the extent of the crisis has become clearer, we are moving to stabilize operations. We brought together all the leaders of Colorado colleges and universities, both public and private, to engage our Congressional delegation, sending them a joint letter [2] that detailed vital areas of need for higher education in stimulus and relief packages. I have followed up and spoken with most of Colorado’s delegation, and they are extremely supportive.

We proceeded with the hiring of a new chancellor [3] for CU Denver (below), Dr. Michelle Marks. She is a visionary leader who will provide much-needed continuity to the campus at a critical time. At the same time, we are engaged in a hiring chill, suspending some key searches and ensuring that only essential hires are made.

We also deferred decisions (until May or June) on tuition, fees and compensation until we
have better information about the financial impact of COVID-19 on state funding, research funding and enrollment. The CU Foundation, which manages the university’s $1.2 billion endowment, is carefully tracking the stock market for risks and opportunities. While the recent downturn has hurt everyone, our diversified portfolio is holding up relatively well, ensuring continued scholarships and other critical endeavors.

Helping the state remains a focus in the stabilization phase. We are exploring the possibility of making some campus facilities available if needed for patients who are asymptomatic or in quarantine to alleviate the load on hospitals. The CU Anschutz Medical Campus has also substantially increased testing capacity and is providing the data infrastructure to track the virus.

We have an eye on transformation for when we emerge from the worst of the crisis. We took a pause on work on our strategic plan, online education project and information technology initiative to allow our faculty and staff to deal with important matters at hand. But we have not stopped those projects. If anything, the crisis highlights the need for more focused planning, more robust online education and a better IT infrastructure.

The silver lining to the crisis is an increased urgency for online education expansion. Last week we established the CU Online Accelerator Committee to build on the strong work we did in the area in the several months before the crisis.

Our three-pronged approach to dealing with COVID-19 has one sharply defined goal – to continue to deliver on our mission to educate students and serve our state and beyond. COVID-19 has disrupted life, but institutions like CU will be crucial to a future where education, research, service and health care will be more important than ever. We intend to be as vital to that future as we have been for the past 144 years.

All the best,

Mark Kennedy President

For feedback, contact officeofthepresident@cu.edu
To receive President Kennedy’s monthly newsletter via email, contact us at contact@cu.edu.

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