

Dear College Family:

Remember last March, when we went on Spring Break, only to work really hard, shift our classes, and work online? Yeah, me too, and I am really proud to work with and for all of you and appreciate what we were able to achieve then.

Now we're back. Back after months and months of work, of planning, reorganizing, redesigning and reimagining our classes, our classrooms and our common areas. Sure, it's a little strange, but soon enough we'll settle into a rhythm.

Most importantly, for us, you're back. We're educators, and we're in the business of teaching students, after all. When I chatted with my colleagues over the past few months, we almost always returned to the same theme: how much we missed you. How we missed the informal interactions with our students, the classroom banter, the student organizations, the events. I missed the constant sound of laughter in the hallways, bumping into a student in Peyton Anderson Forum, and making the rounds, checking in on faculty and staff.

Ok, so we don't get all of these things back--not right away, anyway. To keep us in school, we have to make the right choices—we need to follow the rules, wear our face coverings, wash our hands, keep our social distancing, avoid crowds and check in daily on Dawgcheck. We must look out for one another, and we must begin with kindness, with patience, with tolerance of the ways we must work and learn these days. Not a one of us is thrilled with all of this, but I can't tell you how much more I prefer it to sitting at home – so let's all commit to doing our level best.

Finally, save a little space, even if it's just a minute or two a day, for some self-compassion. You are doing the best you can with what you have in this moment. This year has been an exercise in surrendering to uncertainty. Most days, I find I criticize myself for not getting enough done without taking time to process that we all are surviving in a very jarring, scary and drawn out unknown. Yet, in our college we are trained story tellers, and our life experiences shape who we are and the stories we tell. One incredible skill we need to be excellent story tellers is compassion for ourselves and for others. Taking care of yourself helps you take better care of others and will make you better at your profession.

I'm so delighted to welcome you back. We all are. Let's have a great semester!

Dean Davis