

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
UNIVERSITY COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday, April 21, 2021
Online via Zoom

Good afternoon, and welcome to the final University Council meeting of the year. Going into today's meeting, I had planned to provide my customary report on achievements of the spring—of which there have been many. However, after personal reflection last night, I decided that a different message was necessary.

I want to begin my report by expressing my gratitude for the collective effort of everyone in this meeting. You have helped the University fulfill its mission this year, despite unprecedented obstacles, and I am grateful for your service.

One of the challenges that made this past year difficult—particularly for our Black faculty, staff and students—was the murder of George Floyd. After months of pain, frustration and anger in the wake of his senseless death, it is my hope that yesterday's verdict can provide us all with an opportunity to reflect, to heal, and to come together as a University community to better support one another. In our statement to the campus community yesterday, we provided information on the resources available to support our faculty, staff and students, and I encourage you to avail yourselves of those resources, if needed. I want you to know that we remain committed to working together—with care and compassion—to move our institution forward.

I would like to take this opportunity to express a special word of thanks to Dr. Michelle Cook. Dr. Cook, despite facing her own personal health challenges over the past year, has provided wise counsel and tremendous leadership in our ongoing efforts to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion on this campus. She is helping to make our campus a better place, and we are all grateful.

I also want to recognize the extraordinary contributions of many other individuals who have enabled us to continue our mission of teaching, research and service in the face of the unprecedented challenges wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. In just a few short weeks, we will be hosting in-person Commencement ceremonies for our graduates, bringing to a celebratory conclusion what many critics said could never happen. You may remember the harsh criticism from members of our own campus community who warned of dire consequences if we attempted to resume in-person classes in the fall. Thankfully, level heads prevailed. Through careful planning, heeding expert advice, and incorporating best practices to promote health and safety, we have not only persevered, but succeeded.

I want to take a moment now to thank those who have played key roles in helping us to reach this point. First of all, I want to thank our many dedicated faculty members, who pivoted their classes with very little notice last spring, worked to hone their methods of remote instruction

over the summer, and have continued to provide classroom excellence with a blend of face-to-face, hybrid and remote teaching over the past year. I also want to thank our graduate teaching assistants and lecturers who have done the same. And I acknowledge the leadership provided for these efforts by the Office of the Vice President for Instruction, led by Dr. Rahul Shrivastav, as well as the Office of Information Technology, led by Vice President Tim Chester. The members of our Medical Oversight Task Force—Dr. Garth Russo of the University Health Center, Dean Shelley Nuss, Dean Marsha Davis, and Dean Lisa Nolan—have provided invaluable counsel over the past year. Dr. Nolan and Mr. John McCollum have co-chaired our Preventative Measures Advisory Board—comprised of faculty and staff subject-matter experts across campus—as they have helped units across campus and around the state to address tough questions regarding how to offer programs and provide service during the pandemic.

I want to recognize Provost Jack Hu, who has provided outstanding leadership for our overall academic enterprise, as well played an important role in advancing the University's comprehensive support to the pandemic, from surveillance testing to vaccine roll-out. Faculty and staff in the University Health Center and Veterinary Medicine have pooled their expertise to establish and maintain a comprehensive surveillance testing program for our campus. Dr. Russo has led the University Health Center staff in treating our students and administering life-saving vaccines to thousands of members of our campus community. He is retiring in June, and we owe him a debt of gratitude for his service.

Also retiring is Dr. David Lee, who as Vice President for Research has helped our research enterprise to expand this year with record levels of federal support and outstanding new hires made to strengthen our faculty in the future. The team members in Mr. Ryan Nesbit's area of Finance and Administration often go unheralded, but they provide critical support of this campus operation. Truly, we could not operate without these men and women—who have cleaned and sanitized our workplaces, kept the HVAC systems running, kept our paychecks coming, and provided food for our students, among many, many other duties.

Similarly, under the superb leadership of Vice President Victor Wilson, those in Student Affairs have gone above and beyond the call of service to support our students in this difficult year. And, we are a land-grant institution. Dr. Jennifer Frum's leadership of our Public Service and Outreach units ensured that we continued to provide critical support to communities across the state at a time when our engagement was needed most. The 18 deans of colleges and schools have also stepped up to provide incredible support for their faculty, staff and students.

I realize that by naming a few, I have left out many others worthy of individual recognition. For that, I apologize. Truly, there are many unsung heroes among us. I hope you take the time to thank those within your schools, colleges and units for the exceptional support they have provided over the past year.

The finish line to this academic year is now in sight, and I look forward to crossing it with you. Thank you for the remarkable work you have done this year. That concludes my report.