Very recently I delivered the General Academic Assembly (GAA) address from the President’s residence, a very different location than the customary Convocation Hall. I chose this location due to its significance in providing shelter for the quarantined staff fighting the Spanish flu epidemic over one hundred years ago. This very different setting also symbolized the very different environment we find ourselves in as we proceed through the end of the winter semester and into exam season. For this, I am grateful to all of you who’ve had to make significant changes in the delivery and scope of your work. I thank all of you for making the extraordinary wholesale move to on-line teaching and learning, the complete move to on-line exams, as well as continuing your research from a remote location.

As I noted in my GAA address, the extraordinary circumstances created by the pandemic have brought out extraordinary responses from members of our USask community. In short, we are working together to be the University the World needs in this worldwide crisis. We are now turning our attention to scenario planning, assumptions and strategies for the fall term. We will need to know, as a university, by sometime in mid-May, what our teaching, research, workforce locations—and other fundamentals of what we do—will look like come September.

I continue to urge you to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and its impact by ensuring physical distance, and self-isolation when necessary, in accordance with federal and provincial public health orders. Please continue to stay connected and updated through our USASK COVID-19 website. This site provides key, up-to-date information on the many things currently affecting faculty, students, staff and administration. It also offers an uplifting collection of the courageous and impactful work that USask community members are contributing to fight the pandemic and ensure the well-being of others.

**PM announces $23.3 million in support for USask’s VIDO-InterVac**

In March, the federal government announced that USask’s Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization – International Vaccine Centre (VIDO-InterVac) would receive $12 million to help address Canada’s shortage of vaccine manufacturing capacity, as well as $11.3 million for continued operational funding for high containment laboratories over the coming year. VIDO-InterVac is part of the national and global response to finding a vaccine for COVID-19. As one of the few Canadian research facilities with regulatory approval to work on the new virus, VIDO-InterVac was the first lab in the country to isolate the virus. VIDO-InterVac is also the first lab in Canada, and one of the very few in the world, to establish an animal model for COVID-19.
SHA and USask’s VIDO-InterVac partner to help ensure supply of N95 respirator masks

A recently announced partnership between the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and USask’s VIDO-InterVac will assist with the shortage of N95 respirator masks. VIDO-InterVac will use a successful decontamination procedure on used N95 respirator masks from the SHA – a procedure that is routinely used at VIDO-InterVac to decontaminate its rooms and equipment. As a result, this procedure will allow for the safe re-use of masks that are normally thrown away after a single use. There is also the possibility of using the same process to decontaminate other personal protective equipment (PPE), which requires further exploration.

The Government of Saskatchewan releases its 2020-2021 budget

On March 18th the Saskatchewan government announced its 2020-2021 budget, including a one per cent increase to the USask operating budget. During these uncertain times, USask appreciates the government’s commitment to investing in the institution and the world class research that is on-going. The funding increase is critical to the university’s operation and is an indicator that the government is committed to this university and the value our world-class graduates and research provide to the province, its people, and economy.

USask to lead new CIHR Indigenous health research networks

USask health researchers have been awarded $5 million by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) to lead a network of Indigenous research centres as a part of a major new national initiative. Of this funding, $1.5 million has been awarded to Dr. Caroline Tait, who is a USask medical anthropologist and member of the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MN-S). She will lead the national centre and coordinate health training and research with eight other regional Indigenous health research networks. With the remaining $3.5 million and in-kind support from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and MN-S, Tait will lead the Saskatchewan NEIHR network to foster health research within Indigenous communities, working in partnership with the FSIN, MN-S, the Whitecap Dakota First Nation, and a team of more than 60 researchers and community partners.

USask researcher awarded Indigenous Research Chair in Nursing

University of Saskatchewan researcher, Holly Graham, was awarded an Indigenous Research Chair in Nursing to build research capacity in Indigenous nursing and improve the health of Indigenous peoples. The new $1.05 million research chair is the first for the College of Nursing and will support both indigenous and non-indigenous student nurses in advancing reconciliation in nursing practise, research, education and administration. The funding for the research chair has been provided by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, Canadian Nurses Foundation and USask.