GENERAL REMARKS

Welcome to the 2020-2021 academic year! As I settle into my interim provost role, I look forward to working alongside in the coming months. Although this year will look much different than previous years, I am confident that we will continue to have robust and productive Council meetings.

As the fall term gets underway, I want to acknowledge all of the hard work that has happened over the last six months to ensure success for students, faculty, and staff as we transitioned to primarily remote delivery. We had approximately three days to transition into a remote delivery environment in March of this year when the university campuses physically shut down. That was an incredible accomplishment but really only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what staff and faculty would work to accomplish as the weeks of spring and summer rolled on. The consistent experiences were about teamwork, reflection, re-visioning, and innovation.

- Teams pulling together to support confidence and success: Multi-disciplinary teams of staff colleagues in the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching and Learning (GMCTL), ICT, the Distance Education Unit, and the Library have worked tirelessly these last weeks and months to re-vision and build up our Remote Learning and Remote Teaching websites. Each of these sites speak directly to their constituents providing positive, constructive and sometimes step-by-step guidance about how to be successful in a remote environment. This is exactly the help needed to get ready for new territory.
  - Remote Learning - https://students.usask.ca/study/remote-learning.php

- Leveraging “new to us” technologies and platforms: We welcomed a new learning management system into our teaching and learning eco-system this spring and from mid-April through August, we had a team of six Canvas trainers working with almost 1,000 attendees to date. We were also able to work directly with colleges – seven who put their hands up – to create bespoke sessions. These sessions often included a large number of faculty dedicating their time and energy to learning how to get the most out of Canvas. Other ICT colleagues hosted 47 Microsoft Teams training courses in the few last months with over 700 attendees alongside 25 WebEx training opportunities with just over 350 attendees.

- Embracing remote: We had six educational/curriculum developers from the GMCTL run over 100 sessions focused on the “how to” of remote instruction between March and August. These sessions involved almost 1,000 participants (where some people participated in more than one session).
  - There were countless formal and informal 1:1 consultations that happened over these last weeks and months.
  - More typical activities like the course innovation community and the new faculty orientation were re-imagined for remote engagement and by all accounts thus far, emerged as continued successes.

- The power of graduate students: In early April the university allocated $175,000 of central funding to a program referred to as the Student Assistant/Graduate Student Funding Initiative. This was designed to get funding into the hands of graduate students who were in financial need while at the same time
provide supports to the academic mission of the university at a time when help was needed. The original allocation was expanded when staff and faculty voluntarily redeployed APEF dollars. Funding went to graduate students who provided marking support to help complete the winter term but also to projects across the university where supports were sought to aid in the development of content and the redesign of courses for remote delivery. In total, 82 projects funded with 92 graduate students receiving employment.

- **Helping our entering students build confidence**: There was uncertainty at the precipitous close of the school year for many learners including those finishing Grade 12 and planning to join USask this fall. Fortunately, with the Dean of the College of Education as an early champion, the university built a “prep” program to build confidence and create a bridge for our incoming students. Working collaboratively, the College of Education, the College of Arts and Science, and the portfolio of Teaching, Learning and Student Experience developed programming designed to ease transitions of incoming first year students in four key subjects – Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Math. Graduate students in the Sciences (Arts and Science) and in the Educational Technology and Design program (College of Education) developed the course content. Education and science graduate and undergraduate students were hired to facilitate student learning through the modules. Colleagues from the Colleges of Education and Arts and Science supported course development and facilitator mentorship. The courses had over 350 registrations across two sessions held in July and August. The initiative received funding from the federal government’s Canada Summer Jobs program and from TECHNATION’s Career Ready Program.

- **Re-visioning orientation**: Colleagues figured out quickly that we couldn’t just take all aspects of an in-person orientation experience and replicate this virtually. The student support teams learned quickly in recent months that there are new and innovative ways of bringing people together, building community, and sharing information and services on-line that students need the most. In advance of our Orientation on September 2nd there were over 3,200 students registered (our highest number ever signed up) to take part in an event that included live streaming, web-conferencing, engaging activities, opportunities to ask questions and to meet other incoming students. These virtual welcome activities were designed to bring people together in a more flexible, accessible, and inclusive orientation model that we will continue to learn from. Colleges also hosted afternoon sessions for their students with a view to providing information that is more specialized. The Aboriginal Student Centre, the International Student and Study Abroad Centre, Access and Equity Services, and the University Library also hosted tailored orientation activities. In keeping with new visions of how to create positive transition opportunities for students, the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies has launched a new website called the Grad HUB https://cgps.usask.ca/orientation/

- **Support students**: Our student support website, http://students.usask.ca, has been revised and enhanced to connect students to the online supports that are available. In addition, it is important to note that all of the support services continue to be accessible.

- **Solving challenges**: A long section of these reflections on preparing for the fall could be dedicated to the topic of solving challenges. It was inspiring to see that the university community was unwilling to give up in the face of adversity and continued to persevere. One on-going challenge that we faced over the spring and summer involved our international students. Federal rules, to date, have restricted the entry of at least some of our international students. Nevertheless, teams from across units worked on return plans for international students who could come back into Canada but needed our assistance to safely and securely quarantine. We also had a team working to identify creative solutions on how to provide funding to new international graduate students. Flexibility during this period has been a key strategy and the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies has continued to work through the graduate students challenges by providing flexibility in awards and leaves.
INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

Academic Program Review
In 2019, a new process for Academic Program Review (APR) was implemented. The USask APR is informed by both a U15 benchmark study and an external review and includes both undergraduate and graduate programming. With our swift pivot to work from home and remote teaching, the reviews planned for Winter and Spring 2020 were postponed and scheduled visits from external program reviewers canceled. However, we will be restarting the APRs for Fall 2020 using online platforms for meetings, site tours, and document sharing. Of first priority are the APRs that had been scheduled for Winter and Spring 2020, followed by those programs identified on the 8-year cycle for APR during the 2020-2021 academic year.

More information about the APR process and schedule is available at: https://www.usask.ca[ipa/Assessment-and-Analytics/reviews.php

COLLEGE AND SCHOOL UPDATES

Edwards School of Business
This summer, the Edwards School of Business became one of the first business schools in Canada to partner with Mitacs to launch a research internship to stimulate Canada’s economic recovery. Through the “Mitacs Business Strategy Internship” program, Edwards interns are supporting businesses who need assistance in modifying their business operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic by analyzing opportunities and providing strategic support to adapt to the new economic reality. To date 82 students have submitted expressions of interests, and so far, 30 matches have been made with employers.

College of Arts & Science
The College of Arts & Science welcomes our new Vice-Dean Indigenous, Dr. Angela Jamie:
https://artsandscience.usask.ca/news/articles/5174/Angela_Jaime_appointed_vice_dean_Indigenous_in_the_College_o

Our new Arts & Science degree requirements, ten years in the making, are now in effect for all newly enrolled students and their successors in the years to come. This includes our new 3 cu requirements for Indigenous Learning, Writing in English, and Quantitative Reasoning:

Arts & Science is partnering with the College of Medicine on revamped BMSC degrees:
College of Education

**ITEP Remote Support Coordinators:** The College of Education is hiring two Remote Support Coordinators to build connections between instructors and advisors in the ITEP program and Indigenous students enrolled in remote courses in the fall. These teacher liaisons will be recent ITEP graduates and will work predominantly with first-year ITEP students, with the goal of increasing retention.

**Saskatchewan Principals’ Short Course Online Success:** The annual Saskatchewan Principals’ Short Course was successfully held online July 6 – 9, 2020. Traditionally, this week-long course is offered in-person out of the College of Education. To meet continuing demand from First Nation and provincial schools, the College’s Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit redeveloped the course into an online format with presenters and facilitators hosted out of the Education building. This blended format had a goal of maximizing accessibility, engagement and learning for its participants while maintaining the quality of technology. At 148 participants, the registration was the highest ever in the course’s 56-year history, with representation from communities and First Nations in the North and Far North that hadn’t previously participated. Participation from Métis and First Nations schools was at its highest number, as well.

College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

The College of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies continues to operate remotely. To date all our staff and functions continue to operate seamlessly in a remote environment except for disciplinary type of files that are more easily managed in person.

Our priority continues to be:

**Students and navigating the complexities of programming and funding during the pandemic**

- As of July 31, approx. **213 thesis defenses** have been successfully completed remotely; and both deferrals and admissions are trending above average.
- Student payments continue to be a complex issue for students who have or will be started their students outside of Canada.
  - **Non-employment payments include both scholarships and stipends.**
  - Communication to our graduate community was distributed on Aug. 21st with instructions how to pay students out of the country who **do** have a Canadian bank account as well as for those who **do not** have a Canadian bank account.
  - Protocols are in development with respect to student offer letters for teaching assistantships falling within the PSAC agreement that affect students who cannot start ‘work’ due to travel bans.
- We continue to communicate with our stakeholders as information is available to us.

At the same time, the CGPS team have been working on three key projects that will impact stakeholders across our grad community.

- As key players on the project team tasked with building recruit management software (RMS), the next phase of USask’s ERP, **recruit**, will contribute to recruitment success and streamline hundreds of processes for grad. We expect RMS to go live September 30th – capturing all grad student applications spring/summer 2021 forward.
• On August 20th CGPS’ new grad student onboarding platform went live. The platform was developed from a thematic approach heavily based on research, extensive collaboration and student consultation. The platform allows students to asynchronously engage with orientation information allowing early adoption of the extensive information students must learn as well as point to tools that will help develop strategies to be successful in grad school regardless of where they are in their program. [https://cgps.usask.ca/orientation/](https://cgps.usask.ca/orientation/)

• Implementation of the newly adopted policy requiring students and faculty complete a student-supervisor agreement effective September 1, 2020 is underway.

  ... approve and institute a new policy which will require students enrolled in thesis-based programs to complete a CGPS Student-Supervisor Agreement in partnership with their supervisor. The agreement must be filled out within the first twelve months of the students’ program and will be treated as a non-course requirement. **Approved unanimously CGPS Faculty 200505**

The new dean has been engaging key campus stakeholders to get a deeper understanding of the university, the colleges and their graduate programs, the funding landscape and the CGPS governance.