

Date: March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear students,

We write to you on behalf of the Whitman faculty to welcome you “back” from Spring Break. This is not the spring semester any of us anticipated. We know that this time did not feel like much of a break for many of you as you reckoned with the seriousness of the pandemic. Many of your plans were cancelled, your daily lives changed in significant ways, and some of you took on new responsibilities. But we have also heard stories of students who are taking on these challenges with courage, thoughtfulness, and concern for others. As you all already know, concern for the health and wellbeing of others in this moment *necessitates* taking measures that distance us from each other (social distancing, social isolation, quarantining). This is hard, because we are, after all, social beings and our need for company and connection is real and sometimes intense. But this is what this moment demands. We hope that you will continue to take all the necessary precautions through the rest of the semester, because that is what will, ultimately, make us collectively healthier. Even as we bemoan your physical absence, we know that we will get through this period by building community from afar.

As you restart classes, we would like you all to keep two things in mind. First, all your professors care deeply about you and your wellbeing and are fully committed to seeing you finish your courses and continue your progress toward the completion of your degrees. All through spring break, your professors having been working tirelessly to revamp their courses to make them online-ready, while homeschooling and taking care of kids, parents, and other family who also depend on their support. We are all excited to “see” you back and are looking forward to intellectually re-engage with you in all the wonderful ways that make a Whitman education so special. Please be considerate toward your professors as they navigate the choppy waters of online teaching. And even more importantly, please put in the best work you can, given the specificities of your current circumstances, by showing up, doing the work assigned, and engaging with your classes to the best of your abilities.

Second, we would like you to keep in mind that your peers are scattered all over the country and the world, facing a variety of circumstances of which you may or may not be fully aware. Some may have spotty internet connections, some may have taken on jobs to support family, and some may be taking care of siblings or ill relatives. All the issues of power and privilege with which we grapple during the school year are magnified in this moment. Please be kind and generous toward your peers, thoughtful in your interactions with them, and reach out (virtually) to others who can use your support. Whitman students are at their best when they stand up for and with each other, and this is a moment that calls out for your very best in all the ways that you have the energy to muster.

Good luck to you through the rest of spring semester. We miss seeing you all in person, in our classes and milling around campus, but we are committed to making the best of what lies ahead in the next few weeks. Together, we can do this.

Barry Balof, Chair of the Faculty  
Shampa Biswas, Chair of the Division of Social Sciences

Rebecca Hanrahan, Chair of the Humanities and Fine Arts  
Kurt Hoffman, Chair of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics