

Subject: Welcome to the Spring Semester

Date: Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 10:49:55 AM Eastern Standard Time

From: Office of the President

To: SRU Stakeholder

Jan. 20, 2022

Dear Campus Community:

For the second time in about a year, I have found myself moved by the words of the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, Amanda Gorman. In a column in today's New York Times, she describes part of her experience at the January 2021 presidential inauguration and shares thoughts on its aftermath. In particular, I was struck by the following paragraph:

"Yet while the inauguration might have seemed like a ray of light, this past year for many has felt like a return to the same old gloom. Our nation is still haunted by disease, inequality and environmental crises. But though our fears may be the same, we are not. If nothing else, this must be known: Even as we've grieved, we've grown; even fatigued we've found that this hill we climb is one we must mount together. We are battered, but bolder; worn, but wiser. I'm not telling you to *not* be tired or afraid. If anything, the very fact that we're weary means we are, by definition, changed; we are brave enough to listen to, and learn from, our fear. This time will be different because this time *we'll* be different. We already are."

Like many of you, I suspect, I find myself starting this semester fatigued by the pandemic and all of the changes that have come with it. When the academic year started, I had hoped that by now, masks and testing would be behind us, hospital bed counts would be an odd memory, and that fear and frustration would have abated. Alas, these things remain and, consequently, we still face regular disruption.

Still, there are reasons to be optimistic. Effective vaccines are readily available in our region. New treatments are emerging. Properly worn masks reduce the spread of the virus. And, the omicron variant is substantially less debilitating or deadly for those who are fully vaccinated and boosted.

I can't tell you for certain how the next few months will play out. If nothing else, this pandemic has proven that crystal balls simply do not exist. I suspect, however, that we will continue to experience sporadic event cancellations. Some course sections will likely be pushed online for a week or two if too many students or faculty members cannot attend in person. In addition, some campus services or offices will probably have to limit their offerings if there are a substantial number of staff members in isolation or quarantine. If these things occur, I ask that we all do our best to learn from the challenges that we have faced during the past two years. We must work to maintain our goodwill and flexibility.

I don't know exactly when, but sometime in the near future, COVID-19 will become simply one of the diseases that our society regularly manages. Until then, I urge us all to heed Gorman's words: let's acknowledge that the experience of the past two years has changed us. And, to the extent possible, let's embrace that change by calling upon the resiliency that the pandemic has helped us to discover within ourselves in order to meet the challenges to come.

Together, let's make this a successful semester.

Best,

William J. Behre, Ph.D.
President