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Welcome back

1 message

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To: Union-Faculty <Union-Faculty@union.edu>

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Faculty colleagues,

Welcome back! I hope your break was enjoyable and refreshing, despite the difficulties of the times. I write today to thank you, once again, for all the tremendous work you do on behalf of our students, your colleagues and the College and to wish you all the best for a successful winter term.

While 2021 promises to get better, its opening continues to present major challenges. In the context of a worsening pandemic, attempts to undermine the results of a free and fair presidential election and the incitement and carrying out of a violent insurrection against key institutions of our democratic system call into acute relief the centrality and vital importance of higher education, and of Union specifically. Our mission of providing a "rigorous, holistic, and immersive residential liberal education that emphasizes integration, innovation, inclusion, and reflection for every student" is essential to the protection and advancement of our core democratic principles and the pursuit of truth, knowledge and understanding. Now, perhaps more than at any time in recent memory, this important work requires wisdom, empathy and courage from all of us as we prepare our students (and ourselves) to make a meaningful difference in a world that desperately needs it. The work we undertake together this winter and spring can, and will, help the College emerge successfully from the current situation and thrive going forward.

As we navigate our way through these challenges, we face both hard tasks and strategic opportunities. Among many important priorities, our budget situation remains very challenging as we face substantial projected deficits for the coming years. We will need to find ways across the College to increase efficiencies and effectiveness, reduce expenditures and raise revenues that protect and advance our mission, vision and goals. On the academic side, I have been and will continue meeting with faculty from the FEC and AAC, and the Planning and Priorities Group is actively engaged at the College level as well. These and broader conversations with faculty and staff will provide crucial input into these difficult decisions continuing through the setting of the comprehensive fee and financial aid budget in February and the overall FY22 budget in May. Navigating this terrain will require both difficult choices and innovative approaches, and I am grateful for the engagement of my faculty colleagues in the process.

The General Education task force (a sub-council of the AAC) continues its good work in developing a proposal for a new GenEd curriculum that advances our strategic goals to ensure that every Union student receives a maximally integrative, innovative, inclusive and self-reflective education, no matter their major. The task force will continue to meet weekly and will remain engaged over the winter term with the general faculty and the AAC as it develops a compelling proposal for a reimagined curriculum, as called for in our strategic plan.

The planning committee for the Templeton Institute for Engineering and Computer Science begins its weekly meetings this term, with its initial introduction to the faculty planned for tomorrow's 1:20pm faculty forum. I'm grateful to Interim Templeton Director Jenn Currey and the rest of the planning committee for their commitment to advance this exciting initiative to strengthen and integrate engineering and computer science at Union.

Several additional priorities will continue to engage our collective efforts, including FRB review and potential revision of our merit system, the adoption of a digital faculty reporting (FAS and merit) tool, revision of the AAC process for recommending the allocation of vacated tenure lines, and others. Stay tuned for further details as these and other emerging initiatives continue to advance.

I appreciate that everyone has been working harder than ever for what may feel at times like fewer returns. I remain grateful for the amazing work our faculty are doing in their teaching, research and service in the face of increased pressures and demands from all sides, both professionally and personally. Thank you all, for all you do.

Best regards,

Strom

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