

Impacts of COVID-19 Disease and Actions Taken by the UW System

Remarks by Board of Regents President Andrew S. Petersen
April 2, 2020

I would like open my President's report by extending my thanks – and that of the full Board – to our System leadership, our Chancellors, Provosts, Chief Business Officers, faculty, staff, and students for their extraordinary support, understanding, and compassion at this highly unorthodox time. Only a month ago, the circumstances we find ourselves in today would have been unthinkable.

I'm afraid it's going to remain a bit rocky for a while. That's probably a huge understatement. But what sustains me is my belief in our shared humanity, our willingness to adapt, and our ability to work together.

Amid all the truly distressing stories that seem to bombard us regularly, I find hope in how our faculty, staff, and students are pivoting – and on extremely short notice – to having their classes delivered by alternative means. I salute all those who have helped to make this happen, allowing us to continue in our primary mission: to educate students.

I also want to commend the above-and-beyond work of so many others who continue to support the University's work – the custodial staff, food service workers, first responders, and a long list of others. Thank you!

It is through this shared commitment that we will get through this – and, I believe, emerge even stronger as a people and as a University system.

To our students, our hearts go out to you. This is not how your university experience is supposed to go. We appreciate your adaptability and your understanding, and I hope – just like in your classes and this meeting – you can continue to maintain strong connections with your friends and

classmates, your professors, and your UW communities through alternative means until we all can meet face-to-face again.

To the Class of 2020 ... You will have heard that traditional commencement ceremonies have been suspended, at least for the time being. This was a very difficult decision, because we know how hard you've been working to reach that apex moment, and how much you and your families were looking forward to it. However, we believe it is the right decision, given the circumstances.

I know each and every UW campus is working to come up with either rescheduled ceremonies or other ways to mark this important celebration that you have certainly earned and deserve. We'll figure this out!

One thing I am certain about is how important each of our approximately 37,000 graduates each year are to the state of Wisconsin and beyond. And never more so than now. We need you. So, early congratulations and thank you!

On behalf of this Board, I would also like to offer special recognition at this time to Student Regent Torrey Tiedeman, who will graduate this spring from UW-Madison. Congratulations, Torrey!

Before turning to other updates, I'd like to say something as both a board member and also as a businessperson. The University of Wisconsin System is one of the state's largest employers – with about 40,000 employees and 170,000 students.

We are a unique and powerful economic engine for the state, with a \$24-billion annual impact on the Wisconsin economy.

To keep the state's businesses and communities strong, it is vital that the UW System and our operations are supported. Simply put, as the University goes, so goes the state.