March 12, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

This coming Monday marks one year since USF pivoted to remote instruction and university operations in the face of COVID-19. Representing a rapid change which, at the time, we expected and hoped would be little more than a temporary disruption to the “normal way of doing things,” we have instead learned to temper our expectations and, perhaps in some of the more challenging moments of uncertainty, we may even have questioned the possibility of a return to more familiar circumstances?

We cannot forget how we felt in the early days of the pandemic as the magnitude of the situation began to unfold. Nor has time made it any easier to comprehend the inconceivable and continued loss of life, the prolonged separation from loved ones, or the economic uncertainty that has followed for so many. While COVID-19 has presented a public health crisis unlike anything we have witnessed in our lifetime, it has also uncovered and intensified long-standing issues of systemic racism and socio-economic inequality, along with the attendant social and political unrest. Indeed, we must recognize that while all of us are grappling with the many-layered challenges presented by the pandemic, the impact and experience for each of us has been uniquely different.

Yet, one year later, together we stand resolute in our commitment as higher education professionals to educate, mentor, and support our students along their path to a successful future. You have done this while continuing to tackle real-world challenges through research, scholarly and creative activity, understanding that even as we seek to make sense of the current crisis, other issues refuse to pause for a pandemic. Your actions have been nothing short of heroic as you have remained dedicated to fulfilling USF’s mission amidst these most extraordinary of times.

Along the way, we have navigated some uncomfortable and occasionally comical blurring of our personal and professional lives, adapted to new technologies, sought novel solutions to deal with our personal feelings, and
those of our students, in regard to isolation and loneliness through creating virtual and physically-distanced opportunities to connect, all while juggling unprecedented and competing demands on our time.

Of course, I know that none of this has been easy. We will continue to face public health challenges in the months to come, and, as we have been reminded, much work remains in addressing our broader societal issues. However, when I reflect on what each of you has managed to accomplish in support of academic continuity, consolidation, addressing budgetary challenges, and so much more throughout the past 12 months, I find myself looking toward the upcoming academic year with a renewed sense of optimism.

I am privileged to be part of an academic community of dedicated professionals and talented scholars who continue to rise to the daily challenges we face while displaying inspirational strength, dedication, and resilience.

What more can I say than thank you for your creativity, flexibility, and fortitude in what has been a most remarkable and challenging year?

Best regards,

Ralph C. Wilcox
Provost & Executive Vice President
University of South Florida