Dear faculty colleagues:

I hope that you and those close to you are safe and well, and that the close of the semester brings rest and rejuvenation. Your efforts this semester to teach and support our students in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic have been exceptional, and you have my deep and enduring appreciation.

Over the last several weeks I’ve had the chance to meet and talk with many of you through a number of venues, from informal faculty coffee hours and meetings with the University Chairs’ Council and Academic Senate Executive Committee to the open forum on May 8, which was sponsored and facilitated by the Academic Senate. I’ve valued the chance to answer questions, share information, and hear your experiences and insights.

With all the uncertainty that we currently face, I want to keep our communication open, direct, and ongoing. I’m writing to share a recap of the themes and topics from those meetings and to invite you to my next open forum on June 1st from 12-1:30 p.m., sponsored and facilitated by the Academic Senate: to register (and send questions in advance), please visit https://sfsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8wx3KTFSH2UiCod

**Fall 2020 planning**

Earlier this month, I wrote to share our planning process for fall 2020, and President Mahoney communicated her expectation that nearly all fall 2020 coursework will be offered through remote modalities. All face-to-face activity will be strictly limited for the sake of health, safety, and feasibility—and subject to the approval of the President, in conjunction with campus facilities and risk management administrators, the Chancellor’s Office, and state and local guidelines. As of Friday May 22, the city of San Francisco remains under a shelter in place order, which must continue to govern our actions: https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Stay%20Safe%20at%20Home%20Health%20Officer%20Order%20FAQs%20Rev%205.22.2020.pdf

We recognize that some programs feature in-person experiential learning, both off-campus and on-campus, or coursework requiring access to specialized spaces, equipment, or materials, and we hope that some exceptions can be allowed for a select few of these in the fall. Possible exceptions for face-to-face delivery were recently proposed by department chairs and reviewed by deans and academic leaders. We need to limit exceptions to those that are critical to student degree completion and can be feasibly carried out in line with strict health and safety guidelines; as a consequence, many of those proposals will not be able to be implemented. Chairs will be notified of the status of their proposals by their deans, whether or not those proposals could be approved for further consideration.

Those approved at this stage are now being reviewed by a university-level planning committee, which will integrate considerations of facilities, student housing and transportation, risk management, and cost. SF State must submit a final list of proposed exceptions to the Chancellor’s Office, which is overseeing all 23 CSU campuses’ plans for the fall. We expect to
receive final confirmation of our face-to-face exceptions in mid-June, when those courses’ faculty and students will be notified and arrangements begun. This is a planning process more complex than most of us have ever done, and your involvement and patience are much appreciated.

We also hope to be able to open some select facilities, studios, and fieldwork sites for student and faculty research, scholarship, and creative activities. Faculty were recently invited to complete a survey of their needs in these areas, which is currently being reviewed by the University Research Council before advancing to further university-level review. Opening facilities of any kind will be complex and costly, given the need for enhanced cleaning and continued physical distancing; in all cases, our priority must be health and safety, along with the wise and balanced use of our scarce resources. For this reason, we expect facilities access to be strictly limited. Along with face-to-face teaching and learning exceptions, plans for access to facilities will be finalized and shared in June.

Given that the large majority of our fall classes will be offered through remote modalities, we are also preparing to support high-quality teaching and learning through a significant investment in faculty development. Informed by 780 faculty responses to their recent survey, the Center for Equity and Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CEETL) will launch a summer faculty development featuring a roster of learning opportunities that carry stipends and the option of certification for participants; please look out for registration, which will open this week. SF State is a recognized national leader in virtual learning emphasizing equitable access, student support, and authentic assessment. Even after the campus re-opens to face-to-face instruction and we return to our classrooms, laboratories, and studios in person, the skills that you develop through CEETL’s summer institute—whether in backwards course design, interactive learning, or trauma-informed pedagogy—will help you grow as a teacher, whatever your chosen modality.

**Budget**

These meetings have also given us a chance to begin an important discussion about our budget. I’m sure that you’re following news about how hard the state of California has been hit by the COVID crisis: dramatic rises in unemployment and health and safety costs, along with equally drastic declines in sales and tax revenues, have depleted the state’s reserves and reduced funds available to higher education. Like other public comprehensive universities, our funding derives largely from our annual allocation from the state, and that funding is directly impacted by the state’s hardships. Two weeks ago the Governor indicated that the CSU should expect a significant cut to our 2020 funding, with the possibility of further cuts in the year or two years ahead.

We will not receive our final budget until fall 2020, which means that we are examining multiple possible scenarios for 2020-21. This spring we instituted a hiring chill and suspended major spending in order to preserve budget flexibility—while anticipating cuts, we don’t yet know how deep or sustained these may be. In the absence of that important information, I have asked the colleges and academic units to engage in flexible scenario planning to envision
several levels of possible cuts. This is to begin to identify areas where cost reductions—in operational expenses, for example, or salary savings from unfilled positions—could help us economize in the short term.

Long-term sustainability, however, will require a deeper analysis of our current activities in light of future resources—and ultimately, a willingness to rethink our current practices and spending in order to protect our core mission. To begin this process, the Academic Affairs Council, which includes the Academic Senate Chair, will be meeting this summer to conduct a close analysis of academic spending. I have also asked incoming Senate Chair Teddy Albinjak to convene the Academic Senate’s Executive Committee this summer in order to participate fully in this effort. I expect this analysis to produce a set of conclusions and recommendations by the end of the summer that can be shared and discussed broadly in fall 2020, once we have our final budget in hand. Transparency and collaboration produce better decisions. Together, I look forward to building a sustainable budget model for Academic Affairs, within the context of the university budget and in line with our priorities and values, that will enable us to pull through the current crisis and emerge stronger than before.

Enrollment and the Course Schedule

Another critical component of our fall 2020 planning is student enrollment. Here again, we project a significant decline but will lack solid enrollment data until later in the summer. We already knew that our enrollment was on a downswing—even before COVID-19, the university received 5,000 fewer applications in 2020 than it had the previous year, following a national downward trend. With the additional volatility of the global pandemic, we predict further loss of enrollment for 2020, though we are hopeful that good planning will help us turn this around in at least some areas.

Given the volatility of enrollment, we have asked programs and colleges to build their fall 2020 schedules around the required courses that students need to make progress and graduate—these should be our highest priorities. We are also asking programs to plan, but hide, other important courses that may be needed if enrollment exceeds the current conservative projections. Chairs and college offices have also been given new tools to help them monitor enrollments and anticipate student need in key areas. As classes fill, chairs will contact associate deans for permission to open additional sections—with the assurance that classes that are critical to student degree progress should be offered. Since we expect fewer students and resources, enrollment caps should not be reduced at this time.

As we plan the fall 2020 schedule to meet student enrollment needs, we need to carefully consider the conditions affecting our lecturer faculty. This time of uncertainty has created special stress for our lecturer faculty. As new sections are opened, we must closely follow Article 12.29 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement to ensure that available work is given to the lecturer faculty to whom it is entitled. Lecturer faculty are among our campus’s most gifted teachers, and their technology and professional development needs have been included in our planning for the summer 2020 teaching institute.
Faculty Health and Wellbeing

We recognize the tremendous pressure our faculty are experiencing. Your job now often requires heroic efforts, while you juggle family and self-care with work responsibilities in a way never before experienced by most of us. The consequence of this situation is higher levels of stress, anxiety, and even trauma – mental health consequences that will be with us for some time. While I can’t pretend that this can be fixed at an institutional level, I do want to share a key resource available to address these mental health challenges, beyond the benefits available through individual insurance plans.

Our campus provides access to “LifeMatters,” a comprehensive wellbeing website. It contains opportunities for emotional assessment and information about coping strategies. It also provides links to topics such as: “Covid-19 Resource Center,” “Emotional Wellbeing,” “Health,” “Substance Use,” “Workplace,” etc. At each link the information is delivered in multiple modalities, including videos, webinars, and articles. I encourage you to take a few minutes to learn what they have to offer: visit mylifematters.com and enter sfsu as your password.

In closing, I want to thank you again for your extraordinary efforts. I’ve never been prouder of our faculty and programs than I have been during this difficult semester, as you’ve rallied to support our students and advance our mission in the face of unprecedented challenges. While we enter an uncertain time ahead, the clarity of our values will enable us to weather the storm. We know that the need for high-quality public higher education has never been greater than it is now and will be in the new world in which we find ourselves. I know that we can meet that need and reaffirm our vision of social justice and educational equity for the future.

Again, I hope to see you at my last open forum of the semester, on June 1st from 12-1:30 p.m. If you have questions you would like to discuss, please send them when you pre-register through https://sfsu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8wx3KTFSH2UiCod. I will send another update following that meeting. And to all, I wish you a peaceful end of the semester.

Best wishes,
Jennifer Summit
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs