Dear colleagues:

Welcome back to the new semester, after what I hope was a restorative winter break. This message shares updates in two critical areas: academic planning for fall 2021 and budget planning for 2021-22 and beyond.

Academic Planning

Given the many unknowns of the COVID crisis, the university’s plans for fall 2021 are still in early stages of development. As you’ve heard, we hope to offer as many in-person classes as we safely can, consistent with health and safety restrictions from the San Francisco Department of Public Health. It is highly unlikely that we will be able to go back to a largely in-person schedule by the fall, however. If the need for social distancing continues, our room capacity will be dramatically reduced, and we will need to limit face-to-face courses to those with a direct impact on student degree progress and success. Courses that faculty continue offering online will free up classroom space for others to be offered in person. These are among the contingencies that must be balanced in our planning.

As planning moves forward, we would like your input: this week you were sent a survey by CEETL inviting you to share your perspective with the university’s planning committee. Your responses will help us as we consider potential scenarios for the fall, as well as build capacity to support your teaching, whether online or in person. While survey responses will be anonymous, planning committee members will follow up the survey by meeting with department chairs in small group discussions that gather more detailed feedback. I hope you will complete the survey and discuss your ideas and concerns about fall 2021 in your departments, so department chairs can bring them to the university's planning committee.

Planning for fall 2021 will be challenging. To allow time, departments will be given an additional month to prepare their fall 2021 schedules, which will be due to the college deans on April 16.

Budget Planning

In my message before the break (archived here), I shared Academic Affairs’ plans to repair a significant budget shortfall precipitated by COVID-related cuts, as well as a structural deficit that makes current operations unsustainable. Those plans began in the summer of 2020, when the Academic Affairs Council and the Academic Senate Executive Committee developed a range of possibilities to realign our costs and our budget (the “Portfolio of Imperfect Options”). Consultations throughout fall 2020 generated feedback from faculty, staff, and administrators, which resulted in the attached Directive Memo on Academic Affairs Budget Realignment that I share with you now. As you will find, the memo details specific actions that academic units will undertake in order to meet our current budget goals and attain long-term fiscal sustainability.

Consistent with the “Portfolio of Imperfect Options,” the directive memo includes both short-term and long-range efforts. This week and next, I will be discussing these with the University Chairs’ Council and Academic Senate, and I expect to work closely with the colleges and academic units this semester and beyond as we plan their implementation. This work requires collaboration, transparency, communication, and support. The Academic Affairs Budget website offers links to previous presentations and messages that supply background to the directive memo; it also shares Frequently Asked Questions and invites feedback and questions, which will be answered directly or added to the FAQ list for future reference.
The challenge of building a sustainable budget is made all the more daunting by the COVID-related uncertainties that we currently face. I know it will take many discussions and a considerable planning effort to reach this goal. But the reward for our work will be the long-term strength of our academic core mission—which is well worth the effort. I look forward to working together toward this end.

With gratitude and respect,

Jennifer Summit
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
San Francisco State University