Dear UW-River Falls Campus Community,

This semester has presented challenges unlike any other. As a campus we have had to develop resiliency under the pressure of maintaining the health and safety of ourselves and our loved ones while continuing to pursue our mission of higher education. We know it hasn’t been perfect. We know that student and employee mental health and emotional wellbeing have also been deeply challenged.

I want to thank each and every one of you for your perseverance and resilience during this unpredictable time. Our amazing faculty and instructors learned and are still learning how best to leverage online teaching methods, especially during our September shelter-in-place and our post-Thanksgiving pivots to offering online-only learning. Our incredible staff and administration took on completely new job responsibilities, invented creative ways to serve and support our students, learned new things about cleaning and sanitation and helped us navigate the difficulties of our institution’s financial reality.

My deepest appreciation goes to our wonderful students: you are why we are here, and we know this wasn’t the semester you’d hoped for. Nonetheless, you have persevered and made it to finals week! Great job, Falcons.

Who would have imagined a year ago that we would have become experts in testing? Since late August, we have administered over 15,000 COVID-19 tests to our students and managed nearly 450 positive cases in collaboration with Pierce County Public Health, including disease investigation, contact tracing, isolation and quarantine. I have been exceedingly proud of how we have kept our positivity rates low, averaging around 1-3%.

Since November, we have also taken up the call from UW System to provide more testing options for our employees and community by starting a surge testing site. At that site, we have administered nearly 4,000 tests to date, and plan to continue operations through mid-January.

As fall semester moves to a close, there is much hope for our future. Plans are already underway for a spring semester that looks better than fall. What “better” means may be subjective, but I can assure you we are striving to provide better ways to connect and engage with others.

We are working with UW System on how best to implement their new spring testing protocols in which students living in the residence halls will be tested once a week, off-campus students who attend any type of activities on campus will get tested once every two weeks, as will all employees working on campus.

Meanwhile, we are refining our “mass clinic” vaccination plan, in cooperation with and under the direction of Pierce County. UW-River Falls is designated as a Point of Distribution for the vaccine doses available to university students and we hope these will become available sometime in mid to late spring.

Students and employees alike have been through a challenging semester and a difficult year, and we know that there is still uncertainty and sacrifice ahead. I am honored to be part of this campus through these times. They say difficult times bring out the best in people. I have surely seen that over the past several months with you.

Stay strong, Falcons, enjoy your holiday break and join me in wishing for a safe and peaceful 2021.
Sincerely,

Connie

Connie Foster, Ph.D.
Interim Chancellor
University of Wisconsin-River Falls