



December 18, 2020

Dear faculty, staff, and students,

Today marks a major milestone in our 2020–21 academic year — one that all of us started planning for back in March. It’s the official end of the fall semester, which included 117 days of in-person, residential education. This achievement was only possible because everyone in the Spider community did their part to help protect our web and move us safely toward our goal. We need to take a moment to celebrate this milestone and how fortunate we have been even as we look forward to the spring semester.

From the beginning, it was clear that following key health and safety guidelines were essential to completing a successful semester. The University adopted a mantra that we all took to heart: Six feet. Mask up. Protect our web.

We now know the careful planning and shared responsibility of our community served us well. Thanks to the thoughtful prevention strategies implemented by our faculty and staff — deep cleaning, reconfigured learning spaces, prevalence testing, and perhaps most importantly overwhelming adherence from all of us to wear face coverings and adhere to physical distancing policies — we have seen no evidence of transmission in our classrooms or other facilities, such as dining locations. These same results are mirrored on many college campuses nationally, which adopted and held fast to similar health and safety protocols.

Our data suggests that several of the positive cases that did occur in our community stemmed from instances of non-compliance with our safety guidelines and were the result of off-campus, social gatherings that violated those guidelines. Even in much larger universities that encountered higher rates of positivity or transmission, links to risky behavior and breaking protocols were most often implicated. We end the semester confident that our prevention strategies have been effective thus far and will continue to be emphasized in the new year.

We are extremely proud of and grateful for our Spider community. And we are optimistic that we will continue to be successful as long as we all continue our shared commitment to the well-being of our community and each other. The arrival of vaccines provides us great hope. But it will be sometime before the vaccine actually begins to have a direct impact on our campus. Our continued vigilance and strict adherence to safety standards must continue. We have been fortunate thus far, but we must remain vigilant through the spring semester. Working together, we are confident that we are up to the challenge.

While we have good reason to celebrate the fall semester, we know this milestone is just half of the academic year. We are actively planning for and excited about the spring semester and will

begin welcoming students back to our campus in January following winter break. Be on the lookout for future messages that contain details about our spring plans.

We know it's been a difficult year, and we applaud all of you for your resilience and helping to keep our community strong during tough times. We hope the winter break will be restful and restorative. Be well, rest, and enjoy your break — safely.

Jeffrey Legro

Executive Vice President and Provost

David Hale

Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer

Shannon Sinclair

Vice President, Chief Counsel, and Resilience Working Group Chair