Some Thoughts on the Past Week: A Message from President Gibralter

Friday, March 13, 2020

Dear Wells Community:

It goes without saying that this has been a week like no other. In the past 48 hours alone, we have witnessed our society come to a near-standstill, in a way that we haven’t seen since 9/11 shook our nation two decades ago. I know that many of you are experiencing heightened anxiety, fear and uncertainty as the coronavirus crisis holds the entire world in its grip.

Wells College and countless other organizations, large and small, are racing to find a way to continue operating and fulfill their missions in light of this rapidly evolving situation. Our faculty are working to find different, innovative ways to deliver their class content and interact with their students, in the event that we cannot resume instruction on March 23 as we still hope to do. Likewise, our staff are working to support the needs of our community in the face of possible inventory shortages, employee absences, and disruptions to our routine.

There is, of course, so much more to figure out, and many more questions to answer in the coming days and weeks. These logistical issues are important, and I do not seek to minimize their significance or their impact. Yet, I think it is important that we all regularly take the time to pause, reflect on what has happened, and make sure that we are taking care of ourselves and each other. When crisis looms, oftentimes the most difficult aspects are not the challenges standing before us—but our own doubts on how we will overcome them.

To our students: I want to acknowledge that there is not a clear or obvious path forward for anyone, at least not at this moment. You may be concerned about family or friends; you may not have adequate access to technology or the internet in your current location; or you may be experiencing additional financial pressure. I am sorry that so many of you will not be able to fully experience the things you were eagerly anticipating this semester. More than anything, I want you to know that you are not alone. Being away from campus in such an uncertain situation can be isolating and distressing. If you need help, ask for it. Reach out to your RA, to the Student Affairs staff, to a professor or fellow student, or to me or my Cabinet. You may have a question that we have not yet anticipated, or a need we are not fully aware of. More than anything, please know that we are here to support you.

To our faculty and staff: I know that the tasks before you are great, and realize that you are not facing them in a vacuum. Many of you are worried about your children’s schools or day care, or your parents’ health, or how your friends and neighbors are coping. I recognize that many of you are experiencing this crisis through the lens of also being a parent, spouse, partner or caregiver. I am enormously grateful for the countless contributions and enormous effort that all
of you are putting into our response to this crisis, helping to meet the needs of our entire community.

Philosopher Francis Bacon once wrote, “Fortitude is the marshal of thought, the armor of the will, and the fort of reason.” We are all, every one of us, working day by day, hour by hour, to get through this. While I cannot make any promises, we are doing everything we can to get back to normal as soon as possible. What that new “normal” will be, however, no one can predict.

As we head into the weekend, I hope that each of you has a chance to get some rest, spend some time with friends or family, and temporarily take your mind off things. It is often said that we stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. But it is equally true that we stand tall with those who walk this journey alongside us. Much has been taken away from us in recent days – but that does not diminish the amount of care, support and love that we continue to show each other as we face the unknown.

Jonathan Gibralter
President