Dear Colleagues,

The 2019-20 academic term is complete, with the exception of the posting of the graduation list and conferral of degrees. It is hard to believe that more than eight weeks have passed since StFX took the steps necessary to finish winter courses via online learning and so many staff and faculty members transitioned to their home offices and work spaces. Upon reflection, it is impossible not to contemplate the scale and scope of work and change that has happened over a short period of time and the remarkable efforts by everyone to shift to a new reality.

In the span of a few weeks, the StFX team moved almost 2,000 students from campus, translated our courses to online and alternative delivery, reworked final assignments and marking schemes, adjusted plans for meetings and large-scale events, created and delivered widespread technical support, created the conditions whereby students who remained could live safely on campus, and countless other monumental tasks, which maintained the operations of the university. All of this was accomplished while you adjusted to new working environments at home against the backdrop of a global health pandemic that has caused unprecedented stress and uncertainty. Added to the pandemic adjustments, a senseless tragedy in Nova Scotia affected all of us. The transition has not been easy and it has not always gone smoothly. But I am heartened by our collective commitment to work together, to help one another, to be flexible, and to care for our students and each other under extremely challenging circumstances. You have maintained the kinds of meaningful relationships that we value at StFX.

There are many challenges that remain. While the majority of our staff members have transitioned to working from home, this has not been possible for everyone. I want to acknowledge those staff members who continue to work on campus. I recognize that these last few months have been particularly difficult for you and I thank you for your dedication.

I also want to recognize the challenges faced by many of our professors. At this time of year, faculty members are normally getting ready to re-focus on research projects and present their work at conferences; but, instead, like many others, their important work is placed on hold and this is frustrating to say the least.

Finally, I want to acknowledge our colleagues who are working from home and struggling to balance their work with personal and family responsibilities or are having trouble adjusting to these challenges. As busy, productive, and successful people, there can be a sense of guilt or discomfort from these working conditions and there are stresses presented by uncertainty and a lack of information about the immediate future. Please take it easy on yourself and try to do
your best under the circumstances. Be sure to take steps to ensure your own wellbeing -- don’t neglect your physical or mental health, and talk to your supervisor if your work is becoming harder to manage. Be sure to access the health supports at your disposal as a StFX employee and do so without trepidation or shame.

Like all of you, I am looking forward to a time when we may all gather again. In the meantime, we will continue our work and begin preparations for classes in September. I’ll have more to say about this later this week. Please be watching for my email.

I thank all of you for your patience, perspective, your compassion, and hard work. I hope to see you soon. In the meantime, stay well.

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