August 31, 2020

Dear Wheelock Colleagues,

Typically, at this time of year, as we ready ourselves for the opening of the semester, I would be brushing the sand from between my toes, getting my school haircut, and writing a welcome back letter to you about the year ahead. The opening of school has always been one of my favorite times of the year. Unfortunately, this is no ordinary year. For over five months we have witnessed our communities struggle with the pandemic, continued horrific violence against Black men and women by law enforcement, divisive rhetoric at many levels of government, and continued disasters linked to climate change. I know many of you have been personally impacted by COVID-19, have participated in protests in support of Black Lives Matter, and are working to figure out how to proceed with the semester in a safe and healthy manner. If you are like me, these events are contributing to a considerable amount of anxiety, anger, and concerns about an uncertain future.

Despite the challenges we face, I believe we have many reasons to be hopeful and grateful that we are together at BU Wheelock. We have one another for support. We also have opportunities ahead of us to continue to shape this new college to make a positive impact on our community and the world. Let me thank you all for your patience as we have worked throughout the summer to implement health and safety standards that will allow us to resume, at least in part, our work as a residential institution while protecting our community. In particular, I am grateful for our leadership team and staff directors who have worked tirelessly to help us categorize everyone for the surveillance testing protocol and have communicated regularly with you about changes to university processes and procedures related to the pandemic. I also want to thank Gleny Burgos for leading the transformation of our facilities to prepare for the Learn from Anywhere model (LfA) and to ensure that we can provide adequate guidance to our students with only a select number of faculty and staff in the building at any given time. I also want to thank Maryellen Madaio and Mariana Stoyancheva for launching our Social Justice Webinar Series enabling us to communicate with an external audience during the shutdown. And, finally, I want to thank Ellen Faszewski, Mary Hughes, Grace Kim, and Jerry Whitmore for their willingness to serve as LfA coaches as we all adjust to a new reality in our teaching.

As we look forward, we have many important projects that continue to require our attention this year. The GuideStar we created last year has led to a detailed draft of our BU Wheelock
Strategic Plan 2020-2030. We will work across the semester to complete and launch implementation of the plan. In concert with the Strategic Plan, we will create and implement an Operational Plan that will build on much of the work that administrative staff have begun to put in place, including prospective budgeting, improved HR practices, and greater transparency in overall policies and practices. Our faculty hiring this year will likely be scaled back due to budget restrictions. However, we intend to grow our faculty consistent with needs identified in the Strategic Plan. We will complete planning on our new undergraduate major and assess the viability and alignment to our GuideStar of several graduate programs to determine ways in which we can attract more students to our college.

I am very pleased with the progress of our faculty and staff in building our research enterprise. Over the past two years, our external funding levels have increased by 53%. Faculty leaders are building centers, institutes and labs that are attracting external funding for research and innovation. Continuing this progress will require ongoing investments in these entities and in the research support we offer to help faculty produce more proposals and better support the awards they receive. Relatedly, we will refine professional development opportunities for faculty, post-doctoral fellows, and doctoral students to ensure that we continue to grow as a research-intensive college. We will also need to expand our collaborative partnerships within Boston University and with the local community to ensure that the questions we are asking matter and that we have adequate methodological expertise to answer them.

Finally, the year ahead will require much from all of us in learning to practice justice and equity, and to humanize our teaching and scholarship. We must hold ourselves and each other accountable for creating a culture of belonging while extending grace as we inevitably make mistakes as we grow. I am grateful that we have experts on our faculty who are eager to help us learn and will lead us to create a better place for everyone to learn and work. The very nature of our work in education and human development offers us the opportunity to directly impact social justice with children, youth, families, and communities who have historically been marginalized.

As we embark on this very different academic year, despite the fears and uncertainty you may be feeling, I urge you to look forward and be hopeful for all that we can become together.

Let's make it a wonderful year!

Yours,

David J. Chard, Ph.D.
Dean ad interim