



UAF news and information

Friday Focus: Some kind of khichdi

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Provost Anupma Prakash prepares khichdi in her kitchen in May 2020. Photo by Tanja Gens.

— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

As I searched for a second dinner in my fridge, I reached out for the leftover khichdi — a popular Indian dish made of rice, different lentils and vegetables all mishmashed together. I looked at it and remarked to myself — that's how this semester made me feel — a mishmash of all kinds of emotions.

There is no other way to say it. Spring 2020 was one rough and bizarre semester.

It has been one that disrupted life as we knew it. We were constantly adapting. With every new COVID-19 mandate from the governor came new guidelines and policies. We worked on plans A and B only to realize that the situation had evolved and we needed plans C and D. We made each plan work to serve our students to the best of our abilities. We proudly shared stories of the incredible creativity, adaptability and resilience of our faculty, staff and students in [recent Friday Focus articles](#). As we continue to celebrate every achievement, I would also like to acknowledge the underlying emotional toll of these trying times.

Sometimes I would start the day ready to cheer up everyone around me, and end the day not wanting to pick up the phone as I did not have the energy to address another issue. There were days I was frustrated with the remote work setup and days when I was grateful for the safety and comfort of the home environment. And I know I was not alone in feeling these difficult emotional swings. Stress, anxiety, fear all manifested in different ways around us. I heard normal tones on Zoom calls change to muffled voices that certainly were not from a cold or a poor internet connection. I saw some colleagues becoming

quieter and some becoming more agitated in their conversations. Though expressions differed, there was one thing in common — we all had plenty on our minds.

Personally, I have been taking out time to deliberately remind myself to be mindful even when the mind is full. Each one of us has a different mechanism for coping and being mindful. Some practice meditation, some walk in the wilderness. I dive into reflective thinking as I cook, pray and practice silence. Regardless of how each of us finds our path to mindfulness, it is important to acknowledge the anxiety, anger, sadness and fears, and let them pass, without obsessing about them or struggling to avoid them.

Just as the mishmashed flavors and textures make khichdi an Indian soul food, there certainly is a deeper reason for our mishmashed emotions. In surfacing our complex emotions, the COVID-19 pandemic has given us the environment and opportunity to think differently, learn, heal and grow. Sometime in the near future, the pandemic will be behind us, but the experiences and the learning will shape us and remain with us. They will become a part of our stories that will continue to be shared by the generations to come. For that learning I am deeply grateful.

Friday Focus is a column written by a different member of UAF's leadership team every week.