



UAF news and information

Friday Focus: Really coming together

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Provost Anupma Prakash speaks at the new-faculty orientation during the fall 2018 semester. UAF photo by JR Ancheta.

— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

Spring 2020 has given the word “change” a whole different meaning. Just in a matter of weeks, the world inside us and around us has changed dramatically, and it has left no one untouched.

In higher academia, our professional lives sync with the rhythm of the academic calendar. Spring 2020 disrupted that rhythm and posed challenges that demanded us to step up in ways that we did not know we could. In just two weeks our faculty and instructional support staff worked together to convert over a thousand courses from a face-to-face offering to an alternate delivery format. That is nothing short of pure magic! Academic policies, which typically take months or years to change, were thoughtfully adapted in a matter of days to better serve our students. Even those who would normally oppose the idea embraced the sophisticated and flexible use of technology to ensure academic continuity. And above all, our students showed a level of adaptability and

resilience that is unprecedented.

In the last week, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit Interior Alaska, I saw our university community really coming together in many other ways. Our engineers and entrepreneurs found innovative solutions to meet the supply needs for personal protective equipment. Microbiologists volunteered to work in the labs to support COVID-19 testing. Counseling students took on additional responsibilities for telecounseling. Staff in the facilities, police and fire services raised the bar higher for safety and compliance. Residence Life staff put their fears at bay in order to help the students who needed to move back to their hometowns at short notice. Individuals made runs to grocery stores to drop supplies to colleagues who were unwell. Anonymous alumni donated to student support funds. And numerous informal virtual groups were formed to support community well-being, be that in the form of reading circles, yoga and meditation groups, or simply chat groups to simulate a sense of normalcy. The surge of support from all fronts is humbling and uplifting at the same time.

I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to serve in a leadership position in this turbulent time. It has extended my capacity to absorb and process information faster in moments of crisis.

It has made me more aware and empathetic to individual needs of the rich and diverse community we are a part of. And, it has revived my appreciation for simple acts of kindness. I do not know what the landscape of higher academia will look like globally in the coming academic year. However, I do know that we will continue to find creative solutions and build the needed resilience in our education system and this crisis has extended us an opportunity to really come together to do so.

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