

A Message from Dean Sniegowski

4.20.20

Hello College students, this is Dean Sniegowski speaking to you from the study in my family's home in Media, PA.

The College's first and foremost hope is that you and those you know and love are well. Please know that our deepest thoughts and prayers are with those of you who are ill or have loved ones who are ill with COVID-19, and with those whose families have lost someone or have otherwise fallen on hard times during this crisis.

I wanted to reach out to all of you and offer some perspectives as the end of this extraordinary semester draws near. Of course, nobody has all the answers we want right now about the future; but I hope that what I have to say can provide you with some reassurance in this uncertain time.

As hard as this semester has been, we need to see it through to the end. The College is pulling for all of you to finish strong in these next weeks as classes end and we go through reading days and finals. Keep believing in yourselves! I hope you all look back on this time many years from now and say to each other, "yeah, it was tough, but we got through it!"

Now, I know that many of you are considering taking one or more courses P/F this semester, and I wanted to give you some perspective on how to think about your P/F choices. First, the practical details: remember you will need to decide which, if any, courses you will take P/F by April 29<sup>th</sup>. Remember that you can take any course P/F this semester, including those counting for the general requirement and requirements in the majors and minors, and that courses taken P/F this semester do not count toward the total number of P/F courses you can take during your undergraduate years here.

The expanded P/F option was put in place to help students who, for any reasons, are having difficulty with the remote learning experience this semester. When considering whether to take courses P/F—as with all important choices, I'd say—it's a good idea to consult more than one source of advice: instructors, advisors, informal mentors, parents, and classmates all can help you get different views of the matter that are valuable. Once you have heard these different voices, though, remember that it's *your* choice.

And here are some things to consider:

For any given course, how well has it been going, both before and after spring break? Remember that a B is a very good grade, so if you have good reason to think you are in B territory or better in a course, certainly consider keeping that grade.

Be honest with yourself, and be confident in your individual choices about P/F. Everyone in the world of higher education and those who employ college graduates—and this includes medical schools, law schools, and graduate schools—knows that this semester has been an extraordinary exception to business as usual. These institutions *expect* to see P/F grades from this semester; they will not be surprised at all to see them on your transcript.

Remember, too, that this spring is but one out of eight semesters you will have spent as an undergraduate; professional schools, graduate schools and employers all know to look holistically at your other seven semesters of achievement and engagement in assessing your applications.

So, to summarize on P/F: consult multiple sources of perspective and think it through carefully, but then decide knowing that everyone understands this is an extraordinary and exceptional semester. And once you've made your choices, do your best to leave it behind you and look ahead.

Well, I know that one big source of anxiety for all of us these days is what the fall will look like at Penn and other universities and colleges. I'm sure that, like me, you are following the news closely and hoping for a clear view of things through the swirling fog of information. I can tell you that every day I hope and pray things will be completely back to normal for the fall semester, but I also try to temper that hope with realism.

To date, there is no set timeline for a decision about exactly how the fall semester will go here at Penn. It still depends on how the pandemic develops in the coming days and weeks. Many different scenarios are being discussed and carefully considered. My best advice is to think as you would have anyway about the fall: ask yourself where your interests lie and what your academic priorities are, and register for the courses that fulfill those criteria, as you would normally. There will be time to make changes if it becomes necessary.

Of course, some of you will not be returning in the fall but will be graduating this spring into a world that is dramatically different from what you expected as recently as January. To our extraordinary senior class, let me say that the College, and the University, are so disappointed that we cannot give you the same big celebration this spring as every spring as you leave here for the next phase of your lives. This really hurts, I know; and it hurts not only our students, but our faculty, staff and administrators who so look forward to seeing the proud, happy faces of graduates and their friends and families in Franklin Field, on College Green, and in the many departmental celebrations of majors and their achievements. As President Gutmann has promised, the University will welcome you back for a big celebration in person next year sometime. In the meantime, seniors, please know that our hearts are full for you, and we will post a virtual, online celebration of your extraordinary class and its achievements and promise when graduation day comes around. We know that there is no way this can take the place of walking in graduation in-person, but we hope it will at least let you know the depth of our love and appreciation for *all* of you in this extraordinary time.

At the risk of getting overly philosophical here, I'd like to conclude with a perspective from an old friend and neighbor of my family who passed away many years ago. She was a widow in her 80s and had lived through a lot: the Great Depression, World War II, and the sudden death of her husband in his forties. Though she never remarried, she was one of the happiest and kindest people I have known. I asked her once how she kept her perspective on things. She said, in so many words, that she always tried to have at least one thing to look forward to: that thing might be as small as the dinner she was planning to cook that night, the radio show on jazz that she listened to each day, or her garden's progress through the season; or it might be one of the bigger joys in life that are less predictable. But always something.

I admit it's not easy to have things to look forward to, these days. But I thought I'd pass her example along, with the hope that we all can keep looking forward to good things both small and big as this spring passes by.

From all of us in the College, stay well and stay hopeful this spring! Better days are ahead.