

Dear Faculty, Staff and Students,

Every family looks forward to significant milestones in the lives of their love ones. I personally remember the excitement and pride as my own children advanced through their educational journeys. They were so proud as they joined their fellow kindergarten class in walking through the gymnasium with paper mortar boards balanced on their heads; followed by elementary, high school and college graduations that continued to open doors to their future.

At Midwestern University our students look forward to many key events. White Coat ceremonies are very significant to our first year students, as they are welcomed into the health care professions and begin their journey. Along their journey they experience many special events, while they are taught, mentored and encouraged to fulfill their dreams. Each milestone along the journey is important; however, without a doubt, one of the most significant events in the lives of our Midwestern University students is graduation. Not surprisingly, one of the questions I have been asked most frequently during the past two weeks is, "What about 2020 Commencement plans?"

The COVID-19 Response Team met today to discuss this critical question. We came to a difficult decision as outlined below.

Commencement is one of the most, if not the most, special and cherished events we host each year. I truly love seeing our Midwestern University family come together to celebrate the academic accomplishments of our extraordinary students. It is an important opportunity for me to personally thank every graduate for being a member of Midwestern University and entrusting us with their dreams. I enjoy seeing their families brimming with pride as they participate in this solemn yet celebratory ceremony. I know we have guests from around the world travel to attend our commencement events. It is personally rewarding to watch our graduates and their faculty proudly walk together into our Auditorium during the Processional wearing their regalia, with *Pomp and Circumstance* playing in the background. It is a special moment hearing our students' names as they walk across the stage, and seeing them participate in the Recessional as new health care professionals.

That being said, it is with an especially heavy heart that I write to inform you that all of our Spring, 2020 Commencement Ceremonies, which would have taken place between May 20 and May 29 on both of our Campuses, must be conducted online. Given the advice we are receiving from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, other public health officials, and our own faculty, many of whom are experts in infectious disease, epidemiology, and virology, it is difficult to imagine that we would be able to safely hold large gatherings this Spring. I know you, your family and your friends need to make plans soon, and I thought it would be best to provide guidance to all of our 2020 graduates now. Please begin notifying your loved ones about this change. I can only imagine how upsetting this announcement is for our graduates, and their families and friends who were eagerly waiting to celebrate their accomplishments.

I fully understand that no virtual gathering can possibly match the splendor and solemnity of our usual commencement ceremonies; however, under the exceptional and trying circumstances we are facing, I have made the decision that we will all come together online in May, on a date to be announced soon, so I can congratulate you and confer your degrees. The delivery of your cap and gown, graduation program and the actual diplomas will be made through the mail; specific details about the official degree dates will be communicated soon.

We are also exploring opportunities to host an in-person celebrations for the Class of 2020 sometime later, once we know it is safe to bring people together again. By then, we will be eager not just to celebrate our graduating students, but also to recognize and acknowledge the sacrifices that so many of them have made to ensure the well-being of our communities.

I wish we could give a firm date for both the online and future in-person celebration today. I want to thank each of you for your understanding during these unprecedented and challenging times. When we are finally able to host a commencement celebration for the Class of 2020, I know it will be a joyous event.

To all of our faculty, staff and students who are saddened by this news, please remember the quote by Philosophy Rumi, "Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes around in another form."

Be well. Thank you for your understanding and support.

Dr. G.