A message from Dean Ira Solomon: Unprecedented Times

March 31, 2020

The past several weeks has been, for all of us, a period of unprecedented disruption and uncertainty. As we here at the Freeman School have settled into our second week of delivering classes remotely, I wanted to take a few moments to give you a brief update.



Let me begin by expressing my sympathy to everyone affected by COVID-19. The health and safety of our community is paramount, so please take care of yourself and know that we are keeping you in our thoughts.

I also wish to thank those of you on the front line in the fight against this pandemic — the doctors, nurses, first responders, hospital and nursing home staff, and others who are risking your lives to protect all of us. We owe you an immense debt of gratitude.

The rapid escalation of the novel coronavirus outbreak took much of the world by surprise. While our crystal ball is no better than anyone else's, I am proud to say that we anticipated potential disruptions to our operations early on and took action. In early February, for example, we made the decision to move the start of our one-year master's programs from June to August to allow for potential impacts from

COVID-19. As the situation evolves, we will continue to evaluate our options and adjust accordingly.

On March 11, we and our alliance partners at the Idea Village reluctantly canceled New Orleans Entrepreneur Week (NOEW 2020). This series of events would have brought thousands of attendees to the city during the last week of March. Our decision was so difficult because we had put together a fabulous lineup of speakers and presenters, but the safety of the community was and is our utmost concern.

That same day, Tulane University made the decision to send all students home and transition to online instruction for the remainder of the semester. For a school that prides itself on delivering a high-touch, highly interactive classroom experience, this change could have been a disaster, but I couldn't be prouder of how our faculty and students have responded. Our faculty adapted their courses to this new learning environment quickly, seamlessly and with great enthusiasm, and based on the initial reports I've heard, students are enjoying this new way of interacting. By and large, I believe they understand the situation and are happy to have the opportunity to continue — or complete — their degree requirements without interruption.

A few students with special circumstances were given permission to remain on Tulane's campus for the remainder of the semester as long as they observe social distancing protocols. To ensure their safety, we are carefully monitoring the density of the student population inside the Goldring/Woldenberg Business Complex. Access to the building is currently limited and security personnel are making sure that students do not congregate in groups.

While we may be doing things a little bit differently for the foreseeable future, I want to assure you that we are continuing to operate at a high level and to deliver an outstanding learning experience. Challenges often lead to innovation, and in that respect, our own Albert Lepage Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation truly lived up to its name. When the pandemic necessitated the cancelation of this year's in-person Tulane Business Model Competition, the center reorganized the event into an online competition. Instead of pitching their ventures in person at NOEW, this year's semifinalists and finalists presented their ventures and interacted with judges via Zoom. Virtually everyone involved in the competition, which you can read more about here, told me this was an especially valuable and gratifying experience.

As we approach our third week of online instruction, I’m hearing similar stories of innovation and ingenuity from across Tulane. While working away from campus, I participate in regular, even daily, meetings with President Fitts and Tulane’s senior leadership team, and I spend much of my day in Zoom meetings and on conference calls with faculty and staff as we continue to prepare for the 2020-2021 academic year.

COVID-19 represents a challenge unlike any we’ve seen before, and the word unprecedented clearly fits. I, however, am optimistic that the challenges we as a society are facing will stimulate a wave of innovations that will help to control this public health emergency and leave us better prepared to take on future such public health emergencies. The next four to six weeks clearly will be difficult, but if we all heed the advice of public health experts, the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel should start to be visible.

– *Ira Solomon, dean*