Good afternoon and welcome to the November 2020 University Senate Meeting.

This past weekend, I decided to take a quick one-night getaway to my hometown in SW Michigan. I haven’t been there in a while due to COVID.

Much of my family still lives there. I stayed in my childhood home….Hotel Nichols….which was a little strange because the hotel left my family maybe 10 or more years ago. I had an opportunity to speak with the new owner (masked up and distanced of course) and share stories and history about the people who stayed there over the years. It was a fun trip down memory lane, especially perfect given that Thanksgiving is just 10 days away.

In the before times, I have always looked forward to thanksgiving. My 2 older kids who are grown and (mostly) successfully launched into the world come home and spend time with me and my 2 younger kids. We cook a ton of food. We watch Star Wars and Lord of the Rings marathons. We eat all the things for 3 days straight. We play games. We hang out. The house is noisy and chaotic.

My kids look forward to the turkey transforming into Jon Snow and doing a little dance. I love it. During the current times, living through a pandemic means not being able to gather with all of my family. Only those who have been in the bubble with me. So going to Michigan for a night and visiting childhood haunts and waving and shouting hello to my parents through the glass, even for just a few minutes, was incredibly meaningful and re-energizing for me. My parents are older and not in the best health, so I couldn’t give them a hug or really talk to them for very long (that big nasty storm that came through yesterday was just hitting as I got to their house, so the wind and rain were pretty awful).

I was reminded as I walked through the hotel that, as a kid, when things were rough and my parents were not around, I would often turn to books or to TV. We didn’t have access to a lot of TV channels (no cable). I mostly watched PBS…which is probably why my research has been focused on studying media,

Like Cookie Monster….and whether kids who watch Cookie Monster waiting to eat cookies can themselves wait to eat their own cookies! [click 1 time on slide 5]. And yes they do…12.5 minutes vs. just 8 minutes for those who didn’t watch cookie wait.

My 5-year-old self LOVED Mr. Rogers. I absolutely loved him, and still do. While I was never fortunate enough in my own work to meet him, I did get to meet some of the other actors and to shoot a TV talk show episode in his studio in Pittsburgh. The actors were as wonderful as I imagined them to be, by the way.

What I loved about Mr. Rogers

[slide 7]
is that no matter what, he made you feel you were important and valued for who you were. These were powerful words for a little girl to hear. And today, his words continue to be powerful and perhaps more important than ever to hear. He was also able to remind us that there are good people around us, particularly when things have been as challenging as 2020 has been. His mother told him when he was scared as a little boy from what he heard in the news to “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.” Many of us have been that this semester, the helpers. Trying to help our students, our families, others navigate this difficult time.

Thank you to everyone who completed our 4th senate survey (including the one of you who said you coped with these difficult times by “Ignoring the Purdue University Senate”…given your sentiment, I especially appreciate that you still filled it out).

[slide 8]

Last month, I shared results regarding our well-being prior to the start of classes. There were definitely signs of burnout among faculty and graduate students.

[click one time on slide 8]

These well-being questions were included again on this survey as well as some new ones indicated by the stars and burnout has not only deepened among faculty and grant students but also spread to staff and undergraduates. Across nearly all indicators, there has been a decline of between 10-40 percentage points in how true these statements were of us. This is, of course, not surprising. All of us are under tremendous pressure, stress, and anxiety. How could we not be?

But, while we are struggling, we are also responding and doing what we can to live, and work, and accomplish what we need to do. As you already know, I love Mr. Rogers. In revisiting his book “You Are Special”,

[slide 9]

I think this captures perhaps the spirit of our collective Purdue community:

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say ‘it’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes.”

[click once on slide 9]

Over 93% of us, when asked if what we were doing was worthwhile, responded that yes, it is always or sometimes true that all of this is worthwhile. I think that is a powerful statement about who we are. I know I have struggled from time to time to remember this.

To remember that empathy and compassion and gratitude and thankfulness are profoundly powerful aspects of our humanity.

Certainly, we have work to do. We need to make sure we are protecting everyone who comes to campus or who support those who come to campus: from those in dining services to those who provide child care, from our graduate students to our undergraduate students, from faculty teaching this semester to staff who keep Purdue running. We need to make sure that those who are sick or become
sick receive excellent medical care and do not become burdened with substantial debt as a consequence.

[slide 10]

We need supports and resources for our entire community that truly conveys we are all worthwhile. We all have value. We all contribute substantially to the success of Purdue.

These are all issues and concerns you have raised by completing our senate surveys. We thank you for your many thoughtful and detailed responses. We read them all and we share them all to advocate on your behalf.

[slide 11]

In our last survey, we wanted to end on a positive note by asking you how you are coping with stress this semester. In a quick analysis of what you wrote, key themes that emerged were spending time with family, exercising, working from home, going outside, walking, connecting with others. Perhaps we might be able to find some creative ideas to further support everyone.

[slide 12]

Your coping responses would also suggest that a neighborhood liquor delivery van might be welcomed...I’m not sure which Senate standing committee might take that up and explore as a possible resolution.

[slide 13]

I leave you with one last Fred Rogers-ism:

“How great it is when we come to know that times of disappointment can be followed by times of fulfillment; that sorrow can be followed by joy; that guilt over falling short of our ideals can be replaced by pride in doing all that we can; and that anger can be channeled into creative achievements…”

Here’s to the creative achievements, the innovations, and the giant leaps ahead of us.

[slide 14]

It is my hope that you all can enjoy some much needed relaxation in a safe and healthy way. Thank you for all that you do and all that you have done over the summer and throughout this semester.
Thanksgiving turkey dressed as Game of Thrones’ Jon Snow
The Power of Media

Cookie Monster
Wait Time
12.54 minutes

#CONTROLMESELF
Imagine Your 5-Year-Old Self
“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

—Fred Rogers
My supervisor shows that they genuinely care about my well-being

In general, I feel what I am doing when working is worthwhile

I can work productively in my current environment

Purdue has addressed key areas of concern in relation to COVID-19

I generally feel positive about Purdue’s efforts with regard to COVID and the fall semester

I am confident I can make progress in my career/goal aspirations at Purdue

Most days, I can accomplish all I need to do during my normal working hours

I feel equipped to manage both personal and work life demands right now

I have found meaningful ways to stay connected with colleagues regardless of working on campus or remotely

During these challenging times, I feel able to bounce back as quickly as I normally would

I am able to effectively switch off from work to make time for rest

I am spending enough quality time interacting with others
We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say “It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem. Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes. - Fred Rogers

63% of us believe it is true that what we are doing is worthwhile; another 30% say that this is sometimes true.
The world needs a sense of worth, and it will achieve it only by its people feeling that they are worthwhile.
What have you found to be helpful or useful in coping with stress and anxiety this fall?
Fred Rogers, Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood

I like you just the way you are.
THANK YOU
STAY SAFE AND HEALTHY