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Members of the Wharton Community –

Across the country, colleges and universities have begun sharing plans for resuming operations this coming semester after months of uncertainty brought about by COVID-19. President Gutmann’s [recent statement for Penn](#) details our University’s current thinking on needed health and safety campus procedures, while also pledging to sustain “*teaching, learning, research and service.*” By balancing a commitment to the student experience and caution for their community’s safety, institutions will usher in a new academic year amid the lingering effects of the global pandemic. It is within this context that I feel it necessary to provide perspective on Wharton’s approach for fall 2020.

I also recognize this is my first formal communication to you as Dean of the Wharton School. Under normal circumstances, I would use this time to offer heartfelt thanks for your warm welcome and share my goals for the first months of my tenure. While that is still needed, priority must be placed on communicating how Wharton can evaluate the complicated decisions around fall instruction to ensure we continue delivering exceptional academics, impactful research and an engaging student experience. It is also true that navigating Wharton through this ever-shifting situation will remain a focus of mine – and in many ways the entire school – for the foreseeable future. For those reasons, a formalized foundation can

assist us as we strive to provide excellence while creating a safe environment for all.

Guiding Principles

One of my formal areas of academic study is crisis leadership, where a key to managing in turbulent times is the development of principles to frame an organization's planning and execution. In recent days, I've worked with Wharton faculty and staff to outline an agreed upon set of guiding principles to advance our collective efforts for the fall. These principles should be a litmus test for evaluating the viability of new ideas and initiatives, as well as a reminder of our commitment to the entire Wharton community during this process. They include:

- Maintaining the safety and well-being of Wharton faculty, students, and staff above all else, **no matter the changing global circumstances**
- Facilitating access to all coursework, **no matter a student's unique situation**
- Ensuring academic and co-curricular content is developed to be student-centric, **no matter the delivery mode**
- Executing with operational excellence that aligns with the values of the Wharton School, **no matter the executional complexity**

These simple but important statements should be embraced by all as we work to welcome students, faculty and staff back to campus. They will also be vital as we develop necessary contingency plans, should future restrictions or guidelines make such shifts necessary. Though at present our focus is on the fall, our principles also should acknowledge the possibility of the virus' continued presence, and the need for any resulting approach to be sustainable through changes that may affect spring and beyond.

With these principles in place, faculty and staff are empowered to assess instruction options and elevate those that best showcase the exceptional quality of the Wharton experience. To offer options utilizing both in-person and virtual academic instruction, Wharton will employ a hybrid delivery model we are calling “Remote Plus”.

Remote Plus Model

Our instructional model must ensure that students who are unable to return to campus (for example, those affected by travel limitations, or those having health conditions) as well as students who prefer to remain off-campus for personal reasons, are able to remotely access their classes through online delivery. Further, in accordance with prevailing health & safety guidelines, Wharton anticipates the need to deliver all large courses virtually during the fall semester. This means Wharton classes with more than 48 students will be conducted online, while classes with 48 or fewer students may be offered in a hybrid format, with students alternating between in-person and virtual attendance and no more than 24 students in-person at any given time. For those classes under 48 students, Wharton faculty will evaluate each class on its viability for in-person instruction. Once determined, available in-person classes will be communicated to students through their program offices for registration. Delineating courses in this manner provides us needed flexibility to respond to social distancing and group gathering guidelines as they are dictated by government and University regulations. Conducting large courses remotely decreases density within our classrooms and hallways, and also allows us to reimagine the utilization of large classrooms to accommodate smaller group sessions. Overall, applying such considerations

are imperative for maintaining the health and safety of the Wharton community.

Remote Plus also speaks to the way we will blend our remote and on-campus experiences, which will leverage the distinct opportunities our size, network and community affords us. Across our degree programs, we will work to identify meaningful academic programming conducive to small group settings, in complement to remote coursework. Academic department chairs will work with faculty to develop, adapt and structure coursework that adheres to this model, while program leadership is adjusting existing programming and creating new chances for personal and professional engagement. By finding the intersection of viable face-to-face instruction and impactful points of student/faculty connectivity, we commit to prioritizing both our community's ongoing safety and our steadfast belief in the importance of the Wharton student experience. I have the utmost confidence in our faculty and staff's ability to bring the Remote Plus model to fruition, and that it will represent an offering that wholly underscores Wharton's global distinction.

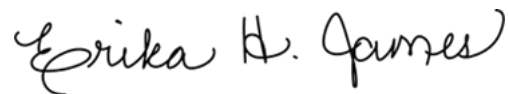
Community Commitment

The above principles and proposed academic method constitute Wharton's philosophical approach to the fall. Yet they require support across our entire community, and agreement on how we will bring this approach to life. I am encouraging faculty to design coursework that is engaging and edifying across all modes of delivery. I am inviting staff to creatively consider how to connect with students so the power of our incredible community is felt as we bring Wharton to the world. And lastly, I am asking students to continue extending patience to everyone working tirelessly to make this new model a reality. I know

you understand that we want nothing more than to be able to provide concrete answers about the coming semester. Yet the evolving situation requires us to operate with fluidity, and even beyond that, with an eye towards extending grace to all involved.

Despite the uncertainty, I know Wharton is prepared for the challenge that lies ahead of us. Though I cannot guarantee an outcome, I can confidently say there is no business school better equipped to survive – and thrive – in these challenging times.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erika H. James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "E".

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