May 29, 2020

To all members of the Menlo College community:

I hope this finds you and your loved ones well and staying safe in this difficult time. The pandemic that is still raging around the globe is unprecedented, and we’re all grappling with the best way to respond as we anticipate the months ahead. I write to share with you how we’re doing here at Menlo, and to describe our expectations for returning to face-to-face classes on September 8, 2020.

We concluded our spring semester earlier this month, and by the time the last class was held, most everyone was feeling the loss of the interpersonal interactions that are only possible with a residential campus. However, all that I witnessed in recent months fills me with pride and admiration. The Menlo College community demonstrated our ability to respond to the moment this past semester. When the pandemic broke, we successfully pivoted in order to quickly deliver an interactive online education and to provide a safe harbor for those of our students who did not have the option to return to their homes. My thanks go to everyone who is part of Menlo – students, faculty, staff, families, alumni, and trustees -- who joined together to support our students and fulfill the College’s educational mission during this extraordinarily difficult time.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the upcoming fall semester – and likely the immediate semesters to follow – will differ in significant ways from life as we knew it before the pandemic. We are, though, committed to doing everything possible to allow for the safe reopening of our campus. We are closely following the guidance issued by the CDC, the State of California, as well as the San Mateo County Public Health Department. When we reopen, we will follow the recommendations of those agencies that serve to prioritize the safety of our students, faculty, and staff.

What will the fall semester look like? We don’t fully know, as the course of the virus, the development of rapid testing, and the protocols for most effectively ensuring the safety of communities are all evolving. At a minimum, though, we will have in place health screenings, more hand sanitizer stations, broadly-disseminated best-practice protocols, signs to remind every member of our community about their personal responsibility, and educational material to ensure everyone is equipped with the latest information. We will also promote social distancing where appropriate, reduce the number of people allowed in a given space at any one time, and provide protection barriers to limit the possibility of viral spread. We also expect to have the test-trace-quarantine capability to stop any outbreak in its tracks.
Despite all our efforts to prepare for our students to return to campus this fall, we are mindful of the fact that travel restrictions and/or underlying medical conditions will nonetheless preclude the on-campus participation of some members of the Menlo community. We therefore also plan to offer remote access to all of our classes throughout the fall semester. Thus students will have the option to elect to participate remotely for some or all of the time, as conditions merit.

In every semester of our 93-year history, the majority of Menlo’s students have lived on our campus. The residential experience is a core aspect of our mission. By bringing people together on our special campus, we provide a transformative aspect of the Menlo education – one that complements the education that takes place in the classroom, in the library, on our beautiful quadrangle, on the athletic fields, in the gym, and elsewhere. We are social beings, and we all benefit from interactions with other people. The Menlo community is particularly beneficial, given the mix of people from different backgrounds and perspectives that come together on our campus. As we look forward to the fall and beyond, the importance of once again offering the opportunity of full engagement with each other is of paramount importance to us.

I am confident in our ability to make the changes necessary for Menlo College to continue to flourish. This is a special place, and it is worth the extra effort now required to ensure that we come through this challenging time and emerge stronger and more resilient. Given the chaos we are now facing in our economy, but more broadly, in our society, a college education is more important than ever. Beyond the need for a four-year degree in order to be competitive in the job market, we need creative thinkers with strong skill sets to be change makers as we rebuild. Helping young people assume those roles has been a hallmark for Menlo College, and I’m determined to ensure it will continue to be so for many years to come.

It is often said of the people in the United States that we are a diverse community, joined more by a common future than we are by common pasts. That statement also reflects the microcosm that Menlo College represents. We gather people from all walks of life, from all corners of the world, and unite them by a shared future of opportunity. I look forward to seeing that future potential on display on our campus this coming fall.

My heart goes out to everyone who is experiencing pain and disruption as a result of the spread of the coronavirus.

Sincerely,

Steven A. Weiner
President