



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

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A Healthy Return

Dear Colleague,

As we return to campus, I find myself excited by the possibility of a new academic year. This year feels different than the last few for sure: the city is feeling increasingly alive and full as more commuters return. The landscape around Drexel is visibly changing as the Spark Therapeutics building rises on the old F lot, Schuylkill Yards takes shape, and we see our own new science building going up.

I am also more aware than ever of the changes in higher education and on our campus. As I have [written before](#), we are facing both a demographic cliff and unprecedented questioning of the value of higher education that is affecting enrollment models and the overall landscape of higher education. Artificial Intelligence and Chat GPT have brought unprecedented changes to every aspect of teaching and learning. We are just beginning to understand how this technology will change the very nature of faculty work, both how we teach and what we teach. Closer to home at Drexel, we will be engaging in [feasibility assessments](#) as we consider the recommendations of the University Advisory Committee (UAC) on Academic Structure. Post-pandemic, our students are returning to us less prepared academically. They are often struggling with overload and mental health issues, creating new challenges for faculty work. So much change in such a short time is a lot to process and can contribute to feelings of precariousness and uncertainty. Determining how to manage through these changes is critical to our own well-being as well as that of our students.

As [this article](#) from Forbes points out “our brains hate uncertainty.” We perceive “ambiguity as danger because we are wired to survive.” Uncertainty at work can be particularly difficult to manage. Starting the academic year with a plan to address the challenge posed by the turbulence around us and tapping into available resources can help us and our students to start the year on the right foot. There are resources available on the [Faculty Advancement website](#) that we can use for our own benefit or to assist colleagues or students in distress. We also have access to valuable supports through our institutional membership in the [National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity](#), such as the webinar on [Managing Stress in Stressful Times](#) that directly addresses the impact of stress on our work and provides actionable suggestions for managing in these uncertain times. The speakers highlight the crucial role of sleep and rest as well as [mindfulness meditation](#). Drexel has a [weekly meditation](#) group and there are many resources available to support this activity. I have found even small doses of mindfulness meditation to be very helpful in managing my stress and anxiety and use the app from the [UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center](#) that has several guided meditations of varying lengths. We also have new resources (a [Teaching Tip](#) and [Workshop](#) as well as a new [Academic Integrity Pertaining to Artificial Intelligence](#) policy) dedicated to helping navigate Artificial Intelligence. Myriad student supports can be found at the [Academic Resource Center \(ARC\)](#) and through [Student Life](#). Faculty, who are in weekly and daily contact with students, are often in the best position to notice trouble brewing and direct students to resources.

Uncertainty is going to be a part of our landscape for a while. We have little ability to control world events or titanic changes in the higher education landscape. Being aware of resources available to navigate these changes for ourselves and our students is helpful. Whatever technique or practice you use, finding ways to care for ourselves, and manage our own emotions and behaviors is something we can do to make each day a little

better and pointing students in the direction of enhanced resources and supports is also an important part of our work.

Wishing you a healthy return to campus!

Erin

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