

Sept. 11, 2017

Dear friends,

The beginning of any new academic year always brings excitement. I love seeing students and faculty members return to campus—and welcoming those who are just beginning their DU journey. I hope many of you are sharing my sense of excitement, anticipation and joy as we begin the fall quarter and prepare for another productive academic year.

Still, like many of you, my heart is heavy with many of the realities facing us and our world. Last week, we experienced the tragic loss of one of our own first-year students. Around the nation and world, we are seeing natural disasters, political discord, violence and hatred. During times like this, when hopefulness clashes with despair, I find myself reflecting on our purpose—individually and as an academic community.

Universities like ours make meaningful contributions to the global public good through the creation of knowledge—through research, scholarship and creative work that enhance our understanding of the world now and into the future and help solve society's problems. As Dean Andrei Kutateladze said in our summer Commencement address this year, an academic community engages in critical thinking and the scientific method: we listen to each other, challenge ourselves with new perspectives and information, process, analyze and synthesize. We empower students to learn and grow academically and personally—and as alumni, they go on to build and lead communities and organizations around the globe. And we partner throughout the region and world in mutually beneficial ways—transforming our communities in partnership with our neighbors.

The University of Denver invests in the flourishing of everyone—our students, faculty members and staff, as well as our alumni, neighbors and friends. We strive to be noble and honorable in an age where such aspirations seem to be in question.

How can we achieve such a lofty goal? We won't achieve it by simply being a place of tolerance. We strive for more. DU is a place of acceptance, compassion, respect and love. One of the meanings of respect is to admire the other. And one of the most important definitions of love is to let other individuals, no matter who they are, make an authentic claim on our understandings and on our hearts.

The U.S. experiment in democracy remains, as John Dewey said, "the task before us." Despite great advances in recent decades, events last month in Charlottesville, Virginia, and around the country underscore the reality that fundamentally un-American values such as hatred and violence still threaten our democratic aspirations.

To hold certain values means to denounce others. As several members of our law faculty wrote in an open letter last month, "[D]isagreement sharpens our understanding of the world around us and leads to the advancement of knowledge. But, on some fundamental issues we see

no room for disagreement.” Bigotry represents a threat to our deepest values of equity and fairness. Violence threatens our ability to let reason and morality prevail.

The work of being an academic community that embraces democratic values is hard. It requires caring for other people and for this country and world, resilience in the face of challenge, and an enduring belief that all of us are embraced for who they are as individuals and as members of this community. This does not happen of its own accord; we must rededicate ourselves to the task each and every day. Let us be a beacon of light. Let us work together to uphold our values of inclusion, acceptance, compassion and love. And let us maintain a vigilant skepticism that any of us ever knows all the truth as we serve and change the global good through pioneering research, student-focused engagement by faculty and staff, and deep connections to communities near and far. As much as ever, the nation and world depend on us.

In a few weeks, we will update you on the progress we are making toward DU IMPACT 2025—through continued engagement and consultation with faculty, staff and students across campus—and set forth plans for the year ahead.

Meanwhile, I hope you will join me in approaching this new academic year as a gift and opportunity to demonstrate to others and to the world what it means to build the global public good as we continue to teach, learn and grow.

Welcome/welcome back!

Rebecca Chopp, Chancellor, University of Denver