

December 23, 2017

Dear Team,

As I shook the last hand of our graduating class on Friday and welcomed them as new Guardians of Health, I realized that this year has been more bittersweet than most for me. I thoroughly enjoy the celebratory mood of graduation but, after three years at the College, I can recall when I first greeted these now alums and invited them to learn from us and help teach us how to create health in our communities worldwide.

As I reflect on 2017, this year has been filled with great accomplishments even as we navigated rocky fiscal conditions.

There is no denying that the state's budget decisions have impacted the University and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. President Bounds and Chancellor Gold have done an excellent job of identifying solutions and disseminating information in a timely and transparent manner. Although reductions have not been painless, they've also been done in a way to maintain the integrity of our programs and ensure that people most important to our University – you, our faculty, staff, and students! - are not adversely impacted.

The signature accomplishment is that we now have a crisper focus for the College to supplement our core educational and research activities. Through our strategic planning recalibration process, we were able to define three focus areas for the College and how we will make an impact locally, nationally and around the world: health security, rural health, and implementation science. Faculty, staff, and student involvement was essential to explore our goal – becoming a leading public health institution, what it means to us, and the innovative concepts and big ideas on how we will achieve our goal. Thanks to Kara Stephens for introducing us to the e-collaborative tool, Think Tank, to boost our engagement.

As always, our students were the highlight! Our fantastic Student Association (17-18) led by Emma Schultz, Sachi Verma, Alisha Aggarwal and Bedant Chakraborty, didn't miss a beat as they arranged a full schedule of events and activities. There were MANY publications and presentations at national meetings plus other accolades. This year saw 15 inaugural Public Health Workforce Expansion Scholarship awards. Nada Alnaji, Moses New-aaron, Xiaoting Sun and Sachi Verma were our Suzanne and Ward Chambers Global Health Fellows; Roger Gonzales was awarded the 2017 Student Impact Award from the Student Senate; and Katelyn Jelden received the 2017 Excellence in Public Health Award from the United State Public Health Service.

Kudos to Dean Meza and Dr. Schmid for leading the team that allowed the College to achieve a full seven year reaccreditation from the Council on Education in Public Health (CEPH). But there is no resting on those laurels. The faculty and staff have continued the work to completely revise our MPH program and 4 of our PhD programs, add an online component to all of our MPH concentrations, and develop a number of new degree programs for the Fall of 2018. This includes the just approved Masters in Health Administration thanks to the efforts of Dr. Wilson. All of our programs will become increasingly academically rigorous and practice-based to equip our students with the tools and skills to address the most complex public health issues. A bit of foresight to where we are heading as a College is the recent notice that the College was ranked No. 2 out of 50 overall best online master of public health degree programs in the U.S. Special thanks to Ms. Analisa McMillan for her work and expertise on these acclaimed distance learning programs.

Additional highlights this year include welcoming a new Panel of Advisors. Thanks to Susan Thomas and Freddie Grey for serving as Chair and vice-Chair. They are energized and focused on advising us on how we work collectively to continue to make our College a destination for students, innovative public health programs and partnerships, and public health research.

We celebrated our successes: Dr. Paul Estabrooks received the Distinguished Scientist Award and the very prolific Dr. John Lowe received the New Investigator Award. And welcomed many new faculty and staff: Dean Christine Arcari and Elizabeth Keuter in Epidemiology, Keyonna King and David Dzewaltowski in Health Promotion, Jocelyn Herstein and Catherine Pratt in EAOH, Gail Brondum and Ashley Dawson in HSRA, and Jessica Snyder in Biostatistics. And bid farewell and best wishes to others: Eugene Boilesen, Robert Chamberlain, Amr Soliman, Renaisa Anthony, Antonia Correa, Aleta Gaertner, Wayne (Joe) McMillan, Sherry Cherek, and Karen Levin of the University of Nebraska Foundation.

As we head into 2018, as always, there's work to be done and I can't wait. America's Health Rankings were updated and there is a lot of opportunity to redouble our efforts to support the University and our partners to help make our state healthier and explore better models of health, health equity, and healthy behaviors. We are guardians of health and we are up to the challenge.

Wishing everyone and their families a safe, happy, healthy holiday season and 2018!

Always listening,
Ask

Ali S. Khan, MD, MPH
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