Dear Colleagues:

Among many blessings of an academic profession, you’re bound to revel, as I do, in the experience of concluding one semester, taking stock of what went well and might have gone better, and beginning anew the next semester, simultaneously humbled and emboldened at the prospect of greater, wiser, better work. The rhythm of university life ensures, semester after semester, those welcome first days when the slate has been wiped clean and aspirations run high.

Let’s enjoy these days as long as possible, returning from Christmas and New Year’s holidays refreshed and ready to teach, mentor, challenge, and support the gifted women and men studying among us. Yet, lest idealism outshine reality, we ought to ponder the opening of T.S. Eliot’s “Little Gidding”:

Midwinter spring is its own season  
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,  
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.  
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire,  
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,  
In windless cold that is the heart’s heat,  
Reflecting in a watery mirror  
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.  
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,  
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire  
In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing  
The soul’s sap quivers . . .

We begin the second half of the academic year in midwinter, such as it is in central Texas, with intemperate swings of weather, barren fields and trees, long nights and short days, and sometimes with our soul’s sap run cold. May our spirits be stirred by “pentecostal fire / In the dark time of the year.”

Please note the following:

- Early reports show fall to spring retention for our two majors, Great Texts and University Scholars, at 98.1%. (I’m sure numbers for the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core and Honors Program are also high and I’ll share them when available.) We’re well on our way to meeting a first-year retention goal of 96.5%. Please keep up our outstanding efforts to engage students in and out of the classroom, provide timely assistance, and refer when necessary to colleagues in the Paul L. Foster Success Center, Counseling Center, Student Financial Services, or other appropriate offices.

- We’re also well on our way to recruiting an exceptional, academically qualified class of entering students for Fall 2020. Our college-wide ACT/SAT target for this class is ACT 32/SAT 1400. At present we’re running ahead of that goal with programs reporting average ranges of 32.8-34.5 ACT / 1457-1504 SAT. As we continue sharing the benefits of
the Honors College with prospective students of high ability and aspiration, I look forward to seeing further gains in the quality of our incoming classes.

- Great appreciation is due to Diane Haun, program and advisement coordinator for the Honors Program, who after 19 years of service officially retired last Friday. Diane’s devoted work and ever-kind, pleasant presence have been a mainstay of the Honors Program. Her good counsel and big heart have made a difference in the lives of countless students. You have our thanks and fond wishes for happiness in the wonderful season of retirement ahead of you, Diane!

- Welcome to Mary Moore, newly hired in the Honors Program as advisor. Mary earned two degrees from Baylor, a B.A. in religion (2005) and an M.A. in English (2012), and she enjoyed an enriching education and close mentoring as a BIC student. Having served in the College of Arts & Sciences Advisement (CASA) office, she moves over to the Honors Program with ample experience behind her. We’re delighted to have you with us, Mary!

- Congratulations to Samuel Perry, associate professor of communication in the Baylor Interdisciplinary Core, on the publication of his new book, Rhetorics of Race and Religion on the Christian Right: Barack Obama and the War on Terror. Reviewers laud it as “[f]ascinating and essential reading for anyone wanting to better understand the intersections of race, religion, and conservative politics” underlying responses by the Christian Right to Barack Obama’s presidency and as a “timely argument” that shows how certain species of religiously charged, blame-casting rhetoric regrettably displace “the possibilities for deliberation, conciliation, and political pluralism.” Well done, Sam!

- Appreciation is due to David and Emily Lill, longtime members of the Honors College Advisory Council, for their generosity in establishing the Lill Family Endowed Scholarship Fund. Given as part of the Give Light campaign and in support of Illuminate’s Human Flourishing, Leadership, and Ethics initiative, this new scholarship will benefit Honors College students, with preference given to students residing in the Honors Residential College. Many of you will remember Avery Lill (B.A. ’16, University Scholars) and Isaac Lill (B.S. ’18, Biochemistry), two of our recent Honors College alumni who followed their dad’s example in pursuing degrees at Baylor.

- Another scholarship fund benefiting Honors College students deserves celebration. Nearly twenty years ago, Suzanne and Ralph Wood generously established and faithfully built up an endowed scholarship fund honoring their parents. Ralph and Suzanne have recently designated the Wood/Coppedge Endowed Scholarship Fund for deserving Honors College students, with preference given to Great Texts majors. We admire your stewardship and we’re inspired by your example, Ralph and Suzanne!

All the best,

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