PROVOST JONES REMARKS

Building Back Better: The Role of Empathy in Global Recovery
Webinar and Partnership Launch

Wednesday, December 9, 2020

Hosted by UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway and Penn State University, this online event marked the launch of an exciting and dynamic partnership focused on working with local communities and national and international partners to further understand and promote the role of empathy in global recovery.

Amid a public health and economic crisis, severe political polarization, and continued racial injustice, the transformative power of empathy and kindness remains a means of healing and revitalization.

Driven by these pressing societal issues and a responsibility to work with communities in addressing them, the UNESCO Chairs Program at Penn State University and the National University of Ireland at Galway, the Biden School of Public Policy & Administration at the University of Delaware, and the Fred Rogers Center partnered to promote empathy as a cornerstone of recovery and as a foundation to stable, civil societies in the pursuit of a more peaceful world.

In his remarks, Penn State Executive Vice President and Provost Nick Jones discussed the importance of the partnership and Penn State’s role in leading the charge.

On behalf of The Pennsylvania State University, I welcome all of you to the launch of this remarkable partnership between our friends in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Ireland. This webinar and partnership build on the successful "Living and Learning Empathy in COVID-19" webinar series that took place over 12 weeks earlier this year.

The focus of this global webinar series is particularly important and timely. Penn State has a deep history of supporting and advancing research and programming focusing on
empathy, compassion, and mindfulness. Such work has taken place across various disciplines and significantly advanced leadership development, health care and human development, education, and many other areas of study.

The United States and other countries face tremendous social and political divisions, compounded by isolation and fear in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this environment, empathy is among the most critical forces in helping to fostering stable, civil societies.

Penn State is delighted to join with our longtime research, teaching, and outreach partner the National University of Ireland, Galway, and the UNESCO Chair program there. I’d like to thank UNESCO Chairs Mark Brennan from Penn State and Pat Dolan from NUI Galway for their leadership, as well as Penn State’s UNESCO Graduate Fellow Kate Berardi for her hard work.

The UNESCO Chair programs at Penn State and NUI Galway have been incredibly valuable in responding to social, political, economic, and educational needs. Their ability to conduct high-level research and then immediately apply these through UNESCO channels and programs contribute to a better, more stable world.

We are equally delighted to announce our partnership with the Biden School for Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. This partnership brings a new dimension for shaping national and international policy around civic engagement, expands our land-grant connections, and builds multidisciplinary capacities to respond to issues of democracy, equality, and social justice.

I’d like to thank Kalyn McDonough for initiating this partnership, Dean Maria Aristgueta for her leadership of the Biden School, and University of Delaware Provost Robin Morgan for her support in making this partnership possible.

Finally, we are honored to continue our partnership with the Fred Rogers Center at St. Vincent College.
Fred Rogers' message of kindness, compassion, honesty, and empathy is perhaps never more in need than today as we come together to build a better world amid the pandemic.

Thanks go to Dana Winters of the Fred Rogers Center and St. Vincent President Father Paul Taylor for establishing the partnership with Penn State and our UNESCO Chair program to advance the message and wisdom of Mr. Rogers in Pennsylvania and globally.

Global conversations such as this webinar series allow our four universities to share the best of their applied research and remain at the forefront of responses to the pandemic and social unrest. Together, we will contribute to a more stable, civil, and just society.

We will continue to be challenged as we deal with the impacts of the pandemic. And empathy will be key in how we respond, rebuild, and thrive after this crisis.

Penn State is honored to help lead this charge. Thank you all.