To: Members of the University Community
From: Tom Sullivan, President
RE: President’s Committee on Alcohol and Drug Use

A year ago, on February 10, 2014, I wrote to our University community on the issue of alcohol and drug use on campus. I followed with another message on April 29, 2014 with steps we were taking to address the concerns and describing the membership and charge of the President’s Committee on Alcohol and Other Drugs (PCAOD).

Since that time, the Committee, made up of 72 faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni, has made findings and offered recommendations regarding alcohol, marijuana and other drug misuse on campus and outlined its harmful impact on the health of our students and the barriers it presents to their engagement and success. Representatives of the Committee have shared these findings and their general recommendations with Faculty Senate, Staff Council, SGA and other leaders across the campus.

The Committee’s work has reinforced a broadly held belief that the misuse of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs (AMOD) is a serious issue on our campus. While it often has been normalized as part of the college experience, our concern for our students and for their experience at the University calls on us to clearly name it as a serious and unacceptable threat to their health, safety, and success – one whose mitigation deserves a thoughtful approach and a sustained effort.

In the context of this challenge, it is important to remember our strengths and values. Our University is uniquely committed to the health and development of our students, and we are dedicated to the creation of a vibrant learning environment in which students are fully invested in their education and embrace a healthy and thoughtful lifestyle that supports their success.

Next Steps

Beyond articulating the challenge we face, the Committee has put forward an Action Plan containing a number of specific proposals. The overarching theme of the Committee’s work is the importance of aligning each part of our institution toward making noteworthy progress. This means evaluating our current operating systems and being willing to change the ways in which we carry out our work.

As I assess the Committee’s proposals in terms of their efficacy and associated resource needs, I want to share with you the expressed themes:

• Providing a holistic, comprehensive education through classroom and co-curricular initiatives
There is a clear relationship between the misuse of AMOD and the level of student engagement. We must utilize fully the outstanding skills of our faculty and staff to thoughtfully and vigorously challenge students in the classroom while we also ensure that meaningful learning occurs outside of the classroom as well. Students who are meaningfully challenged in their academic work and are well connected to faculty and staff mentors gain a sense of purpose and membership in the community, and are inclined to make thoughtful decisions about how they spend their time.

**Strengthening student leadership**
Students must assume a leadership role in creating an environment of respect and purpose, one which contributes to safety, wellbeing and facilitates learning. Their involvement in changing campus culture is critical to long term success. In the same way that we expect students to gain skills of critical thinking in their intellectual pursuits, we must provide them with the skills to make good decisions about their personal health – skills which will serve them well now and in the decades ahead. Good decision-making must be incentivized and normalized as part of our culture.

**Education and Professional Development for Faculty and Staff**
Faculty and staff must appreciate and understand clearly the issue and the ways in which they can effectively address AMOD misuse in their community and invest themselves in this work. Education and professional development opportunities must be easily accessible to them.

**National Engagement and Assessment**
The University must employ evidenced-informed best practices in this work. We must consistently assess the effectiveness of our initiatives and measure progress against national benchmarks.

**Communication about our Challenges and Progress**
Leadership on this issue will be manifest in our willingness to openly name it and be transparent in sharing both our successes and our setbacks.

**Sustained Commitment**
The University is fundamentally invested in student health, wellbeing and success and must commit itself to resourcing prioritized initiatives appropriately and in a sustained manner.

A preview of this important work on this issue is the Wellness Environment, that will be launched this fall with a significant number of students in our incoming class. This collaborative initiative between the College of Medicine, the College of Nursing and Allied Health Sciences, and a number of our student affairs departments will offer students a residential community where they will have access to daily mindfulness practice (meditation, yoga, and Tai Chi) and are offered individual nutritional and exercise mentoring. As part of the community’s orientation to wellness, students will agree to choose healthy behaviors including refraining from alcohol and substance use within the community. Students in the Wellness Environment also will be enrolled in a credit bearing course through the College of Medicine entitled “Healthy Brains,
Healthy Bodies: Surviving and Thriving in College” and will engage in community service as mentors to students in local school districts.

Going Forward

While there are no simple solutions in our efforts to change the practices in the area of AMOD misuse, the innovative and collaborative spirit embodied in the Wellness Environment initiative precisely defines the approach we will take moving forward. We will utilize a strengths-based approach, outline our goals clearly, be open about our progress, and work in a sustainable fashion to optimize the health and vitality of our learning community.

In the near future, I will share with the University community additional steps that will be taken to implement the highest priority recommendations of the Committee. I look forward with great anticipation to joining with you in this very important work.