

**We have a chance to redefine our community. We must take it.***A message from President Eli Capilouto*

Louisville. Georgia. Minneapolis. New York.

We may, right now, be physically separated – more than ever before in our lifetimes.

But we can't be isolated – from the world around us or from the experiences that many of our community members are experiencing now and fearing when we return. One of the lessons of this COVID-19 era is this: what happens in places that seem remote and physically removed are tragically real and relevant for so many of our colleagues and community members.

A faculty member many of you know walks into a local grocery store, wearing a mask to protect those around him and feels the glare of stares and second glances.

Black men, he says, are asking what kind of mask they should wear to “look non-threatening.” That's racism, perhaps subtle, but no less real.

And the incidents that occurred in other cities, both near and far, represent for too many the underlying fact that systemic and systematic racism has disproportionately imprisoned and killed blacks and people of color across decades. We must admit that it continues to this day and that these events are impacting, in ways explicit and implicit, members of our community and their loved ones.

**So, there is the question for us, in this time and at this place: What kind of community do we want to be?**

Hundreds of our colleagues are spending countless hours, working in small groups and from often remote locations, planning for how we return to campus this fall. We are calling it a reinvented **safe** and normal operation.

**But the word safe, for us, must mean more than free from the transmission of this virus. How do we stop the transmission of fear, distrust and hate?**

How do we live up to the essence of what I believe we are – a collection of people and ideas, never in complete agreement with one another, but working toward common goals: education and learning; deeper understanding and meaning; solutions and healing; a recognition that we are always more together than we are apart.

I don't have all the answers. But I do know that, as part of reinventing normal, we must find ways to make normal a better experience for all members of our community.

We live in a world that has been enveloped by an invisible virus – millions infected, more than 100,000 in our country alone now dead. We have, perhaps, been given an opportunity in the midst of crisis, too.

We can't eliminate seeds of hate, some planted long ago in gardens near and far from here. They remain deeply rooted in our midst. But in reinventing our campus, we have a chance not only to create new physical paths on our campus; we have a chance to look at each other – our brothers and sisters – with fresh eyes and from different perspectives.

We have a chance to redefine our community. We must take it.

Eli Capilouto