Memo

To University Community

From James H. Hance Jr., chair, JWU Board of Trustees
Mim L. Runey, L.P.D., chancellor

Date June 25, 2020

Re JWU’s New Strategic Direction

Thirty years ago, Johnson & Wales University’s first chancellor Morris Gaebe had the vision to bring a Johnson & Wales’ education to students where they live as an alternative to enrolling at the university’s main campus in Providence, R.I. That led to the establishment of our North Miami (1992), Denver (2000) and Charlotte (2004) campuses during a time when both the number of high school students pursuing postsecondary education and colleges granting degrees were trending upward.

Times have changed in higher education across the country, and so too must Johnson & Wales’ strategic direction as we build for the future. To this end, the Johnson & Wales University Board of Trustees has determined that the time has come to consolidate the university’s physical footprint as we move to become a more comprehensive university, strengthening and expanding JWU’s academic portfolio and delivery models.

As we prepare for the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, Johnson & Wales will continue to welcome and educate students at the Providence and Charlotte campuses; however, the university will not be enrolling a new, incoming class for the fall of 2020 at the North Miami and Denver campuses. North Miami and Denver returning students will be able to continue their education at these campuses through the 2020-2021 academic year. Students at these campuses not graduating by May 2021 will have the option to transfer to the university’s Providence or Charlotte campuses or finish their degree requirements online or remotely. In addition, we are working with institutions in Florida and Colorado to secure opportunities for students who wish to remain in their respective campus states. The North Miami and Denver campuses’ operations will officially end in summer of 2021.

By officially announcing the 2021 closing of the North Miami and Denver campuses, the university will present to NECHE (the New England Commission on Higher Education), our accrediting agency, and other accrediting and regulatory bodies, a closure plan in the coming weeks that details the arrangements we are proposing to meet our obligations to students. The university is fully committed to working with every student at the North Miami and Denver campuses to develop a plan that leads to graduation either
at JWU or another institution. Faculty and staff at the North Miami and Denver campuses will be invited to remain working at JWU through a date established by the university as the end date for their position.

There were many factors that led to this decision. Not only will the number of high school graduates continue to fluctuate in the years to come, with a projected 15% decline between 2025 and 2029 (due to the lower birth rates following the 2008 recession), technology is now expanding the ability of colleges and universities to offer education remotely, diminishing the need for on-ground classrooms and facilities.

This spring, the rapid spread of the coronavirus brought to the forefront for many colleges and universities the need to expand a greater range of academic programs in varied delivery models. JWU, like many schools in the country, has been planning for the fall and evaluating the multiple impacts the disruption caused by the coronavirus has had on campus operations and enrollment. We are aware that there are students, especially those seeking degrees in programs with laboratory components such as culinary and baking & pastry arts, who may delay entering or returning to school until the threat of the coronavirus has passed. This has caused the university to reconsider the most effective and efficient delivery systems to meet the needs of our students.

The university’s strategic planning has guided our decisions for many years. A major component of FOCUS 2022, our current strategic plan, has been the sustainability of the branch campuses. The leadership at the North Miami and Denver campuses have explored multiple options to increase enrollment, introduce new revenue streams, and seek financial contributions from supporters and alumni. Now that we are midway through the plan, it has become clear that in spite of all of their efforts, by the end of 2022, the North Miami and Denver campuses will not be able to achieve the goal to be self-sustaining. As a result of our extensive deliberations and analysis, we have collectively determined that JWU’s unique status as one university, with four geographically diverse on-the-ground campuses, is no longer viable in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education.

As we position JWU for the future, all of the above factors led the Johnson & Wales’ Board of Trustees to conclude that the time has come to consolidate our university system as we strive to become a more comprehensive university exploring more creative and effective options to deliver a Johnson & Wales education.

To succeed, JWU must continue to evolve from its niche status in hospitality and culinary arts to become a comprehensive university. At our flagship campus in Providence, we are focusing our efforts on creating a thriving six-college model complemented by our robust College of Online Education as we add new programs in engineering, design, and health and wellness; expand offerings in the arts and sciences; and promote our new College of Food Innovation & Technology.

As former Chancellor Gaebe envisioned, coupled now with the advances of technology, we will continue to bring a JWU education to students and employees of companies throughout the world. Our corporate partnerships with companies will allow adult learners to advance their education while they are employed. In addition, the university is far along in the development of an online culinary arts certificate program, which will become the basis of an online associate degree program to be offered next year.
As a result of this strategic thinking for the new direction of the Providence Campus with our online capabilities and reach, coupled with new presidential leadership, a growing portfolio of academic programs and continued strong support from the Charlotte community, Johnson & Wales University is well positioned to thrive in the years ahead.

JWU’s physical presence has been transformed many times throughout the university’s 106-year history. Early on, Misses Johnson and Wales moved their classrooms multiple times in the city of Providence before the school purchased its first building at Abbott Park Place in 1962. As the years progressed, JWU established a presence abroad in Gothenburg, Sweden and in conjunction with the University of St. Martin on the Caribbean island of St. Maarten, and outside of Providence, in Vail, Colorado; Charleston, South Carolina; and Norfolk, Virginia. Every decision to open or close a location was done strategically to strengthen and better position JWU for the future.

As the university looks to the future, we realize that this is sad and challenging news for our North Miami and Denver campus communities. This decision has a direct impact on their lives, careers and dreams, and we share their sense of loss. The university is committed to providing resources and support to our returning students, staff and faculty to help them navigate the options before them over the next year as we prepare to close those campuses.

Johnson & Wales University is what we are today because of the thousands of students and hundreds of faculty and staff who have filled our classrooms, facilities and offices with this common goal in mind: to provide an exceptional education that inspires professional success and lifelong personal and intellectual growth. JWU has made an extraordinary difference in North Miami and Denver, contributing to the economy and raising the level of culinary and hospitality in those metropolitan areas. We will be forever grateful to all of the North Miami and Denver students, faculty, staff and alumni who have and will continue to proudly call themselves Wildcats. Our community spirit will bring us together in the coming months as we begin to close one chapter in our university’s history and start a new one.

More detailed information regarding the closures of the North Miami and Denver campuses will be communicated in the coming days and weeks. Separate communications have been prepared and will be sent to new students and their families, returning students and their families, faculty, staff, and alumni. Knowing that many of you will have questions to ask and thoughts to share, we are scheduling listening sessions and town hall meetings at the campuses. We have prepared a webpage (www.jwu.edu/sustainablefuture) that provides additional information including FAQs and a Message from the Chancellor.

Through each transformation of JWU, we became stronger because we had the courage to make the right decisions to ensure that the university would continue to fulfill its mission to provide an exceptional education.

It has been, and always, will be forever JWU.