December 17, 2014

UW-Madison Finance and Administration Staff,

As we approach the end of another semester and calendar year, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude for all you do for UW-Madison and the citizens of Wisconsin.

In the midst of ongoing financial challenges and increased public scrutiny, you continue to produce positive results and help strengthen UW-Madison’s standing as a preeminent public university. Your commitment and day-to-day efforts also help build a sense of community and purpose across the campus.

With semester break approaching, this is an appropriate time to reflect upon where we’ve been and to consider the challenges ahead. During the past year, we have made substantial progress in numerous important areas.

We continue to build on our Finance and Administration strategic initiatives of Engagement, Inclusion and Diversity (EID); Student Employment; and Resource Stewardship/Process Improvement.

We administered our second EID survey in two years across all Finance and Administration units. The 84 percent rate of response was outstanding, and units are using the survey results to help update their EID plans and to identify and address areas in need of further attention.

Through our Student Employment Initiative (also known as WiGrow), we held retreats at which student employees were given opportunities to learn more about connecting their UW-Madison employment to their learning experience. These opportunities included interactions with alumni who talked about how their experiences working on campus helped them succeed later in life.

Our Resource Stewardship/Process Improvement Initiative has helped identify ways in which we can become more effective and efficient and has instilled a culture of continuous improvement across our units. This is especially important at a time when the university and all public institutions face increasing fiscal challenges.

We also worked with campus partners on a variety of issues that will help position UW-Madison for long-term success.
• In April, we gained legislative approval of our HR Design initiative. This was a crucial victory in our effort to achieve additional flexibility for managing campus resources and will help us meet the human resources needs of a world-class university.

• A committee of faculty, staff and students developed and delivered to Chancellor Blank a proposal for a new UW-Madison budget model. This model will be more transparent, provide incentives for innovation and allow some resources to shift based on objective measures of activity. The campus community is reviewing the proposal.

• Our classified staff has done a remarkable job in taking on the responsibility of participation in campus shared governance. Voter turnout in classified staff governance elections was truly impressive, and the structures upon which classified governance will be built are solidly in place.

• Our commitment to continuous improvement was exemplified by the annual Administrative Improvement Award. Our 2014 recipients of the award – the Common Scholarship Application, School of Social Work Admissions and Financial Aid e-Refund teams and Jacquelyn Irving of the Bradley Learning Community – provided excellent examples of administrative improvements and collaborative work.

• We also are demonstrating our commitment to resource stewardship by strengthening our financial management practices and internal controls. About 450 people attended a campus forum on financial reporting and compliance. The forum was just the start of our efforts to develop an internal controls framework.

• The collaborative First 45 Days Initiative – involving the UW Police Department, University Health Services, University Housing and the Division of Student Life – focused resources on behaviors related to alcohol use during the first 45 days of the academic year. The initiative has led to greater awareness of the negative consequences of alcohol use and a decline in repeat university conduct violations.

• In March, students voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Recreational Sports Master Plan, which will lead to major upgrades of the campus’ recreational sports facilities, including the SERF, the Natatorium and outdoor playing fields.

• We have begun the once-a-decade process of updating our Campus Master Plan. Representatives of Facilities Planning & Management are meeting with governance groups and other stakeholders to discuss the plan, which will guide campus development.

Looking ahead to 2015, our most important endeavor will be gaining support for and managing a 2015-17 biennial budget that reflects the university’s mission and priorities. Chancellor Blank – along with alumni, business leaders and other friends around the state – will carry the message to legislators that a strong UW-Madison is essential to the well-being of the state and its economy.
I could go on at length about past, present and future challenges, but I prefer to close by reiterating my appreciation for all you do for the university.

UW-Madison remains a world-class university because of the efforts of its faculty, staff and students and the deep support of the people of Wisconsin. Anyone who suggests that our greatest days are behind us does not see what I see every day – a campus community committed to the Wisconsin Idea and dedicated to enriching the quality of life in Wisconsin and beyond.

Thank you for your service, and best wishes for a happy holiday season and a rewarding 2015.

Darrell Bazzell
Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration