The ESP faculty, staff, and I are eager to welcome you to the 2020-2021 academic year and assist you in a successful year ahead in our programs.

As of this writing, the COVID19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 has infected over 23.7 million people, and contributed to over 815,000 deaths globally. This pandemic has caused major human and environmental impacts influencing scientists and policy makers in dynamic ways, who in turn will reflect on this for years to come. COVID19 has provided novel opportunities to communicate, work and succeed in on our daily activities, and to support a successful ESP moving forward.

This ongoing pandemic, racial inequity including the decentralized movement ‘black lives matter’, and the millions of jobs lost has reflected in budget deficits and, until recently, a leadership crisis that has affected everyone. More than ever, Mason, the College of Science, and ESP need to focus on our students, our minorities who need to be re-trained with new and better skills, providing better pathways to success, and to target our local and regional communities and the planet. There is no better time for a career in Environmental Science and Policy. No better time to become a Conservation Medic or Planetary Doctor.

My vision is to make a national and international exemplar of ESP that will, while aligned to the College and University, will deal with environmental racism, social justice, and equal opportunity. We need to make improvements to our curriculum, promote community engagement, change university policies, and create novel approaches to research, training and development, embracing racial, ethnic, gender, and religious identity. We need to identify racial issues where they are more prominent and develop systems and practices to dismantling these behaviors. We need more than ever to Engage, Align & Expand our Pathways, making our programs more affordable and accessible.

I made the decision over two months ago to go online with most of our course offerings (except for two field labs) for Fall 2020 when there was no clear guidance from the administration at the time. Now, with new leadership in place with President Gregory Washington and College of Science (COS) Dean Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm both starting on July 1, 2020, a new vision, energy, and enthusiasm has triggered this exciting academic year.

ESP is committed to the creation of an academic culture of mutual respect and intellectual collaboration to foster truly productive interdisciplinary programs that better mirror
the environmental problems we seek to address. Our faculty and graduates are active in providing the natural and social science knowledge that informs the formulation and implementation of policies and solutions in government, industry, and nonprofit organizations. Although we were not able to hire new faculty, let’s welcome our new Graduate Program Director, Dr. Changwoo Ahn, professor of environmental science and policy with expertise in aquatic ecology, biodiversity, climate science, and wetland ecology. Dr. Ahn is dedicated to developing innovative methods of teaching that will incorporate strong research experiences into both, graduate and undergraduate science education.

Please remember that when you on or off campus, to continue to follow the health and safety guidelines provided at the university Website. Be sure to complete the daily COVID Health Check prior to your arrival. You will find new guidelines, signage and protocols in place to ensure we remain safe and stay healthy. I ask you to fully follow safety protocols including physical distancing, wearing a mask, washing your hands, using hand sanitizer and other recommendations found in the Safe Return to Campus plan. Each of us has a responsibility to contribute to proper behavior and to adhere to public health guidance that will protect you, your friends, your family, our faculty and staff. Most importantly these measures will help contain the spread of the coronavirus.

Let’s make this a memorable and successful year!