To the College of Engineering,

I hope this letter finds you and yours happy and healthy during these unprecedented times. I am writing to inform you of a few key updates in an effort to keep our students, faculty, and staff informed as possible.

First, I’d like to share some exciting news. The National Science Foundation (NSF) has awarded a five-year, $23.7 million grant to UCSB and UCLA to be joint partners in the BioPolymers, Automated Cellular Infrastructure, Flow, and Integrated Chemistry: Materials Innovation Platform (BioPACIFIC MIP). Nearly twenty CoE faculty and staff are involved, and more than half of the senior investigators are women or members of an underrepresented minority group. The MIP establishes the first user-facility in the nation that combines automation and high-throughput experimentation in synthetic biology and material synthesis to develop new bio-based polymer materials. You can read more about the MIP and other college news in the stories that are included below.

Second, in light of recent events, college administrators have begun to examine issues of diversity and equity in our institution while deepening our commitment to, and expanding our actions to ensure that equality and inclusivity frame our actions. We must and we will do more, beginning by engaging with diverse audiences in the college and beyond, and listening to the voices that arise from them. We want our students, faculty, and staff to participate in the process, because we will be stronger by working together. As a small but important step in the process, the college launched a diversity webpage (engineering.ucsb.edu/Diversity ), which includes our commitment to diversity, a statement endorsed by myself and our associate deans. By posting this statement, we pledge that our words will lead to actions appropriate to reaching our goals. The webpage is a work in progress, and we will continue to add content in the coming months, including our short-term and long-term goals.

Finally, while a majority of us continue to work remotely, a handful of approved research projects in the College of Engineering have returned to campus according to a detailed, staged plan for a methodical and cautious ramp-up of on-campus research. The college launched a website (engineering.ucsb.edu/information-research-ramp) intended to be a one-stop shop for those seeking information about the research ramp-up. The website includes: access and operation plans for each building where the college conducts research; contact information for building committees; a place to submit comments and suggestions regarding the reopening plan; frequently asked questions; and links to important sources of additional information.

Stay well and have a happy and safe summer,

Rod C. Alferness
Dean UCSB College of Engineering