April 22, 2016

Dear Members of the Washington University Community,

I write to you today regarding the shooting incident that took place on campus Wednesday afternoon. One of our community members was injured, a Bon Appétit employee whose name I will not share out of respect for her privacy. I join the entire community in wishing her well as she continues to recover. Like so many of us, I am deeply upset that the specter of gun violence has hit so close to home and directly affected a member of our community. I know that Wednesday afternoon was a scary time for all of us.

The Clayton Police Department, with support from our personnel, continues to investigate the incident. We do not have any further updates at this time. I extend my sincere gratitude to those in our community who are on the front lines of such incidents – the Washington University and Clayton police officers and many others who acted so quickly and effectively. A fast-acting student member of our Emergency Support Team, who happened to be nearby, was able to give initial medical care until others arrived to assist. Our emergency personnel were able to quickly disseminate our alert messages, and other caring members of our community helped to comfort our injured colleague until an ambulance arrived. The immediate response was outstanding.

I also want to thank all of you who took the alerts seriously and did what you could to protect yourselves and others until we could gather all of the facts and determine that it was safe to resume normal activity. Please remember: we only will issue alerts for emergencies that pose an immediate threat to the campus community, when the safety of the members of our community could be in serious danger. It is very important that you take action.

I understand that in challenging situations like this, there always is a desire for more information, more quickly. We have processes and procedures in
place upon which we rely, with the highest priority of maintaining your safety. Particularly as an incident unfolds, we work to balance several priorities: getting notice to you – immediately – based on what we know; creating an environment in which our emergency responders are able to focus on the threat; and keeping you regularly updated with further detail. We try to do our best on all fronts.

However, it is clear from our recent experiences that we can do more to better prepare our community before something like this happens again. We already are debriefing and discussing options, and we will be working to improve communications and actions in the event that we face another emergency. We are considering all of the feedback we have received, with special attention given to the experience in our classrooms; the extent to which alerts are received by all members of our community, including those who are working outside or who might not be included on our usual university distribution lists; and the door lockdown process.

Here are a few key steps each of us should take – right now – in order to be prepared in the event of an emergency situation.

1. Download the WUSTL Mobile app, which is the fastest and easiest way for anyone — with or without a Washington University email address — to receive emergency alerts. The app is available for iOS or Android. Note that it is important that you enable push notifications to receive alerts.

2. Keep your contact information updated in HRMS and WebSTAC.

3. Know where to go and what to do. Become familiar with our processes and procedures. Be prepared to assist others who may not be as well-informed. You can access some helpful information and learn about our “Where to Go” emergency awareness program here. Steps to take specifically in the event of violence on campus are available here. Please know that we are constantly working to improve our emergency preparedness and will share additional resources as they become available.

Our university is a very special place, where our open campus is an
important part of our everyday lives. We’re not in danger of losing that very special quality. But our experience this week is a sad reminder that we are not entirely immune from the societal epidemic of gun violence. It can take place anywhere at anytime. We will maintain a constant focus on assessing our preparedness, the systems and protocols we have in place, and what is necessary to keep our community safe.

Please know that nothing is more important than your safety, and we are committed to ensuring that each of us is empowered to respond as best as possible to any emergency.

Sincerely yours,

Mark S. Wrighton
Chancellor