Message to the Membership:

This message is a welcome to a new year, but clearly under circumstances that we never anticipated, our life under the pandemic of the coronavirus and its disease, COVID-19. As Presidents that have preceded me, this letter serves as a welcome The Academy of Leisure Sciences (TALS). This association is still dedicated to the advancement of leisure scholarship, leisure service delivery, and the study of leisure. But now, more than ever, TALS Values areas of 1) Responsible Stewardship, Justice, Community, and the Core (ethical leadership, innovative thinking, and intergenerational/professional mentorship); are fundamentally important in moving forward and principally guiding us.

We are clearly living in uncertain and extraordinary times during the pandemic of the coronavirus. It was only three months ago that many of us that attended the wonderfully (and simultaneously) organized 2020 TALS annual conference and 2020 China-International Leisure Research Association conference. As we exchanged insight, ideas, recognitions, and pleasantries the threat of COVID-19 had begun to loom in the background of our minds as many international delegates could not attend. While this does not account for those who had already begun to feel the effects more personally since November 2019, it did become a part of many of our consciousness. Now, hours feel like days, days feel like weeks, and weeks feel like months. We truly do not have any idea how the months will feel as they begin to increase in their tally. And this only begins the type of uncertainty that many of us are facing.

An early phrase of “we are all in this together” gave some of us some measure of warmth, but this novel solidarity has given way for a more critical and measured line of thinking: “we are all experiencing something, but what that is depends on our circumstance”. While TALSnet is not the official email listserv for members of TALS and the Academy of Fellows, it is one of the best mechanisms to give some word of important news, share ideas and information, and seek assistance to activities related to the newly developed TALS Guiding Principles (thank you, Dana Kivel and Linda Oakleaf) and our own individual teaching/research/service obligations. For better or worse, TALSnet and the TALS website (thank you to Sagamore-Venture) are the mechanisms that will keeps us connected based on our association to areas of study related to leisure, recreation, sport, tourism, outdoor adventure and education, conservation, recreational therapy, hospitality, events, and experience design.

Behind each email posting (or lack thereof), we simply have no idea what each of us are experiencing or how each of us are processing this, as we are not quite going through this together nor the same. Some of us are carrying for sick loved ones, parenting/teaching on the fly, balancing budgets in emergency mode, trying to maintain health and fitness, and dealing with breaks in our social connections. Some of us are dealing with the loss of loved ones and friends already within these few weeks, diverting the impact of sudden layoffs at our academic institution, facing homelessness, and mitigating threats to our health and life on an everyday basis.
What has helped some us in this uncertain present reality is being informed of the future. So, in not so pleasant news TALS 2021 Conference planned for February 2021 in Indianapolis has been cancelled. As planning had begun to schedule and book rooms at the conference site, looking into hotel space for members and attendees, and seeking external funds for support; this reality had also set-in on the lack of wide-spread testing, availability of adequate treatment, unsafe work conditions for those in the hospitality industry, and more importantly, a lack of a vaccine for those of us in the United States and our members abroad. We have to base decisions and activities on the most current data and guidance we have today, and not our hopes of tomorrow. This is even more the case when we have to balance this with the consideration of that data and guidance from countries of our membership and attendees (United States, China, South Africa, Israel, South Korea, Australia, and Canada, alongside others). We just could not plan an in-person gathering without a sense of assured safety. Additionally, austerity measures are steadily rising at many of our respective institutions for travel and other support that would make such travel ventures impossible. Yes, we could plan a virtual conference, and this was a consideration and conversation. But this is also something that requires some level of assured structures at the onset of planning. Many of us are dealing with bandwidth issues, overburdened by screen-time, and the full level of design of a conference that is as close to the face-to-face to experience. This is not as easy as inviting 250 of your favorite friends on to a Zoom chat.

That was the not-so-good news, but the good news...

1) We were able to move our room holds at IUPUI to 2022, allowing Indianapolis to host us once again during the week of February 27 – March 4, 2022. I know this is quite some time away in the future, but it is something to look forward to as an association;

2) We will be working on a set of virtual keynote panels, one per week, during the four weeks in February 2021. Information will be forthcoming, but more importantly, seeking assistance in planning via TALS Committee chairs. Taking advantage of our distant connectiveness through virtual platforms, we can hear an even broader set of individuals from our retired, seasoned, and emerging scholars; and,

3) Related to this, awards will continue and information on those will be rolled out through the website and TALSNet in due time through TALS Committee chairs. This is important to continue, as many of these awards recognize the hard work that has been accomplished by students as they complete their degrees, incredible teaching by scholars, and the relevant research of members. The importance of those awards and the ability to perform in such exemplary ways during this time cannot be put to the side;

4) As our colleagues in the Canadian Association of Leisure Studies has done (acknowledgements to Heather Mair), TALS will extend your current membership through 2021. The membership benefits are still the same opportunities to access teaching and job resources from TALS website, workshop and seminar opportunities, support to the Future Scholars program, and access to the electronic newsletter.
The latest and future issues of the newsletter will be available (thank you Nick Pitas and Andrew Kerins) and hopefully this will be a good break from the rigmarole of our everyday as we hear good news from our colleagues across the membership.

TALS Committee chairs may contact you (or you can reach out to them) to serve on one of the committees: Awards, BoD Nominations, Communication, Education, Global Relevance, Membership, and TALS 2021 Keynotes (in place of Annual Conference). Leisure Sciences will publish a special issue directly related to “Leisure in the Time of Coronavirus” (thank you for your service Diana Parry and Corey Johnson).

Additionally, issues from other journals will arrive in our inboxes, over 2020 and early 2021, from new or soon incoming editors-in-chief for Journal of Leisure Research (congrats Paul Heintzman, thank you to Laura Payne); Leisure/Loisir (congrats Rebecca Genoe, thank you to Bryan Smale); and Annals of Leisure Research (congrats to Louise Mansfield and Belinda Wheaton, thanks to Neil Carr). As well as other special issues and standard issues for Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, Leisure Studies, International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure, Recreation, Park, and Tourism in Public Health, Therapeutic Recreational Journal, Schole, and other journals and publications.

Some of us will return to our courses (hopefully, safely and virtually). Some of us will not be able to attend conferences like the 2020 National Park and Recreation Association but will still lean on its regular publications and educational webinars.

Hopefully, beginning sometime in 2021 we will see each other through some gatherings that may occur late Spring, Summer, or that Fall.

This is not to say or invoke some call for normalcy which many are rightfully challenging, but this does give us some sense of opportunities to maintain our psyche and sanity to be quality scholars, teachers, students, parents, children, and contributors to the societies in which we live. Maybe in these journal issues, and in our virtual exchanges we can find insight to envision a new reality that is safe and meaningful for all, and for the environment. We have things to do, and we have things to look forward to.

Keep posting on TALSnet what you feel is needed to share and request. Again, the TALS board does not control this communication outlet but it does serve a function for all of us (thank you, Diane Samdahl, for establishing this platform years ago and Michael Bradley for maintaining its function). Sure, it can be annoying, useful, insightful, and even “inciteful”.

My thoughts are with you as you undergo this within your own struggles and hopes. Please stay safe, stay healthy, and stay alive.

Thank you for your membership.

Rasul, President.