



Letter from the

# President

Office of the President, [president@uidaho.edu](mailto:president@uidaho.edu)

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Dear Vandals,

Our University of Idaho faculty go to great lengths to engage students. Heather Heward will even walk through fire, at least virtually.

Using scenes from the U of I's Experimental Forest and [cutting-edge video technology](#), Heward is working on an online module for the fire ecology and management program. With her customized avatar, she's able to provide up-close details and realistic perspectives for students no matter where they're located.

"This program allows her to be in that (virtual forest fire) environment and teach in live time," said Jean-Marc Gauthier, a professor in our Department of Virtual Technology and Design (VTD) who is leading innovation in the virtual classroom space. "She's able to teach up to 50 students remotely, which is ideal for training fire fighters all over the country."

Gauthier and a team of students work across the academic

spectrum to provide a new level of engagement online. They created a virtual microbiology lab for Professor Brenda Schrader so that she can walk students through using a pipette, turning on a Bunsen burner and other basic skills before they enter the lab in person, which saves valuable instruction time.

In what Gauthier calls the "post-Zoom" era, more students are comfortable learning online and expectations are increasing. Ken Udas, vice provost for digital learning initiatives, said the U of I is positioned well to innovate for students.

"There are great pedagogical reasons to develop simulation and controlled learning environments," Udas said. "It helps overcome a lot of constraints. We're not trying to get all of our professors to develop virtual spaces, but I think eventually, in the future, it will become an expectation to have some virtual components."

The number of U of I students enrolled in an online major or program has increased 21% over the past six years. But Vandals are also enhancing traditional in-person curriculum.

In our Idaho WWAMI program, Professor Tyler Bland takes students back to their youth to increase their understanding of the complex world of physiology. He's creating [Medimon](#) – a Pokémon-like game that helps students wrap their heads around the interaction between cells, organ systems and diseases.

Students, WWAMI graduates and faculty in both VTD and the computer science department are collaborating to create 188 creatures and dozens of environments. The goal is to release a demo video game later this year and a full game within the next two years.

Bland's Medimon project is just one more example of U of I innovation that delivers a world-class experience for students and a well-equipped workforce for Idaho.

Go Vandals!

C. Scott Green  
President



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## Snapshots

### U of I esports team finds its footing

Esports provide social connection and potential career paths for U of I students, who compete against Big Sky League rivals online. The increasingly competitive Vandal esports team joined the National Association of Collegiate Esports this year and plays in the new gaming lab in the basement of the Bruce M. Pitman Center. [Learn more.](#)

### Field project looks to develop virtual fencing

Researchers at the U of I and Washington State University gained federal funding for a four-year project to test the safety and efficacy of a prototype virtual fence system. Using GPS technology, the virtual fencing could help make ranches more affordable and sustainable. [Learn more.](#)

## Falcon opens new horizons for U of I researchers

U of I physics professor Zach Etienne utilizes the Falcon supercomputer for his simulations of black holes – just one example of faculty across the state tapping into one of the fastest computers in the country. The Falcon is managed and operated by an agreement between Idaho National Laboratory, the U of I, Boise State University and Idaho State University. [Learn more.](#)



The U of I Golf Course was designed by Frank James and completed in 1936. James served as manager of the course, golf coach and resident professional until he died in 1952.



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