

Virtual Town Hall
Enrollment, Fiscal Health and Return to Campus
Faculty & Staff
Thursday, May 7, 2020, 4 p.m.

Nayef Samhat: Thanks Jo Ann and thanks to everyone for joining us for this Town Hall. We certainly appreciate the opportunity to hold these town halls and take your questions and hear from you, what's on your mind, given the circumstances. We've gleaned a lot of insight from these town halls and from conversations around the community about the concerns of faculty, staff, students, families and coaches and that's really been quite helpful in helping us to shape our responses to the coronavirus situation and as we make plans for summer session II and the fall. In the past couple of days, we've had meetings, board meetings, committee meetings with the board of trustees and tomorrow we will have our full board meeting, tomorrow morning. And it will be via Zoom of course, although one trustee said he was coming to the campus and sitting down in the board room, right down from my office, so we will see. But we will have a Zoom meeting and I'll have a full report to share with you afterwards next week sometime. The conversation, as you might imagine, will continue to be our response to the coronavirus situation. We also plan to have a meeting with the board in mid to late June where we will discuss our final plans for the fall term. I can tell you right now and I've shared this with those students who have deposited, Brand has some very good news to share, and to anyone I've talked to I've said the same thing. We are fully committed to bringing our students back on campus in the fall, all of us on campus and doing what we do best, the transformation of young lives. We will do that and fully expect to do that but will not put anyone's health, safety and well-being at risk. We will be looking at practices, guidelines, frameworks for interaction to ensure that health and safety are our foremost consideration. So, thank you all for being here, I really appreciate the resilience of our Wofford community and thanks for your patience and support. I think the highlight of this Q&A will actually be the guy who is speaking next. Brand, why don't you share the enrollment report.

Brand Stille: Thanks, Nayef, I am excited about the news that we have on enrollment. We have 503 new students who have committed to join us next fall. And our goal this year was 495 first-year students, so we've exceeded our goal again. We had a record number of applications this year, record interest in early decision. We dropped our acceptance rate from 59% to 53% which is a new all-time record for the college. Things have gone very well this year in spite of lots of challenges in the enrollment office, and admission and financial aid. And I really think that these numbers, this outcome, is a tribute to all of us at Wofford and the work that we do and the community that we've created that Wofford continues to be very attractive to prospective students and their families. Thank you for the part that you played in making this result possible. In addition to first-year students, we have good news as far as returning students are concerned too. 1264 returning students have paid a deposit and last year at this time that number was 1226. And so, a few more returning students who have paid this year than last year at this time as well.

QUESTION: What is the gap year policy at Wofford, both for entering first-year students and continuing students?

Brand Stille: We don't have an official policy right now for gap year students but our practice in the past has been to talk with the student once that they suggest they are considering a gap year. We ask them to let us know what their plan is and if their plan appears to us to be a valuable use of the year then we typically would agree to defer admission and defer any financial aid or scholarship that student might receive to the next year. And then encourage that student to defer their application to early decision in the following year. There are three first-year students who are committed to enroll in the fall who did defer last year. Because of that, we added a question to the common application this year and we asked students if they were considering a gap year when they applied to Wofford in the fall. And right now, no students who have paid a deposit indicated they were considering a gap year. But this was when they applied and certainly lots has changed since that time. If we get a few requests from students who are considering a gap year, I think that our policy, our practice, will remain very similar to the past. If we get lots and lots of requests, we will have to re-evaluate what that plan might be.

QUESTION: With enrollment so high and the possibility of study abroad students not able to go abroad, does the college foresee a housing shortage, and if so, what is the plan for handling it?

Nayef Samhat: We certainly don't want a repeat of last year if we can avoid it. And no one could anticipate a pandemic that has reshaped all of our estimates on housing and enrollment and the like. But we do have the new residence hall, 150 additional beds. We have contingency plans in case students get sick and need a place to quarantine. The real wild card right now is the number of students planning to study abroad. I think under normal circumstances we would not have an issue with housing. But many of those students who originally planned to study abroad have decided to delay their study abroad experience. We have sent a message to them today, Dean Bigger has sent a note to the remaining 61 or 62 students scheduled to go abroad asking them, now I see 58 planning to go abroad, that we need a decision really by the 20th of May to insure that have adequate beds on campus. So, we will wait to hear from those students and plan accordingly.

QUESTION: Could you explain how Wofford is allocating CARES Act funding so the students who need it most receive their fair share? When will students receive support?

Chris Gardner: That's a great question and one that a lot of people have been working on very hard. We got good guidance from the Department of Education about two weeks ago that helped us figure out what to do. There's a team that included Carolyn Sparks in Financial Aid, Ron Robinson, Boyce Lawton, James Stukes, a couple of folks from my office just to provide logistical support to that very question. They brought a recommendation to the cabinet earlier this week that the cabinet approved that provides for a sliding scale of payments to students based on their need. In our first round of payments, we will see 405 students receive direct cash grants from Wofford through the CARES Act funding. Those grants range from \$1700 for our neediest students to \$425. That will leave about \$150,000 of our original \$550,000 allocation available for the application process that we will open to all students because we understand that there may be students who are experiencing need at this point that would not have traditionally experienced high need in the past. The first round of funding, that tiered approach that I talked

about, the Office of Financial Aid is working very hard with my office to get that applied to students and to try to get checks printed either tomorrow or Monday, then get them in the mail to students as quickly as possible. And then the application process will be available sometime next week for other students.

QUESTION: What are some ways you are considering changing the academic calendar because of COVID-19?

Nayef Samhat: Great question. A couple of things: as you know, we've assembled a working group on the return to campus and that is led by Dan Deeter and has representation from folks across different areas of the campus. The task that I've asked of them is to formulate practices, guidelines, best practices, consistent with ensuring the health, safety and well-being of everyone, students, faculty, staff and coaches should we return to campus and interact. And those practices need to be across all areas of the institution, events of all types, athletic, artistic, performance and classrooms. So, the whole range of things, development events, things like that. That is one kind of basket of information that we will get, I am confident, under the good leadership of Dan and the great members of the committee, that we will have available to us in mid-June to review and discuss. The other thing is the calendar committee led by registrar Jennifer Allison; they are examining calendar options for us in the event some extra time will allow us to bring students back on campus. That might mean a delay of a couple of weeks in the start of the term, it might mean, there are a variety of options out there. A block schedule, dividing the term into two segments in effect, maybe ending early. So, there are a whole range of things they are looking at and existing models out there already in the small world of residential liberal arts colleges that they can draw on. So, those are the things that we are looking at to ensure that students and all of us can be back on campus as soon as possible. I do see some of the questions, Jo Ann, and I'm going to take a little liberty on the second one, I may have misspoken. We want to make a decision on summer II sometime in the later part of May with the provost's office, that is our plan. We are still waiting to hear about the Panthers and their plans for training camp and we're waiting to hear about the NCAA and the expectation for fall sports starting up in the summer.

QUESTION: Do you expect more summer melt of enrolled students than usual? If so, what are we doing to minimize that?

Brand Stille: Every year we do have a little bit of change over the summer in the number of students who have paid a deposit. But typically, the number that we have near this date, about a week after May 1 is the number that we enroll in the fall. There's a little bit of change in who makes up that number. We certainly expect that there could be more activity this summer than in previous summers. We know that a number of institutions like us, near us, who we cross applications with, have not enjoyed the same level of success that we've had in enrollment so far. There's not much that we can do to prevent those institutions from continuing to recruit or offer additional scholarships to students. But our plan is to continue to engage with students who have paid deposits. We have another town hall for deposited students on Monday and we hope that lots of our new students and their parents will participate. We are also working with the orientation staff, Beth Wallace and the students who she has selected for orientation staff to schedule a series of Zoom meetings over the summer and other activities as well. In addition to

the kinds of things that we've provided through FYI to deposited students in the past. So, we've got a list that we're developing, activities that we're developing as well to try to engage with those students as quickly as possible and as effectively as possible.

QUESTION: Financially, what will happen if we cannot return to campus in the fall?

Chris Gardner: Obviously we are looking at a variety of scenarios and as Nayef mentioned earlier there's a team that's been put in place to make sure that we do everything within our power to make sure that we are on campus in the fall, in a safe way for our faculty, students and staff. The cabinet working with me and others, we've developed sort of some frameworks for decision making. If we find ourselves in that situation, just like in the spring if we are not on campus for the entire semester there will be financial consequences to that fact. And so, we are prepared and have prepared a variety of scenarios and contingencies if we find ourselves in that situation. We are really working hard to make sure that that is not the case.

Nayef Samhat: Let me add, briefly, everyone wants students back on campus in the fall. I'd like us to be moving into some degree of normalcy, certainly with students, in summer II. Again, the overriding concern is the health, well-being and safety of everyone. We have talked at the cabinet level about June 1 as a date to begin a limited return to campus for staff and coaches on a rotating basis. The VP's might can organize with their staffs how we might do that and gradually hopefully return to some kind of normalcy, to the degree that there can be any kind of normalcy under the circumstances during the course of the summer. If we are able to bring students back in some fashion for summer II and we have activity on campus in summer II and a set of practices that are shaping our interactions and activities, then I fully believe we would be ready to go in the fall. The situation is straightforward. If Wofford can't return to having students on campus in the fall, then one is, every college in the country probably does not have students on campus in the fall. Two is, there are sectors across the entirety of the American economy that will equally have been devastated. And three is we would have to make some very difficult decisions. We have committed to maintaining everyone whole, completely whole, through this fiscal year and our efforts are directed at not having to make any difficult decisions in terms of reductions of expenses or staff frankly. So, everything we are trying to do is to get back to some degree of normal. And rotating people back into offices, gradually, after June 1, hoping we can get folks back on campus for summer II but most certainly in the fall. That is the crucial variable here. We have indeed a passed a budget that included some significant increases across all divisions of the institution, and, of course, beginning to increase the retirement benefit, move that back to ten percent. Our goal is to maintain those things. The first part of fulfilling that goal has been to get the enrollment that we have been able to realize for the fall. That has been absolutely crucial. We stand out among many many other institutions in that regard with the degree of success we've had. The second thing that is somewhat out of our control is what are the general public health guidelines and practices. So, our commitment is maintaining everyone fully and completely, maintaining our budget program and maintaining health and safety for everyone on campus.

QUESTION: How and when will student move-in occur? Will any coordination need to be made to manage expectations? Are returning students going to be given an "ease back into social life" suggestion when returning?

Nayef Samhat: These are great questions. On the one hand we have our working group to help guide us and good practices. Our move-in date is scheduled for August 26th. We've got two campus construction projects that are due to be finished in time to accommodate us in the fall. And I think that, turning to our working group and calendar folks to help guide us in making good and sensible decisions as we approach the fall. And those decisions and guidelines will apply to everyone, students and parents included. I don't know how the fall will look exactly but the most important thing is that we will be together, all of us.

Jo Ann Brasington: We're going to take some live questions now.

QUESTION: Are professors being proactive to create classes that could easily translate to online learning if the situation calls for it again?

Nayef Samhat: Well, the Provost is probably better positioned to answer that. What I can say is I think this experience here in the spring has expanded the tool kit. I've had communication with some parents and as I've said to some parents and others, our faculty have done heroic work, and staff in supporting this transition to remote learning in such an extraordinarily tight timeline, it's just truly remarkable. It's a remarkable commitment to the endeavor of teaching and our students and the institution. What I sense this may do for many is expand the toolkit for pedagogy. And find new ways to blend classrooms for the like. But, having said that, I think that we have to be prepared for all possibilities. There is the idea or the notion that in fact that the COVID 19 might flare up again in the winter so one strategy available to us is to perhaps end the term around Thanksgiving. But how faculty will adapt, I have no doubt they will adapt and continue to do outstanding teaching in the classroom and mentoring outside the classroom.

QUESTION: If we return to campus for summer II isn't it safe to assume that we will be back in the fall?

Nayef Samhat: Yes, of course I'm optimistic. My view is if we return to campus for summer II and all goes well then, I think that we should be able to return in the fall on schedule. And there are a lot of other variable out there again, we are waiting to hear from the Panthers, the NCAA and things like that. But if we are together in Summer II, I surely expect that we would be together in the fall.

QUESTION: When should staff expect to hear from VP's regarding rotating schedules?

Jo Ann Brasington: I'll go ahead and say that OMC has already heard from me. So, Brand and Chris have your people heard from you?

Chris Gardner: I'll answer that. We've talked about it a little bit, not in-depth, I've talked to some of my folks but not every single one. We normally have at least a weekly Zoom chat, but I think my schedule was a difficult this week so I'm not sure I was able to participate in our weekly chat. So, I haven't as a result haven't been able to talk directly to all of our folks, but we've already started to raise that conversation and we will probably be refining that next week and the following week as to what those rotating schedules will look like.

Brand Stille: Same for me and my staff. Some are aware, and I see lots are on the call now. But we meet every Monday in a staff meeting so I'll update them then together.

Nayef Samhat: We're going to talk about it further in the cabinet. We have had one conversation about it. And the working group is providing a set of practices and guidelines for us to share with our staffs. And I know they'll have those guidelines and practices for all of us, if I'm not mistaken, tomorrow sometime that we will be able to share with our staffs across the institution.

Jo Ann Brasington: We have no other open questions. I want to thank everyone again for participating. Thanks to our panelists and all the people behind the scenes who have made this event possible. Remember to visit <https://www.wofford.edu/coronavirus> for the latest updates and recordings of our virtual events. This includes our faculty and staff town hall. Stay well Terriers!