

Faculty/Staff Town Hall  
Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020  
4 p.m.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** Good afternoon and welcome to this virtual town hall for faculty and staff. I'm Jo Ann Brasington, your host and moderator. This event is supported by the offices of Marketing and Communications and Information Technology Services, with special thanks to Kaye Foster, co-host and Mark Olencki for help with the slides. Joining me are panelists Dr. Nayef Samhat, president; Dr. Mike Sosulski, provost; Roberta Hurley Bigger, vice president dean of students; Chris Gardner, chief financial officer; Chee Lee, director of human resources; Dan Deeter, director of business services and risk management and leader of the college's COVID-19 working group; and Beth Wallace, associate vice president and director of the wellness center. Dudley Brown, director of communications and a member of the working group, will be monitoring the Q&A feature and responding or passing along questions to the panelists as appropriate. This will last no more than 45 minutes. If you cannot stay for the event, we will post a recording and transcript at [www.wofford.edu/coronavirus](http://www.wofford.edu/coronavirus) under the Town Hall icon. Let's begin with remarks from President Samhat.

**Nayef Samhat:** Thank you all for participating in another Town Hall event. It's late in the semester, and I know many are suffering from screen fatigue, so I appreciate the effort to remain engaged and informed. I'd also like to thank all of you for doing your part. We're a little over a week away from November 20<sup>th</sup>, and students returning home. It's been a remarkable semester in so many ways. Everyone has contributed to student success and wellness this semester. I know it's been a challenge, but we continue to persevere thanks to everything everyone is doing, all of you. In the spirit of Thanksgiving, I would like to express our appreciation for all that you have done by making Monday, November 20 and Tuesday, November 21 remote workdays. That goes across the entire campus. People who cannot be off campus those days, should talk with their supervisors about substituting those days for two other days in December before the Christmas holiday. It's a small gesture of appreciation and I hope you'll have more time to spend amongst loved ones during Thanksgiving week. Today — Wednesday, November 11 — our college and country remember and thank our country's military service veterans. Veteran's Day, originally known as Armistice Day, is also a day to aspire to unity, peace and service above self. We all need that reminder right now. This Town Hall event is, therefore, a nice way for Wofford College to do its part to promote community. As a community we will share information and ask and answer questions. The goal is for everyone to leave feeling heard, valued and equipped with information that will help us complete the semester together and prepare for a spring full of hope and possibilities. Again, thank you. Now, let's begin.

**We know that students will be working and learning remotely after Thanksgiving, and then beginning the holiday break early. Should faculty and staff anticipate any changes to schedules to clear the campus after Thanksgiving?**

**Chee Lee:** Given the steady increase in Covid-19 numbers and in addition to what President Samhat just mentioned, I will take this liberty to state that the Monday/Tuesday, November 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, the week of that Thanksgiving week, the college, this cabinet, is going to support that staff and employees, including faculty and staff, continue with a flexible work schedule. We've been thankful of everybody's service and what everybody's been doing. So, should faculty and staff anticipate any changes to schedules? Yes, we are going to continue with remote work and flexibilities for all staff and positions that can be.

Editor's note regarding Thanksgiving week and time off, please refer to this message from President Samhat: *In the spirit of Thanksgiving, I would like to demonstrate the college's gratitude by recommending that whenever possible, we consider Monday, Nov. 23 and Tuesday, Nov. 24 remote work days. People who cannot be off campus those days should talk with their supervisors about substituting those days for two other remote work days in December. Additionally, the rise in cases of coronavirus once again makes it prudent to consider flexible schedules that offer less density in spaces while ensuring that the needs of the college are met. Beginning Monday, Nov. 30, the college will offer the option to work remotely, when appropriate and applicable, until the beginning of the spring semester on Monday, Jan. 4. Again, please coordinate with your supervisor.*

**Are there ongoing discussions about delaying the start of the spring semester or starting the semester as remote only, given current projections about the pandemic and the timing of the holidays?**

**Dan Deeter:** The original plan was for classes to begin on campus on Monday, January 4. Classes will still begin on January 4, but they will be held remotely until January 11. Students will be able to return to campus beginning January 6, provided they have a negative COVID-19 test result or have recovered from coronavirus (and we have that information in health records) within the past 3 months. The move in period will run from Jan. 6-10. Remote classes from January 4-8. In-person classes begin again on January 11.

**What are we doing to ensure that students don't bring positive cases back to campus with them after the holidays?**

**Beth Wallace:** The college is requiring students, faculty and staff produce a negative COVID-19 test result prior to returning to campus. This was decided by the working group that's been in operation under Dan Deeter since early spring. We would like the negative. We would like the negative test to be on or after January 4 or through Sunday, January 10. We will be sending you information through the wellness center with explicit instructions about that test as far as locations in our area plus how to get that information to us. Faculty and staff who are asymptomatic do not have to quarantine while waiting on test results from DHEC, but a flexible schedule will be put in place until students return to campus for in-person classes on January 11.

**Where does the college stand on testing for the spring semester? Also, I've heard that Wofford may become a COVID-19 testing center. Is this true, and if so, how will that work? Will it only be for our campus community?**

**Dan Deeter:** Yes, we are changing our testing protocol for the spring semester. Based on new DHEC guidance, testing protocols will be entirely different. Beth just told you about requirements for pre-semester entry testing. We will be increasing testing of asymptomatic students throughout the spring semester and we're working with vendors to set up no cost and on-site testing for students and employees. That testing site would also be available to members in our community. I'm not at liberty to discuss what that site is because it's still being negotiated. But we're confident that the site will be in place for the spring semester. Athletics will continue to follow NCAA testing guidelines for all winter and spring sports as well.

**What's the status of spring semester or Interim travel study programs?**

**Mike Sosulski:** At this point in time we have around twenty students who are still planning to study abroad in the spring but we don't know at what degree that will be possible so we are staying in touch with our study abroad partner programs and monitoring that closely to keep students informed. As to Interim, we will make a decision on what April and May Interim will look like in terms of travel in late January or early February.

**Are there guidelines on personal travel over the holidays?**

**Dan Deeter:** There's a link to a CDC website that handles this question much better than I can handle it. (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>) I would advise you to read their information. There is information out there about CDC guidance for holiday gatherings, for travel over the holidays, for precautions that we all can take to take care of ourselves, our families and others that we might gather with. I think the college is interested in making sure that everyone has that information and that we all protect those who are closest to us over the holidays, including colleagues when we return.

**Can you give a brief report from the Board of Trustees meeting?**

**Nayef Samhat:** The first thing I want to say, to just bring clarity to the remote workdays, are actually the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, Monday and Tuesday of Thanksgiving week. And again, work with your supervisor if you need to be on campus, so you can make up those days before the Christmas holiday. We did send out a memo about the board meeting but let me just reiterate some of the things that we discussed. The fee was set for the next academic year, room, board, tuition for \$63,895 is the comprehensive fee. Our goal has been to reduce the rate of increase annually. A couple of years we had about a 4.5% increase, last year 4.25%, and this year we're just under 4% and we hope to maintain that trend going forward. The board also voted to honor Steve and Maria Mungo by naming the campus life building in their honor. I'm sure you've been in there and seen the first phase of renovations. There's another phase coming next summer that will touch the Tony White Theatre, the game room, and once we get past the

pandemic, we'll have wonderful colorful furniture in that space as well. The signs will be placed on the Mungo Student Center in the coming weeks. We haven't had the opportunity to have an official naming ceremony for the building nor have we had an official ceremony to recognize Harold and Delores Chandler for the Environmental Studies building. Those are things we intend to do after we get through this pandemic and are gathering again in some sense of normalcy. Steve and Maria Mungo, not only did they provide resources for the student center renovation, but they also led the campaign to raise funds to help students whose families were negatively impacted by the coronavirus. That was a very quick and substantial effort which generated over a half a million dollars to go to students in need. The board approved a new investment committee of the board. We have been operating with an investment advisory committee which was not an official committee of the board, but it was an advisory committee that reported to the operations committee. But we have formally incorporated the investment committee into the board as another official committee. That's best practice and good governance. And then finally, the board discussed the new Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion strategic vision process. Ramón and Christine were there along with Journey Jones and Dylan, I believe, are the two students there as well. We had some good conversation and I know the board is looking forward to hearing from the steering committee when they update the community and begin listening sessions and we'll be having another conversation with them in the February meeting as they continue their work through the spring. It was a good meeting, a good comprehensive meeting, very forward-looking. So, I think we should feel good about where the institution is at this point during the semester.

**How did the college fare financially during the fall semester? Are we anticipating financial challenges this spring?**

**Chris Gardner:** I shared with many of you that were on pre-session where we were, heading into this semester and that we felt good about our situation, that we were ahead of budget on enrollment, which is the biggest driver of revenue and that therefore the resources that are available to support our programming and operations. As we get to this point in the semester, everything has gone more or less as we would have planned and hoped. We feel good about where we are from a financial perspective. We really didn't have any surprises this fall so at this point I think we'll get through the end of the semester without any of those surprises. The other thing I shared with you at that time was that for every week that we would have to be in remote instruction, it takes about \$400,000 out of our operating budget. Unfortunately, as we look forward to the spring, the financial challenges aren't new or different, but I think the level of uncertainty remains high. If anything, I think that the uncertainty about our ability to effectively contain the spread of the virus on our campus in the spring may be a little bit higher simply because of the amount of community transmission that we're seeing and the prevalence of the disease. It's not new concerns, it's the same concerns. Obviously, Dan and his team and the folks in the wellness center have done an outstanding job of creating a safe environment on campus. Although we have seen spread of the disease and we have seen students who've been affected and even some employees, we haven't had the big spike. That's the biggest financial risk and the risk that leads us down the road of potentially needing to go remote, is if we see one of those big spikes and unfortunately I don't think that risk is any lower than it was and it's

a testament to our students, to our faculty, to our staff that we've been able to get to this point without those big spikes.

**With open enrollment about the close, do I need to opt in to the EyeMed plan or will I be automatically enrolled in the base plan if I do nothing?**

**Chee Lee:** Insurance is one of those things that HR or the institution never opt-in for you. The EyeMed plan, if you don't have any eye coverage, or if want the EyeMed plan, you do have to enroll. There is no "by default" or automatic enrollment. If you have the Wofford health insurance right now, no matter what your coverage is: individual, individual and child, individual and spouse, or family, to continue with our health insurance and to have minimal eye coverage, you do have to enroll in the EyeMed plan. So, make sure you stop to see Julie or email her, she will be happy to send out the application to you.

**How will all of the athletics seasons happening in the spring impact expectations for faculty/academic attendance policies?**

**Mike Sosulski:** That's a really good question and it's good that people are thinking ahead and planning. When we went to remote instruction on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March in the spring semester, we asked everyone for flexibility because the situation is fluid and unpredictable and unprecedented. And as we see the pandemic continue to roll through our lives we're going to have to continue to be as flexible as we possibly can. So, I'm going to ask everybody to really remain with that mindset of grace and flexibility because students come here for all kinds of important reasons. Academics are paramount but there are also student-athletes, and these are important parts of their experiences here, so we need to work hard, support each other and maintain that flexibility in allowing students to participate in all of the aspects of their experience here on campus. We will see how things go. We have fall and spring sports planned for the spring semester, but we will continue to monitor that activity. As we get closer to those seasons beginning, we don't know what the pandemic will bring so let's just all hang in there for now.

**How strict was the college in enforcing COVID student guidelines?**

**Roberta Bigger:** I think our staff, meaning campus life and student development, and especially residence life and campus safety were very consistent in enforcing the COVID guidelines. Initially it was masks, and we had 36 mask violations to date. And then the most difficult for students was the gatherings, not physically distancing. That number of violations was 175. There were a few students, prior to us changing the rule that they couldn't have any guests in their apartments, there was a group that decided to have an event in their apartment, so they were asked to move off-campus and take classes remotely and they've done that. That was the biggest challenge. It pointed out to us that not every student had read all the guidelines when they signed the pledge but I remind them the pledge is on our website and all our guidelines

are listed on the website and we know going forward that we're going to have to remind students before they come back on January 11 about the guidelines.

### **How would you grade the college on its COVID response?**

**Nayef Samhat:** Well, I would grade an A+. First and foremost, we're close to finishing the semester on campus and I imagine many of us didn't think we'd get this far without spikes and the like. I feel pretty good about where we are, and notwithstanding any unforeseen event over the weekend and next week, we should be ok getting to November 20. I think we've learned that our protective measures worked. Faculty and staff counts of transmissions through students, we haven't had any demonstrated case of that. I'll let Dan and Beth correct me if I'm wrong with that, but the cases that we have had have been generally among students as Roberta has just described for different reasons. I think that we have created opportunities for innovation and one of the things that I'd like to do as we make our way through this pandemic, is, maybe in the spring, although I'm reluctant to have yet another committee, so we'll hold off on forming another committee. But I think we need to look at, as a community, all of the innovations and responses to the pandemic, and what we did and what we've been doing. Faculty have innovated tremendously; they've turned on a dime to create remote and hybrid learning environments. Staff have innovated across all areas, whether it's in student affairs or admissions, advancement, facilities, athletics, there have been lots of opportunities for innovation and we need to gather up those innovative practices and look at them and see what we might carry on with and how we might use these innovations under normal circumstances. If there is any silver lining to this moment and I'm hard-pressed to find one, but that forced innovation, I think, is one of them. Our students were challenged academically, they are challenged academically, and they have become very resilient. They have generally followed our guidelines, they have found ways to connect with each other, innovative ways as well as traditional ways. And I think we should be proud of our students. In many instances, I don't think we'd be able to get very far were it not for the high degree of compliance from our students. I think we can improve in different ways; we're learning a lot of things about how to respond to this situation. But we have done this together as a community and really, I think one of the most important outcomes of this semester is that we've come together as a community in solidarity in order to respond to this pandemic moment, this most unusual semester. It's a testament to all of you and your commitment to our institution, a place-based mission, the student experience, and your deep affection for Wofford College that we have had, what to me is, a successful semester under the circumstances. And as we look forward to the spring, I know Dan has outlined some of our responses and proposed practices for the spring, but we have a glimmer of hope with the therapeutics and vaccine that appear to be primed for distribution in the early spring. That might once again bring sunshine to all of us. I want to thank everyone. An A+ is a pretty good grade and I've been told over the years that I'm a pretty hard grader. Thank you.

### **When will the WoffordTogether website be updated with this new information?**

**Jo Ann Brasington:** The website was being updated today, it probably isn't quite finished, with this information thanks to Kevin Huffman, he's a genius and the college's digital director. I'm sure he will finish it up sometime tomorrow. So, thanks to him and Dudley Brown and the working group for making sure we had the correct information there.

**If the Southern Conference decides to not have spring sports, what would the financial implications be?**

**Nayef Samhat:** I'm almost positive we're going to have spring sports, having talked to our Southern Conference commissioner and other CEO's. But, in the event we would replicate the situation last spring. The athletic program is not a surplus revenue generator. It is an important aspect of the collegiate experience for our students, but we're certainly not like any of the Power Five institutions and we would hold expenses associated with competitions to zero since there are no travel expenses or other kinds of associated expenses. The net impact would be minimal. Chris can correct me if I'm wrong.

**Chris Gardner:** No, I was going to say that as I look at the financial forecast for the year, it's possible we'll have some fans in attendance for some of the games, it's possible we won't but here in my office we are not counting on any ticket revenue from those athletic contests. So, as Nayef said, it should not have an adverse impact on what we're expecting for the rest of the academic year.

**What is the plan for fraternity and sorority recruitment in the spring semester?**

**Roberta Bigger:** The fraternities and sororities are working with their national offices to follow all of their guidelines as well as ours. And I know that the sororities are more organized at this point and are going to start recruitment by Zoom. I believe the fraternities will follow suit.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** That is all of the questions. Thank you to all who participated and thank you to our panelists and all of the people behind the scenes who have made this event possible.

Remember, you can find a recording and transcript of this event at

[www.wofford.edu/coronavirus](http://www.wofford.edu/coronavirus). This concludes our virtual town hall. Stay well Terriers!