

Families Town Hall  
Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020  
5 p.m.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** Good afternoon and welcome to this virtual town hall for families. 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 and dean of students; Richard Johnson, director of athletics; Thom Henson, director of parent engagement; Dan Deeter, director of business services and risk management. He is also 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 college's COVID-19 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 Jo Ann and thanks to all of you for participating in another town hall event. We're nearing the end of the semester and while I wish we could say that we have more answers than questions there is still much that remains dependent upon the pandemic. The uncertainty is frustrating for all of us I know, and I appreciate your patience and your efforts to remain engaged and informed on things and events happening at the campus. I'd also like to thank the many students, faculty and staff who have worked very hard over the semester to ensure student success and wellness. We have less than two weeks before we break for Thanksgiving, a week of remote learning, exams and winter holidays. We're almost there and I'm already looking forward to a spring semester full of hope and possibilities. News about vaccines and therapeutic treatments encourage all of us that maybe there is light at the end of this tunnel. Today, Wednesday, Nov. 11, our college and country remember and thank our country's military service veterans. Veterans Day, which we knew originally as Armistice Day, is also a day to aspire to unity, peace and service above oneself. And we all need that reminder right now. This town hall event is, therefore, a way for Wofford College to promote unity and solidarity among the Wofford family. Again, thank you, and now, Jo Ann, let's begin.

#### **Has Wofford considered reducing tuition or giving refunds because of the disruptions to the student experience because of COVID?**

- **Nayef Samhat:** The Board of Trustees at their most recent fall meeting set tuition, fees, room and board comprehensive fee at \$63,895 for the 2021/22 academic year. This is actually a reduction in the rate of change, and we are very conscious of the fact that

families are facing challenging circumstances. We do provide more than 97% of our students with some form of aid. I understand that the experience on campus is different. It's different across the entire country. Every college and university is facing similar challenges. But there are expenses associated with our attempt and our mission-based approach to educating students in a pandemic. We've had lots of additional expenses and mitigation and safety and testing measures. Upwards, in fact, over the course of the year, of half a million to three quarters of a million dollars by the time we get through the spring. The college also distributed about \$550,000 in CARES Act funding to students to support students in need. And Wofford trustees an additional \$500,000 in funding to support students whose families were negatively impacted by coronavirus. So that's over a million dollars that we have distributed to support students. Of course, if you have any questions, I urge you to contact the office of financial aid, especially if your family's circumstances have changed. You can email them at [FINAID@wofford.edu](mailto:FINAID@wofford.edu). And Jo Ann can put that in the chat box as well.

### **Will there be more in-person class options in the spring?**

**Mike Sosulski:** Thanks Jo Ann and welcome to everybody who's joining us this evening. I expect next semester, spring semester, to look quite similar to the fall semester in terms of our mix of in-person, remote and hybrid learning options for students. There are basically two situations that would lead to remote coursework or hybrid and that would be in the event that the faculty member teaching the class has a CDC recommended condition that would basically recommend that they should stay away from the classroom and teach remotely. We had about 30 faculty members in that situation this past semester and that's about what we're looking at in the spring as well. The second reason is, in order to accommodate physical spacing, physical distancing in classrooms, many faculty members are using an in-person day and then a remote day, in sequence, so that we can continue to have in-person face-to-face contact with students but also fit into the classroom spaces in which we need to teach. So, like I say, I think that we have accomplished this fairly well this semester and we will work at it the same way this spring. The other thing I'm going to say is that the course schedule is coded so that students, as they are selecting courses, will be able to tell what course is taught in what fashion and make their decisions, at least in part, accordingly. And advising, which is happening now, advising for course selection for the spring semester is taking place over the last couple of weeks, that has also been specifically tailored to help students understand what their in-person versus remote and hybrid options look like. So, that's how we're approaching things from the academic perspective in the spring.

### **Are there post-pandemic plans to help first-year students acclimate? They did not get the same opportunities as students in previous years because of the pandemic.**

**Beth Wallace:** Believe me, it saddens no one more than me that we didn't have our traditional orientation full of activities and memory making for our first-year students. We did have a type

of orientation and I give credit to our orientation staff for designing an orientation experience for very small groups, but of course it wasn't our traditional orientation. But as I've looked at this question, I've thought that nothing would thrill me more than to create some opportunities for first-year students instead of dealing with quarantining and isolating, like we have been doing in the fall. So, with that I've started thinking about that, and I thought, well, if we have the opportunity this spring, we can certainly create some opportunities for students to gather and get to know each other, and celebrations, to be able to get together. Our first-year seminar courses are winding up this fall, but those 20/21 students continue to gather and do some social events with their orientation staff in small groups. But then I started thinking, if it really is next fall, what can we do for these students? Of course, we would have our orientation, but then I thought, wouldn't it be cool to create some sort of sophomore experience in the fall for these students who did not have that opportunity in their fall semester. And I was just brainstorming in my mind, we could have some picnics that would replicate the one up at Greystone, which is an all-time favorite with the steaks. We could bring our staff down from there and do some service projects that we've done in the past and other things. I appreciate whoever posed this question. Let me get out of my bubble of COVID-19 for a little while and think, what does normal look like? What could we do for these students? So, I appreciate the question and we will keep asking students, I'll ask the orientation staff that I continue to work with, what are some ideas that they may have. So, we will look forward to these times and we will not forget that these first-year students didn't have our traditional experience.

**Will students be offered a pass/fail option again this semester since the learning environment is still not normal?**

**Mike Sosulski:** We will be returning to a normal letter grade system this semester and we'll maintain that throughout the year. The reason that we implemented kind of an emergency credit/no credit option last spring was due to the suddenness of the change. There really wasn't very much time for faculty to make adjustments and for students to get prepared to learn in a very new way on a very short timeline. So, it really seemed justified and all of our peer institutions made exactly that same decision. We are in that same position now of being right along with our peers in returning to the normal A through F grading scale. Very few institutions are continuing the pass/fail option. There are many reasons for that, but in order to maintain the academic integrity of a Wofford College, or any college degree, quality grades need to be issued. And so, we are much, much better prepared than we were in the spring. The faculty spent the entire summer doing professional development workshops to make sure that they had really good command of the tools that are necessary to teach in a hybrid format or even in a remote format. The effort has been really impressive from faculty, staff and students all across the campus to adapt to this new environment. So, the thing that makes Wofford special, always has and will continue to make is special is how much faculty and staff care about students and develop those relationships. We continue to reach out in the same kind of ways to support and care and give individual attention. That's the situation for the spring.

### **Just wondering how spring sports will look.**

**Richard Johnson:** It's going to be very busy! So, our spring sports are going to play their full, normal schedules. And at the same time, we're going to have to manage the fall sports that were postponed to the spring. So, the only competitions that we've had in the fall has been cross country, they participated in one meet and they will have their conference championship at the end of this month and then they are done. But every other sport will be going on, pretty much at the same time, in the spring. So, it will be very busy. The fall sports will play truncated schedules, primarily just conference only schedules, with one or two non-conference events. And spring sports will be playing their normal spring schedules. We'll be quite busy. We won't be able to do maybe all of the streaming that we normally do because we'll have multiple sports going on the same day.

### **Will Wofford do a student lottery for tickets to basketball games this fall and winter?**

**Richard Johnson:** If we have fans, we will. So right now, our plan it to, of course students will be gone here shortly as the semester comes to a conclusion and we're not going to have fans at our men's and women's basketball games until 2021. That's our plan right now, we hope that we'll be able to keep to that time schedule. We will then do a lottery for students in the student section, faculty and staff, and then we will do a priority point system for our ticket holders to allow them to purchase and get tickets for individual games. We've got a plan approved by the State of South Carolina right now that limits us to about 20% capacity, so it's going to be tight but we're going to make sure that each one of our constituencies are represented and taken care of to the best that we can.

### **Is there a plan to loosen gathering and event restrictions in the spring?**

**Dan Deeter:** This one is a difficult one for a lot of reasons. We all know the community that makes up a college gets a little compromised when we have restrictions on gatherings and events. On the other hand, we also know from our own experience and our own contact tracing that gatherings are probably the biggest source of transmission on our campuses. And I think there was a study that came out today that there was about 80% of transmissions occurring in a three-month period from gatherings. Having said that, we want to at least begin the semester with similar restrictions as we've had in the fall, because we've had a reasonable amount of success with those restrictions. What we do want to do is, we want to clarify a little better, the difference between a gathering and an event. To put it as simply as I can, a gathering would be an informal gathering of people that come together, say a group of students in a mall, or in the horseshoe on campus, or in the village. An event would be a planned event which is advertised and approved and so forth. We currently have an event limit on campus of forty individuals attending an event. That we expect to stay in place. We've also made special exceptions for events where we've reviewed the plans and feel the events are safe and we've been able to do those events. And I think that Roberta's Campus Life and Student Development Office has done

a great job of developing activities and events that are interesting to students and allowed them the chance to do other things than just study in their rooms. Gatherings, on the other hand, are an informal group of people that comes together. We still want to limit. Our current limit would be ten people gathering outside. And in any gathering or event, we're going to require social distancing and masks because we know those are effective. So, look forward to that information being clarified much more clearly in the Wofford Together plan in the coming days. That's our current plan for the spring.

**What are you doing to ensure that students don't leave campus in the spring to attend parties at large universities because Wofford is limiting gathering?**

**Roberta Bigger:** As we said in August before the students returned to campus, we realized we couldn't tell students they couldn't leave campus. We have about 500 employees who are coming back and forth to campus every day and we have several hundred students who commute to campus. So, there was no way for us to say that students had to remain on campus, unlike some smaller institutions that we know about in the Midwest. Wofford Activities Council, which is run by students who applied to be on that great group had events every week with this week being an exception because of tests and papers. We had over 25 activities in the last two and a half months. In addition to that there were several student organizations who, like our Finite group which met every Friday night with social events and the Geek Guild which meets on Friday nights also. So, there was always something going on. Then, every Friday afternoon I would send out an email to the students reminding them about our guidelines and reminding them about activities that were being held on and off campus that week and weekend. For example, beginning tonight, and through the weekend is the play by our Wofford Theatre majors is another opportunity for our students to get out and do something with their friends or roommates. I appreciate the compliment from Dan Deeter, and I think between the staff and the students we've done a good job at having events on campus in light of the COVID restrictions.

**I appreciate the Conquer and Prevail e-newsletters, but I sometimes don't feel like I'm getting enough information about how students are doing on campus with COVID? Can you start putting those type things on the parents Facebook page or sending me regular emails?**

**Thom Henson:** We're glad that Conquer & Prevail has been popular, and it's been popular with parents and alums, and we hope that all of you will continue to enjoy that. In addition to the monthly parent e-newsletter that we do, the college is updating coronavirus information on our Wofford Together site and it's located at [Wofford.edu/woffordtogether](http://Wofford.edu/woffordtogether). I understand that that information was updated today. So, I encourage you take a look at that and to get the latest information. And I think the Facebook idea has some merit and I think it's a good idea to maybe incorporate social media. That is something we can certainly look into. Let me also mention, if you're not getting our parent newsletters or if you would like to help us with some of our social media, we're always looking for parents to help us out with that, please get in touch with me and let me know. My email address is [hensontm@wofford.edu](mailto:hensontm@wofford.edu). I'll be happy to hear from you and then connect with you that way. Again, we thank you for your patience this semester. I'm

sorry I haven't been able to meet as many of you in person as I normally would, hopefully that will change in the spring. But thanks for that good question.

### **Explain the change in the academic calendar. What happens if you can't start on time in January?**

**Mike Sosulski:** There would be two main motivations for flipping the Interim, which normally happens in January, as you know, and the spring semester. The first reason for doing that was that two big features of Interim have traditionally been travel, often foreign travel, which isn't possible right now due to the pandemic. And also, internships which are also limited to some degree because many employers have gone to remote work schedules or flexible work schedules and are not necessarily taking interns into their companies right now. One rationale was to postpone Interim so that we might still preserve the possibility of having those experiences still take place for students in April and May. The other reason would be that if the pandemic would dictate to us that we still couldn't travel for Interim in April, and internships were still less possible, or there were fewer of them available, that would mean that we would have to have most if not all students taking part in on-campus Interims. Now that's a little bit of a logistical challenge at Wofford because the way on-campus Interims work is that they meet for longer periods of time. Many of them meet for three hours a day and some even longer. That would put a strain on our classroom capacity, to be able to host that many Interim classes at one time. We would need a little bit of time for planning to reconceive the time on-task that Interim projects would take, how we would schedule them, if we are still not able to travel by April and May. Postponing Interim to April gives us that planning time that we need. So, we are planning for both possibilities and we will share information about what that will look like as soon as it becomes available.

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

**Mike Sosulski:** I realized that I didn't answer the second part of the previous question, what happens if we can't start on time in January. The answer to that question is that we will be able to start the spring semester on time because we have just made the decision that Wofford will begin the spring semester on January 4<sup>th</sup>, but that first week of instruction will be remote. I can refer to Dan Deeter to speak a little bit more about the rationale for doing that, but we do think that it will mean a safe return for students and a much safer start to the semester in general. The status of the spring semester study abroad programs is very similar to what the fall semester programs at this much in advance of their beginning. That is that our partner organizations through which we send students to study abroad, many of them have cancelled or suspended their programs for the spring. At this point we have about twenty, the number is in the low twenties, of students who are still enrolled in spring semester programs. But again, we are on alert, we are talking to our partner organizations who provide us programs and staying in touch with students who are enrolled to make sure that we have alternate plans

available in case those plans, or programs are cancelled. I think I explained the Interim piece of that in my answer to the previous slide.

**Will my student need to be tested before returning in January? Will the college pay for that? Is there a testing plan for the spring semester?**

**Dan Deeter:** I'll start because I can finish up some of the thought about the beginning of spring semester being remote. We're making that change in order to conduct pre-return testing. We're going to require that all students, faculty and staff be tested prior to return to campus in January for spring semester. In order to do that effectively with the holidays it was just far easier to begin that testing requirement to be on or after January 4<sup>th</sup>. Then we will begin in-person classes on January 11<sup>th</sup>. With that, once a student has proof of the negative test, beginning that Wednesday they will be allowed to move in to the residence halls, and they can begin their spring studies in the residence halls and take the remote classes there or they can wait until the weekend to move-in. The move-in period will be from the 6<sup>th</sup> through the 10<sup>th</sup> of January. There will be more information coming on this testing and then I'll finish with talking about the rest of our testing program. Hopefully that will answer everyone's question. DHEC, rather recently, changed their guidance regarding asymptomatic testing. What that has done has been to lead us to reevaluate our own program. So, the changes we are making is part of trying to make that guidance. So, the pre-semester testing allows us to have a base start for everyone without COVID-19. I know there is concern about costs for these tests, and I will say that most communities, most states have no-cost testing available. I Googled that this morning for South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia, obviously not all fifty states, but if you have trouble finding those resources, try Googling it. You are welcome to call me. You can call the Wellness Center; they will help you find those resources. In addition to the entry testing, the other change that we're going to make is that we're going to implement surveillance testing for asymptomatic students throughout the semester, which is something we have not done before. If you're not familiar with what that is, we're basically going to basically run groups of our students, and I guess we may do it with faculty and staff as well, through that testing process periodically to get a measure of what the level of infection is on our campus. We have that sort of in place already because our athletic teams have been going through surveillance testing as part of the NCAA mandated guidelines. But we want to expand that further into the student population just to make sure that we're catching the cases before they spread, to the best degree possible. I'm working on setting up a no-cost clinic on campus that would be able to do testing. It would not be there 24/7/365 but would rather be an opportunity for us to conduct the testing without students having to leave campus to get it done. It would also allow us to set up a site that the Spartanburg community can use, can be an additional resource for testing. That's the latest and most current update. As I said earlier, we will be sending our additional instructions about what the testing requirements are. Beth, did I miss anything?

**Beth Wallace:** We will be sending out very detailed instructions about when to be tested and how to upload and get those test results to us. We'll work with Residence Life for move-in process and procedures to make sure we are checking those off. And in the event that a student, faculty or staff are positive, of course we will communicate with them directly about

instructions on how they should proceed. I see there is a question about international students. How will international students be able to meet the testing requirements, and will they be able to arrive on campus earlier than the 6ht? I read that and then I think I will go back and partner with Sara Milani who works with international students. I know that we had talked about early arrival, testing, quarantining, so we will work with her on our international students to make sure we're accommodating their schedules and their returning to campus. Many of them are student athletes and we work with them and their coaches. And all of our international students, we will make sure that we take all of that into consideration as we develop this plan.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** Thank you both. That was our last pre-submitted question. We have a few more. One for President Samhat. What is the plan for May commencement? And, considering that we have another question that talks about senior week, awards, that kind of stuff, I think you can answer all of that together.

**Nayef Samhat:** I'll do my best, Right now, the spring, I think about last year here as we approach Thanksgiving, no one would have imagined what happened over the subsequent months in the spring. I have a strong thread of optimism in me that says with therapeutics and vaccines, and efficient distribution and the great management of folks here on campus, many of whom are on this Zoom, we will find ourselves, hopefully, in a different public health environment. So, for now, I'm assuming that we will have a public health environment that will allow us to have commencement on campus. But it is all dictated by conditions and public health environment. If the pandemic is not under control and we find ourselves in a situation this coming spring that we were in last spring, then we will have to defer again. But I can tell you all of us, everyone at the college, everyone on this Zoom, wants nothing more than to have those activities during commencement and Senior Week, so we can celebrate them. That is our plan. We will make that call sometime during the spring term. I don't have that precise date, but we would do so with plenty of time so that parents and families can plan for the weekend.

**Jo Ann:** We have another question. Dean Bigger this one is for you. Is there a plan for Greek life and fraternity and sorority rush in the spring?

**Roberta Bigger:** They have done a great job this semester, I really applaud their patience. I met with IFC and fraternity president's last week. Most of them had meeting by Zoom and occasionally they had meetings in Leonard Auditorium, where they could distance their membership. They have been busy planning recruitment. The faculty committee will look at the dates this Friday, but I presume it's going to be approved for late January. They are following their national guidelines to do recruitment by Zoom, so they will recruit new members and they are excited about that. We've allowed the officers access to their houses to have small meetings in their houses, and the sororities asked if they could have members study in their houses, so that's been happening. We hope, depending upon what happens in the spring, as you've heard from everyone here, that we will amend our gathering and event guidelines. And as I've promised IFC there will be parties again sometime at Wofford College in the Greek Village.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** Richard Johnson, we have a question asking if parents of athletes or cheerleaders will be able to attend any of the games?

**Richard Johnson:** That answer is yes. So again, we'll be doing no fans through December. But once we begin in January, the answer to that is yes.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** Beth Wallace, here is another one for you. Students who have had COVID may test positive long after they are not considered infectious. How will this be handled for the return to campus in the spring?

**Beth Wallace:** Great question. We deal with that now, as students were returning in August, and we will deal with that on an individual basis, ask some questions about symptoms and timeframes. But as that information comes to us our staff will talk to those students on an individual basis.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** Dean Bigger, will books be shipped again over the break since the spring semester will begin remotely? Do you know the answer to that, or does Provost Sosulski?

**Mike Sosulski:** I'm not sure about the answer to that.

**Dan Deeter:** I just met with Rebecca from the bookstore today, so we had some discussion about this. I think they will plan to ship as many of them as they can. I'll take this opportunity to ask the parents to encourage their sons and daughters to return their books at the end of the semester because some of those books will be reused for the spring semester and it definitely impacts how quickly they can turn those books around to be shipped or distributed for spring semester.

**Roberta Bigger:** We can get detailed information on that and send it to students and parents.

**Thom Henson:** Look for it in the December parent newsletter, we'll make sure it's in there.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** And Thom, remind me, those newsletters come out the first Tuesday of every month?

**Thom Henson:** That's right, the first Tuesday of every month. Again, if you're a parent and not receiving that, please let me know and I'll be happy to add you to the system so you can get the parent newsletter monthly.

**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!