

Q&A with Human Resources and College Operations Town Hall  
Thursday, May 28, 2020  
4 p.m.

**Nayef Samhat:** Let me just thank everyone for their commitment to the college and their patience with this situation we find ourselves in. I know it's been a challenge for everyone across the Wofford community. And hopefully there's some light at the end of the tunnel. I know that starting next week we've talked about and have said we want to begin rotating folks to campus in a safe and socially distant way, a gradual rotation of people so we can get acclimated, so we can build comfort and confidence in our practices and in our operations. It is what I would call, a very long runway to get us ready to welcome students back to campus in August. We are committed to doing that, as you know we look to the end of June to make a final and firm decision on that. The two committees that are working on guidelines and a framework for to return to campus and a calendar will be reporting to the cabinet in the next couple of weeks so we will have their best recommendations. Assuming that we go forward we will have that very long runway to build that comfort and confidence in being back on campus, all of us, in preparing for the arrival of students. So, I want to thank you for your questions and this opportunity to share information and response. I'll say what I've said before in these town hall's is that we don't have all the answers, but we'll give you the answers we do have. And those we don't have we'll find the answers out in time. So, thanks for your patience and thanks for everything you do for Wofford College. Jo Ann, back to you.

**Question: Please explain the mask protocols. Should we always wear a mask or only when we are within six feet of others?**

**Chee Lee:** The return to work committee recommended and the cabinet approved that all individuals wear masks. So, in general, individuals should wear masks as much as possible and especially in the presence of others when you're out and about on campus and definitely in shared spaces. When or where one may not have to wear a mask or be asked to remove a mask are in cases of accommodation. For example, if you're interacting with someone who reads lips, obviously it's going to be difficult for that individual to read your lips if you're behind a mask unless you have a clear or plastic mask. Additionally, if you have your own office and you're by yourself, this too is another situation where you don't necessarily have to wear a mask. But having provided these specifics in the protocols of wearing masks, equally important is to continue to maintain social distancing, six feet apart from others, and continue frequent hand washing, as both have proven to be effective measures in the prevention of spreading all diseases.

**Question: How can we prevent students from coming to class sick and making others sick as well?**

**Nayef Samhat:** I think the most important thing in this situation is education and individual responsibility. As Chee noted with the masks, wearing masks and social distancing, these are things that we as individuals have to assume responsibility for, for the greater good. In the case of this specific question in students, we need to educate them on the perils of leaving their room sick, the perils of exposing themselves to others if they are not well. We have the Wellness Center who can take care of students and identify issues. But we need to be able to communicate, we will communicate with students and educate them on proper behavior at every opportunity. Through messaging, through our various messaging mechanisms and mediums, through FYI classes, signage across campus, residence halls and the like. On the other hand, a lot of students will attend class if they're not well because of the attendance consequences. So, I think, working with the provost office, faculty should maybe think about their attendance policy under these circumstances. Just as I would say coaches should think about their policies for practices for students, in theater and music, across the board we need to create an environment where we can be flexible and accommodating not only for faculty, staff and coaches but also for our students, especially if they are not well.

**Question: Some buildings have 24/7 access for students. How will these areas be handled to ensure health and safety?**

**Chris Gardner:** First of all, our students are the reason we are here and the reason we operate. So, we want students to have access to buildings as much as they can and be able to use this campus as much as they can within appropriate guidelines that are being developed. So, we want them to have access to spaces on campus. But we also, as Nayef mentioned, want to educate them on how to responsibly use our buildings. That includes staying home when they don't feel well, following proper social distancing guidelines and washing their hands frequently. Obviously, every area is different and if there is a specific concern or area that someone wants to raise, I would encourage anyone to reach out to the working group, chaired by Dan Deeter. I believe Tim Schmitz is also a representative of that group. I believe there are a number of members of that group, so I would encourage you to reach out to that group if you have specific concerns that you think they should be considering as they develop our guidelines for returning to campus.

**Question: Will there be specific guidance for setting up offices or limiting access to maintain social distancing in the fall...or is this up to each individual area to determine?**

**Chee Lee:** The return to work committee is currently in the midst of reviewing, discussing and determining those parameters as there are many different buildings and types of spaces utilized for different purposes on our campus. So, as such, some of those spaces may require the college to manage and implement social distancing or accommodation measures for all while other smaller office spaces may be at the discretion of VP's and immediate supervisors working directly with staff to implement. In those cases, clearly the college would still expect that supervisors and employees maintain measures of social distancing, however, are afford

flexibility in how they implement those measures as smaller office spaces may be unique to those individuals or the work that they do.

**Question: Please share an update on the CARES Act funding. Have all of our students received their assistance checks? Do we still have student with unmet need?**

**Chris Gardner:** We have distributed all of the CARES Act funds at this point. We had about \$551,000 that was allocated from the Department of Education to distribute as cash grants to students. We distributed those funds in two rounds and the first round was a grant to our students with the greatest financial need and then we had an application process for students to also apply who may not have been in that initial round. So, over the course of that process we distributed funds to about just fewer than 500 students, so on average, a little over \$1000 per student that received the funds. Hopefully those checks should be in everyone's hands, they were distributed by our office before Memorial Day. As far as the question about students with unmet need, I would never be in a position, I don't think I would ever suggest that we have zero students with unmet need in any circumstance. We work hard to meet those needs, both in terms of financial aid and other needs. Whether that's food insecurity, whether that's financial insecurity, and so we have distributed funds, from other sources on campus even before the CARES Act was available as a funding source and continue to do that for students that have needs. And then we are also actively working to raise funds to support a new pool of financial aid for students whose families have experienced changes in their financial circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 situation.

**Question: What is the college's stance on testing for COVID-19?**

**Nayef Samhat:** A great question that comes up often. The CDC and WHO have not yet come out with policy or guidance on testing people who are well. I know the state is expanding their testing but it's still not sufficient, both in the state and throughout the nation. DHEC and the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education actually just discussed this last week and noted that testing wasn't actually necessary, wasn't one of the guidelines or practices that they were recommending, largely because you would need to be tested daily. People who are tested one day as negative might be positive the next or there might be false positives or false negatives, which are still too common. In fact, what they've recommended is basic practices of hand washing, social distancing, wearing masks, if you're not well stay at home. There are other things we might do such as temperature taking. So, there are a wide range of options in place of testing that we will look at. We are consulting with public health officials and of course legal counsel to make sure that what we do is what we do is appropriate for the community and the individual. We have those forms that we've asked people to complete, one mandatory, one voluntary and those are entirely consistent with the Department of Labor guidance, CDC guidance and DHEC guidance in terms of the mandatory questions and we hope people will supply voluntary information. It's all absolutely confidential to ensure the safety and well-being of the wider workplace. So, as far as other recommendations and guidelines, our committee, again led by Dan Deeter as Chris mentioned, is working on it and we will expect to have a good set of robust recommendations in June as we prepare for students to come back to work.

**Question: Many large companies have been telecommuting for years now. Would Wofford consider that for employees who can effectively do their jobs from home?**

**Chee Lee:** Good question. You know, telecommuting is the norm for some companies and an accommodation for other companies such as Wofford. Arguably, telecommuting is also more appropriate for some jobs or specific roles versus other jobs. So, would Wofford consider telecommuting for employees? I think that as an accommodation, telecommuting should always be a tool that we keep within reach to leverage to meet our needs, such as in the case of COVID-19. As a permanent option, I think that will be contingent upon how Wofford evolves and in specific, if there are jobs that change or that are created that would be appropriate for telecommuting. As of now, Wofford is a traditional liberal arts college where much of the administrative support or services support, originate from the campus. At this point, we have not considered long-term telecommuting policy. However, obviously, during this unprecedented time, COVID-19, and as individuals transition back to campus, many employees continue to telecommute, and we continue to be flexible.

**Question: Will we limit gatherings in the fall based on COVID-19?**

**Nayef Samhat:** Another great question. I was on a call this morning, another ZOOM meeting, with presidents of the SOCON institutions and talking about how we're going to manage athletic events. Of course, no one had an answer. In fact, we're considering how to do everything from classes to athletics to student's social gatherings, meetings on campus, the whole range of activities. I think it's important that we understand that, again, I'll go back to the long runway metaphor. We have several months to get acclimated to being together on campus. I think we have lots of time between now and the start of the academic year, that we will learn a lot more. We are committed to not putting anyone – faculty, staff, students, coaches – in any jeopardy in terms of their health and well-being. And so, we will continue to look at what our best practices, public health guidelines to shape how we define appropriate gathering size. And continue to educate everyone, including ourselves as well as students, on best practices – masks, hand washing, social distancing and the like.

**Question: The events at Furman are distressing. How well-prepared are we to avoid the types of financial and employment disruptions that Furman is being required to implement?**

**Chris Gardner:** That's a great and important question. We feel well-prepared to avoid those types of measures. As we've communicated in a number of different forums, the college is in good shape. We're taking good steps right now as we limit expenses through the rest of this fiscal year to set us up to begin our next fiscal year in a strong position. Another thing that we have going for us is that our enrollment numbers continue to look strong. The first-year class still sits at 503 deposits against a budget of 485. So those extra 18 students provide incremental net revenue to the college. We are also below budget for financial aid for that first-year class.

And we also see that our retention numbers are running ahead of last year at this point and time. And so, we are, similar to Furman, we are a tuition-driven institution and we do rely on our students coming to attend in the fall in order to meet our obligations and meet our expectations. But all of the data that we have at Wofford right now would suggest that we are in a strong position and would be able to avoid those types of significant financial measures.

**Nayef Samhat:** I would just echo what Chris is saying. Across the board we are in a good, strong position, between enrollment and retention and we plan, at this point, to continue on with our existing budget program and don't anticipate any changes in employment. So, we are in a very strong situation at the moment, relative to many other institutions.

**Question: How much liability exposure is there for the institution if we have an outbreak on campus?**

**Chee Lee:** Obviously, it is very important to us and to Wofford that we limit our exposure and liability as much as possible. And that is why we're taking all the parameters that we have – consulting with outside groups, our attorney's, looking at labor provisions as well as our risk-management team and the policies that we have in place. Our goal is to limit our risk and manage anything and everything on the front end so that we do return students, faculty and staff safely. That's why we're implementing all of these measures.

**Question: Will the college require outside contractors working in our buildings to wear face masks? Not the construction projects. They are not currently doing this.**

**Chris Gardner:** I just want to address the construction part of that question first. This week, Robins and Morton did implement a policy that workers on their construction sites are expected to wear a mask when working on the site. Now I'm not personally walking around to make sure they are doing that, but earlier they were not doing that but this week they have implemented that policy. As for other contractors, I'm sure Nayef will jump in, but I think we'll look for the recommendation from the working group, but I imagine we would expect third parties working on our campus to adhere to the guidelines that we're asking our employees to adhere to.

**Nayef Samhat:** Yes, I think that, especially on the inside of our buildings, absolutely.

**Question: When do we expect a written plan? You are all discussing a return in August, but actually some students are returning next week to live and work in labs.**

**Nayef Samhat:** We've had students on campus throughout the spring. A small number of students. And our expectation is that we will have a limited number of students coming on to campus. Those who are working doing collaborative research, the provost has worked with the faculty to outline the expectations and guidelines. Those guidelines that we have distributed apply to everyone on campus who are working in labs and such. We expect to have a plan, a

formal drafted plan, coming out of the recommendations from the two working groups, will be later in June.

**Jo Ann Brasington:** That's all of our questions. Thank you for participating 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

<https://www.wofford.edu/coronavirus>. This concludes our virtual town hall. Be well Terriers!