

Student Town Hall
Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020
6 p.m.

Jo Ann Brasington: Good afternoon and welcome to this virtual town hall for students. 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; Richard Johnson, director of athletics; Dan Deeter, director of business services and risk management. He is also leader of the college's COVID-19 working group. Beth Wallace, associate vice president and director of the wellness center and Drew Reynolds, Campus Union president. 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 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 to ensure our community's wellness. From the beginning, students have led the way toward safety and the successful completion of the semester. I know it's been a challenge and has taken discipline and sacrifice, but we continue to persevere thanks to you. 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. Thank you all for being here.

If I had a warning in the fall and suffered consequences for a second violation of the COVID commitment, will that carry over until the spring?

Roberta Bigger: We are going to clear the slate for the spring semester so you will not carry over. We are going to send out information about the guidelines with reminders for students so it will be very clear for the spring semester, and transparent, so hopefully there won't be any violations in the spring. And I want to add my thanks, as Dr. Samhat said, to the students who have been great. We've made it, with a week and a half, and I really appreciate all that the students did so that we could operate in person this fall. Thank you.

I heard that tuition is increasing for next year. Is that true? Why since we're in the middle of a pandemic and the student experience is different?

Nayef Samhat: Yes, it is true. The Board of Trustees set tuition, room and board and comprehensive fees of \$63,895 for the 2021/2022 academic year. We have been working to slow the rate of increase and we have done that over the past several years and this year is no exception. We've gone from a 4.5% increase to a 4.25% and now we are just slightly under 4%. Now I understand that the experience is different. It's different across the country. Each and every other college and university is struggling in the same way that we are. But that doesn't mean that it's less expensive. We have committed at least \$500,000 to mitigation measures, safety measures and testing measures as a result of the pandemic and I expect that to increase as we go into the spring semester. We've done it to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone on campus and to preserve our place-based mission of education. The college distributed \$550,000 in CARES Act funding during the late spring and summer. And, Wofford trustees raised an additional \$500,000 to support students whose families were negatively impacted by the coronavirus. So, we've distributed over \$1,000,000 in additional assistance for students and their families. I would urge you to contact the office of financial aid if your family's circumstances have changed. So please email them at finaid@wofford.edu and they can help you with any adjustments that are needed.

I understand that the Campus Life Building is getting a new name. Could you share what that is and the rationale?

Nayef Samhat: You understand correctly. The board voted in October to honor Steven and Maria Mungo by naming the Campus Life building in their honor. This is the first name of that building. Because of the coronavirus we can't have an official naming ceremony now, but the signs will be placed on the Mungo Student Center in the coming weeks and we'll celebrate this gift from them when we are able to in the spring. We've begun the first part of the renovations as a result of their lead gift for the fitness center and the campus life center. We will do the second phase of renovations next summer. The Mungo's are an extraordinary family whose generosity is equally extraordinary. They support major endowed scholarships for students. They also lead the campaign to raise that half-million dollars for student's whose families were negatively impacted by the coronavirus. In addition, we will also celebrate the Chandler Center for Environmental Studies as well, sometime in the spring when we're able to gather. That beautiful building was the result of the lead gift by Harold and Delores Chandler. We are looking forward to celebrating these signature buildings on campus and gifts.

Will we be under the same health and safety protocols as the fall?

Beth Wallace: Let me add my thanks to the students who have taken the pledge seriously and have really worked hard to do what we've asked. I do know that it has not been easy. I know

that there has been some difficulty in making connections, but we hope that we will continue to stay together on campus. We've almost made it and we are absolutely thrilled and know that that was a community effort. So the same health and safety protocols in the fall, as we watched the public health situation around the world and the United States, yes, I think I can safely say with confidence that we will continue to wear masks, and social distancing, physical distancing, staying away from others if you're not feeling well will continue to be our guide. It worked in the fall and we will continue to rely on this in the spring. Know that the working group, along with the residence life staff and the campus life/student development staff, the wellness center staff, we are working already to talk about what January will look like, in what we've learned and how we can continue to be safe. We will be getting all of the information to you as soon as possible and some parameters are in place. But believe me no wants these guidelines to be lifted and for Wofford to get back to our fun and traditional activities more than we do on this Zoom meeting. Our goal is to keep you safe and we will continue to educate you on what we will do and what that will look like on returning in January. Again, thank you for all your hard work.

Will the college do more COVID testing on campus?

Dan Deeter: I want to echo all the thanks to the students who have worked so hard to be vigilant this fall and I am confident that our great student body will do the same in the spring so that we can be celebrating our spring semester at a similar time in the spring. We do have some exciting changes in testing. South Carolina DHEC made a change in their guidelines and recommendations recently and we have made changes to reflect those guidelines. We are going to require that students, faculty and staff be tested for COVID-19 before returning to campus for the spring semester. So, students will need a negative test result to return to campus. We are also going to increase our surveillance testing and we are currently in negotiations with partners to establish some on-campus testing facilities which will allow our students, staff and faculty to receive their testing on-campus. It will also enable us to do surveillance testing which we want to do for that. Athletics will continue their testing protocols as are required by the NCAA. I saw a question pop up about the fourth of January, so I'll answer it now since it makes sense to this question. We will begin the semester remotely on January 4th. We are requiring that the pre-spring semester test be done on the fourth of January or after and then students will have an opportunity to move onto campus into the residence halls after they have a negative test result which has been shared with the wellness center. That test result and all of the information the details about those testing protocols, how to get them, will come in information from the wellness center, which is forthcoming in the next couple week or so.

Beth Wallace: We'll make sure it's communicated explicitly through the website, through emails, about the process. We're working on that now, we have a good start with that, we're working with residence life. We'll make sure you understand and of course we're available if you have any questions about anything that is not clear. You can help us make sure it's clarified.

Will there be any relaxation in the gathering's restrictions in the spring?

Drew Reynolds: I think that it's all dependent on what happens with the virus itself. Obviously, I think that everything is dependent upon that at this point. So, I don't think there will be much relaxation. We can always hope that things will be better at the end of spring, but for right now I don't really see things loosening up and honestly, I don't think they should. I think that the way that we've been doing it has been able to keep us on campus for much longer than I think we all anticipated. Relaxing the guidelines would not really be the best idea. But the gatherings, I think we all need to be reminded, that we're allowed to do forty people at an event and that's exciting. So hopefully people will take advantage of that a little bit more next semester. But I don't really think the guidelines will be relaxed. However, I just want to remind everyone that it's two weeks until Thanksgiving, so we just ought to keep these guidelines the way they are right now until the end of the fall semester too.

Roberta Bigger: I'll add to that, because we've talked about this in the family town hall a little while ago, that the fraternities and sororities will be doing recruitment this spring via Zoom. Our newest students will be able, if they want to, to take advantage of that and learn about those organizations and what they do, they'll have that opportunity in late January.

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

Mike Sosulski: Let me add my congratulations to all of the students who all have done incredible, incredible work to get us here to the place where we are today. I'm really proud of you all and it really is a testament to your commitment and how much you love Wofford and how much you want to be here. Way to go, congratulations. Getting to the question, if you haven't seen it yet, there's a really nice article in the Old Gold & Black last week that was really nicely written addressing this question. The answer is that we will be and are returning to the typical A-F grading scale. And here's the thinking behind that, and you can read more about it in the article. The reason we shifted to credit/no-credit system in the spring, it really was because of the suddenness of the need to change to a new medium for instruction. Very few people were prepared to do that in such short time, and we did a really great job in a short time of getting some training on how Zoom works and the advanced features of Moodle. But we really did have to react quickly to that, and it was a bit shocking to everyone, students and faculty. And so, over the summer, faculty spent a lot of time working on professional development in order to be able to do these things much better. And that includes learning to teach in a hybrid format, or a high-flex format, teaching remotely if the faculty member is in a health position that requires that, and things like that. We feel confident that we can return to the normal grading system and students will be standing in good stead.

Will there be fans at the basketball games this year? If so, will there be a student section?

Richard Johnson: Yes and no. We will start the season in November, but students will be gone by the time we start. But we will not have fans pre-Christmas. We will, or at least our plan is, to have fans, but on a very limited basis. We've had a plan approved by the State of South Carolina for seating, that's approximately 20% of our listed capacity. We will have a section, beginning in January, for students, that will be limited, and we will work with Campus Union leadership on ways to distribute those tickets. We'll have some seating for faculty and staff, and that will also be limited. And then we'll have priority points for our season tickets holders and that will be limited as well. That's our plan right now. We hope to be able to implement that but like everything else this is all driven by what the coronavirus does. We're hopeful that we'll be able to have fans beginning in January.

Jo Ann Brasington: I know that Dan mentioned this one earlier:

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?

Jo Ann Brasington: Dan, was there anything else you needed to add to that one?

Dan Deeter: I just would say that we felt that this schedule would give us the best opportunity to allow people to get testing which was timely and effective prior to coming back in the spring. I will add to what I said earlier, if you've already had coronavirus and have had it in the three months prior to the beginning of spring semester, then as long as proof of that exists in our wellness center then you don't have to have that test. If anyone has a follow-up question, just to be clear, remote classes from January 4-8, in-person classes begin on the 11th, students can begin moving in on the 6th, as long as we have proof of a negative test.

Are there guidelines on personal travel over the holidays?

Dan Deeter: There's a CDC page that covers this far better than I can: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html> . We would ask obviously that students would be careful, we're asking our faculty and staff to be as well about travel. Obviously, it's something that can raise someone's exposure to coronavirus. We just want you to be mindful about that in terms of your fellow students, faculty and staff at the college and your family as well. One of the things the website talks about is being considerate of those who may be high-risk and trying to access plans for the holidays and how we might rethink that in time of COVID-19 and the pandemic. I encourage you to read that particular page on the site.

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

Mike Sosulski: Wofford provides most of its study abroad opportunities by partnering with organizations that are external to the college. We are staying in close touch with those organizations to make sure that we are on top of developments as the pandemic moves in

different parts of the world. We did see almost all study abroad cancelled in the fall semester due to the pandemic and right now many of our programs in the spring are not going to take place because of the pandemic. We have a small whose programs are still considered viable, it's in the low twenties I believe. And we are watching closely to make sure those students still have the opportunity to make different plans in case the pandemic dictates that travel and foreign study isn't a wise idea during the spring semester. We'll keep everybody posted as those developments come in. Regarding Interim, we have move Interim to begin April and end in May, and part of the reason for doing that was the hope that Interim travel abroad might still take place. We don't know yet, it's too early to whether a vaccine will be available and distributed, making it possible, or whether travel will be advisable or allowed by other countries at this point in time. So, we'll keep our finger on that pulse and our hope is by late January or early February to be able to spread the news about whether we will be able to offer travel programs during the spring Interim.

Have any decisions been made in regard to spring break or coming back from spring break?

Nayef Samhat: One thing I will say is that we all want a spring break. I'm almost positive everyone on this Zoom will want a spring break. As far as I'm concerned, we should have it. I expect everyone going on spring break will pay attention to appropriate public health guidelines so when they return, we can finish up the academic year in a safe, sound manner. Everything, of course, hinges on the larger public health environment. I am an optimist. I think the news on therapeutics and vaccines are promising for us and so I do think as we get into the spring term and make our way through the winter months, we'll have a much better sense of that public health environment as we get closer to spring break. But we will not do anything that increases, exacerbates the risk to the health and well-being of everyone one campus; students, faculty and staff.

Jo Ann Brasington: Dr. Sosulski, correct me if I'm wrong but this year, with the change in schedule, spring break is between, there's a week in-between the semester and the beginning of Interim. That is the spring break, correct?

Mike Sosulski: That is correct. It's actually about a ten-day period, in the schedule right now.

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. This concludes our virtual town hall. Stay well Terriers!