WSU COVID-19 Town Hall – 4/10/2020

>> PHIL WEILER: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to Washington State University's second system-wide COVID-19 town hall meeting. My name is Phil Weiler, I want to welcome attendees from across the state and across the country who are tuning into this. When we did this two weeks ago, we had more than 5,000 people who participated at one point or another. We’re anticipating a good response this time around. I want to welcome people from all of our campuses, Everett, Spokane, Tri-Cities, Vancouver, Pullman, and our Global Campus as well. I'm joined today by Washington State University president Kirk Schulz, interim provost and executive vice president, Bryan Slinker, vice president for student affairs, Mary Jo Gonzales, vice president and Chief Human Resource Officer, Theresa Elliot-Cheslek, and a new participant with us today is Vice President for Finance and Administration, Stacy Pearson. So thank you all for joining us. Before we get started, let me just lay out what the next hour will look like. As we did two weeks ago, we would like to do this as an informal Q&A. We did solicit questions online before we got started today. We have well over 200 questions that have been submitted, so that's wonderful. We also welcome questions live in the comments section of our YouTube feed. So if you have questions, feel free to put them there. We had a very robust set of conversations going on two weeks ago. There were probably hundreds of comments. There were more questions than we were able to get to two weeks ago. So we went through and actually pulled all the questions out and found answers and posted those on the WSU COVID-19 website. I mention that because we will do the same this time around as well. If your question doesn't get answered, we will try and pull that out of the stream and get that -- get the answers posted. I would encourage you to take a look at the WSU COVID-19 website. If you have questions about what our response has been, that website includes all of our communications, some wide, going all the way back to January, which feels like a lifetime ago to me. I'll talk more about the website at the end. We have a new feature that I’m actually very excited about. We have recruited a cadre of subject matter experts who will help us try and answer some of those questions in the YouTube comments live. There were so many comments last time around, like I said, we didn't have a chance to get to them all. I want to introduce and thank those folks who are joining us as the subject matter experts. From the international programs group, Cheryl is with us is information technology services, Jacqueline Southwick, from human resource services
we have Lisa Garring and Kendra. From the provost office, Craig Parks. From student affairs, Jill Creighton and Matthew Jeffreys. And from finance and administration Vicki Murray and Matt Skinner. So that group has their own Zoom hangout that they are in the process of setting up so they can communicate live and make sure the right people are answering those questions in the comments. Please take advantage of that. With that I will turn it to President Schulz and we can get started.

>> PRESIDENT SCHULZ: Happy Friday, Cougs. I appreciate you joining from all across the WSU system. I thought our first COVID town hall two weeks ago went well. It was great to see the number of people that participated, and it's awesome to see the questions and things coming in. Just a couple quick points. I want to remind the faculty staff and students that are engaged and watching this to make sure you take a little bit of a Zoom break every now and then. I remind leaders when I talk to them that I know we're busy, we all have lots of stuff we're doing, it's a stressful time for many of us and many of our families, but please make sure you give yourself a break, go out and take a walk, do something else, get away from the computer screens and social media for some period of time. I think it's healthier for all of us. Secondly, just once again, I want to commend our faculty for the exceptional job that they continue to do moving those classes online in a short period of time, and as I talked to our deans and other people this week, really impressed with how smoothly that has gone. To our staff, I know many of you are balancing lots of different things in Pullman and other communities. I appreciate the work the staff do to support students during this really critical time. And finally, to our students, and I've heard from many of you on social media, thank you for being flexible. Thank you for your feedback. Sometimes it's positive, sometimes it's not positive, but we can't get better if we don't hear the things that you're experiencing. So continue to send those things our direction, and every two weeks we're going to continue to do these town hall forums as long as people are interested and try and make sure we always work our way through the questions you have. A final reminder, though, there are still a lot of uncertainties out there, whether budget around the University, financial impacts, what is going to happen in the fall and so forth, and we just don't know. We're not hiding those things. We just don't know where they are. So continue to ask us those questions, but understand there's some times we just have to say we're not sure and we'll do the best we can to get you the best information when we have it. I look forward to
visiting with you all and colleagues. Thank you, Coug Nation for all you are doing for us right now.

>> PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Kirk. So Bryan, the first question is for you. I know that we are now three weeks into distance learning. I also know that you talk with the deans on a daily basis. Any feedback that you're receiving from the deans and faculty how things are going or for that matter from the student perspective?

>> BRYAN SLINKER: As Kirk said, it seems to be going relatively smoothly. That's not to say that every experience is fantastic. The faculty have really stepped up here AOI to get prepared to do this, so it's gone better than we would have expected, and we learn. We're now definitely two weeks into this and -- or three weeks now, and it's gone relatively well. We want to still hear when it doesn't go as well, so that we can continue to improve on the fly and get ready to improve this experience. I asked the deans yesterday, actually, what they were hearing from their faculty and students, and a vast majority of students from the perception of the faculty are engaged fully in their experience going to distance education. Those that are a little less engaged, which is a minority, are still keeping up with their work and we're still worried there are some students that are unable to engage, so we have a loaner program for Chromebooks and we're in the final stages of rolling out a program for WiFi access as well. We have about 900 students who expressed interest in a WiFi hot spot and we'll start getting those rolled out as quickly as we can. To address that need where we can. The other thing that students should know is that they should have parking lot access to WiFi at any WSU county extension office, and if they can get near another university, they should be able to access WiFi. So we're still continue to develop those tools to support the students, but the engagement from the students has been really strong and the experiences have mostly been good.

>> PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Theresa, the next question I want to send to you. I know talking with one of my staff people that when the governor announced that K-12 classes would not resume in the spring, that was kind of a blow for them. They are trying to manage a household, trying to manage their job working at home, plus trying to educate their kids, and it's a very significant burden. I'm just curious, what are you hearing from employees? How are
they handling this? Are there resources they should be thinking about as they -- if they need additional help as we try and manage the situation?

>> THERESA ELLIOT-CHESELEK: Great question. So with that directive from the governor, there was also some leave options available. So if an employee has questions on work assignments, hours that they're working, they can either contact HRS or work with their supervisor directly. There's all kinds of options available to modify hours of work, when the kids are sleeping or whatever works for them coming into the office, if that's a possibility. But reaching out to HR, if they do have concerns with balancing that workload. But keep in mind, what I would say to the employees is that there are leave options available for impacts due to COVID-19, and in some cases due to the K-12. So go to our website or contact us and we can help guide you through those processes. Two other things I want to highlight that HR is doing on a weekly basis is we have info sessions on work and leave options, and over these last few weeks we have had over 900 employees participate in those sessions. Those are similar to the forum we're doing now where questions can be asked and answered in realtime from the subject matter experts in HR. So I would encourage employees to take advantage of that. The other thing is every day at 10:00 a.m. we have what we're calling a daily Coug connect, and we have had six sessions with over 600 faculty and staff participating. I want to highlight that because our presenters are from throughout the WSU system, experts in wellbeing, exercise, other tips and tricks. So that's another great resource for information for all the employees. 10:00 a.m. weekdays. Thanks!

>> PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. On behalf of my staff and team, we want to say thank you to the folks in human resource services. It's good know we have real professionals backing us up and supporting us during this time. Stacy, I want to direct the next question to you. We know that there are going to be fiscal impacts from COVID-19, I think probably too early to know what those look like, but I'm curious from a finance and administration perspective, what kind of work is being done to identify scenarios and begin some financial planning?

>> STACY PEARSON: Yes, thank you, Phil. And thank you to everybody who has participated in helping us, you know, work out all of these -- on all of these issues. So, I would start with the fact that just a reminder to the communities that we are on the third year of our fiscal recovery plan, and for the first time for the year ending fiscal year '19, we went into a positive operating
budget situation, which our revenues exceeded our expenditures. So that is excellent news. And certainly it puts us in a better position as we look ahead to what is happening with COVID-19. What I would say is that we should expect that we will continue a process. So this being the third year, we'll be looking at the fourth year in which we already implemented many of these processes, you know, to manage expenses as well as our revenues and continue that into the future. In addition what we're trying to do is work very closely with sister institutions in the state of Washington, our government relations folks also, to find out what is going on in the state, anything related to state budgets, anything related to federal programs like the CARES Act and looking at those impacts. Obviously we don't know yet but we're tracking those very carefully. And we're doing what any good finance and administration office should do, we're starting to model scenarios. We're thinking about -- certainly when we made the decision to go online in summer, we are modeling those scenarios, both in terms of the academic programming, as well as the impact on facilities and what facilities will be open and those types of things. So I'm sure there are many questions about what happens in fall, and it's a different situation if we are online and if we are not. But meanwhile, we are tracking what is happening in our admissions office, as well as other institutions, like other Pac-12s and other western universities and we're on list serves talking about what are some of the plans that others are doing, what scenarios are they modeling. For example, international student enrollment or non-resident student enrollment. So we're doing a range of analyses on that. Certainly we will be impacted in the fall of our enrollments decline, but we're watching for all sources of revenues, what will be happening with federal grants. And then we're being very mindful, looking very carefully at our tuition policies, tuitions and fees, and what we might do for the future there also. So we're really taking into account all revenue sources, all expenditures. Certainly looking in the past to when we went through the recession, some of those tools. We're looking back at some of those tools and methods that we used for that. What might be different now? Well, let me tell you... one is not many people are traveling, so travel expenses are certainly down, and we can account for that. So, like I said, everything is on the table. We're looking at that, and as we get new information we are trying to communicate out to others.

>> PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. So Mary Jo, I know that in addition to financial planning there is a lot of other planning going on and a number of groups formed. Can you share with us,
what are the issues those groups are looking at and what kinds of decisions might we see in the future?

>> MARY JO GONZALES: Absolutely. Hello, Cougs! It's Friday morning. I want to let you know we're thinking about you. Like Kirk mentioned, we are paying attention to what is happening in your world and what is going on. Please continue to reach out. Phil, in particular I think students -- I happened to meet with the student government council yesterday. That is all the ASWU leadership from all the campuses and one of the major issues that came up are the issues students are facing just being able to pay the basic bills. They're worried about childcare just like our staff. Many students have families and so they are trying to manage educating their school-age children and maintain their jobs as well as finish coursework. And so I want to let you know exactly what I shared with them is that we are working hard on our emergency -- our student emergency fund, and if you are struggling, it is really important that you reach out. Go to the dean of students website. That's deanofstudents.wsu.edu where you can apply for emergency aid. In some cases we can turn that around quickly and get you the support and finances you need. Additionally the federal government has released a lot of information about how we're able to support students with its new grant policy. And so we have a small group that is one of the groups that we have experts around the campus starting to work on is how do we get the aid to students, in their hands. It truly is about getting cash to students when they need it, and we know that is happening now. It covers technology, childcare, housing, food, all of those things that we need to help you get across that stage at graduation and actually to continue to next year if you're coming back to WSU. Some of the other groups we have been working on, Bryan and Stacy alluded to, it's about petitions, students who are struggling through emergency situations. We also are looking at summer programs and activities because we know that a lot of activities, including a lot of summer camps, bridge programs are being impacted by COVID-19 and the unknown. And really want to reiterate the message that Kirk said. There's a lot of unknowns right now. So those groups will continue to meet and continue to work. There is a large question out there, and I'm going to repeat it again. April 30th is the day that we will share our information about fees and activities, and the reason we are taking the time to do what we need to do is we have students and staff on those salary lines as well as making sure those buildings are available for Cougs in the future. So we are looking very hard at that and I want to thank all of our team members, faculty, staff and students who are
participating in those discussions and giving the feedback we need to make the right decisions at the right time.

>> PHIL WEILER: Kirk, I'm going to ask an unfair question. A question a lot of people have. Do you think we'll be able to be going back to face-to-face instruction in the fall?

>> PRESIDENT SCHULZ: Absolutely, Phil. Thanks for the question. And I just... I believe that we will be back to face-to-face instruction in the fall. I think we're seeing in Washington State some flattening of our curve. I want to remind everybody, it is not even mid-April yet and I think some people are very concerned about what is going to happen in August and September. We share that concern and we will certainly not do anything that is contrary to what public health officials, the governor, other people are recommending, but at this particular point, I am planning and I think my colleagues here on the leadership team are planning for us to be back in-person sessions in the fall. I expect us to make sure that we're doing what we need to to ensure appropriate social distancing and some other types of things. So we'll look exactly like -- will it look exactly like it did in January and February in the fall? Probably not. But I think our Cougs, our incoming students are returning students, faculty and staff should plan on in-person instruction and in-person interactions across all of our campuses in the fall semester.

>> PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Bryan, I'm going to come back to you. One of the things we did talk about two weeks ago was the pass/fail policy, but that continues to be an area of concern for students. We still have seen a lot of questions online about pass/fail. What I would ask of you, I guess, when do students need to make a decision whether they want to take a letter grade or pass/fail? What things do they need to keep in mind as they make that decision? And is there any help as they try and decide what the best choice is for them?

>> BRYAN SLINKER: Thanks, Phil. I'll start with your last sort of sub-question, is there help? Absolutely there's help making the decision. The main help is their academic adviser. It's not a decision to be made lightly and the academic advisers are in best position to guide them through the different possible scenarios of do I take a letter grade or do I take the pass grade, depending on what the next steps for them are. It terms of the decision, we purposefully extended the request deadline to June 1, so that students would know what letter grade they received before they had to make the final determination on whether it was pass/fail. So, yes,
for those who are questioning will I know what my letter grade is before requesting pass/fail, the answer is yes. We haven't made a final decision yet, but because of the switch to distance and the extra attention to try to get students through here to the finish line, we're likely to extend the deadline for when final grades are due by a week. That is still mid-May. So students should be able to know their grade a couple weeks before the final deadline before making a decision. And that's really important. And I just want to emphasize we want to get you across the finish line in the best possible way, and your academic adviser is the best resource for you as a student to help make that decision. There's a lot of support out there for you. You know where you want to go and whether it's a specific adviser for like a health science program or your academic program, reach out to those advisers who know you and know what your goals are and can help you make the best decision in that framework.

>> PHIL WEILER: Just to follow up, is there any reason why a student wouldn't want to just make everything pass/fail for the semester?

>> BRYAN SLINKER: I mean, each circumstance is very different, obviously, but those students that are most concerned about letter grade versus pass grade maybe those applying to graduate school, professional school, medical school, veterinary school where their GPA is often used as an admission criteria. They just need to know the schools they're applying to and, again, their advisers can help them walk through that. I think we're all going to have to count on, even in WSU, we're going to have to count on that everybody understands this is a disruptive end of the semester and that whether it's WSU admitting students in the future coming out of high school that is disrupted in their senior year or our students graduating into going on to other schooling that they might want to do, we're going to have to all count on the next step understanding the disruptions and taking that into account in a more holistic approach toward admissions going forward. Again, it's all linked, of course, to GPA and students need to talk through their advisers if they think they're going to be limiting their option if they take the pass grade.

>> PHIL WEILER: The takeaway I'm hearing is check with your adviser before you make any decisions, because there could be negative consequences if you're not being careful.
>> BRYAN SLINKER: Right. You just have to think it through. And the adviser is the best thought partner.

>> PHIL WEILER: Perfect. Thank you. Theresa, next question I want to send to you. I know there's a lot of anxiety across the country and quite frankly around the world with regard to the seizing up of our economy and the impact on people's jobs and people's incomes. We saw a lot of questions from faculty and staff asking about what does the future hold for the possibility of layoffs or early retirements or furloughs? I imagine it's too early for us to tell, but just wondered if you have any information you can share about those.

>> THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Yeah, and, you're exactly right. It's a little too early to know, as Stacy and Kirk both said, we're looking closely at the budget and trying to evaluate and make decisions of what may be happening, but we don't know right now. But I do know employees -- it's hard when there's so much uncertainty. So anybody who wants to know, what is the process if I was impacted in some way, we have that information on our website. So you can go out there and look or you can contact HR just to say, hey, I'm an employee, I'm civil service, I'm just concerned, I'm interested in what that process is. Keep in mind that's out there all time and that information might help you at least know there is a process in place, here is where it is, so that's what I would recommend for anyone who is concerned at the moment. But I do know we're working really hard to try to make those decisions and we will get that information out as soon as we know what those impacts are going to be. I saw Kirk raising his hand.

>> PHIL WEILER: Kirk, did you want to add something?

>> PRESIDENT SCHULZ: Yes, I think because of the nature of our economy in the state and nation right now, people are appropriately scared and worried about their jobs, their position at the University regardless of campus location. Just a couple things. Please remember that, you know, rumors and things that you sort of hear from somebody, it's really important to check with supervisors, check with deans, vice presidents, chancellors, and find out if there's any truth to those. I think that's really important. The second thing is I know my colleagues here are all working to make sure we do everything we can to preserve jobs and employment and all of our campuses, whether that's our students, whether that's full-time staff, part-time staff, our faculty. So that's not the first thing that we're talking about when we talk about any sort of
budget challenges. Will there be layoffs in the future and workforce reductions? Right now we simply don't know. I want to emphasize again, this is not us knowing something and not wanting to share that. We don't know what the federal stimulus package is going to do for us. We don't know what the final impacts are on the state budget. And so we will keep everybody informed, but I just want to make sure we reassure folks, one of our priorities, our chief priority, is making sure we preserve as many of those jobs that are so important to our Cougs as possible.

>> PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Stacy, a question for you. This was something that came up a number of times. I was actually a little surprised to see how often it came up in the online questions that people submitted, but a number of staff members are able to get tuition waivers for in-person classes that they take. Now that during the summer session we are moving to distance learning, people are wondering, will those waivers still be available, and what changes can staff expect?

>> STACY PEARSON: Yes, Phil, thank you. So the current policy regarding staff tuition waivers for summer session on each campus does remain in effect. If you are eligible for a staff tuition -- faculty -- I'm sorry, faculty staff tuition waiver for WSU summer course at a physical campus location, regardless of how the course is delivered, you do remain eligible for the waiver. For example, if the course is listed on the Pullman campus schedule of classes and delivered via distance technology due to COVID-19, you are still eligible for that staff tuition waiver. As with past summer sessions, faculty/staff are not eligible for tuition waivers for Global Campus sections in accordance with our current policy. So really the difference here if the delivery method changed, the waiver policy did not change.

>> PHIL WEILER: Okay. And Theresa, did you have something to add to that question or was there another question?

>> THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: There were a couple questions that came through asking if HR is available to verify the employees' tuition waiver and the answer is yes. And those can be sent via email. We do have staff in the office. We're available to get those signed so you can proceed through with your class.
PHIL WEILER: Terrific. Thank you. Mary Jo, a lot of questions that I saw beforehand and actually now as I'm watching the live chat as well. Questions -- still having questions about housing fees and the residential dining fees. I know we discussed that a little bit two weeks ago, but still there are questions out there. Can you just remind folks what the policy is around refunds for housing and dining?

MARY JO GONZALES: Absolutely. So I'm going to encourage you to go to housing.wsu.edu today is the day we requested students who have apartments with us or live in residence halls submit a form that tells what they would like to do. They have an option between a refund or a credit for their housing fees, and they also have the option of RDA into our Cougs feeding Cougs program. There are plenty of options to pick from, but today is the day we're asking for the information from you. You will in the next couple days, and some students who filled the survey out very early have started receiving emails about next steps. Some of those next steps are pretty easy, like choosing to terminate the contract. Some of those other next steps, like when we're going to be able to move out, will really be dictated by Governor Inslee and the stay home stay healthy order. That will not be lifted until May 4th, and we have students concerned about that. I can assure you that the apartments and residence halls are staying put. Nobody is doing anything with them except in extreme cases, and that is when students call and let us know that, hey, they have medical supplies that they need to pick up, so they come pick up their medical supplies and leaving the remainder of the items here. I want to assure you we will let you know and will communicate as soon as we have more information about the move-out process. Again, today is the day. Go to housing.wsu.edu and that will allow you to fill out the survey. You don't need to fill it out more than once. Once is enough. Details will follow. It gives an example when to send in your keys or what does it look like, the process moving forward, but the emails should be going or have been going out and will continue to go out as students get that information. Students will be receiving refunds. It could be up to three to four weeks. We want to let you know, it's a little of a process. Please make sure to get your direct deposits filled out with the bursar's office, so that they will know exactly whether you want it sent via check or deposited into your checking account. So critical information there. Please fill out the survey. It's the only thing I can say. I do want to address quickly off-campus housing questions. We have had a lot of fraternity and sorority life parents and families as well as those living in apartments. Please talk with your landlords. Please let them know what financial situation the
you’re in. Don’t hesitate to reach out to the housing corporations or the national fraternities and sororities if you need additional information. Unfortunately, WSU does not manage those properties but we are in contact and communicating and saying that they should be as flexible as possible given the current circumstance that we’re dealing with with COVID-19.

>> PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. That last item was another thing that we saw quite a bit from people who lived off campus and really weren't sure what options they had available. Thanks for sharing that. Kirk, I know two weeks ago when we did our last town hall we did talk about commencement and what your plans were, what the plans are for the system. We still are hearing those questions, so might be a good opportunity for us to remind folks what the plans are for both May and August.

>> PRESIDENT SCHULZ: Yeah, thank you, Phil. As a reminder to all the Cougs and Coug families out there, we recognize the leadership team recognizes that not having that in-person commencement in May is just a severe disappointment to so many families, so many students, so many first-generation students, people getting that Ph.D. and wanting to have family from all over the world come in and celebrate. With that being said, we just felt the right thing to do was ensure we had a celebration in May. And I think sometimes we use language that suggests that we’re going to do a kind of livestream commencement type of ceremony that might be several hours long. What we're going to do is about a 45-minute graduation celebration working with our students, and I'm going to ask you in just a minute, since that's in your area to talk a little about what that could look like. And as a reminder, in August, many of our campus locations have elected certain dates when they're going to do postponed but in-person commencement ceremonies. I did see some questions in advance that there is some frustration with people saying, well, what about this particular campus? How come they haven't scheduled that yet? It’s interfering with plans, we need to know. We will work with all our campus locations to ensure that those in-person commencement celebrations scheduled for August are all there as soon as practically possible. I would remind the Cougs out there that those in the hospitality industry and others, there is still a lot of uncertainty around scheduling any events with particular locations and things like that. So people sometimes feel like, how come someone doesn't make a decision on it? We don't want to announce for a commencement on a day and find out we don't have a suitable location to do that. That is what is taking the extra
time. So, Phil, it's appropriate for me to turn the tables a little bit as Vice President for Marketing and Communications, the commencement staff reports to you, and tell us a little bit about maybe what exactly people are thinking about for that May 9 celebration.

>> PHIL WEILER: Sure. So before I jump to May 9th I want to add something you mentioned about August. All the campuses are working really hard to try and make sure they secure venues for that August event. Many of them have selected dates and have venues, but as you can imagine, the venues that we would use for commencement events are also venues used for concerts and other kinds of activities, and so dates are filling up quickly for the kinds of spaces that we would typically use at all of our campuses for these in-person commencement exercises. So if you have not heard a date from your campus, know that they are working diligently to find the best location on the right date and they will share that information as quickly as possible. Now, with regard to May 9th, that was -- that would have been the date that most of our campuses had their in-person event. As Kirk mentioned, we don't want that day to go by without recognizing the accomplishments of our students. You know, as the president said, this is a four or five or six-year effort, depending on what kind of a degree you're getting. We need to recognize that. And so we're going to do something different. As he said, it is not going to be a typical commencement exercise. I's going to be much more of a celebration. We're asking students to provide content in the way of very short videos, photos, remembrances of what their -- you know, what their time at Washington State University was like. We want this to be focused on the students. We want them to be able to see themselves and not necessarily have administrators or other leaders who they may not know as well taking the time to share remarks. So we really want this to be student focused. One thing I will note is we are asking students to register. Let us know what their plans are for both May and August. We would like them to do that by tomorrow. You should have received emails earlier in the month... [ phone ringing ] Excuse me. You should have received emails asking you to fill that out. If you haven't done that, do that today or tomorrow, because we want to know what your availability is going to be like. I think it's going to be a fun event in May. I would encourage you to have your family members connect virtually. We'll have a tag wall where people can be posting comments live. So look forward to more information as the semester winds down. So thank you. I think -- make sure you fill out the form if you haven't done it, and we'll have a good time in May. Let me move now to Bryan. I'm going to read this question, because I thought it
was a very heartfelt. I have added responsibilities at work due to COVID-19. I have five children who have been pulled out of school and are working -- I'm working full-time at home due to social distancing. I'm concerned enough regarding my student workload that I wish to remove myself from the current course that I'm enrolled in. Will there be a grace for withdrawals for late withdrawals for students who just feel like they can't complete a particular course? I know you talked a little bit about pass/fail. Can you tell us a little bit about what is the process for someone who feels like they may need to withdraw from a course?

>> BRYAN SLINKER: So it's a bit of staged or complicated response, but those situations are -- those are students we really want to help. And we want to help all of our students get across the finish line. For those students that truly believe they cannot finish, first I would ask you to, again, talk with your adviser, talk with your faculty members and see if there's a way, a strategy you can extend the time period of your studies, incomplete grades or X grades. There may not be, but please check to see if there is a strategy that you can extend the time to complete some of your work. If you fail to find that strategy working with your adviser or the faculty, we have extended the withdrawal deadline. And so you can make the decision later, and if you are able to do so as you try to develop a strategy. You don't have to make the decision as early. And if you do make the decision to withdraw and we would direct you to the petition process for potential refund of tuition. We know that everybody's circumstance is different. We know that we have to be as flexible as possible. And we want you to engage with your advisers, engage with the instructors. Try to get across that finish line. Let us know what you need. Let us know what would help you. At the end of the day, you don't see it working, then we'd liberalize the withdrawal time frames and work with you through the petition process when it comes to that. But, again, I know everybody's circumstances are different. But please, please work with your team that is going to try to help you get across that line. I see Mary Jo also would like to add something to answer as well.

>> MARY JO GONZALES: Yeah, so one of the things that I'm going to remind all of us during this time of uncertainty, and I'm feeling it too, use these three words. I. Need. Help. It's important you say the words, because Cougs help Cougs, that's who we are. One of the things you ought to know is that many of the services like counseling and psychological services, Coug health services, even services provided on the campuses are moving to telehealth. If it is around
stress, anxiety, reach out for help and tell us what you're looking for. All campuses are doing food pantry delivery, we can get you groceries quickly so you and your family are eating. Many student employment opportunities have gone remotely except those that physically need to be on campus. You can do remote work and continue providing that. But academic success center has academic success coaches that are able to sit there and work you through a tutoring schedule, stress management, all the support that you need is now remote. I know it doesn't look or feel the same as the in-person, but more than ever it's really important to reach out and ask for help and engage with people who really are there to support and provide and get you through a really tough semester, and frankly, a tough time for all of us.

>> PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Theresa, one of the questions we have seen from faculty and staff have to do with, again, the fact that our K-12 and the State of Washington is not returning to the classroom. There is the possibility that WSU may return to a more normal work schedule prior to the end of the academic year for K-12 students and there's a question about telework agreements, are we willing to extend those or what kind of leave options might be available?

>> THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: Yeah, and when the modifications are made to the stay home stay safe directive we'll adhere to whatever those rules are, but if for some reason WSU is back in session ahead of -- before the school is out time frame, employees should be working with their supervisor on options for continuing teleworking or working at an alternative work location or modifications to their schedule. They can contact HR if they have any questions. At that time we will take a look at that. We would be encouraging people to be as flexible as possible to accommodate the needs of our employees.

>> PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Stacy, a lot of questions both as I'm looking at our chat function now, and they were pre-submitted, they have to do with parking. So some campuses sell parking passes and students and faculty obviously aren't able to use those parking passes, so people are wondering do they -- can they get a refund for their parking and what would that look like?

>> STACY PEARSON: Yes, Phil, we have received that question a lot. And actually it's our current policy is in place, is that faculty, staff, students, can seek a refund. It's prorated from the time they cancel it, of course, but they're able to do that.
>> PHIL WEILER: Great. That was easy. Mary Jo, you talked earlier about the student emergency fund. Can you let folks know if they're in a position to be able to donate to that how they might contribute?

>> MARY JO GONZALES: Absolutely. And I have to tell you, I want to say thank you to all of those Cougs out there who have donated and given. We're looking at between 25 to 35,000 plus have already given to help our Cougs. All you need to do is go to the WSU Foundation web page and you will find Cougs help Cougs. What is great there, there is a variety of ways you can give. Every penny helps. Again, that is a way to give back to the Cougar community if you’re able. If you need help, go to the student websites. What I love is I've been watching Facebook, the Cougar community is showing up for each other during COVID-19. I see those putting masks on and shout-outs and props to all our nurses and doctors, teachers and social workers and everyone in Coug Nation who is fighting hard not just for Washington State, frankly, but for the nation and the world. I want to say thank you from our entire Coug family, not just those on the physical campuses but everywhere across the world.

>> PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Kirk, you had announced that you will be freezing salaries for some senior leadership team. We did get a question pre-submitted asking if the salary freezes might extend beyond just your leadership team. I know it's probably too early to tell, but wondering what your thoughts are there.

>> PRESIDENT SCHULZ: The salary freezes are right now just for executives and WSU, and we got all kinds of questions around that. So let me attempt to answer a few of those. First, we had a lot of faculty that received promotions from assistant to associate, associate to full, both tenure and other faculty tracks, and were those you know, part of the hiring freeze. And the answer is no. Those promotion increments are still going to move forward just as we had planned. We are in discussions with members of the executive team and other highly compensated folks at WSU about some voluntary salary reductions and that includes some of our coaches and athletic director and me as president and others. I know there's some people out there who have responded and said, well, that's not enough, or things like this. And I would just remind everybody that this is an initial set of decisions that we're making before we have much in the way of data. And there may be a set of additional reductions for coaches and
executives that may come down the road in the next several months as we know where things are. The other question I got when we talked about freezing the executive salaries was -- this came up in faculty senate yesterday -- did that mean there were a bunch of scheduled increases that maybe people didn't know about that were going into effect? And the answer to that was, no, there was no scheduled increases, we just felt it was really prudent immediately just to make sure that people understood that we were trying to take this seriously, even in very uncertain circumstances. So promotions, things like this that were already underway, those certainly will be honored and well-deserved by faculty and staff. However, everything else for the time being will be frozen moving forward.

>> PHIL WEILER: Okay. Bryan, we've talked a lot about undergraduate students. We have received some questions from graduate students as well. There's one in particular that caught my attention. This is from a first-year Ph.D. student. This person was concerned about the qualifying exams for this summer. This person was asking if there's a plan in place for those exams should the situation extend through the summer if we're not able to be meeting face-to-face? Is anyone working on that question?

>> BRYAN SLINKER: The simple answer is yes. WSU, those sorts of graduate program progression points, preliminary exams, qualifying exams, final exams are largely under the purview of the graduate program itself. They're all different. I've talked with Dean Gloss about messaging about flexibility around these requirements, and she is definitely going to work with me to message strongly to the graduate programs to introduce flexibility, delays into the fall, for example, in this case. We don't have university-wide policies that would dictate blanket changes. What we need to do is be really committed, and I no Dr. Gloss is as well, to communicating with the graduate programs to be as flexible as they can be about rescheduling these things, and I know we're going to stand the exemptions from some of the defense requirements that -- for the spring semester for defending re -- remotely, we're going to extend those through the summer as well at this point, so that there's more options. Qualifying and prelim, we're going to have to work with the graduate programs themselves from a philosophy if we need to introduce flexibility.
PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. So Theresa, we talked a little bit about issues around the freezes and new hires and things like that. That brings up questions about staff promotions, reclassifications. I'm wondering, do we have any information we can share on those issues?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Yeah, so currently the hiring freeze does not impact civil service or AP promotions or reclassifications. Those processes still follow their normal procedures, and that's currently -- they're not impacted.

PHIL WEILER: So, somewhat related question. This one is a little long, but it was from somebody who works in a grant funded position. And this person was -- wanted to confirm that the hiring freeze would not apply to those positions funded by grants. This person is concerned about the research that could continue that would be funded through the grants, whether it's through National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, do we know whether these federally supported positions would be included in that hiring freeze?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: And this will be a really easy answer. They are not part of the hiring freeze, so the grant positions are not impacted.

PHIL WEILER: Well, good. Thank you. It's nice to have an easy to answer question. Stacy, this was an interesting question, and I think it could go to you and could go to everybody else as well, but people are wondering, what sources of data are being used as we are following COVID-19, what kinds of -- you know, how are those sources of information impacting the decision making process? Can you talk a little bit about kind of the groups that have been working on COVID-19 through the executive policy group and others?

STACY PEARSON: Yes. I think as you indicate, a lot of us could answer that. We have developed or assigned multiple task forces to work on everything from tuition and fees and a lot of those things. And so as far as what data are we using, we're actually looking at some of -- say for our own admissions data and comparing it to last year and that type of thing, that is something we do every year regardless, as we look forward as to how we might estimate the incoming class. We're certainly in this case relying on state, national and federal data, when it comes to budget information, when it comes to the interpretation of the CARES Act, for example, we're pulling that information in and working with our colleagues on interpretations,
but in terms of fiscal data and looking at policies and actions we took from prior actions related to either budget reductions or, you know, other situations, we're relying on the same sets of data there, as well as, in my case, and I'm sure others will speak to this, I'm working with my colleagues, Pac-12CFOs, other universities, my professional organizations, those that we work with, they're giving us quite a bit of data about what is going on around the country, as well as toolkits for how we might approach some of the activities. They're also helping with the interpretation of CARES and other types of information. So we really do have a lot that we can rely on in this case.

>> MARY JO GONZALES: I would like to add, you know, there's another piece here, that we are really taking the data and feedback we're getting from students about their concerns and needs. The provost office sent out a question about how are you doing related to Internet access. We received about -- between 900 and 1,000 responses, and what students are telling us is they don't have access to Internet or it's not stable or there's about eight people fighting for the Internet signal and how do we do it? We're working on hotspots and Chromebooks, all the things students can utilize to make a difference in getting through the academic side and courses. We're also doing that here in Pullman, so we know we have about 800 students staying with us and there was resounding feedback that said -- students said, I like the grab and go, but I just want a hot dog or a hamburger. So we moved to the get food app and students can order delivery and pickup, really important, as part of that strategy to make sure students' needs are met. We're also looking, for example, students asking for emergency funds and saying, what else do you need? What support services are you requiring? Is it this particular angle that you're struggling with? We want to make sure that you know we're taking that feedback very seriously. We're taking the surveys very seriously, so we know how to provide the services you need to get you and your families through the next several weeks. Again, to finish the semester, some people are saying finish the semester strong. I'm saying just finish the semester. Get through it, do what you have to do, and I joked about TikTok, I joked about it, I have an account, and keep playing in that space, but do what you have to do, because we know you are filled with a lot of grit and resilience, you've done a lot to get here and we know you can make it through the next couple weeks. We're here to help you. You're not alone.

>> PHIL WEILER: Bryan, did you want to add something to that?
>> BRYAN SLINKER: Yeah, I think also in terms of it's important to emphasize the internal data collection as Mary Jo just did and what we can do to support faculty, staff and students, but there's a larger set of data out there, Stacy mentioned other universities, professionals, but we're constantly scanning and we have pathways into government agencies, our state Department of Commerce, our state department of agricultural, the governor's office. So we're getting data updated almost daily about how the COVID-19 is unfolding in the state and different parts of the state, how the public health response is going. And so those are really important data for us as we think about predicting what is going to happen in the future. And so we just have a rich source of data that changes daily, but it's a rich source of data from external scannings to help us decide internally what the best approaches are for tackling this response together.

>> PHIL WEILER: We are getting close to the top of the hour. Kirk, is there anything you want to add before we close this out?

>> PRESIDENT SCHULZ: Well, thank you for those of you who have been with us for an hour today. I think we got through a lot more questions than we did last time. And keep submitting questions. Keep letting us know where you're concerned. Make sure that, like Mary Jo mentioned, ask for help. We can't solve problems that we don't know exist. So that's faculty, staff, students, families, alumni, ask for help and let us know. Maybe we can't help you, but more often than not we can find a creative solution. I would say the final thing is we talked to governance groups across campus and there's a little bit of a national conversation going that university administrations are going to utilize the COVID-19 as a time to pull away from shared governance, from working with our students, our faculty and our staff on managing and leading through our universities through this time. We have no desire to do that at WSU. As a matter of fact, the only way to come out of this stronger is by working with our faculty, staff and students together on making these really critical decisions. So I just want to reassure, we are not stepping back. We have no intention of stepping back from working with our campus communities on key decisions, and we're going to continue to engage on really tough decisions that we may have ahead of us, we're going to do that with our colleagues together. And I just want to continue to emphasize that. So, Phil, my colleagues, thank you.
PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Before we close, I want to make a pitch for another opportunity for us to join via Zoom and YouTube. Work continues despite the fact that we are not in our offices or in the classrooms. That’s obvious. One of the things that we have continued to be working on is the recruitment and selection of a new permanent provost. We have limited narrowed the pool down to four finalists, and each of those finalists will have an opportunity to do a live presentation to students, faculty and staff, who will be using the exact same kind of a format as we used here. That first public presentation will take place next Monday from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. The second will be Tuesday, the third Wednesday, and the final candidate will have their opportunity on Monday April 20th. I mention this for two reasons. One is we want you to be there. But more importantly, we also want to have you submit questions in advance. It's going to be really helpful for us to be able to see what those questions are, as any of you have been following the live chat, that's a great way for us to communicate during the event. But it's not as easy for us to pull those questions out in realtime. So do think about the kinds of questions you think a provost needs to answer in order to be working here at Washington State University. In order to find out more information, you can visit provostsearch.wsu.edu. You can see the curriculum vitae and submit questions there. This is a very different kind of process for the candidates. They're going to have to do this via Zoom. I think it's important for us as a Cougar community to welcome them and make sure we have lots of folks participating in that, in each of those public presentations. So, again, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and the following Monday, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m., please do join us. The last thing I will say, as we mentioned at the very beginning, we're committed to doing these system-wide town hall meetings every two weeks as long as the interest continues. I think we can see that we had a lot of folks involved this time around. So look to the next one in the next two weeks. Again, we will take the questions that we received both pre-you know, electronic questions, as well as those submitted live today and do our best to get those answered and posted to the WSU COVID-19 website. The easiest way is simply go to WSU.edu and follow the links. It provides all the information we have been providing system-wide since the end of January. So a great resource, if you have any questions about what WSU is doing in response to the situation. So, with that, I want to thank our panelists. I also want to thank our subject matter experts who were working live in the chat feature. I can see that they have been answering lots of questions, what I think
is great. I want to thank you all for joining from wherever you are joining, whether in the state of Washington or beyond. Enjoy your afternoon. And Go Cougs!

>> Go Cougs!

>> Go Cougs!