

WSU COVID-19 Town Hall – May 15

PHIL WEILER: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the fourth in our series of system-wide WSU COVID-19 town-hall meetings. My name is Phil Weiler. I'm Vice-President for Marketing and Communications, and I'm going to serve as our moderator for the next hour. I want to welcome everybody who is joining us from across the state of Washington and beyond-- certainly, all of our campus locations-- Everett, Spokane, Tri-Cities Vancouver, Pullman, and our global campus. And also a special welcome to those faculty members, staff members, and researchers who are working in our extension offices and our research facilities across the state.

We're joined today by President Kirk Schulz, Bryan Slinker, Interim Provost and Executive Vice-President. Theresa Elliot-Cheslek, who is Vice-President for Human Resource Services, and Stacy Pearson, our Vice-President for Finance and Administration.

This morning's session is going to be similar to what we've done in the past. We have solicited questions online. And we have received well over 100, again, which is fantastic. I want to thank folks for taking the time to submit their questions, share their concerns. We'll do everything we can to answer as many of those in the next hour. But my guess is the time will go more quickly than we have the ability to answer all the questions. In addition to these submitted questions, again we'll be doing live questions.

If you are watching on YouTube, and you have a question, feel free to submit it in the Comments section. Again, we have a cadre of subject-matter experts, who are going to try and answer those questions live-- and also provide resources for folks. I'm looking at the chat right now. We've already got some folks who are logging in. So please don't hesitate to take advantage of that option.

With that, let me turn it over to President Schulz, so we can get started this morning.

KIRK SCHULZ: Well, good morning, folks, and thanks for joining us once again on a Friday morning, for a little bit of a chat-- and to spend some time talking with the WSU community at large about some of the things that are on your mind. First and foremost, let me just thank and express my appreciation to our faculty and our staff, for the great job that everybody did finishing up Spring 2020 semester. I look back to spring break, when everybody was doing training. We announced online-instructional formats for all of our classes and all of our campus locations-- and our resilient students, who stepped up, rolled up their sleeves, and just did a great job. So once again, we have terrific people at WSU. And I think that was really showcased extremely well in this last spring term.

But we're now off to a summer session. We have a whole bunch of students enrolled at our different campuses and global-campus online. We have the largest summer enrollment, I

believe, we've had ever in our history. So really, really pleased with how that's going, and how people are continuing to work towards degree completion.

I know there's also a lot of questions out there really on two main areas. So let me just try and address those a little bit very quickly. The first is, I've continued to be very active in talking about our plan is to be in-person for our Fall 2020 semester, on all of our campuses. Now, sometimes people say, well, does that mean that you're going to have 500-person classes? Does that mean we're going to have this-- you know, all these different types of questions.

The answer is, we just don't know all the answers to those yet. But we want to continue to communicate with our campus community. Safety for our faculty, staff, and students is paramount. We are not going to put any of our populations at risk, without a really good plan-- that we articulate, that people see, they agree with. They go, OK, this is a good environment. It's going to be good for me to learn. It's going to be an environment that's good for me to work. It's going to be an environment where it's good for me to teach. And so that is going to continue to be our number one overriding concern as we do those things.

And sometimes people have expressed concerns, to say, well, Kirk, economically, you're so worried about getting everybody back. What about-- is it going to be safe for me to go into work? And the answer is, we're going to make sure that's a possibility-- that's a sure thing, not a possibility.

The second thing is that clearly the state of Washington is undergoing some real economic strain. And there's been some news this last week from the state and the governor's office around potential budget reductions and planning. As soon as a number comes out, everybody wants to know, what exactly are you going to do? How are we going to get there? And one of the really important things is what we don't want to do is go through any budget-planning exercise without a clear sense of why we're doing what we're doing-- not just how we get from number A to number B.

So we're working out a set of core principles that's going to guide our fiscal-decision making over the next several months. Those core principles we're arguing. And I mean this in a really good way. We're optimizing what those look like. And we'll introduce those to the campus community early this next week, along with some other data, on at least how we're going to be approaching this as a WSU community. I know people want to know today.

We just want to make sure that we're careful to roll-out information in a really reasonable fashion. And we'll attempt to answer any questions that we can. But next week we'll certainly have more information available to faculty, staff, students, alumni, and everybody concerned with WSU as a system-- our campuses and where we're going fiscally.

So we're going to continue to roll-up our sleeves. We're going to continue to work hard. We're going to continue to make sure that we're communicating using these type of town halls, social media, letters, video. We're going to use everything we can to make sure that people feel

informed-- that they feel that we're doing the right sort of things, and that they understand our decision making. So keep those questions coming. Keep asking things that you're concerned about. And we're going to do everything we can to make sure that the Cougar Nation feels good about our future-- about the leadership and about where we're going. So Phil, thank you. Look forward to answering some questions in the rest of the hour.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you, Kirk. Actually, I'm going to start with a question for you. And this was something someone had submitted. This person noted that last week the California State University system received a lot of media attention about what their plans were for the fall. It sounds like they are going to be mostly online and not in-person. I know that you've been doing a number of interviews across the state this week with reporters asking you about WSU's plans. And I know that you feel strongly about this. But for you, why is face-to-face important? Why is that something that you think we need to be looking at in the fall?

KIRK SCHULZ: Well, Phil, let me answer that two ways. The first is, if you really read carefully what the Cal State system is doing, I think the headlines kind of got out there in front of it. And they are still talking about doing some in-person experiences at the Cal State system. And that kind of got lost in a little bit of the frenzy around that announcement.

All of us are looking to do the same sort of things. We want to use instructional technology to help our students and faculty be safe. And that probably means that you're going to see more flipped classrooms, where maybe we do some of the lecture content using technology-- and we bring people into classrooms with social distancing and things like that in smaller sections, to answer questions and do in-person types of things. But the core to your question-- why is in-person important-- education is more than content delivery.

And I think as I talk to our families, I talk to faculty and staff, there is an inherent value to us being together-- for me to be able to look at somebody and see, are they understanding what we're talking about? Or ask questions, or query-- things like this-- and learn from each other as peers, not just from our instructor or teacher. And that in-person experience, I think people from this last term have probably valued it even more highly now, because they missed it. And I think they say, hey, we want to be safe, but we think this is important part of our education.

That's part of what we talk about-- the New Cougar Experience-- is it going to look a little different at WSU than it did in fall of 2019? Absolutely. But I think that in-person part of what it means to be a WSU Cougar is going to be something that we really want to emphasize, and do it in really the right way. So that's why we're prioritizing that. And that's why we've got some of the best minds at the University and in the state working together with us on how can we do that in a way that families feel safe-- they feel good about it. And it's going to be that kind of experience that people say, this is why I'm coming to WSU.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. And actually, I want to piggyback on what you last said about using some of those sharpest minds at WSU to help us make some of these decisions. Bryan, I'm going to pose this question to you. I know that Dr. Guy Palmer is working with a task force of

WSU epidemiologists and infectious disease experts to look at modeling. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Because I think that gets at the real core of a lot of these questions that we're seeing, where people want to know about testing. They want to know about contact tracing. They want to know about physical distancing. So what role will this task force play in helping us figure out those kinds of questions?

BRYAN SLINKER: Absolutely, Phil. Thanks for that question. Guy Palmer, one of our Regents professors and the founding director of the Allen School for Global Animal Health, a member of the National Academy. He's an infectious-disease expert. And he's assembled a team of other faculty-- two from Spokane and two from the Pullman campus-- who are epidemiologists and infectious-disease modelers. We're calling this a technical group, that undersells what they do. They're a key partner in planning. But of the several planning groups that are working on various aspects of what campus life might look like-- what instruction might look like-- all of those people thinking about those questions need to know, if we do this, what happens? If we do that, what happens? If we test for COVID-19 virus or antibody, under what assumptions could we have certain kinds of on-campus activities-- whether instruction or other activities.

So they are extremely helpful in putting the underpinnings of the safety on any of these discussions of what on-campus experience and instruction might look like. They're not telling us what we can do. We say, if we did this, if this is our goal, what's the best strategy for testing, or attestation, or contact tracing? And how do we mix together those safety and biosecurity measures with whatever we can do with face-to-face, or on-campus.

And as Kirk said, we're very unlikely to have what we would consider our normal-- like what Fall 2019 looked like. But as we figure out what we can do, it's been critical to have this expert panel helping us understand the parameters of how we mix safety with our goals to provide the experiences we want.

PHIL WEILER: Well, speaking for myself, I can say I feel fortunate that we have those experts that we can rely on, who have made this part of their life's work-- to be able to give us the advice we need to make sure that we're being as safe as possible, and providing the best experience for students, and for our faculty and staff. Next question, I'd like to direct to Theresa, if I could.

Theresa, we've talked about this, I know, at other public forums we've had. But there's still a lot of anxiety around the question about telework-- I think particularly with parents who have children who are grade-school age who are at home. And parents are worried that there may be decisions that are made that say, hey, you have to be back to work on Monday. I know that's not the case. And I'd love to have you talk about kind of what your thinking is around telework.

And there was just a new wrinkle that occurred this morning. We learned that Whitman County, the county that the Pullman campus is located in, received a waiver from the governor to go from phase 1 to phase 2. What impact does that have on faculty-staff in Pullman. And as

we see other counties receiving waivers or moving from one phase to the other, is that going to impact the way that people have to work in the short-term?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Sure. Great question. Right now, for the foreseeable future-- well, the priority for WSU is the safety of our faculty and staff and students. And even with the opening of phase 2 for the Whitman County area and some of our other counties, the priority again is safety-- and making sure we have processes in place for all of our staff on-campus. For the foreseeable future, employees who can work at an alternative work site, or from home-- teleworking-- are to continue to do that. And that's throughout the governor's information. And that's a priority for WSU.

So employees should anticipate that they will continue working as they are now for the near future. And we'll have some guidance out there. We're working with our partners in environmental health and safety, to ensure when we are ready to bring staff on, we have protocols in place to make that safe. But for right now, teleworking continues as the primary option for all of our employees.

PHIL WEILER: Well, and I think you made a good point. As you look at what the governor's four phases say, what I'm taking away from that is the governor is encouraging telework at virtually all those phases, if it's practical and possible. And my sense is-- we've been doing this now for two months. And by and large, teleworking seems to be working well, for those employees who are able to telework. So thank you. It sounds like we'll be in that mode for quite some time. And if we ever get-- well, we will get to it. We'll get to the stage where this isn't the case anymore. But when we get to that stage, it sounds like we'll have plenty of advanced warning, so that faculty and staff can make necessary arrangements.

KIRK SCHULZ: Phil, let me just reinforce the comment you just mentioned, and follow-on to Theresa's comment. I don't want any WSU faculty or staff member thinking that, you know, Friday afternoon at 4:30, they're going to get some email or edict that says, Monday morning at 8 o'clock, you better be into the office. We are not going to operate in that way. We will provide plenty of notice on how we want to do things as we resume different types of operations over the course of the summer. And I just don't want anybody fearful that we're going to put people in this really uncomfortable position, through poor communications, or things like that. So I just want to put that to rest as much as possible.

We're glad to say, hey, maybe next week I can go sit down in Whitman County at a restaurant, with appropriate social distance, and have a beverage and actually have a meal. That's great. But I think that we still want to make sure that we just ramp-up-- whatever operational changes we do, we're going to communicate. We're going to give people plenty of time. And we understand that we have to have flexibility. And that's all going to be there.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you for clarifying that. My guess will need to be reiterating that message throughout the summer, as things continue to change-- and as I said, particularly as different counties enter different phases.

So Stacy, I wanted to direct the next question to you. I know that we talked last at our last town hall about the CARES Act. And there was approximately \$10 million worth of funding that came from the federal CARES Act and went directly to students. And my understanding is there was an additional \$10-million dollars that would go to universities-- in our case, WSU-- to help us defray some of the costs we've experienced due to COVID-19. Can you tell us a little bit about that sort of second infusion of cash. Has the money been received? How is WSU expected to use that money? And where are we in that process?

STACY PEARSON: Yes, thank you, Phil. And again, thanks to everybody for joining us. Yes, we've been following, not just CARES, but all potential federal and state funds that will become available to help us deal with this COVID situation. And as Phil alluded to, Washington State University received a total of \$21.76 million from this program. Again, 50% to be allocated to students experiencing financial hardship due to this disruption. And then the other half of that-- \$10.88 million-- coming to the University, to be used to help cover the costs related to the operational disruptions, as well as lost revenue due to COVID-19.

So many of you have heard that we refunded a portion of housing-and-dining fees. And that is identified as one of the items that can be covered by this amount of money. In addition, it can be used to help support students with emergency grants that are not eligible for the CARES emergency funding-- so the other half of that money. And in addition, it can help fund hardware, software, providing Chromebooks and hot spots to students, so that they can access their classes and coursework. So we have gathered these expenses. In fact, nearly \$10 million is the amount of those housing-and-dining refunds. And then we're gathering some of the other expenses, that are indicated here.

We have received that funding. We want to make sure that we report it appropriately. And then we'll have some decisions to make. Because those costs are actually well in excess of the \$10.8 million. So we will go through these. And again, we work very carefully with our government-relations staff and colleagues, to identify what sources of funding can be used for what types of activities. And we will continue to do so.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. Kirk, I know you touched on this briefly, but this was a question that we received from a number of people, so it's worth asking again. This person says, "What kind of budgetary hit are we expecting, in terms of a reduction in state funding? And what impact will we see on departments and staffing?"

KIRK SCHULZ: Yeah. The state just recently announced a reduction target, that they've asked us to submit a plan to the state of Washington. And Stacy can correct me, but I believe by June 1, on how we would propose to meet a particular goal. What we're going to be doing over the next week we'll be asking deans, vice-presidents, unit heads, chancellors to start putting together contingency plans, that would say, if we took this percentage of a reduction in our budget, how might we manage that? And I want to emphasize to everybody, at this point this is idea generation.

And because a conversation goes in a particular direction in a college, in a campus, in some sort of administrative unit, at this point that's not set in stone. What we want to do is gather that information, see what ideas, see what impacts are there. And then what we want to do is sit down and very carefully and thoughtfully use those budget principles that I talked about, to make sure that we're being careful with how we manage those fiscal decisions.

So the bottom line is, at this point no decision has been made. The state has asked us to come up with a particular number. And Stacy can remind me, but I think it's 38 million, or something around that. And what we're going to do is put together a thoughtful plan. I also want to make sure that people don't think there's two or three of us in some sort of smoke-filled room in the back that are making all these decisions without appropriate input from faculty and staff and campus leadership-- and other things like that. We'll be inclusive in our decision making.

But the bottom line is, everybody at WSU right now is working it really hard. You can't take a budgetary reduction like the state is asking us to do without affecting people, services, and what we're able to do. And we want to make sure we minimize the impact on our students and minimize the impact on a student's ability to come to WSU, study what they want to, and move through in a timely way towards their degree. And those are the kind of paramount things that are going to be very important to us.

I'm also personally very concerned in the Pullman community with job preservation. We're the largest employer. It's important that we keep as many people employed in our community as we possibly can. And those are the kinds of principles that we're going to use to govern our decision making. No matter how much we communicate, how much we put out there, some members of our community will say, well, they didn't ask us, or we didn't have a chance for input. We're just going to do the best that we can.

And fortunately, we have a leadership team at WSU with a lot of highly-experienced individuals, that, even if they weren't at WSU, were in positions of high responsibility in higher education during the last recession. And while things are different, still the way we treat budgets, the way we treat, the way we interact with our campus community, a lot of lessons were learned in '08 and '09. And I think we want to make sure that we learn from those as we make some really challenging and difficult decisions moving forward. Still, the bottom line is next week we'll have more details out to the campus community on some of our modeling efforts and where we're asking people to be. And we will keep people as informed as we can.

Finally, the thing that kills you more than anything else around these issues is the rumor mill. And I'm constantly amazed how somebody sees somebody at a restaurant, or they run into somebody at the grocery store, and they've heard that this is going to happen, or that's going to happen. And I would just urge people to please talk to supervisors. Talk to deans, vice-presidents, other folks. Find out if information that you're getting has got any legs to it before getting panicked, before spreading it around-- and things like that. And that is really, really important. Because those rumors that spread around as fact can sometimes be more damaging than the actual decisions that are going to be made down the road. So please just be careful.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Kirk. And I'm going to ask another question, that sort of is, again, a piggyback on that one. And this was one that we have received a lot of comments on, both in the chat as well as in advance. And that had to do with the question of furloughs. This person, in particular, notes that other universities have already started making announcements about furloughs, as a way of helping reduce the deficits that are anticipated. This person wanted to know, is this an option at Washington State University? If so, are we looking at any kind of a tiered furlough system, where the highest-paid folks might be furloughed first-- so we can help protect those lower-paid individuals?

KIRK SCHULZ: Yeah. I want to emphasize that we've not made decisions on what we're going to use and how we're going to get to any sort of budgetary targets. So I think one of the things that we talked about a month ago was how much contingency planning to do? What sort of programs should we put in place to try and recoup some dollars? And then it really came back to, well, what's the purpose, and what's our goal? Is it just to have money? Or do we actually have a number, or a figure, or a target? We did not have that target until basically the last few days. And so it's just too early to start talking about, are we going to do furloughs, because they did those at the University of Arizona? Are we going to do x, because they did that at the University of Oregon? Obviously, we're going to look at all those things, and we're going to balance out, using those core principles, what types of levers we want to use to get to those budgetary targets.

So I just want to continue to emphasize to the community, there is no secret plan that's been made, that we're just waiting to announce. What we need to do is gather information from leaders. We need to gather ideas from leaders. And then we'll have to use those to make some key decisions on what we want to do. At this point, I would say, we haven't removed anything from the set of options. But we still are in a very early, early stages of planning. And I want to continue to emphasize that we won't do anything without a clear reasoning, without clear data being put out in an open-and-transparent fashion.

And I will tell the campus community writ large, whenever you've got to cut dollars, there's always going to be somebody, or a whole group of people that will feel that was a poor decision and the wrong way to go. There's no real win here. But I will pledge, again, transparency-- putting data and information out, so everybody can see it. And I never expect everybody to agree with our decisions. But I do expect people to understand why we made those decisions. And that's got to be the way that we operate moving forward. And I believe that's the way we've operated the last four years during my tenure at WSU. There's no reason to operate any differently now.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Bryan, I have a question for you. This was from a faculty member. It's a little bit along, but I think it's worth reading. This person says, "While faculty are exhausted from their efforts this spring, many are already beginning to think about fall course design. Designing a course for distance learning is different than designing a course for face-to-face delivery. This spring, faculty taught distance courses successfully with little warning, but our efforts will be even better if we can plan ahead. Will the University set guidelines and

expectations for hybrid models, or other kinds of options. And if so, what kinds of resources would be made available to faculty members as they're making those plans?"

BRYAN SLINKER: Yeah, long question. So remind me if I don't hit all the pieces of that. But the short answer is, in relation to expectations, our expectations is that we will offer a value proposition to the students, that they will receive an excellent education. And as the questioner pointed out, that looks different if it's online or hybrid or flipped than it does if it was a traditional method. I wouldn't state it's an expectation. The goal is that, as the questioner pointed out, we adapted successfully over the spring on short notice. Now, we have time to prepare. And what's the plan for preparation? And so I will get to that. But I wanted to first provide just a couple of statistics about the shift in the spring, to set some context to emphasize the questioner's point.

Everybody was worried, will students stay engaged? They did stay engaged. Faculty rose to the occasion. They shifted in literally 10-to-14 days to a new mode of instruction. They worked with students. It didn't go absolutely flawlessly, but it went fantastically well, in relation to the task at hand.

So the main worries that we had in our office was, would students stick with us? Would they give up? So we had the Chromebook loaners. We had hotspot loaners-- tried to help with technology. Faculty really rose to the occasion. And so students did stick with us.

We had actually fewer students withdraw from at least one class than happened in Spring 2019. We had fewer term withdrawals-- that is, dropping out of the term altogether-- this spring than we had in the spring of 2019. There were more incompletes and more X grades, but that's somewhat to be expected. Because in some classes, students need a little bit more time to finish up-- because of either technology glitches, or other glitches in adapting to the new model. But it went fantastically well. And so now the goal is to keep that up and do better in the fall, in terms of improving our offerings and the value proposition.

So hybrid will be necessary. Kirk mentioned the Cal State situation. And if you look at what Cal State's planning to do-- actually, look at the details-- as he noted, it's not that different than what we're contemplating. If there's face-to-face, it's likely to be those smaller, more intimate studio or laboratory things, with safe distancing.

There's going to be a lot of need for flexibility, because the situation may change-- either through government regulation, or the course of the disease shifts on us. And so there will be a lot of online content. And what happened-- and as they did in the spring-- Academic Outreach and Innovation (AOI) is stepping up over the summer to work with faculty. And nearly 350 faculty are now engaged in one or more of 10 working groups-- cohorts of faculty looking at various aspects.

Those range from creating content modules to support asynchronous learning-- creating content online to support synchronous learning-- doing more robust assessments-- in an either asynchronous or synchronous online environment. Virtual-lab content-- where can we focus on

developing exciting labs that drive home the principles virtually, if we can't do them face-to-face? In classroom activities that support social distancing-- different ways than the traditional lecture.

And then a variety of groups working on, how do we connect better with students, if there is distance element to it-- whether those students are in Pullman, engaging online, or whether they're somewhere else engaging online. So those 10 groups are working now. And I'm just so thankful and pleased and proud that 350 faculty are engaged in that improvement over the summer. We don't know what the outcome looks like. One of the outcome-- to one of the questioner's points-- is that they may identify technology that we need to help improve. They know where to go to ask, is there a resource to do that? Through, hopefully, the resources available to us, support virtual-lab simulations, for example, we need more tools, we would be able to provide those tools. So they're not only looking at what they can do with what we have, but they're being thoughtful about, are there other tools, if we had them, we could do even better-- and have those discussions.

So I feel really good about our preparation for fall. And again, really proud that our faculty continue to step up. And I know they're tired. This wasn't what any of us wanted. But I'm just so thankful and proud that they're there staying engaged in this way over the summer, to have a really good Coug experience for the fall.

KIRK SCHULZ: Bryan, thank you. One of things that I want to remind our WSU faculty and staff-- and I think this part is really important-- everybody sprinted, essentially, to get through last term. We had a very successful graduation celebration. That was only this last weekend. It wasn't that long ago. I want to remind everybody to take a little bit of a deep breath, to slow down a little bit-- and just to remind everybody, I know everyone wants answers on exactly what things are going to look like in mid-August. And we're going to continue to work hard to plan and communicate. But I also worry that sometimes folks need to just acknowledge that it's going to take us a week or two to make sure we have some of the planning processes in place, to satisfactorily answer a lot of those questions and concerns.

I do worry about people burning themselves out. Because I know a lot of our faculty, staff, and a lot of our students just really sprinted hard to get done successfully last term. So my hope is, take a minute, take a deep breath. We're going to continue to communicate. We'll be ready for August. But we may not have every decision made that people would like to know about in the next week or two. And that will just take us some time.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. Stacy, I have another question for you. And this is kind of an interesting one. This person-- I'll read the question, and then I'll give some of my own little commentary and let you answer. The question the person asked is, "If I went to a private gym and I wanted to stop paying my gym membership, I'd stopped paying, and I'd lose my gym privileges." This is a person who is paying student fees, to help support the Student Recreation Center. And so they're asking, why do I have to keep paying student fees for the Student Recreation Center, if I can't use that? I know that part of the answer has to do with debt

service. Could you tell us what that means, for those of us who aren't really that familiar with the concept-- and why there may be some fees that are continuing to be charged, even though people may not have access to that facility?

STACY PEARSON: Thank you, Phil. And yes, that is a very difficult question. What we have to remember is a lot of these facilities are built via student referendum-- so student initiatives in which the students agree to tax themselves-- both themselves that are current students, as well as students into the future-- a fee to build and bond these facilities and to cover the operating expenses. So as was explained when we discussed the fees for the summer for those facilities, a portion of those fees are pledged to the debt service. And debt service has to be covered. And it is a little bit different than that gym membership, in that there wasn't such a referendum that required that particular funding source to be able to bond finance the facility.

So this has certainly created a situation that I don't think anybody anticipated. And what we're trying to balance with this situation is our ability to meet those bond payments-- and of course, identify if there's any other funding support that might come in to help us alleviate that in the meantime. But first and foremost, we want to make sure that we're able to meet our bonding commitments, and then see if we can make the appropriate level of adjustments, or emergency funding in the meantime. It isn't a situation that anybody anticipated or planned to be in. And so we have very carefully gone through all the bond covenants and how each individual facility was established.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you for that explanation. I agree. I think people don't understand the difference necessarily between need to pay the loan to build the facility versus the dollars that might be used to help program classes in a facility.

STACY PEARSON: Correct. Those are dedicated funds only to those purposes.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. Next question I have is for Bryan. This person noted that last week the University of Washington rolled out some guidelines for revamping all their in-person research activities. And this individual is wondering, what our Washington State university's plans around restarting research?

BRYAN SLINKER: Sure. Good question. For about the last three weeks, a group led by Levi O'Loughlin in the Office of Research in Vice-President Keane's group, has been working with faculty and leadership to develop guidelines to ramp-up research at WSU-- similar to what the questioner noted is happening at UW. That guidance is very close to the final format. It's gone out to faculty recently, through their ADRs-- they associate deans for research. So faculty should be receiving this near-final draft guidance for input from their associate dean for research. And then this is leading up to the town hall at 11 o'clock in the morning on Tuesday, where a variety of us-- mostly, Vice-President Kane and his staff. I'll be there as well. But that's just for faculty who have seen the guidance, to provide the opportunity to hear from us the approach we wanted to take. Again, safety is paramount. But if we all have a desire to get back in the research lab, with more engagement and a higher level of engagement.

So after that town hall, we anticipate that we will finalize that guidance. And then based on the interactions with the state government, the Department of Health, the governor's office, to be sure we're in compliance, those conversations are ongoing. And this will all come together late next week, and a decision to follow that guidance to begin to ramp-up research. And with a period of time-- four days, basically-- to get, everybody, their plans in place, reviewed by their department chair and ready to roll. So by the end of the month, we would anticipate, if everything comes together like we're planning, there will be ramp-up of research.

PHIL WEILER: Terrific. Thank you. I'm glad you mentioned that research town hall on Tuesday, for those who are interested. Another question, maybe, Bryan, that would be addressed to you. We received a number of questions from, I think, probably new students and new parents, who are wondering about our new-student orientation sessions-- whether they be SOAR or the Alive sessions. My understanding is that we're making decisions about those on sort of a rolling basis-- that the ones that are happening first will be online, but we'll make decisions for other ones later in the summer if they'll be face-to-face. Is that still the case?

BRYAN SLINKER: Yes. Right now the Alive sessions, that would have ordinarily been on-campus-- or those two that were in California and the one in Hawaii-- that's shifted to online. And we will have to make a decision fairly soon, I think, about how we extend that into July. But we're not ready to do that just yet, until we see how the shift in phases goes and guidance we're getting from the state government. But the online content is live webinars. There's online modules. We purchased new software from the Advantage Design Group, to help students and their families work through the content of Alive online. Then with the live webinars that are scheduled throughout the day. So the Alive sessions are still scheduled on the days they were originally scheduled for.

And then there are various chat functions. There are optional meet and greets in the evening time. So they're still virtual, but there is campus resources. Those vary slightly from session to session, based on feedback of those enrolled in the session. Plenty of breaks built into the schedule, so you're not sitting in your seat all day long on virtual.

So again, the programming for the new students and for their parents, or both happening. There's a secure website for parents to log into. And all of the PowerPoints that parents would have had if they were here on campus will be available there prior to live webinars. And so it's going to be a robust engagement. It just won't be face-to-face. And if we shift to more online later in the summer and things change, we can have some limited on-campus engagements. But we just don't know that yet.

And the team has been doing a lot of work to make sure everybody's questions are answered-- and make sure they begin to understand the issue, get signed-up for their classes-- know what campus life is like and what it would be like if it's face-to-face and what it's like if not everybody can make it to campus. It's really turned out to be a lot of effort, of course. But it's rolling out really well and stays on schedule.

The recruiting is doing similarly. We just had a town hall for parents of recruits last night. Almost 900 families joined in that town hall. At of course, the questions often are some of the questions being asked here, by parents of prospective students, or students that are committed. It's just important that we keep those communications going. And those town halls will be repeated periodically through June, for new students. And then on June 11, there's a big recruiting town hall focused on students that haven't made a commitment yet to WSU. So lots of work going on to shift those in quality-- and lots of engagement with students and their families, now through the extent of the summer.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks for mentioning that parent-information forum that took place last night. The next one is scheduled for June 4. If there is any parents who are on and didn't get a chance to listen in on that one, that is open to you. And as we do with all these online forums, they are recorded. And so if for some reason, you want to see a parent forum, can't make that time-- it's 5:00-to-6:00 PM-- it will be recorded, and you can get a chance to view it live.

So next question I have is for Stacy. And Stacy, this is one that we have addressed I think a couple times now, but it's still coming up. So it's worth talking about again. And this is from a faculty member, who has a parking pass for the Pullman campus-- and wanted to know how to go about getting a refund, since obviously they didn't, for a couple of weeks at least, have any reason to be parking on campus.

STACY PEARSON: Right, and certainly. And really, all they need to go do is go to the Parking and Transportation website and identify when they want to cancel their permit. And then they will be entitled to a refund for the remainder of the period that they had purchased. It depends. They might have a full-year, or a semester. So they'll need that information, though, at Parking and Transportation.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Looking at the Chat function, I've noticed a lot of people are asking questions about things like, what happens if a student tests positive? What kind of contact tracing are we going to have? What does that process look like? If I heard you, Bryan, it sounds like we are working through those protocols now. But is there anything you would want to add to that kind of a question?

BRYAN SLINKER: Sure. Touched on this a bit with the answer to the question about the technical working group and our infectious-disease experts. So the broad issues for us in thinking about safety include safety on campus-- in residence halls, dining halls, recreation facilities, and so on. Safety of people as they move back and forth into the community on-and-off campus and safety in the classroom, or teaching laboratories. The toolkit is pretty consistent. And as we look at what other universities are doing-- for example, University of California San Diego, we have a call with them later this afternoon, actually, to talk through some of these issues.

At the highest level there's testing for virus and antibody. And testing may be at the core of a robust return to campus, if that's possible. We don't know that it's possible. But whatever we

do, testing is on the list of things to model, to see what we can do within safe parameters. If we're testing, we're also doing contact tracing. The one has to go with the other. And depending on what we decide to do-- and again, this is really theoretical right now-- if we do have any student presence, there will be testing. Likely, testing wouldn't require contact tracing if there are positive tests, but it may require quarantine. So these are all tools. And then the other tools are the standard hygiene. If we're around each other, we have safe distance. We wear facial coverings. We wash our hands. We don't touch our face. All of these basic hygiene things are extremely powerful to keep us safe.

And so the real issue is, is there a role for testing to allow us a return to function more than if we didn't test? Let's put it that way. Would testing allow us to have a closer return to function? We're not returning to normal, under the most expansive scenario we can think about. So testing is the highest level. How we test is a whole other set of issues. And that's where the modelers come in. If we test this way, it becomes possible. If we test that way, what's possible?

I'll call digress slightly and say that we are building up our own testing capacity to support the state and region. And if we choose to do so, we can use some of that testing to support our own needs for a safe environment for students, staff, and faculty. That testing will be through the Washington Animal Disease Diagnostic Lab, in coordination with a human-pathology lab partner. We've been asked to do this by the State Department of Health, and we are doing this. We're investing in ramping up that testing. And we may serve a variety of interests around the state to help the entire state navigate this, particularly in eastern Washington. But some of that could be available to us, if we decide to use it. So we're considering the entire gamut of safety measures-- modeling, what we would have to do for certain outcomes. And this will come together over this summer and the decisions we make about how fall looks-- and the biosafety measures, biosecurity measures necessary to support whatever those decisions are.

KIRK SCHULZ: Phil, if I can just add a little bit. Bryan went through a lot of the details and things that we're looking at. The only thing I would add is that prior to anybody being on campus, we are going to lay all this out. All families, all prospective and returning students, the community are going to know exactly what we're doing, what the protocols are, what the expectations are. This won't be the type of thing that people are going to have to worry about, what is it that the plan is? Or how are they going to handle this? Or what are the contingency plans? Part of the key here will be, again, as we've put this together-- as Bryan and our science teams put together best practices, that communication will be really paramount and important, that people know, understand, and feel good about it. And that's going to be part of it as well.

I just want to remind, again, folks that we are mid-May. And this is mid-August that we're talking about. And while I understand people wanting to know today what we're going to do, we've got to take the time to continue to look at best practices-- what we can do, what's going to be required for a safe working and teaching environment. And that'll be tied together and communicated effectively.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. This next question came from a student who currently is enrolled in Vancouver. This individual lives with folks at home who are in what are considered high-risk categories according to the CDC. So the student understands that we are looking to do some sort of a hybrid face-to-face learning environment, but this person isn't sure if that's the right choice for them-- in the fall, in particular. And they're just wondering, what are their options? Do they have to do face-to-face, if they're not comfortable doing that?

BRYAN SLINKER: So the hybrid model, we hope in most cases, supports that kind of concern. Even if we are able to do some face-to-face, it's likely to be more limited than normal. So that would be students engaging online for at least part of their content, anyway. There will be students in high-risk categories-- for either people in their household, or themselves-- who may not want to come to class. That's why would we have to anticipate that in the design. So if those students can stay engaged, even if some of their classmates are physically in an activity. There's certain activities that we may not be able to do that with. But the idea is that, whether it's staff, or faculty, or students, some are not going to be able to engage, even if others are engaged. So part of the hybrid model is to allow students to engage in multiple ways. And a return to face-to-face for some doesn't mean that everybody has to be face-to-face to still participate in that class. We can't guarantee that 100% of the classes can offer that. But that's part of the planning groups over the summer is, how do we allow that flexibility?

For example, even if students could assemble in a group of 20 in a large classroom, but their faculty members is in a high-risk group, it shouldn't be in that classroom, even at a safe distance. That instructor may still have to teach with distance methods, even if it would otherwise be possible. So that's the kind of flexibility we need to build in-- because we know there's going to be those individual students, or individual faculty or staff, that have to make a decision that's maybe different than the rest of the class.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Last question, I'm going to direct to Kirk. We're just about at the end of our time. This was something that we heard yesterday, certainly, during the parent-information forum. And I think it's worth repeating. We've heard from some students who are saying, should I take a year off? Should I take a gap year? What are your thoughts about interrupting your college experience and taking a year off?

KIRK SCHULZ: A couple things. First, I think it's important for students to continue their educational experience-- whether that's coming to WSU, going to community college, going to one of the other four-year institutions. I think the idea of just sort of saying, well, I'm going to sit out for a year, because maybe then things will be better, or different, or more what I would anticipate in fall of 2021 than fall of 2020, I just don't ever really recommend that. Because I don't think that that necessarily gets you anything. And there's no guarantee that things will necessarily look different in fall of 2021 than they do in fall of '20.

So I think it's important to talk to academic advisors, talk to high-school counselors. Get their advice on what things are important. And then work with them on what makes the most sense for you and your family. But taking time off just because you think things may look a little

different-- I think, get in the classroom-- whatever that environment is-- get started down that area of passion, in the area that you really want to learn more and have a career in. And I think that's a really important step for people to take.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. We are just about out of time. Kirk, do you have any last parting comments you'd like to share?

KIRK SCHULZ: One, thank you, everybody, for joining us. Once again, we're going to keep doing these during the summer. We want to keep answering your questions, or at least as many questions as we can get to during the time. I appreciate the fantastic job, once again, our faculty, staff, and students did last term. And I appreciate the desire by parents, by students, by our own faculty and staff, by community members, to know, what are we going to do? When are we going to do it? What's it going to look like? What's the budget going to affect? All those types of things. I just urge, once again, patience. We'll continue to communicate widely and broadly. And we just want to be thoughtful in making sure as we communicate that we don't have to contradict ourselves because we got out there too soon.

So be patient. Keep asking questions. And we'll do the best we can to get those answers to you. And as always, go Cougs.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Kirk. Let me reiterate that idea that we are intending to communicate frequently and as extensively as we can. I'll remind people again-- if you ever have any questions about how WSU is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit our at COVID-19 website, and just simply go to the WSU home page-- that's WSU.edu-- and click on the COVID-19 link there. You can get all the information that we've ever communicated about COVID-19 all in one easy-to-use location.

Other reminder that I will let people know about is that our next COVID-19 town-hall meeting is scheduled in two weeks. It'll be Friday, May 29. So please join us then. You'll again also have the opportunity to submit questions in advance.

So with that, let me thank our panelists. I appreciate you all making yourselves available. And a special shout-out to our subject matter experts. As I've been looking at the chat, it is continuing to be really heavily used. So thanks to everybody for submitting their comments. And thanks to our subject-matter experts for doing their best to answer those questions. With that, everybody enjoy your day. And go Cougs.