

WSU COVID-19 Town Hall – May 29

PHIL WEILER: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the fifth in our series of COVID-19 town hall meetings. My name is Phil Weiler. Again, I'm going to serve as our moderator for this hour. I have the opportunity to serve as Vice President for Marketing Communications here at Washington State.

And right off the bat, I want to welcome everybody who's joining us. These meetings have consistently had thousands of people joining. And they're connecting from all of our campuses around the state, all of our extension offices, our research facilities, all over the country. And in at least one case, we received a question today from a person who's planning to attend from Sri Lanka. So great to have so many folks joining us.

We're going to follow a very similar process to what we've done in the past. I'm joined today by four members of our panel. I'll introduce them in a second. And then also we have a cadre of folks who are helping out with live questions in the live chat, and I'll talk about that just before we get started.

As I said, I'm joined today by Kirk Schulz, President of Washington State University, Bryan Slinker, our Interim Provost and Executive Vice President, Theresa Elliot-Cheslek, Vice President for Human Resource Services, and finally Stacy Pearson, our Vice President for Finance and Administration. As we've done in the past, we collected questions prior to this online. As of this morning, we have 18 pages of questions, so lots of interest this time around. We will get to as many of those questions as we can.

As I mentioned, though, if a question comes to mind for you while we're talking, please feel free to use the live chat feature. I'm looking at that right now and already seeing folks who are connecting via that live chat. We will again have subject matter experts who are monitoring those questions and, if at all possible, either answering the questions live or pointing folks to resources where they can get more information. So with that, let's get started.

As I said, we have a lot of interest and a lot of questions. And I guess the first thing I'd like to do is ask President Schulz to talk to us a little bit about what the plans are in the fall. As I looked at the questions, there are a lot of people who are still not sure what we're thinking about doing in the fall. And so this will be a good opportunity for us to lay the groundwork for where we think we're going and what we think the fall is going to look like.

KIRK SCHULZ: Phil, thank you. And good morning, Cougs. And thanks, everybody, for joining us. Before I start talking about our fall 2020 plans, WSU, we have a history of working hard to develop an inclusive and diverse environment throughout the WSU system at all our campuses, extension centers, student groups, faculty, and staff, and alumni. Our communities of color this morning are hurting across the nation as we watch the reaction to several deaths that have occurred recently by African-Americans.

We want to continue to make sure that we're setting a standard in the State of Washington for how we work with diversity, equity, and inclusion. And we're pledged to work with our police in our local areas to make sure that we are not just showing sympathy for that pain right now in our communities of color, but we're setting an example. And so this morning, for those of you watching, for our faculty, staff, students, alumni, anybody associated with WSU and our communities of color, our heart goes out to you. And we're pledging to continue to do the best we can to improve, to do things differently, and to make a difference moving forward.

So Phil, as we talk about restarting for fall 2020, we got lots of questions about what that's going to look like. And what I want to do is go through a few items that some will be repetitive, but some may be a little bit different as we continue to work in this particular area. First, and I always want to emphasize this, safety of our faculty, staff, and students is a paramount concern. When we start talking about logistical things, we are-- that is a part of our conversations all the time and will continue to be so.

We received lots of questions. We still get questions, what are the plans for fall 2020? And I just want to reiterate our plans are for in-person experiences at all of our campus locations for fall 2020. As I've said before and will continue to repeat, the experience for fall of 2020 is going to look different at all of our campus locations than fall of 2019. But we're committed to it, we're working on it, and we'll continue to keep everybody informed as our planning moves forward.

We work hard to make sure that we're communicating across the higher education sector in Washington and the Pacific Northwest so that we're bringing the best ideas, not just to WSU but from all of our campuses, all our locations, from California, Arizona, other places, what's working there. What they're thinking we're also thinking. One of the first steps, though, before worrying about students coming onto campus is, how do we safely bring our employees back to our different campus locations?

This has to be done in conjunction with the Department of Health in different areas. And Theresa Elliot-Cheslek, our Vice President for Human Resources, and her team have put together a very comprehensive plan that we're going to start sharing next week on how to safely bring people back to campuses, how to maintain social distances in the workplace, where people can report issues or challenges or things where they don't feel safe or there's concerns that we need to be aware of. So we will pledge to put that out and make sure that people have a clear written set of guidelines on what it needs to look like when people return to work if they choose to do so.

We're also committed to reopening our research enterprise. And just last week, there was a town hall on research and scholarly activity at WSU and what that restart also needs to look like. And that draft plan is out there available for people to look at now. And that's an important part of us also reengaging and continuing to expand our in-person operations prior to the fall semester.

We're doing all this in conjunction with Governor Inslee and guidance that we're getting from the state. And we want to make sure-- I always want to let the Cougs know that we're not doing this independently. We're not doing this on our own. We're doing it in conjunction with public health care professionals and so forth.

We also are working to develop our in-house COVID-19 testing capabilities in Pullman that will work for the entire WSU system through the College of Veterinary Medicine. We've mentioned that before. We're continuing to ramp that up. And it's going to be important for our fall in-person experiences to be able to do rapid testing in a format that's close by that we can get those results quickly. And that's continuing to move forward.

We'll clearly also need to have contact tracing as part of our testing protocols. Contact tracing will be done with a phone app. And if you say, "Well, that's great, Kirk. What phone app are we going to use?" we don't know. Right now there's five or six different ones out there.

We're going to evaluate those, and we'll let the community know well in advance what that needs to look like. But there's going to be a lot of developments that occur over the next four to six weeks. But that contact tracing will also be an integral part of our in-person plans for the fall.

We will have a social distancing policy in place for all campus locations. And that applies not just to residence halls and classrooms but gathering spaces and other types of things. We'll have a cleaning protocol in place that is whether it's a classroom or we have an event somewhere what that looks like. And for many of you who are out there-- and our county here, Whitman County and Pullman, is in phase 2, those cleaning protocols are in place for restaurants and other types of things. We'll have to make sure we design the ability to do that into our schedules.

We will work on what our residence hall population looks like in terms of number of people per room and things like that. I know people want to know that. It'll be the middle of June before we make final decisions on what those look like. And we'll make sure we communicate those.

We will also be working closely with our colleagues in the Pullman community, in the Vancouver community, the Tri-Cities community as we come back. It's not just what are we doing on our campuses; it's what are we doing in the area where our students, our faculty and staff are coming from. And I want people to feel some confidence that we can have everything done on our campus location, but if we don't work with our partners and colleagues surrounding our campuses, it's going to be really hard to have that environment that we think is so careful.

And then finally, out there, there are lots of changes proposed at different institutions to the academic calendar, to minimize travel and things like that. As much as I wish I were-- I could just snap my fingers and make it happen, these things require careful consideration. It requires looking and talking with our faculty, our faculty leadership. It involves our accreditation, class

days, and things like that. And I will just say that we are engaging in those conversations to look like what we could do with our academic calendar this next year to again just put us in a position to be safe and successful with the fall 2020 semester.

Finally, we'll put a publication, a letter, out to the general WSU community next week that has more of these details in there. I will say, and I know we'll have some questions, that people want to know details. They want to know exactly what we're going to do and how. And we want to make sure that we're just careful with our communication, that we don't contradict ourselves, that we don't put out one thing and then put out something else the next week.

So I realize people want to know more. They want to know it quickly. And we're going to continue to pledge to put out high quality carefully thought out planning documents and communications through video, social media, these kind of things all through the summer to make sure by the time fall gets here, people say, they've done it well, they've communicated well, and we feel really-- we feel good about the environment that we're going to teach in, that we're going to work in, that we're going to learn in, and that we're going to live in.

So lots there. That's more than I probably want to talk at one time but lots of activities going on. Our planning is going well. We're going to be ready for an exceptional fall 2020 in-person experience at all of our campuses.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you, Kirk. That's helpful. Bryan, I'm going to address this question to you because President Schulz made a reference to it. There has been a lot of work that's been done lately on how we do a slow phased reintroduction to research.

I know that that's a big concern to investigators, researchers across the system. There was work, as President Schulz mentioned, on guidelines that are in draft form. My understanding is we've got one big last hurdle to get over before we can share those. Can you give us an update on where are those research guidelines and if people are interested in learning more where they should go?

BRYAN SLINKER: Thanks Phil. And thanks, everyone, for just tuning into this. And I'll acknowledge right off the bat that I wore the wrong shirt today for a video conference. So if you're seeing my stripes, I apologize for that.

So for research, this planning has been led out of the Office of Research under Vice President Keane who charged the task force led by Levi O'Loughlin in that office. There's been a lot of feedback on that, lots of iterations of the draft culminating with a final-- what we consider our final draft now is done. And the reason I call it final draft, even though that seems kind of odd, is that we recognize that no matter where we think we are done, the conditions will change dynamically that may change our guidance.

So the document is created as a dynamic document with change control, so we know which version we're working on. But the first version of that is ready to go. That doesn't mean we're

ready to start turning people loose in the labs yet because, as Kirk mentioned, we still have to coordinate with county and state public health authorities and state government for these plans so that these plans are vetted and approved as consistent with government guidelines and public health guidelines. That process is ongoing in multiple communication channels with both county and in state government.

Once we feel like we have the go ahead, then we're ready to go. So the draft one is done. It's the guidance we're going to start with, but we will start as soon as we get the go ahead from public health authorities. And starting means there will be an initial period of about a week where we have a very structured, staged reintroduction and where plans are approved and posted.

A lot of this is outlined in the previous discussions and town hall. And it's all available on the Office of Research website if you want to refer to it. So we're ready to go from our perspective as soon as we get approval. But there will be a few days of structured getting ready to go, and then we'll begin to ramp up as soon as possible.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. I have to say from my perspective, I thought that team did a really good job of thinking through all the issues that need to be addressed before we can begin to start repopulating those labs. So again, I'll say if you're interested and have not had a chance to see the current draft, the Office of Research website has links to it. And, like I said, I think it's a good document.

I'm going to use that as a segue to ask a question of Theresa if I could. I know that in addition to the guidelines we've been preparing for research, you and your team have been preparing guidelines for what a safe and phased reintroduction to the workplace looks like. And I know that that work isn't done. But I'm wondering, could you give us a preview of what those guidelines might look like and just provide any other information?

I think I will say that, as I looked again at the questions, a lot of folks are anxious thinking that they're going to be having to return to the workplace before they may be ready based on their own personal situation. So could you share the guidelines and then maybe hit some highlights for us?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Yeah, great. Thank you, Phil. Yeah. HRS is working in collaboration with our subject matter experts in environmental health and safety, risk management, on developing a general guide for a safe return to work, a guide that will just-- it won't cover everybody's special needs in labs and some of the other high volume areas where there's some sensitivity. But for the general population, we're working on a guide that will address the primary issues such as, number one, employees who can work from home and telework will continue to do so through phases 2 and 3.

And I know that's a common question we're getting on the chat. And I want to assure everyone, that's going to be one of the primary concerns. When an area is deciding who to bring back to a

workplace, the first question is going to be, can they perform that work at home? And then that answers that question. They shouldn't be being brought back to work.

But we're establishing guides regarding social distancing, hygiene, those important considerations to ensure the workplace is safe and in accordance with the local health officials and the phase that's in place for the county. So it'll be a general guide. But in addition to that, the area supervisors, managers, decision-makers are going to have to be considering what phase the county is and any other directives from the local health officials. Those are going to be the priorities as we move to slowly phase employees back into WSU work locations.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. So what I heard you say, I'll just reiterate. If work can be done from home at this stage, it should be done from home. Is that right?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: Yes.

PHIL WEILER: Good.

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: All right.

PHIL WEILER: All right. Do you have a sense of the timing of when we might be able to release those guidelines?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: As President Schulz said, we hope to have the guidelines out sometime next week. The guidelines will include a mandatory training that all WSU employees will take, a very short safety training that we're working with Environmental Health & Safety on, five or 10 minutes through our online system, a quick training video. And there are some other possible requirements we're working on that employers will need to take if they're required to come back into a WSU work location.

So hopefully the guides will be ready next week. And I'll add the disclaimer, it's a general guide. For other areas, you're going to have additional stipulations that you'll need to adhere to in accordance with Labor and Industry requirements for the specific work performed.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Kirk, I'm going to ask this question of you. It could be you, or Bryan, or Stacy, but if you wouldn't mind starting, there's been a lot of questions and concerns about what our budget situation's going to look like next year. Can you address that? And then maybe if we have specific questions, we can have Stacy look at those.

KIRK SCHULZ: Yeah. I'm concerned like everybody else what our budget's going to look like next year. And just to provide some background, we were asked by the State of Washington to start doing scenario planning for a particular cut. They asked for a 15% cut. And by the time you translate that to our budgets at WSU, that constitutes a 10% reduction.

Now, this is an exercise. The state has not mandated that we have to give back a certain amount of money at this particular point. So it's a scenario planning exercise. We announced this to the campus community in a broad communication, and then we have a process that we're going to go through.

So we gave everybody about a week to 10 days to put together their proposals of how that would be handled. We asked chancellors, vice presidents, and deans to all put together what that scenario would look like for their particular units. Those are being submitted to Stacy Pearson who-- she can talk a little bit about this in a minute.

And there's a similar format that we're asking people to do. So we're getting some data and information. Then what we're going to do is we're going to have a meeting where we're asking everybody to actually verbally present that to other leaders across campus, to talk about why they might choose to do what they would do and what the impacts are on that unit.

Now, I want to make it perfectly clear to everybody who's watching this, we cannot take a 10% base budget reduction and not have major implications for what we're able to do with faculty, staff, students, and the State of Washington. There's not that much fluff out there. And so when people talk about what the impact could be on their particular units, it's going to be dramatic, and it's going to affect people.

It's going to affect what we can do with students. It's going to affect how we operate in the state. So that we understand, and we're asking people to help us with that.

After we do those presentations, what we want to do is take the best ideas, put several scenarios together, and then share that with the cabinet to come up with a proposal basically that would be made to me as president. At that particular point, we'll look at it, put together what we think we need to do, should do, and then at that point have visits with Faculty Senate Leadership, with APAC Leadership, with Student Leadership and a broad based communication to the campus community. That's where that will probably take us to mid-July.

And so if folks are concerned and think something's going to happen next week or that we're-- we've got this all done and we know what that's going to look like, we're going through a very appropriate process to make sure we evaluate what's important, how we use the criteria and the principles that were put out to the campus community, and then make some decisions at that particular point once we get additional guidance from the state on what our target really needs to be. And I want to continue to emphasize to the entire community that this is an exercise at this point. We know we're going to see some reduced revenues, but we don't know how much that's going to be. And we don't know what impact, for example, additional federal dollars could have on what that fiscal situation looks like.

So I understand impatience, and people want to know details. When we have details, we will provide them. But at this particular point, we are providing a campus community everything that we know in the time that we know it. And we'll keep that communication line going open

through social media, through these, and through campus communications periodically during the summer. And that's going to be an important step here.

I would always ask, rumors are probably the worst sort of thing around these budget times. And as I've mentioned before, please, please talk to your supervisors, your deans, vice presidents, whatever when you hear budget rumors or you hear something's going to happen. Let us know when you hear those things. So we can determine and let you know, is that accurate? Is that occurring? Is that true? And keeping that rumor mill to a minimum is going to be really critical for us. And that means president, the provost, vice president for finance administration, deans, and other academic leaders have to be communicating on a regular basis with people on their campus locations as to what they're thinking, what they're planning, and what timelines are. And we're committed to do that.

PHIL WEILER: Great. If I could maybe piggyback on that, the president-- Stacy mentioned the idea that there was a 10% exercise that we're doing. I've also heard that other state agencies are having to do a 15% exercise to figure out what a reduction would look like for them. Can you clarify for me what the difference is between what Washington State University needs to do and why that might be different than other state agencies?

STACY PEARSON: Sure. As we get our budget and we work with the state, there's also the inclusion of tuition into what is our referred to as PBL, our Permanent Budget Line. And that's how we came up with, based on our operating budget utilizing PBL, something that speaks to all of the areas on our campus, is that that would translate into about a 10% scenario.

And so each area, so all of the campuses, the chancellors, the deans, and the vice presidents have been given that target as it relates to what their current operating budget is. And that enables them then to identify what scenarios that they would utilize to meet this reduction. So in general, universities are different than other state agencies because those tuition revenues are included in that state budget.

PHIL WEILER: OK. Well, great. Thank you. So what I heard you say is, unlike some state agencies that only get a state appropriation for their budget, we also have tuition which helps ameliorate the cut that we would have to face in a reduction in appropriation. Is that right?

STACY PEARSON: Yes, that's correct. It also gives us some-- we also have to watch the enrollment side of the budget, the tuition. So that is actually another track that we are looking at. We are modeling different types of enrollment scenarios for the fall. And all of this will come together as we review our budget and make our decisions.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. Bryan, I'm going to address this next question to you.

This was something that I received in the prepared questions, but I'm also seeing it in the chat. And I just-- I feel like again we need to re-emphasize this so people are really clear. The

question that we received in advance was, "Are we still planning to go back to a normal schedule for fall 2020, or will we have to resort to having an online or hybrid schedule?"

BRYAN SLINKER: So I will answer that and follow on to some of the general points Kirk made. The simple answer is we will not have full face to face in the fall, that we will-- we're currently in Whitman County in phase 2. We're likely to be in phase 3 at best for the fall. We don't know that.

So our planning parameters are that large lecture classes are going to have to be distance. So now we have to define large. And consistent with other Pac-12-- Kirk's on phone calls with other Pac-12 presidents. I'm on phone calls with other Pac-12 provosts. Some of our planners are connected to similar people, their colleagues and their networks at the other Pac-12 institutions and beyond.

The numbers we're hearing from our Pac-12 counterparts is that class sizes will be in some institutions 25, other 50 for face to face classes. So we're going to fall likely somewhere in that range based on what we're thinking now. We've already determined that we cannot use more than 25% of any classroom capacity and feel like we can keep people safe.

And again, as Kirk said, safety is paramount here in our biosecurity. And so those are general planning parameters. And we haven't made totally specific decisions, but it's clear that large classes will be distance, maybe some flex hybrid kinds of things that breaks larger classes up into smaller groups to fit within the face to face size limitations. We hope to have these generalities nailed down firmly in the next week or two.

A lot of the specifics are going to take a little more time, which classes and which rooms. We have a room inventory. We know what the technological capabilities are in these rooms. And we have to put that together with class size limitations.

We know we have to disinfect. As Kirk mentioned, we've got disinfection protocols. We have to disinfect between classes. And so it's all coming together, but there's actually thousands of moving parts that we're trying to pull together. But the generalities are becoming more and more clear.

Another thing that's also clear in terms of planning is, even if a class could be face to face with 25, we also know that there are faculty or instructional support staff who are in high risk groups and perhaps shouldn't be in the classroom we-- or their family circumstance. We don't know what K through 12 education looks like, daycare looks like for our employees. So even if a class could meet in terms of our design parameters, safety parameters, based on the instructor, they still may need to be distance.

So there'll be a lot of distance. And the focus will be on face to face for the smaller classes that uniquely benefit from face to face or require special equipment. And so things like labs, studio,

recitations are more likely the things that we'll see as face to face and small to moderate sized classes.

I'll also say that within these general parameters, there may be some college-specific differences or campus-specific differences. But we'll all try to conform as a system within these general design parameters that ensure safety as best we can and allow some flexibility for individual circumstances or unique circumstances with courses. So that's really where we're at. The generalities are gelling.

The specifics of what class and what classroom, that'll take a little bit longer to figure out. But I'm confident that we're on a pathway that we can sustain. And if we couple that with, as Kirk mentioned, the potential of Thanksgiving be a cut off point for the semester, whether we actually shorten the semester has not been determined. That's hard. Financial aid's affected. Course syllabi are affected.

But we can probably find ways to creatively ramp down the semester so that students don't have to be in Pullman after Thanksgiving. And so that's a design goal. We haven't gotten there yet, but we do in the classroom will help facilitate that design goal as well.

PHIL WEILER: Actually, I want to dig a little bit deeper on that question about potentially changing the schedule for the fall semester. I know some universities have announced that's their intent. They would start in August, and they would conclude their face to face in around the Thanksgiving period. What's the advantage? Can you share with us what the thinking is about why that's a good idea?

BRYAN SLINKER: The main driver of this goal is to have students-- we're in winter basically so we-- anticipating we'll have a flu season, we have winter weather, we don't know what a COVID rebound might look like. So one of the main drivers is just recognizing, heading into winter, everything else being equal, it's probably better not to have students on campus during flu season and a COVID rebound.

So that minimizes the chance we get into difficulty and can wind up the semester in a more orderly fashion by plan rather than have to react like we did in the spring semester to a change like that. It's not guaranteed, but there's a lot of public health considerations that would guide us to thinking that we ramp down as we head into winter. We have two weeks of instruction and one week of finals after Thanksgiving break. So there's not much of a semester left.

We already start early. So those institutions that are starting earlier, we already start early. And it's probably not feasible for us to move that start date up. So we're looking at what happens on the bottom end of the semester.

And with Thanksgiving break, we have a 17-week semester. We could shorten that by a week without too much trouble probably, but getting three weeks dropped off probably not. Since many things were likely to be a distance already, we're more likely to wind down those things

that are face to face in an orderly fashion, have project work, papers, things like that that don't require on campus present and wind down the semester in an orderly fashion. So Thanksgiving is about the last we have students in Pullman.

Now, other campuses across the system, we're going to try to keep consistent calendars, but there may be slight deviations that are again unique to campuses. Campuses are in different counties, different public health districts, different opportunities and challenges, so again very general. And I want to emphasize that no decisions have been made yet. But having students not here in the winter in terms of public health is probably a very good thing.

And that may mean we start spring a week or two late. We just don't know yet. And we don't have to make decisions about spring, but avoiding winter is the main goal.

KIRK SCHULZ: I might add on top of that, for families, prospective parents, anybody watching, you will know what the calendar is going to look like well before the semester starts. We want to make that clear. Right now, as Bryan and his team work at what things can look like, I want people to feel confident that when we say, here's what the term is going to look like, that we have every intention of following through on that, assuming that we can manage the COVID-19 things, which I think we'll be in good shape with.

So this is not one of those where we're asking people to say, well, start in faith in August, and then we'll make a decision as the semester goes. This would be something that would be put in place before people arrive. So for travel plans, housing, all those things, people know well in advance what the semester is going to look like. And I think that's a key part.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. And I'll reiterate what I heard you say, Bryan, is that we have not made a decision yet but certainly something that we're actively looking at.

Theresa, I'm going to address this question to you. And this was something that Bryan mentioned but we saw come up a number of times in the questions that were submitted in advance. And that had to do with this idea of whether it's during this summertime period or in the fall semester, what happens if you're a faculty member or a staff member who may have children who have not returned to K12 instruction, or you might be a caretaker for an elderly parent? How are we going to handle those folks? Are they going to have to be in the office or in the classroom, or is there going to be some flexibility there?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: We're working on to ensure there's flexibility for all those situations you just identified. And again, just emphasizing that the priority will be working remotely or working teleworking through phases 2 and 3 for all possible situations. There's also protections or guidelines in place for a variety of health conditions for individuals as well as their family members. And there's currently guidance out there for employees who are at home with their K through 12 kids.

And so there is a wealth of information out on our website on each of those topics. But again, I think working with our areas and faculty and staff, everyone wants what's best for our employees. And again, the priority is going to be working from home whenever possible.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you. That's, I think, just good for us to remind ourselves that.

Bryan, I'm going to address this next question to you. Someone noted that other schools have created task forces to address COVID-19 and to help with the planning for what the fall semester is going to look like. Can you share with us some of the groups that have been formed at WSU to take a look at these questions?

BRYAN SLINKER: Sure, I can try. There are several. One thing I want to emphasize is that even though there are several groups that have specific charges or areas of responsibility related to COVID-19, much of the planning we're talking about, whether it's what instruction looks like, what Theresa's been talking about with general return to work, what Levi and Chris Keane did on the research return, those planning efforts are in the normal planning of the University. Theresa's the Vice President for Human Resource Services. So that's where the planning comes from there.

Where we are trying to coordinate across those plannings and the thousands of moving parts that I mentioned, we're in emergency-- we're still in an emergency response with an Incident Command structure. That's shifted a little bit in how we think about the Executive Policy Group that's mandated by that Incident Command structure. This is shifting more to a broader role for cabinet, the president's cabinet, as we do this. There's several groups that Kirk, I think, plans to announce soon, so communication about operational planning groups that try to pull these threads together into a cohesive plan.

I'm working with the deans, faculty. Mary Wack, Vice Provost, is working with the associate deans. Again, within our purview as vice presidents, vice provosts, we're working with our teams to plan.

We're all supported in our planning by the Public Health Emergency Task Force that's chaired by Ellen Taylor, Associate Vice President in Student Affairs. That task force pre-existed COVID-19, and it was precisely for the purpose of emergency planning like this that it existed and it's taking on. It's a clearinghouse for a lot of the planning that we're doing and the information and implementation.

We're also supported extensively by AOI, Academic Outreach and Innovation, under vice-- or under Chancellor Dave Cillay. And that team is working in co-- there's 10 planning groups working over the summer with faculty. There's over 400 faculty engaged with these 10 different groups that are looking at various aspects of what fall looks like.

So they're not looking at the issues that I mentioned about, what's the class size, what's the cleaning protocol? They're looking at, how do we improve our assessments online? How do we

build online modules to help support a flipped classroom, more pedagogical approaches to being effective in teaching?

And then all of this is supported by, I think we've mentioned before, a scientific or technical advisory group led by Regent Professor Guy Palmer. Four of our faculty, two from the Spokane campus and two from Pullman, are experts in infectious disease modeling. And so they're working together with Dr. Palmer to model for us, if we want to achieve this goal, class sizes of 50, if we want to achieve that goal, certain occupancy in dorms, what would our testing strategy, our quarantine strategy, or contact tracing strategy need to look like to support that goal? So there's a variety of planning groups.

We've all struggled, I think. I'll just say that. I think the honest opinion among us all is we've struggled some to pull all these planning threads together. And we're getting better at it. That's what I'll stay.

It's new planning for all of us. And I'll echo Kirk. I know everybody wants answers to very specific questions right now. I do, too. I mean, we all do, but this is an extremely strange planning environment. And we're doing amazingly well, I think, but we are shifting to where we're learning as we go and coordinating this better.

And the right groups are doing the right things operationally for plans, and we're getting better at pulling those threads together into a cohesive picture so that we can think about risk management. We can think about our messaging to the governor or the county and so on as we develop these plans.

KIRK SCHULZ: I would say, Phil, to add on to that, in the end of spring semester, post spring break, we were essentially having to sprint. We pulled together groups quickly because we had to make decisions really, really quickly. And what we're doing now-- I say we, the leadership of the institution-- is we're shifting from a sprint to a long distance race.

We realize that it's not just COVID-19, but then the fiscal implications mean that we're not just looking at, how do we manage our budget over the next four weeks? We're looking at, how do we manage our budget over the next two to three years? And so what we want to do is make sure that we put some of these planning groups in place that have representation from our faculty, from staff, from students and things like that, that are a bit more of a permanent structure as opposed to something we're going to stand up for a few weeks with a particular task.

So as an example, Stacy will be co-leading a group to work on the University fiscal picture, co-leading with Elizabeth Chilton as she comes in as our provost. That is not a temporary group. It's a group that will be working on budgetary structures across the system for a while that will have representation from across campus. So some of those, we're in a transition time where we're moving from groups we stood up really quickly to groups now that are looking at longer term implications, and that it's created a little messiness right now.

And as Bryan said, we're getting better at pulling the strands together. And we would just want to make sure that we don't have planning groups overlapping with each other and wasting people's time because we've got three groups looking at the same thing. That's really important for us to do, to respect people's time, their efforts, their energy, and their creativity.

So we'll continue to communicate with the campus community what these look like. But I want people to also understand, over the next month or so, we're transitioning into a little bit of a longer time frame that we're looking at. And we don't have as many overnight decisions that have to be made.

BRYAN SLINKER: And I'd also like to emphasize that, back to the-- the operational planning that we're doing is unlike we've had to do before because of the dynamic days here of the disease and the government response and public health response to the disease. But it's still, much of our planning is still again within the normal operational organization of the University. And so colleges are looking at how they're going to teach at a college level and coming up with college level ideas about what's going to work best for them, trying to collect those up into a cohesive view of what's going to work best for the University.

So the planning is happening at normal operational levels. And we're getting better at pulling the pieces together, not perfect yet, maybe never will be. But we're getting better at pulling the pieces together, and it's beginning to gel. And for the past few days, I've felt as confident as I have in a long time that this is gelling in this weird planning environment.

PHIL WEILER: Bryan, I'm glad you mentioned the almost 400 faculty members who are working with Academic Outreach and Innovation, looking at what are the lessons learned from that quick move from face to face to online, because that really addressed one question that I thought was worth mentioning that we received online. Somebody asked the question, "What are we doing to learn from this situation? And how is it going to impact how we deliver instruction in the future?"

And I think you-- like I said, you referenced the fact that we do have 10 different groups of faculty, a group or a total of almost 400 faculty members, who are looking at those lessons learned and trying to figure out, how do we improve what we do because of the situation that we had to go through? I'm so glad you mentioned that.

Stacy, I want to piggyback on something that was just mentioned that was again a question that we received. Again, it's worth probably just reiterating. This person said, "Will the 10% reduction exercise run from July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, or are we looking for a longer recovery time?" Can you provide some framework on those issues?

STACY PEARSON: Yes. Thanks, Phil. That's a very good question. If we go back to the governor's memo a couple of weeks ago, he is pretty much referring to the next three years. So that's the second half of the current biennium or fiscal year 21, which is referenced in your question, that time period, but then the biennium following, which is another two-year period. And I think it's

important to realize that because of the sharp turnaround for this upcoming fiscal year, some of the actions that we do in the current fiscal year to meet these targets will look different, or some will look different, than that longer term.

And so this initial year, we have tried to go through and look through what these scenarios might propose. And we have provided guidance to the campus to consider what those impacts might be in the second and third year of this process. So keeping in mind, if you make temporary-- propose temporary reductions for now how those might play out in the future years.

The other thing that we have is, in the current year, many people have heard about emergency funds that we're receiving from federal and possibly from state. Obviously, as we go through this budget scenario, we are also looking at those one-time tools that we can activate in order to help us through this initial year. So we are looking at programs that we would administer University-wide where we might gain savings centrally or get additional revenues so that we can put all of those together once we look at the scenarios that all of the areas provide.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. Bryan, another question for you. This was something that was submitted, and I think I heard you at one point mention some of this. So I'm going to put you on the spot to see if you remember all the specific statistics.

But this person's asking, "Are there any statistics yet on how students chose to end their spring 2020 semester? For example, what percentage of students chose to take pass/fail? What kind of involvement did we see during those during those last couple of weeks the semester where students were online versus face to face?" Like I said, I know I'm putting you on the spot, but do you recall what some of that information was?

BRYAN SLINKER: Well, I thought you might put me on the spot with that. So, yes, I can because I have this paper right in front of me. So you may remember that we extended the deadline for students to choose pass/fail to June 1.

So that's Monday. So we don't have the final statistics. But as we ended the semester, there were a little over 1,000 students that had taken advantage to shift to pass/fail grading out of our many more than 1,000 students. We don't know how much that will shift before Monday.

The withdrawals from the term after March 13, so after spring break, were actually lower this semester than they were in the previous semester or the corresponding semester in 2019. Only 214 students withdrew compared to 334 the previous year. Very few students dropped classes in-- again, consistent with what happened in the spring of 2019, a year before. Fewer students actually withdrew from classes overall in the spring than in spring of 2019.

What we saw an increase in spring 2020 compared to 2019 was that a lot more use of incomplete grades and X grades, which was somewhat predictable from the disruptions,

switching rapidly to distance. There was more need for students to compensate by taking incompletes or faculty to offer incompletes. We'll see how those clear.

But the other thing that's also important, that this is actually a statistic I just learned yesterday, the academic deficiency. That was, I think, one of the questions that was also submitted. Are there more students in academic deficiency, and what's going to happen with them?

Almost identical, only 2% higher than our recent lowest years. So about 20 more students in academic deficiency at the end of the spring 2019 than at the end of-- or spring of 2020 than compared this spring of 2019. And again, with the shift to pass/fail grading not completed till June, that statistic may change slightly.

So from the surveys that we've done of students which are, as you mentioned, guiding AOI's work and the faculty work in getting ready for the fall and anticipations of the fall in their experiences, again, nothing was perfect. But the numbers suggest that students stayed engaged. That was also, for the most part, the faculty impression during that last six weeks of the semester and that we had no increase in withdrawals, academic deficiencies substantially compared to the year before. We just had a lot more incomplete and X grades as the semester wound down with the disruptions of that switch.

PHIL WEILER: Well, that's great news that students-- I think that shows the resiliency of our students, that they were able to make that switch and still be successful with very little notice. And I have to say I'm very relieved that you were prepared for that question, because I didn't ask you about it in advance. So thanks for not having to be put on the spot.

I want to switch gears just a little bit to talk more about the budget situation. Obviously, COVID-19 is going to impact state tax collections, which is going to impact the appropriation that WSU receives in future years. And so there's a couple questions about that and one I'm going to address to you, Theresa.

Somebody was asking that, "As our financial situation gets clarified, is there a chance that the University might offer incentives for early retirement?" I understand there's a process that has to happen. So can you talk about what that process is and what the current thinking is around early retirement incentives?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: What I'll let you know or respond to is that all considerations are being considered at this time. So there hasn't been a decision on early retirement incentives or any hard decision on any of those processes. As to the specifics, I-- my understanding is we'd have to make a proposal, and the state would have to approve it before we could even talk about an early retirement incentive program.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. That was my understanding as well, that it's not a tool that we get to exercise unilaterally. We really need requirement or approval from the state level. So thank you.

Stacy, I have a different question, but it also appeared in our-- in those questions that were pre-submitted. This person's asking, "Do we anticipate Civil Service Staff will still be receiving the small raises in July that had been provided by the legislature in the past?"

STACY PEARSON: Phil, thank you for that question. We have not been notified otherwise that that is not going to happen. And so at this point in time, that plan continues forward.

PHIL WEILER: And remind me. So that was something that was approved by the State Legislature. Is that correct?

STACY PEARSON: That's correct.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Another question, this may be for Theresa or perhaps Bryan. But there was one person who noted that as businesses across the state are slowly reopening, one of the things we're seeing are plexiglass shields in between, say, for example, front counter staff and customers and the like. And this person was asking, "Have we given any thought to doing anything like that?"

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: Sorry. I was-- oh, go ahead, Bryan.

BRYAN SLINKER: Well, yes, and I hope that was the answer Theresa was going to give. And in fact, the areas are already working with Technical Services to manufacture those within WSU at Pullman for use by those offices that think that that would be a biosecurity measure that would help-- be helpful for them.

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: And I will just add that there's been communications going out to the areas to begin planning for social distancing and those requirements. And so a lot of areas are already making those adjustments, including the whatever type of guards they may want to put in place.

PHIL WEILER: That was a bit of a trick question because I know one of my team members has a front counter, and they have a facility that is open. And so they already do have something like that in place. So to answer the question for the person who asked, yes, we definitely are already producing those. And I think that's going to be part of those guidelines that we see as we get closer to that slow phased reopening.

I'm looking at the time. We've only got a couple minutes left. I think if we could, I'm going to turn it back to President Schulz and see if we have any closing comments before we end the hour.

KIRK SCHULZ: Thank you, Phil. And once again, I want to express my appreciation to everybody who tuned in, everybody who submitted questions in advance. When you submit questions in advance, it helps us to make sure we're prepared, that we think about our answers ahead of time and things like that. So continue to submit those as you have those concerns.

I want to express my appreciation for our faculty and staff for the spring term. I, like a lot of people, was pretty exhausted by the time we got to the end of spring term. And I know a lot of our faculty had a sense of relief that they were done with the term and the quick change over to distance education. I just appreciate that many of those folks took a day or two off and then got ready to roll their sleeves up again and said, what do we need to do to make sure we're going to be well-prepared for the fall in terms of laboratories, instruction, and things like that?

So I just-- we have great people across the WSU system that are all thinking creatively about how to have that great student experience this fall, whether it's Pullman, Vancouver, Tri-Cities, Everett, our Global Campus, Spokane with the Health Sciences, our other locations where we do instruction and research. So we've got great people. I appreciate all that they do and will continue to do.

And we just want to-- I want to pledge, we're going to continue to keep people as informed as we possibly can. And I know the sense of frustration about wanting to know more quicker. We're going to do the best we can to make sure you have information in a timely fashion, and we'll continue to do that.

Watch this next week for campus letters that will talk about and provide some additional context or repetition, if nothing else, to some of the things we've talked about today. And continue ask those questions. And Go Cougs.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you, Kirk. And I will echo that it is really helpful for people to submit questions in advance, because, for me at least, it gives me an idea, as we see multiple questions on a topic, it becomes really clear that that's an area that we really need to focus on when we have our panelists speaking. So please do continue to submit those in advance.

And as a reminder, our next COVID-19 town hall, it'll be our sixth in the series, that's scheduled for Friday, June 12. Again, we're doing these every other Friday. So in addition to that, there are a variety of other town halls of one sort or another that are taking place. For parents who are interested, we have another town hall for parents that I believe is on June 4, if I remember the date correctly. So we're continuing to use Zoom as a way of trying to communicate directly with folks and to answer questions that come up.

We had over 2,000 people join us today, which was great, including at least one visitor from Thailand. So welcome, to our Thai viewer. I would encourage you to continue to attend these when you can. If you have questions between now and our next COVID-19 town hall, don't forget that we do have our COVID-19 update website that's updated regularly throughout the week. And so please do take a look at that.

With that, thank you to our panelists. Thank you to our subject matter experts. And Go Cougs.