

## WSU COVID-19 Employee Town Hall – September 30

PHIL WEILER: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to our 11th COVID-19 Town Hall Session. This is part of our series of statewide discussions about COVID-19. My name is Phil Weiler. I'm Vice President for Marketing and Communications here at Washington State University. And I will, again, be serving as our moderator for this particular session.

Today's town hall is going to be a little different than what we've done in the past. This is a special town hall geared toward faculty and staff. Throughout the last 10 Town Halls, we've heard from faculty and staff being concerned that we weren't necessarily able to always address all the issues that they were raising. So we wanted to have a special one just for faculty and staff this time around.

The content for this has been developed through a survey that Human Resource Services provided a couple of weeks ago. They asked faculty, staff, employees to talk about what kinds of resources they needed as they were dealing with COVID-19 and what concerns they might have. So we used the results of that survey along with questions that we solicited in advance.

And so we've got a number of panelists with us today to help us really go through those questions, address some of those issues, and hopefully provide you with access to resources you may not be aware of or may not have been able to take advantage of before. Let me go ahead and mention we do have the chat section up and running as we have in the past. We have subject matter experts who are monitoring that. So they'll be able to answer questions if you don't get a question addressed immediately in the live session.

With that, let me go ahead and get started. I'd like to introduce our panelists. First, we have Dr. Elizabeth Chilton. She's our provost and Senior Vice President. Next, we have Teresa Elliot-Chesapeake. She's Vice President and Chief Human Resource Officer. Hi Theresa. Next, we have Ann Monroe, Director of Benefit Services for WSU, Laura Griner-Hill, Senior Vice Provost, Kendra Wilkins-Fontenot, Director of Labor Relations, and finally, Lisa Gehring, Assistant Vice President for Human Resource Services

So thank you all for joining us today. Dr. Chilton, I'm going to turn it to you first to give us some opening remarks. And then we'll start addressing some of the issues that we've had employees share with us.

ELIZABETH CHILTON: All right, well thank you Phil. First and foremost, thank you for attending today. And I'm really glad that we were able to have a town hall that really specifically addressed issues relevant to faculty and staff. I've had a chance to meet a number of you in various virtual campus visits and meetings. And I'm looking forward in the weeks and months to come to being able to meet more of you, and especially, when we're able to do so in person.

You know, you all really are the backbone of everything that we do here at WSU. And I just want to thank you. I'm very well aware and very sensitive to the additional burdens on our staff, on our faculty, how many different balls we're all trying to juggle, and how much our heads and eyes are hurting from all the multiple zoom meetings. And you have really stepped up. And I really mostly just want to thank you.

We're several weeks into the semester. And from my vantage point, you know, I'm married to someone who's teaching a couple of classes. And I've also been talking with the faculty senate and my H.R. colleagues. And everything seems to be going extremely well thanks to your hard work.

I do want to remind you, you may have noticed that President Schultz is not here. I hope you're not disappointed to just see me starting us off today. But he's meeting with the governor today and other public university presidents at this time. And so he was unable to attend. But he certainly would join me and a whole-hearted thanks to all of you. And I look forward to our discussion today.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Elizabeth. I appreciate you mentioning that President Schultz is, as you mentioned, meeting with the governor and the leaders of other universities across the state. Because WSU is on a semester system, we have started a lot earlier than those schools that are on the quarter system. So I think the governor is interested in having WSU help share some lessons learned as we've been in session for over a month now.

So I'd like to kick things off, if we could, with Theresa talking to us a little bit about the survey that I mentioned. As I said earlier, this was a survey that was shared with faculty and staff a couple weeks ago. It was addressing issues around work/life balance. And so Theresa, can you remind us what kinds of questions were on the survey, what kind of response did we get, and what did we learn from that survey?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Right, yes, certainly-- thanks, Phil. First of all, I just want to let everyone know that we're really happy to be here today to talk just about employee questions. I'm especially pleased to be here with some of my leadership team. As most of you know, HRS has continued to be open during the pandemic as an essential operation. And we've experienced many of the same challenges all of you have, including life events, child care, elder care, K through 12 impact, and balancing work and life while serving the WSU community.

Many of these same concerns were highlighted in the COVID-19 employee feedback survey. We had over 1,800 employee responses. And top concerns were resources and information for caring for family members, elder care, K through 12, and work life balance. Another top concern was well-being, mental health information, and resources. And one of the top concerns is flexibility-- scheduling work and life.

HRS shared the results with the university leadership, including Vice Presidents, Chancellors and Deans. What HRS has done is use the results to enhance our website resources and trainings

offered, especially regarding caring for self and others, well-being, and mental health. We've added topics to our Tuesday and Thursday 10:00 AM Coug Connect.

And we have also coordinated with our Washington EAP program to offer sessions on dealing with change. All of us have had to adapt to wearing face coverings, social distancing, using Zoom, as we are today, preparing to move from a 40-year-old legacy system to Workday. And to help faculty and staff with all these changes, we're offering several presentations on how to deal with change.

HRS staff will continue to be available to help our faculty and staff throughout the W system. Throughout the pandemic, we're here to help.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Teresa. And, also thank you to the 1,800 folks who took the time to fill out that survey. I think that was certainly helpful for leadership as we've been giving thought to how we can provide support to faculty and staff during this time. Kendra, what I'd like to do to kick us off as we start talking about some of the content is maybe address the issue that I think is most timely.

And that is the idea of providing COVID-19 testing to faculty and staff on the Pullman campus. That started yesterday. I wonder if you could share with us-- let us understand what that program looks like, who it's who it's intended for, and what kind of information people need to be aware of to be able to take advantage of that testing.

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Sure, thank you Phil. Yeah, as you said, yesterday September 29, WSU began offering employee voluntary asymptomatic COVID testing to our faculty members, our AP, and our classified staff, and our non-student temporary hourly employees who work in Whitman county. The program is currently set up to run through November 20.

And we are encouraging employees who are not experiencing COVID 19 symptoms to participate in the program. And that's very important because this is asymptomatic. What's important to know is that all employees, like I said are encouraged to apply, or to participate in the program. All employees who are working on site as well as people who are working in the county may come onto site to take the test. They just have to remember to do their daily attestation.

We do have a website already set up that is accessed directly from our HRS website, hrs.wsu.edu. And then right on the top, it says COVID-19 testing. A variety of information and Q&As are right on the site before you test, when you go to test, after you test while you're waiting for your results. And additional WSU as well as state and federal resources are online.

PHIL WEILER: So, Kendra, a couple of questions I have along those lines-- you mentioned the term asymptomatic. I think many of us know what that means but, just in case, can you explain the difference between symptomatic and asymptomatic? And then what should someone do if they think they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Absolutely, asymptomatic is basically not experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. The voluntary testing is available for only those who are asymptomatic. Symptomatic would be if anyone say, for instance, could not attest on a daily attestation or had any types of COVID-19 symptoms. For those who may be experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, we want them to contact their health care providers to seek care and then follow the normal WSU experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

And there's a flowchart. This is, again, on our COVID-19 testing website. But our environmental health and safety unit has provided-- at WSU, excuse me-- has provided a nice flow chart that says if you're experiencing symptoms, please follow these instructions. They are not to report to work. We encourage them to contact their health care provider and then also contact our HRS disability services unit to talk about what type of leave options may be available to them.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you, and my understanding is that we're partnering with the Army National Guard to actually do that sampling for us. I know that the National Guard is moving their facilities throughout the community to try and make it as convenient for everybody. So I would encourage any faculty or staff members in Pullman who are interested in taking advantage of this.

Please do look at the website so you can find a location and hours that the National Guard are doing the testing. It's also worth noting that the National Guard works Tuesdays through Saturdays. They changed their schedules so that they've got Saturday hours available to make it convenient for employees. And Kendra, is there a cost to employees to take advantage of this asymptomatic testing?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: No, there is no cost to employees. They can participate in the program on their off hours. Right now, this week, the hours are 11:00 to 5:00. If they're taking their lunch time to go take a test, that's fine. If they would like to take the test during their normal work hours, they just have to arrange with their supervisor to take that test. And of course, if they don't work on Saturday, they would be able to go to the location listed on the website to take the test then.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you. So, Ann, I'm going to turn to you with kind of a benefits question. We talked about the idea of asymptomatic testing for people who don't have a fever. They don't have a cough or sniffles or things like that. If somebody is feeling healthy, they want to take advantage of the testing, they can do that and it's free of charge. But what happens if I do have a fever or I'm not feeling well and I think I need a test, is that testing going to be covered by my insurance?

ANN MONROE: Yes, it would be. So for anybody that is experiencing symptoms or have been exposed to somebody experiencing symptoms, those are the sort of testing that will be covered by the insurance. You would contact your own health care provider to initiate the process.

And with that medical verification from them that, yes, you should get the testing, the insurance coverage will cover that for free. So for anybody with symptoms, that would be the case. And then, of course, if they're diagnosed with the condition, then the ongoing treatment of that condition under the WSU policy. So I'm specifically speaking for those of us that have the insurance coverage as university employees, our insurance plans would then cover them in the treatment of the condition just as it would any other medical condition-- but definitely encourage everybody to take advantage of the asymptomatic testing as well if you're not experiencing symptoms

PHIL WEILER: Great, thanks Ann. So this has been a particularly stressful year. I feel like every week, we wake up and there's some new issue or crisis that we're dealing with. And we're hearing stories about people who are experiencing anxiety, depression, stress, or just not even sure how they're going to continue to listen to the news on a daily and weekly basis.

And so it's been a tough time for everybody I'm just wondering what resources or help is available for faculty and staff who are trying to deal with these added stressors caused by the pandemic and all the other issues that we've been dealing with lately?

ANN MONROE: Theresa mentioned and some of them in her opening comments. But, of course, one of the resources that we're really encouraging people to tap into is the employee assistance program who has counselors available that people can talk to confidentially if they're experiencing stress and anxiety and just need to have somebody to talk to. Of course, there's those resources.

They have a lot of webinars, white papers, and just different resources people can read for help. All of our insurance programs-- let's say you contacted EAP or there's a waiting list or you may want to get in touch with somebody sooner or a local provider immediately, all of our insurance plans cover counseling services as well. So that would be something people can tap into.

We also encourage just the resources that are being put out through things like Cougar Connect. It's just a great way to realize you're not in it alone. All of us are going through this sort of thing. We've got great resources here on campus that are providing us with some motivational topics and just tips and tricks of how to work from home and be isolated. So take advantage of those as well.

And then we as a state in the community and the country have all sorts of resources that-- there's 800 lines that you can call, get connected with somebody. The biggest thing is I think for people to not feel like they're are in it alone. There's some self-help tricks, there's the resources that are available to individuals that, when you need help beyond what you can provide, definitely reach out and take advantage of the different resources that's being offered.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Ann. When I think of the employee assistance program, I do think of it as a place to go when I feel like I need to talk to somebody. So it's good to know that that isn't the

full extent of their resources, that there's other things that they can provide beyond just being able to speak with somebody. So if I was an employee and I wanted to get in touch with or learn more about the employee assistance program, what's the best way for me to find out about that?

ANN MONROE: You know, people are really used to doing things online. So we try to have EAP hooked on, or linked up on almost every website at WSU. So if you just go to the HRS website, it's on the main screen that people can do that as well. If you end up being into our benefits website or the wellness websites, links are also available there.

We would-- there's 800 numbers you can call. And that's definitely available. I'll have somebody throw that 800 number into the comments section of the stream here so that they can do that-- so again, very easy to contact. When you do reach out to them what they'll initially do if you're looking to speak with somebody, they'll try to connect you with one of their local-- probably a phone provider that you would start with.

And they initially offer three visits to individuals that you can talk with somebody. And then if you have an ongoing need, they will then assist you in connecting up with a provider in your local community. One thing that we do do-- they do try to be conscientious of what medical plan you're in and hooking you up with a provider that's in your network. But we do encourage employees that, if they get that referral process, to do that double checking themselves to make sure those insurance providers are covered by your insurance plan.

PHIL WEILER: Terrific, thank you. So it sounds like Human Resource Services website is going to be the source of a lot of great information for those of us who are looking for help and assistance. One last question before I move on, Ann-- one of the things that we've seen both from our own questions from faculty and staff and certainly stories that I've seen in the media have to do with the fact that in addition to employees having to care for children, in many cases, they have seniors and elders in their home that they're needing to deal with. Are there resources for helping dealing with either aging parents or elder care of some sort?

ANN MONROE: There are. And, again, and I'm going to direct to EAP. It's a great resource there. They have information on their website. I also encouraging to go to our WSU COVID-19 employee information website. There's a link there now called Caring for Self and Others. And that is really a great resource. We're trying to put information out there. We do specifically have a topic on elder care.

It provides links to local community resources that, if you're looking for somebody to assist with elder care issues, again, a lot of great articles that are just encouraging and supporting from individuals that have been there, done that that can really help as we navigate our own situations because you're exactly right, Phil. I mean so many of our employees can be finding themselves in that sandwich generation where I've got children I'm caring for plus elders that I'm caring for.

And we want to make sure we're providing resources that they can be providing that resources for their family members. And of course, they need to remember to take care of themselves as well. So we don't want them to burn out. And as we find things we're going to just keep posting it to make sure that there's resources available for people.

There's other great resources that will assist with things like even transportation or meals. Maybe your family member is close and you're needing to find and help them with transportation, meals, services in their communities. So those websites that we have posted on our care for self and others link will provide you with how to track down that information for wherever your parent or older family member may be. So hopefully it's of value. We do hear what people's concerns are and we're trying to be very responsive to that.

PHIL WEILER: Ann, you made a good point. I think it's difficult if you have an elderly member of your family who either live with you or live in your community that needs your time. But it's as stressful, and perhaps maybe even more so, if they don't live with you and you're trying-- and they live remotely from you and you have to try and figure out how to provide that care from a distance, so glad to hear that those resources exist for everybody.

Kendra, I'm going to turn back to you if I could. I'd like to talk a little bit about questions that we've received around employee leave options. In some cases, we've heard from faculty and staff where their children's school or their place of care may have either moved completely online, or at least partially to providing online instruction. And the children are expected to be at home and completing assignments. In that situation, is that considered closed? Do we consider that their school is closed if they're having to do some instruction online?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Yes, actually we can. There are so many different models that are out there right now related to schools being open, fully hybrid, open three days a week versus two days a week and so forth. In March, the Federal Family First Coronavirus Act, FFCRA, was passed. And what this program did is it provides for two paid leave programs for employees to take time off if they need to provide care for their children who schools have been closed because of COVID-19.

And this could be a situation in which they are going to school two days a week in person, but have to be home for three days a week. And although the school is not technically closed all the time, they are not eligible to go on those three days a week. So we consider that as closed. There are others that are completely virtual. There are others that are doing in-person with just certain days every other week or every week. Of course we have employees all over the state of Washington.

So there are multiple programs available for employees. And this is in addition to departments being able to work with their employees on maybe different types of alternative work locations that-- assignments that may be available to them. Employees can have for up to 12 weeks of time off under the family medical leave, under this FFCRA leave, if they're full time employees.

And so we do encourage them to contact our disability services group so we can talk to them about what their specific needs are because we are seeing so many variations across the state. We are making sure that we're addressing the person's specific needs.

PHIL WEILER: All right, so that's good to know. So we should be contacting disability services if we're trying to figure out if we qualify for those kinds of leaves. You make I think a really important point that many-- there are as many different approaches I think to schooling as maybe schools at this point. And so a lot of different wrinkles that need to be worked out. But the good news is it sounds like, by and large, those are considered to be closed. And so people should take advantage of whatever leave options might be available to them.

Speaking of leave, what kind of options are there if an employee thinks that they've either been exposed to COVID-19 or perhaps they've been contacted by a contact tracer or who's told them they've been exposed to someone who is ill with COVID-19, what kind of a leave options exist in those situations?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Well, similarly to the FFCRA leave for the school closures, there are certain events which may make a person who has been told to isolate or quarantine by a health care provider or by a federal, state, or local official such as our Whitman county public health department-- if they've been told to isolate or quarantine, they also may be eligible for up to 80 hours of this paid FFCRA.

We also work with them, of course, if they're-- every person may have different situations. And so if they're not eligible for those types of leave, we can work with them to see if maybe they're eligible for sick leave at that time or if they're eligible for annual leave. Or maybe they're not experiencing symptoms, so they still may be able to work from an alternate location. We would work with them and their departments on what they may be eligible for.

PHIL WEILER: OK, I'm going to throw one more wrinkle at you here. What happens if a family member has tested positive for COVID-19, what should the employee do? And is there leave available to them in those situations?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Yep, again, the FFCRA is providing quite a variety of options for employees. And this is the paid leave. So if a person's household member or family member has tested positive-- first and foremost, if they're working on site and they're unable to attest, of course, they cannot come to site. If they're-- let's say for instance, if they want to work from home, and their department has work options, they can work with their department on that.

However for leave options, employees who may be required to care for an individual whose ordered to isolate or to quarantine in addition to their own care, they may also be eligible for up to 80 hours for a full time employee of this paid leave. And then if they may need to take time off after that period, we also work with them on what other leave programs at WSU has, that the state have, that the federal government have for them to make sure that they can care for the person that they need to care for. And, again, contacting disability services so we can



look at their specific scenario because there are so many variations of what people are having to go through right now.

PHIL WEILER: All right, good advice-- talk to disability services. I'm also looking in the chat right now. And I see that our subject matter expert from Human Resource Services did include a link to the website that talks about the FFCRA-- if I've got the acronym correct. And I think that's a link to disability services. So that's a place you can certainly look to.

So, Ann, I'm going to-- this is a question I'm going to pitch to you. And this was something that we received I think in advance as we were asking for people for questions. We've talked a lot about leave options. The great news is it sounds like there are a number of different options available if people need to take leave. But this person who submitted a question said, all right, let's say I take advantage of these leave options. What does that mean for my medical insurance? Would my medical insurance continue during these periods of leave if I either am not able to work or I'm taking advantage of the leave option?

ANN MONROE: It's a great question. And I have to admit that-- our state as a whole-- a lot of times right now during COVID, we hear comments like be safe, be healthy, and practice compassion. And I have to admit that our governor has been fairly compassionate with some of our leave rules and making sure that we're taking care of our citizens and employees with some of the proclamations that he's rolled out.

But for the most part what we see is, of course, we partner really closely with [? Kendra's ?] group and disability services and monitoring the different types of leaves that are being administered to determine benefit eligibility. And for probably 95% of them, people maintain their benefit eligibility. If they're under the formal family medical leave plan, if they're on the paid family medical leave plan that overlaps, they're going to have all the FMLA provisions that say we're going to keep your benefits active even if you're in an unpaid status with the university.

Then what we will look at is the state of Washington Health Care Authority does say outside of the FML provisions that someone should be in paid status at least eight hours a month to maintain benefit eligibility. And so we work with disability services, and sometimes those clients will be referred right on to us when it comes to the benefit eligibility criteria, and discuss how can they use their leave to maintain benefits.

If they've exhausted leave, is this a situation that they're a person that could be continuing to work at some capacity to generate paid status to maintain eligibility? And as I said, we do have some scenarios where people have utilized all the leave provisions they can. They may be out of their own balances. And at that time we will provide them with self pay information on how to maintain their insurance. And we monitor, because as soon as they're back to work eight hours or more per month or in paid status eight hours or more, we automatically will reactivate their benefits.

One thing I will mention, because this one does come up just occasionally, is sometimes people exchange eight hours of pay with one day of work. Well, that will work fine if you are an eight hour a day employee. But if you are a half time employee, three-quarter time employee, the magical number is eight hours and not one day. So for individuals that may be on less than a full time FTE, we really watch for the eight hours.

And as we've been mentioning over and over again, feel free to contact us, get some advice, and tips and tricks. And we will do whatever we can to help people maintain their insurance because one of the most things that we will see is, of course, in the day of COVID, people to not want to be uninsured. They want to make sure they have insurance coverage. So we're going to do what we can to help maintain that for them. So feel free to contact us.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Ann. I will echo what Theresa said at the very beginning. I know you and all your colleagues in Human Resource Services have been working nonstop since we made the switch back in the spring due to COVID-19. So if employees have questions, I strongly encourage you contact a representative from Human Resource Services. They are in the office working there specifically waiting for you to be able to call with those kinds of questions. So they can help you navigate some these questions like health insurance.

So now I'd like to turn our conversation to Laura if we could. Obviously, COVID-19, this pandemic, has been incredibly difficult for everybody. I think for faculty in some cases, there is an added challenge, particularly for faculty who are seeking tenure. We have faculty members who are taking care of family members, taking care of themselves, trying to work from home, but also have concerns about being able to maintain their research and making forward progress in their efforts to achieve tenure.

And so, Laura, if I could, I'm going to read a question that someone submitted. I'd love to get your feedback on this. The faculty member writes, earlier this spring, WSU announced an automatic one year extension to the timeline for tenure. Has that extension continued since the announcement? And is it still active for current, non-tenured but tenure track faculty members?

LAURA HILL: Thank you, Phil, and good morning, everybody. That's a great question. Last year's extension was automatically applied to all junior faculty. And it's in effect for all faculty on the tenure track who were here last year, and will remain in effect unless you opt out at some point before the additional year expires. So you don't have to worry about that.

For those faculty who are new this year, we're gathering data from faculty now, or soon, to learn more about the barriers that people are facing and, in particular, new faculty are facing to see whether we need to offer an opt out for this year's new faculty as well. In any event, we're considering additional extensions on an individual basis for those who have especially difficult circumstances this year.

And I want to acknowledge that this is a challenging time for everyone. And for many faculty and staff, this is a really difficult time. People who are at home with kids, single parents, people who are caretaking, all the things that we've mentioned before, everybody else has mentioned, and just want to say we're really aware of that. We're aware of the stress that this brings for people whose productivity is necessarily reduced.

And we're working actively to support in as many ways as we can faculty to reduce their anxiety and to increase resources that will help them get through this time.

PHIL WEILER: So Laura, I was actually on a call earlier today as a matter of fact, and someone was sharing that there have been several studies that have looked at productivity based on gender. And what it found was that for female faculty members this has been a particularly difficult time. That there are less papers being produced at this moment by female faculty and more by male.

And so clearly this is a burden falling on our female faculty. Are there additional programs that help everybody? And, in particular, are there any programs that are geared toward female faculty who are trying to achieve this work life balance and in maintaining that productivity?

LAURA HILL: Another great question-- with regard to the female faculty issue, and it's not just female faculty, but that's where most of the press has been. COVID-19 has had disproportionate effects on various faculty groups-- women, single parents, faculty of color, disabled faculty. So one of the things that we're doing specifically with regard to that is educating faculty chairs and promotion and tenure committees about equity issues and unconscious bias in promotion and tenure considerations and in just in thinking about how we review annual performance.

More generally, we're asking chairs and deans to be flexible, to defer non-critical service obligations, and to extend grace and patience and kindness to faculty during this time. All faculty will be able to submit with their annual review statements, or with their promotion or tenure packets, a statement of COVID-19 impacts. This is emerging as the best practice in universities across the nation and will allow faculty to highlight not just the challenges they've been experiencing, but their solutions and work arounds because a lot of faculty have done exceptionally innovative work and come up with good solutions to difficult problems during this time.

And then also on the activity insight reporting, people will be able to report on specific challenges and solutions in their service, outreach engagement, teaching, and research. We're also providing chairs with language that they can use when they solicit external or internal review letters for all faculty, career track and tenure track, that describe our university approach to evaluation of accomplishments during COVID-19. This is obviously a national problem, so everybody who is going to be reviewing packets should be aware of how to read them. But we will be including that in our standard letters reaching out to people.

And I guess I would just emphasize to all faculty the information from our HRS colleagues this morning is really valuable. And if you're really suffering, please consider some of the leave options that they've discussed today. I think that's it. We'll be sending a letter soon from-- Provost Chilton and I will be sending a letter soon detailing the things I just talked about and several other resources and opportunities for faculty. Thank you.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Laura, we'll have folks watch for that letter. Lisa, I'd like to turn to you if we could. A lot of employees have been working from home. We made the comment about all of us facing Zoom every day earlier. So I'm curious about telework. And this was, in fact, again, a question that came in earlier. We had a supervisor who was concerned about making sure that they were doing as best they could by their employees. So how can supervisors best support their employees while they're teleworking during this period?

LISA GEHRING: Thank you, Phil. The answer to the question is fairly simple. It's ask your employees how are they doing? Many of our employees, they've been teleworking since March. And so those regular check in's are really important. And what your employees needs were in March, they may have changed. They probably have evolved. So check in with your employees. What's changed? Do they need anything additional?

And so we recommend that you have regular scheduled meetings to discuss the work plan. And if the work plan-- if you need to make adjustments, collaborate, just have the discussion with the employee. And there are unique situations out there that, if there are challenges with the telework, contact HRS. We can share options. We can share information that we've gathered from other areas and departments to improve the teleworking experience.

And in this short hour, I don't think we're going to be able to get to all the circumstances that people may be experiencing. So we do encourage you-- reach out to your HRS team member. Reach out to HRS, either email, call. And we can talk through those situations with you.

PHIL WEILER: Well, I actually agree that that idea of a check-in is a good idea. I have to admit, I probably need to be doing that with my staff as well. We meet on a regular basis. But you're right that things have changed since March. And it's probably appropriate for us to re-evaluate and see if we need to make changes. Along those lines, is a formal telework agreement required for people to be working remotely in this way?

LISA GEHRING: Currently, we're not requiring the telework agreements simply because of the volume. But what we are doing is we want everybody in the telework environment-- be sure you're reviewing their business policies and procedures manual 60 34, which is our telework policy that we have to follow regardless if there is a signed agreement.

And the other thing-- there is a form with that work policy that will assist you in kind of gathering how you'll document the work being performed and what utilities. It addresses who pays for utilities-- what type of equipment does the employee need, supplies. And the thing people forget about is data security. When you're working at home, we still have the same

responsibility for data security. So it's really good to go back and refresh those-- refresh and take a look at those policies again.

PHIL WEILER: So I'm going to turn the table a little bit on the question. We were just talking about employees who are working remotely. There are also those employees, however, who are considered essential personnel. And they actually have to report to various WSU work sites across the state. This is a question that one of those individuals raised. And I think it's important that we bring it up. This person asked, what if they have a concern about their work environment. And they're uncomfortable discussing that those concerns with their supervisor. Are there options available for employees in that situation?

LISA GEHRING: There are options. And I think we have a common theme here is reach out to HRS. And again, we're going to put a link to our contact information so you have access to it. You can email us, give us a call. But also, if you go to HRS's website, there is a site that's returning to a WSU work location. And if you refer to the COVID-19 return to work concerns, there is a form. You can complete the information, share that concern. And it's submitted to HRS. We'll review the concern. And then we'll do follow up and find out how we can best resolve the issue.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you. So a lot of our employees maintain a sort of a regular 8 AM to 5 PM schedule. And that could either in person or that could be at home. But if you're at home, and you've got the 8:00 to 5:00 schedule, but you also have children who need to be taking classes online. You need to be providing help to them. Is there flexibility for an employee to be able to, for example, perhaps start earlier than 8:00 or work later than 5:00? What kind of options are there for flexing a schedule to be able to accommodate needs at home?

LISA GEHRING: Yeah, Phil, it's really going back to those discussions with the employee and the supervisor. First, kudos to everybody who are juggling all these responsibilities. I mean it's quite impressive what some of our employees are doing. And so if you do need flexibility, talk through what's the plan?

As part of the supervisor-employee relationship, employee should know regardless if they're teleworking or not, what are those performance expectations? What do you expect as a supervisor to get accomplished? What are the deadlines to get those accomplished? And then you can have that discussion to say, OK, can we still meet these expectations and deadlines outside of those traditional hours? And many times, that can occur.

And then, what it does, it's going to create better work. It's going to create hopefully a better balance of that work life. And the thing we have to do remember is, as a public institution, we must be accountable for reporting our time worked and for any leave taken. So there may be occasions where you do have to step back and say, OK, I need to focus two hours perhaps on teaching my child math. Then maybe that would be the appropriate use of taking leave. But then if you can make up that work later on, that's a great discussion to have with your supervisor.

PHIL WEILER: That makes sense-- talk with the supervisor. Kendra, because we do have employees who are working remotely, I'm curious-- are there any trainings available that can help employees be more successful in this remote environment? It is a different world and has been for the last six months or so. But what resources or trainings can we point people to make sure they're making the best of this time in front of their computers and Zoom?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Sure, there actually are a variety of different learning opportunities available right now for WSU employees. Our instructor-led trainings that many people attended before March in-person have now all been moved to virtual instructor-led trainings. And so people are able to attend those via Zoom.

We have a variety of custom online courses available anywhere, anytime. Supervisors work with our department in learning organizational development or Lisa's group with employment services to say how can we make our employees successful? We have a variety of courses on our learn from anywhere page that we have been gathering from our state partners and a variety of different places about managing virtual teams, being successful in a virtual team.

There are also some resources-- like Lisa said, we have people doing-- holding all kinds of hats right now. It's like talking to your kids about COVID-19. Being able to manage your home life helps many people being able to manage their professional life. So many of the courses that we had available before are just available now just in different formats. There's also the COVID-19 related topics such as working successfully remotely, family care, the safe return to work programs. All of those are now available online and some are available in different formats because we also understand not everyone has great internet where they are. We have people working from all over the place.

PHIL WEILER: So one set of trainings that I think is especially helpful, in my opinion, is something that Human Resource Services is doing called the Cougar Connect series. What I like about those is they run from five minutes to 30 minutes. They're as long as they need to be. They don't require you know a full hour or a set period of time. Those have been alive. I'm curious-- are included connect sessions still being held? And if I've missed a live session, but I want to learn more about a topic, what are my options There

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Yes, they are being held. We had such a good turnout on our daily Coug Connects during the summer that we continued them into the fall. We are just now holding them on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:00 AM, like you said, five minute to 30 minute sessions of a variety of different topics, whether it be something that is specifically related to creating something in any program that we may use on a day-to-day basis to some of our partners in U Rec doing chair yoga or environmental health services providing some very good information on ergonomics at home.

We may be used to here's how we sit-in our workplace in our office. But at home, sometimes that is a dining room table and how do you work successfully that way? Some people are unable to meet that 10:00 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So we do have, if people have missed a

session-- past recordings are available on our HRS LOD YouTube site which is also linked from our Coug Connect site. And so people can go back and review it once or multiple times should they so choose.

PHIL WEILER: Well, I think I should go back and take a look at that ergonomics session because I don't think my kitchen chair was designed to be sat in for eight hours or more a day. So one last question for you, Kendra. You mentioned that there is a training that employees need to take if they're going to return to work. It's the COVID-19 safe return to work training-- aptly named. But what happens-- you mentioned the fact that some people don't have great internet access. What happens if an employee does need to physically report to their workspace and they need to take that training, but they don't have good internet access to be able to do that?

KENDRA WILKINS-FONTENOT: Sure, what we're doing is we're working with departments and supervisors who have identified that they have certain people who need to return to work. If those individuals don't have internet access, we have basically taken the program, put it into a PowerPoint document for the employer to provide to that staff member or the faculty member. And they can review it, attest to the fact that they have reviewed the information, get it back to us. And we can make sure we note that they have taken the training in our electronic online learning system, even if they were unable to initially take it that way. So they simply connect with HRS learning and organizational development. And we can get the non internet version to them.

PHIL WEILER: Sounds good, sounds like options are available which is important. Theresa, we talked about the fact that some employees do have a need to be physically located on a campus or at some other WSU facility across the state. Can you remind us-- I understand there's a certain step that every employee needs to take before they show up in their workplace. Can you remind us what that is and how they go about doing that?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Yeah, so the very first thing is you want to make sure you've been instructed to go back to a WSU work location. And so if you are, or if you need to go to your office or your location to pick up an item to use at home, one of the most important things to do is to complete your daily attestation whether you're going to be at that work location for five minutes or for eight hours.

So employees need to-- if it's going to be regular occurring event, they need to have been instructed by their supervisor to work at the WSU work location. They need to complete the safe return to work training. They need to complete the attestation any time they're coming to a WSU work location, and, of course, where their mask, social distance, and practice good hygiene.

PHIL WEILER: Great, those are some very clear things that we all need to do for showing up for work in a physical location on campus. Elizabeth, speaking of coming to campus, I'm curious about what the current thinking is around the spring semester. Are we looking at continuing in

a virtual arrangement? Are we looking at face to face? Or is there going to be some combination of those two different modes?

ELIZABETH CHILTON: Well, thank you for that question. Obviously, it's on everyone's minds. And we've been working hard at this both over the summer and all throughout the fall and sort of adapting and adjusting and seeing what's working for peer institutions as well as what's working and maybe not working so well in each of our physical locations across the state.

I do want to point out that we really are not 100% virtual this semester. So we have dozens of classes that are being held in person across the system. And these include animal and vet med. They include engineering labs. They include the fine arts as well as a number of internships and independent studies.

And each of these is approved at each of the physical campuses. So Pullman has its exception process and Vancouver and Tri-Cities, et cetera. They each have their own in-person instruction exception process. So we can evaluate and make sure that students and faculty and staff are being kept safe, that we're using proper PPE and social distancing, that we can schedule the class in a location, again, that facilities can assist us with managing that piece of it as well.

So I think of remote instruction as a sliding scale and not an on/off switch. And by having an exception process for each of the campuses, obviously, we can slide the scale up and down depending on the numbers of cases in the community, how we're doing in terms of the phased reopening of the state, because, of course, we have to follow state and local health guidelines, how well we're able to stand up a protocol for testing for the spring semester. And we're learning a lot from the testing protocols this semester. That will be able to help us model how we can do that well in the spring.

So for the spring right now, we're going to do the same exceptional process where most of our large lecture classes will continue to be offered remotely. But then, there'll be an exception process that's run through my office for the kinds of instruction that really just cannot be done well remotely.

We still need to make sure that we can accommodate students that either get sick or who have been exposed to someone who's sick and need to quarantine for a couple of weeks. That's really important because, of course, we don't want to encourage students to come to a physical classroom or a classroom setting when they're not feeling well or may have been exposed. And so that flexibility is going to be key.

So mid October, we will be releasing the course schedule for students for the Pullman campus. And it will indicate which classes will be held remotely and which will be in person.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Elizabeth-- appreciate that. We're getting close to the end of the hour, but there were two questions that did come up in our advanced questions that we asked people to submit. And they've come up before. And frankly, I think we've answered them



before, but they continue to appear. I think they are things that are of particular concern to employees. And so I think it's important for us to address them.

Theresa, this first question I'm going to send to you. And that has to do with furloughs. A lot of people want to know what's happening with regard to furloughs. I know, for example, that the athletics department has made the decision to use furloughs as a way to deal with the loss of some of the revenue that they've had to go through this year. But I'm curious-- are furloughs something that we are looking at system-wide and institution-wide or is that something that is being used by individual units?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Great question-- so currently, the university is continuing to evaluate the budget situation and making those final decisions as to what impact we will all need to take and what actions are the appropriate ones including furloughs. So at this point that's still undecided as how those would be applied.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, so the second question has to do with early retirements. Again, I think this is something that people have asked before. I know we've talked about it. But is WSU planning to offer incentives for early retirement at this point in time?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: At this point in time, WSU is not offering early retirement incentives. That may be something in the future. But it's not available at this time.

PHIL WEILER: Terrific, thank you. We are at the top of the hour. I'd like to ask Provost Chilton, if you have any closing remarks before we draw to a close today.

ELIZABETH CHILTON: Just again to extend a really warm thank you and greetings to those of you who I haven't had the chance to meet yet. And thank you again for your hard work, your dedication to our students. Please be kind to yourselves and be kind to each other. I think that's the mantra that we-- I think that's what Kendra was saying. And I want to highlight that and just say thank you. And please let us know if we haven't answered all the questions today. We're here and just keep them coming.

PHIL WEILER: Terrific-- before I close, a couple of things I just want to remind folks of-- one is, again, if you are on the Pullman campus, or if you live in Pullman and work at that campus, please do take advantage of the free, asymptomatic COVID testing. We've received a particular request from WSU epidemiologists and infectious disease modelers who are preparing plans for the time when we can all return face-to-face.

And this first round of employee testing is going to be really helpful in being able to determine whether there is transmission from students to faculty and staff, if there's certain activities that might cause the illness to spread, the degree to which our masking, physical distancing, and other methods are helping prevent infection. So this is going to provide those epidemiologists and modelers really valuable data. So please do take advantage of it if you are on the Pullman campus.

The other thing I'll say is if you're not on the Pullman campus, we are looking at extending employee testing to those other locations as needed. It's something that we're looking at closely. Obviously, the Pullman campus has experienced earlier in the semester, particularly in the August timeframe, we saw significant increases in illness in this community, particularly among the college age group. And so it's important for us to be able to make sure that that isn't something that's moving from students to faculty and staff. At this point it doesn't look like it is, and we want to certainly keep it that way.

The other thing I will say too is we're entering cold and flu season. We've talked about this before. Every campus handles flu clinics a little bit differently. I would strongly encourage you, please check out what your options are, whether it's through your campus, through your health care provider, through your local drugstore. There are a lot of opportunities to be able to get those flu shots. Those are covered by your health insurance if you're covered by WSU health insurance.

It's really going to be critical for us as a nation to make sure we're taking advantage of those flu shots. We want to be able to make sure that if someone does get ill, we know whether it's flu or whether it's COVID. And it's possible to have both covered and the flu. And that would be a horrible combination. So please take advantage of the flu shot clinics that are coming up.

With that, I will remind you that our 12th COVID-19 Town Hall Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 21 at 11:00 AM. During this session, we would like to focus on work that WSU researchers are doing to address COVID-19. We've had a number of researchers who have been submitting proposals for funding. Many of those proposals are now funded. And that work is commencing. And I think it would be valuable for us to learn about what our fellow faculty members are doing to address this issue.

The other thing we'll talk about is get an update on testing both for students and for faculty and staff. We'll talk about the fact that WSU has trained its own contact tracers. So we'll hear a little bit about that. And finally talk about the WSU one health diagnostic lab-- that was a lab that we stood up in July specifically to test human samples for COVID-19.

We are making that testing capacity available not only for WSU students, faculty, and staff, but for other folks in the eastern part of the state. So as part of our land grant mission, we are providing increased capacity to deal with testing in the state of Washington.

So with that, I think we've covered it all. I want to thank our panelists. I appreciate you spending their time with us. I want to also thank our subject matter experts on the chat. I've been watching the chat. It's been very active. And I appreciate all the answers to questions that are being provided through that format. And then, of course, I want to thank all of you for joining us. Once again, we had somewhere in the neighborhood of about 1,200 attendees. It was the largest number I saw as I looked. So thank you all for joining us. Enjoy the rest of your week. And as always, go Cougs.