

WSU COVID-19 Town Hall – August 19

PHIL WEILER: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the ninth in our series of system wide COVID-19 town hall meetings for Washington State University. I want to thank you for joining us. I know that each of our campuses across the state have also been holding their own town hall meetings. And so I appreciate that you're coming to this system one as well. My name is Phil Weiler. I'm Vice President for Marketing and Communications here at WSU. And I will again serve as our moderator for this session.

This time around we're going to be running things similar to what we've done to some of our previous town hall means, if you've had a chance to join us for those earlier ones. We asked folks to submit questions in advance. We have about 100 people who submitted questions. We'll do our best to answer as many of those as we can. I think we clearly have more questions than we'll have time to answer, but we'll try and pull those common themes out and address those issues.

In addition, as we've done in the past, we do have the chat feature in YouTube live. We do have a group of system-- or excuse me of subject matter experts who are monitoring the chat. If you have a question that's burning and you're concerned it's not going to be covered, you can feel free to post it in the chat and we'll try to answer it there.

But we did receive feedback from viewers that they're concerned that there's so much activity in the chat that it's a little distracting. So I'd encourage you if possible, stay tuned to the speakers and the panelists, and hopefully they should be able to address your questions that way.

Speaking of panelists, today we're joined by President Kirk Schultz, Dr. Elizabeth Chilton, our Provost and Executive Vice President, Mary Jo Gonzales, Vice President for Student Affairs. A new member of our panel this time around Dave Cillay, Dave is Vice President for Academic Outreach and Innovation. He's also the chancellor of our global or online campus. So Dave, thanks for joining us this time around.

Also we have Theresa Elliot-Cheslek, Vice President for Human Resource Services and Stacy Pearson, our Vice President for Finance and Administration. With that, let me turn it over to President Schultz to see if he has any opening remarks. And we'll dive right in.

KIRK SCHULZ: Well, hello, Cougs and thanks for joining us today. I'm super excited the fall semester is finally upon us. It's right around the corner and we are excited to be going. So the suit and tie today is-- once the fall semester starts, I always put the golf shirts away, except for weekends and start going back to professional dress. And so I'm thrilled to be with you today.

So just to get us started on our town hall in a good way, on the count of three, we want a Go Cougs from everybody. You may be shouting at your computer, that's OK. But that is just part of what it means to be part of the Coug family. So on the count of three-- 1, 2, 3, Go Cougs.

PHIL WEILER: Go Cougs.

KIRK SCHULZ: So thank you. Got to get in that right festive spirit. So just a couple of thoughts as we get started today and as my colleagues talk about some of the exciting things that we're doing to make sure that our fall semester will be different, but that it's an outstanding opportunity for you all to continue around your educational journey.

The first is I'm a chemical engineering professor and I used to teach the laboratory classes in Chem E and one of the things we would talk a lot about is safety. When we talked about safety, we would emphasize that when you're in the lab and you're doing things, you wear appropriate protective gear and you do it in a safe manner. But what that also meant is that when you got home and you needed to change a light bulb, you didn't do it on a rickety chair with nobody around. Safety was something that was all the time no matter who was watching or where you were.

Guess what folks? The same thing applies to what we're doing with COVID-19, wearing that mask, practicing social distancing, washing those hands applies all the time wherever you are, regardless of who's listening or who's watching. So that means when you're on campus buildings, it's great to do all that stuff and wash your hands and be super careful. But that means when you go home, whether it's to your apartment in Pullman or a Greek house or whatever you're doing, we want to ask all our faculty, staff, and students to make sure that you're practicing those protocols all the time, not just during business hours. It's going to be very important to our community.

I find myself, Noel and I, the first lady, when I'm going to eat in Pullman and I'll get out of my car, I get about 10 feet away and I remember I don't have my mask. Now I could probably just kind of go in somewhere and blow it off. I always turn around, go back and get it, and think I've got to be careful not just for me, but for the people I'm interacting with. So I'm asking all of you to really make a double effort to make sure that you're just obeying those protocols that you're helping from a public safety point of view.

It's also an uncertain time for many of you, for many of our families, for faculty that are joining us today, once again teaching online, for our staff and the uncertainty that COVID-19 brings. For you all as students, you're excited to be part of the Coug family regardless of what campus you're on, but it carries some uncertainty to it as well.

Please know that we are here to help, but we can't help if you don't reach out and ask. So all of us that are on this call that you listen to today, we've got help lines, we've got all that stuff, you need to let us know what types of things we can do to help make your experience as good as it possibly can. Now, that also means that we don't always maybe give you the answers you want

to hear. But we will try and be upfront, give you the best answers that we can to help you be as successful as you can be this semester, whether you're teaching in the classroom, whether you're supporting through a staff support role, a student achievement or student housing, or whatever you're doing, or you're a student here that says, hey, this is just different than what I expect and I need some help.

Finally, I want to emphasize for everybody that self care is really important. It's going to be really important for all of you to exercise this over the next semester. That means sometimes you're going to feel that you're zoomed out. Sometimes I find that social media and all those things carry with it some opportunities to interact with friends in a really cool way. It can also carry with it sometimes a sense of depression or things like that.

You need to be in a position-- faculty, staff, and students-- to make sure that you do self care and that you step away from things. I was reading a note this morning to executive leaders and it's not higher ed, it's across the board that said, one of the key things that all of us are going to have to be concerned with is mental health moving forward through COVID-19 over the next several months.

That's something we take seriously. My colleagues may address different parts of this, but that self care part, if you need to step away for a little while, let us know how we can help and we want to all do this together, get through December, have a successful semester, and really look forward to spring term.

So thanks. I can't wait to hear what my colleagues have to say and to answer your questions. And as always, Go Cougs, and let's have a great fall semester.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Kirk. I appreciate those opening remarks. I'd like to turn to Dave Cillay if we could. Dave, I know you have a presentation that you've been asked to give at 1 o'clock and so you're going to need to leave us a little bit early. But I'm curious because we have made the decision to go to remote learning for the fall semester, there's been some anxiety among, I think, students and parents as well about what does that look like? How do we-- you know, what kind of experience will students have?

And so I'm just curious from your perspective, can you talk a little bit about what kind of experience Washington State University has in the idea of distance learning?

DAVE CILLAY: Sure. Thanks, Phil. You know, WSU has been at this for a long time. We've delivered distance and online education for almost three decades. We were one of the first universities in the country to extend a degree at a distance. So this is very familiar to us. This isn't something novel or new that we have to pivot to.

And also WSU has been a national leader in online education. It's not that we've just done it for a long time, we've been pretty good at it. You know, annually we rank in the top 10% of universities that deliver online education to undergraduates. And I think there are a few things-

- if I think back to our history and in our current state that really excite me about the fall, but also comfort me that we've got this, you know, that we're going to create an exciting, engaging experience for our faculty and students this fall.

And those things are-- one, and I think-- I think, you can't state this enough, we're a land grant institution. Access is part of our DNA. It's something that we do. It's something that we are. And so online is just another way of extending that access. We've been innovating in this space for 100 years.

The other thing is the way WSU is designed its global campus or its online operation. You know, there are many universities that made the decision that they were going to hire other faculty to deliver their online courses. We made the decision that we would use on campus faculty to teach in the global campus. And so although that's a great design model, it also creates a dynamic where our faculty are familiar.

Our faculty-- our on campus faculty are familiar with teaching in an online space. It's not something new. It's not something novel. Now it's not all WSU faculty, but many WSU faculty who teach on our campuses teach online and are prepared for this fall.

And then the third thing is that we've created a model where our online curriculum is spread throughout the WSU system. So any given semester, we have over 3,000 campus-based students taking an online course. And so although we have students that are familiar with that environment, we also have a structure that encourages the integration of online education into on campus education.

So again, I think our experiences, our history have created a dynamic where I think we're uniquely prepared compared to other universities around the country. And then in addition to that history and experience, as we grew our global campus, we also have developed a robust suite of tools and personnel that support faculty from videographers to ADA compliance to tech support to technologist to animators, all of those folks are available to help our faculty prepare for this fall.

And if I think about that work last spring-- and we did great work. There were hurdles. There were bumps, definitely. But we made a pivot in two weeks to transition to remote instruction. Now I think about fall, we've had the summer to prepare. And so I would say, we reacted for spring. Fall, we're prepared.

We've got hundreds of faculty that have been working with our design folks over the course of the summer to build engaging, exciting, fun experiences for our students. I'm optimistic that we are-- we are in a good spot for the fall.

Sorry, I went in a little different direction. But I--

PHIL WEILER: That's great. Thank you. But I do want to do a follow up. You sort of alluded to this. And this was a question that we got from a parent. And like I said, you sort of touched on it. But I'd like to address it directly since a parent asked this question. This parent was asking-- they have an incoming freshman, and they were wondering will classes be learn at your own pace because we're doing remote or will students connect into live sessions, into live classes?

DAVE CILLAY: We won't do anything that's learn at your own pace, even our asynchronous courses, those courses where you don't have to attend a set day and time to participate. They're all built around a course schedule. And so even though it's not on the hour, you still are working at the pace of the designed course.

But what I would say, I think, in terms of the question in general, we're not trying to fit our faculty and our courses into a single box. There are going to be a number of different approaches depending on the learning outcomes of that course. And so just like a seminar course is different from a lecture hall that's different from a lab, our online and remote courses are going to be different as well. So students are going to experience all types of experiences as they engage in their online courses.

And more importantly, you know, we're going to do a lot of formative assessments. So as we're going through the semester, we're not just-- it's not just static. We're looking to see what's really working, where some problems are, and we're going to design on the fly as we go through that fall semester.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thank you, Dave. I really appreciate that. I think that gives me a better sense of what folks can expect as classes start. And as we all know, classes are just a couple of days away. With that, I'd like to maybe turn to Mary Jo.

Mary Jo, I know that this has been a summer like no other for the staff in the Division of Student Affairs. They have been working incredibly hard all summer to make sure this is a great experience in the fall. But I guess what I'd like to ask you with classes is just a couple days away, what are your thoughts on what we need to do as a Cougar community to make sure we're going to keep ourselves safe this fall.

MARY JO GONZALES: First, yes absolutely, Phil. I do have to tease the boss for a moment because he can be in a suit and tie. But we are actually in the midst of our Virtual Week of Welcome, which is why I was wearing my Coug mask and Coug gear. And I am crimson and gray all day, baby. Don't forget that Week of Welcome includes things like virtual bingo. It includes meeting with your academic colleges. It also includes a treasure hunt, from what I understand, with some pretty amazing prizes. So I don't want you to forget that we are still in the midst of welcoming our students to campus virtually and that hasn't changed.

I also come to you and Phil, in answering your question, that part of me is coming with mixed emotions right now. In fact, my lamp and I were having an argument about whether or not I should turn it on. And what I will say to you as I'm hearing the same thing from students.

Several students have said, hey, Mary Jo, hey, I'm following the rules. I am wearing my mask. I am doing my attestation. I am taking my temp at the SRC.

And frankly, I saw some of you at the U Rec and SRC this weekend when I actually welcomed some of our students who-- which was a very small number of students to campus-- who needed to be here. And I saw our student employees who were on campus working behind Plexiglass and wearing their masks and making sure that everybody checked their temp. So I want to thank you. I absolutely want to thank you for fighting for our Cougar community, because that's what we need you to continue to do.

For those of you at home, this is what we have been doing to get ready for you and to do everything that we can to keep you safe. And so I want to thank you for staying home. I know it sucks, just going to name it, not going to lie.

Now for those of you who aren't following the rules. You know, I've talked about choice a lot in our conversations, whether it was our student town halls or whether in this environment. And you're adults. And one of the things that my colleagues will tell you at the table is I don't let them call you kids, because you are emerging adults.

And we've talked about importance of choices. And right now we need you to make a choice. It's a pretty simple one. Do you want to go to a party on Friday night or do you want the SRC to be open for you to use? Do you want the Chinook to be open for you to use personally for the rest of the semester? It's a pretty simple choice.

Now that's of course, short term. Long term, Mary Jo, that's a really difficult thing to do when all of my buddies are requiring me-- not requiring, they're asking me to go hang out because frankly we haven't seen anybody for the past several months. So we recognize that. We're not stupid. As adults we're struggling with that too. I actually was able to connect with one of my colleagues. I was, like, oh, my gosh. It's a great experience and we miss that human touch.

Frankly, that is what I saw also during move in is that students were really missing that connection and engagement. So we realize that as being one of the problems.

You're talking to someone who has been homebound for 13 months after a life threatening illness. And it isn't pretty. We are headed in that direction, if we don't do some critical things. I look at the death rates. I look at the infection rates for all of our populations all the time. And I want to put this in numbers for you. There are 30,000 students in our Cougar community.

And if just, just 0.05% or 0.03% get really sick and die, it is 90 students, 90, not 1, not 2, not 3. And I'm asking you to think about who is in that 90 and will it be you? Will it be someone who is in your fraternity or sorority? Will it be someone who is in your student org? And I know you hate me right now for saying that. But I need us to really acknowledge that as the reality of what we're looking at COVID-19.

So I need you, we need you to fight for Washington State and all of our Cougs. We need you to cancel COVID. And that means in every single step of the actions that we take about choosing to walk out-- choosing to walk out on fraternity and sorority row, on college hill, in apartment land, in downtown Pullman that wearing a mask and doing what you need to do to take care of us is a part of fighting for our honor and glory.

I'm also fighting for us to keep each other alive, to take care of each other. I'm asking you to do your best and be your best. And I'm asking you to take care of all of us in the Cougar community. So Phil, if you ask me what we need to do to take care of each other, it's continue to fight, fight, fight for Washington State, because it's not just honor and glory that we're fighting for, we're fighting for each other's lives.

PHIL WEILER: Mary Jo, very well said. Thank you. That's the news we need to hear, quite frankly. It is within our control. If we want to keep this illness from impacting our communities, we need to wear masks, we need to be physically distance, we need to wash our hands. We know what those things are. They aren't that difficult to do, folks. We need to do them.

So with that, I'd like to turn to Provost Chilton. Elizabeth, I know that there has been some anxiety that we've seen in our questions and in other public forum from students and parents wondering what the services to students are going to look like. And so specifically, will students still have access to things like academic advising, tutoring, career coaching, even though we're learning remotely?

ELIZABETH CHILTON: Yes. Well, thank you very much for that. And I really appreciate Mary Jo's message. Our students are first and foremost at top of mind. And our faculty have been putting and will continue to put a great deal of time and energy in, and not just in their class classes and their courses, and I appreciate Dave Cillay giving the context for what we've been doing to create an educational experience that is high quality for WSU students, but also all of the other many supports that our faculty and staff are providing outside the even the virtual classroom, so to speak.

So for example-- and I know that Vice Provost Craig Parks, I believe is supporting the chat. So perhaps he could put the links in for these things. But we will have-- all advising services are still going to be available remotely, and we'll provide a link for that. All of our central career services are also still available. And we'll have a Career Expo virtually this year, but October 5 through 7th. So again, we'll put in the links for registration for that.

And then a number of other services, for example, there are a number of open educational resources which are low or no cost educational materials that faculty put up to assist students who have extra economic burdens because of COVID. And so there are a number of free and low cost educational materials that are available online.

We're also providing financial assistance to cover technology costs, things like broadband costs, Chromebook loaner program, and Hotspot Wi-Fi access. So please reach out if you need assistance on the technological advising or career advising.

But I also did want to just call out the fact that this is a semester unlike any other that any of us on this call at home and here, the panelists have ever experienced. And we all know as educators and as leaders who support students that the first three weeks of the semester are really always a critical window for student persistence at the university.

Students who miss classes or fail to turn in work or fail assignments are really at risk and often are looking for support. So we have a support system that has been there from pre-COVID times and will continue to be there where faculty and other advisors and supporters can reach out to students if it looks like they're struggling in the first few weeks of semester, whether that means advising them to take part in tutoring, which all usual tutoring services are still going to be available, whether it means getting them involved in undergraduate research projects. Sometimes working directly with a faculty member on research can be really inspiring for students and help them still feel connected.

So those are just a few of the ways that we're seeking to create as high a quality experience at WSU. Dave mentioned the support for faculty as well. He mentioned some of the technological and practical aspects, but the academic outreach and innovation also helps them really think through the pedagogy, how do you teach and how do you feel connected and have your students feel connected to each other and to WSU throughout this?

So thank you Dave for all that you and your group do. And please avail yourself of the links in the chat to find out more information.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Provost Chilton. We've spent a lot of time focusing on students and parents. I'd like to shift for a moment to an issue that's been of real concern to our faculty and staff. And Theresa, I'm going to point this question in your direction.

We've heard from a lot of employees that as school districts across the state of Washington have announced that they're moving to their own remote learning, which means students won't be going into the classroom, there's question and I think some anxiety, understandably, about what does that mean for me as a parent. And so can we talk a little bit about what options exist for faculty and staff who have young school age kids at home and what the fall means for them?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESEK: Thanks, Phil. and we recognize that this is a challenge not only to parents, but also to family members, grandparents, and care givers throughout our WSU system. And what we are emphasizing and encouraging is that their supervisors be proactive in engaging their faculty or their staff with options that are available to them, but also that employees have the ability to go to their supervisor and raise their concerns and questions on what options are available for their work schedule.

And we're encouraging you to be creative and flexible, look at the entire workweek, the work days, the work hours, the schedules, whatever may work for the employee as well as the meeting the needs of our clients. And so the word we want people to leave with is flexibility, consideration. We're all dealing with this, all of us in our own way. And even we have to remember supervisors and managers have families that they're trying to coordinate with.

So we're all in this together, one big Cougar family. We need to try to use our creativities, all those options. And when there might be an impasse or some concerns, we would encourage anyone to reach out to HR. And we'll try to work with the employee and the supervisor on coming up with a workable solution that meets the needs of everyone involved. So the word is flexibility.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Theresa. As you were speaking, I was going to say, it sounds like the word of the day is flexibility, and you said it yourself, so good for us to know. Folks, if you have concerns, please do talk with Human Resource Services. They are there to help you to make sure that we can balance that work life challenge that we're all facing right now.

I'd like-- Stacy, we haven't had a chance to touch base with you. And I'd like to bring up a question that appeared in the list of pre-submitted questions. This person had noted that the state of Washington has required Washington State University to cut its budget by \$37.2 million in this current fiscal year. That's a really large number for us.

This person was wondering, though, what type of additional ramifications for the university's budget are we projecting beyond this fiscal year? Do we have a sense of what the next biennium might look like, for example? If there are future reductions from in state funding, what will the likely outcome be for WSU? Do we think that there may be additional budget cuts that come down the road?

STACY PEARSON: Well, thank you Phil. And obviously when the Office of Financial Management and state of Washington delivered their news in May, they were-- at the time they were projecting revenue declines for the state of Washington FOR the coming fiscal year, that year that we're in now, fiscal year 21 and the following two fiscal years.

So the notice that they really gave us is to plan on-- they gave us that number that \$37.2 million number for fiscal year 21, but plan on how we would manage if that were to become a permanent number for those following two fiscal years. And of course, there have been economic updates across the state.

But there have been no official meetings of the legislature or anyone else to discuss any further budget impacts. In fact, we're told that probably that wouldn't happen until after the election. And of course, then we're right into the next biennium fiscal planning.

So what we do as good fiscal stewards is just continue to watch that environment and make our own internal plans. Obviously, we've got our eye on federal funding and state funding to help

us with-- because it's not just budget reductions that we're looking at. But as you can tell from the discussion that has happened today, we obviously need to make some investments to support our students and to make this transition as easy as possible.

So we're really having to look at that from both sides, following our enrollments very carefully to see how our students are enrolling at all of the campuses. And of course we'll know more about that in the month of September. But we're following all of this very closely. And as soon as we do get news, we incorporate it into our modeling.

We're modeling different types of scenarios, different types of budget impacts, and thinking ahead so that we'll be prepared when there is additional news. And of course, what we're hoping for is better news, you know, that in the future that we'll see a recovery. But meanwhile our job is to just plan and make sure that we can manage the information that we've currently been given.

PHIL WEILER: Well, that sounds like a wise approach, plan for the worst and hope for the best. President Schultz, do you have any thoughts on these budget issues that we're facing right now?

KIRK SCHULZ: Yes, Phil, thank you. I just want to remind all the Cougs out there-- students, faculty, staff, alumni, everybody associate with the university that we have been very fiscally transparent over the last four years. This is not something new that we're just doing because we're in the midst of some real challenging times. I think sometimes people can get paranoid thinking we've got information that we're not putting out or things like that.

There's just still a great deal of uncertainty. And we're fortunate to have Stacy as our chief financial officer modeling things and putting data together and helping us make decisions. But we will let people know things as soon as we do. And we'll try and communicate those in a way that's easy to understand and has lots of factual data behind it. But it's uncertain at what enrollments going to look like, what the state's going to look like, impacts on student housing, and what that's going to do and so forth. And so we're going to continue to be transparent. I think Cougs expect it, and they expect it out of our leadership team at WSU right now. And we're going to continue to do that.

But there's no-- I just don't want people feeling we've got information we're not giving. We're going to give it as soon as we feel that we have good facts behind it and that we can provide context to that. So expect to see more of that in the next several months.

PHIL WEILER: Kirk, if I could, I'd like to follow up on a question that's sort of in a similar theme to what we've just been talking about. And there are actually several people who posted questions in advance asking about what the implications are for the Washington State University budget following the decision by the Pac-12 to postpone fall sports? And then what are the implications for the athletics budget?

KIRK SCHULZ: Well, I was really hoping for a lot easier question than that, like you know, what's my favorite sandwich at Subway or something? But you know that Pac-12, that decision, the presidents of all 12 schools with the athletic directors met together. It was unanimous decision by every school that we just needed to postpone fall sports because we just didn't feel we could have a safe environment for our student athletes.

Now I believe-- I still believe sincerely that was the right decision to make, safety first. We've been saying that all along, actions got to follow words. So that was the right thing to do. The challenge is not playing football in the fall has significant fiscal implications for intercollegiate athletics, which in turn affects what we are able to do at the university.

Stacey and her team working with Pat Chun and his team in the Pac-12 office are doing a lot of modeling on what does that actually mean fiscally if we don't play football at all during this next year? And it's just too early to be able to tell. And I suspect that we'll have a lot more ideas of what this is going to look like and the fiscal impacts then on the rest of the university sometime in the next month.

And trust me, we feel we made the right decision, you wake up the next morning. We know there's disappointment by some of our student athletes that wanted to compete. There's some relief by some student athletes that were concerned about their health and safety. And now it's the fiscal implications of how do we manage that over the course of this next year? And we'll be transparent with that. But it's still too early for us to do a lot and say, here's exactly where that's going to do.

I will say at the end of the day, we'll evaluate options. We want to minimize the impacts on the academic enterprise of the institution. But that's a principle. But we still have to work the numbers, see what that looks like, and we'll move forward in that particular way. So we'll be careful that before we put out anything, we just want to make sure that we really model it out, have a pretty good idea where we were.

Finally, so many of our Cougs that are season ticket holders have very generously said, hey, take my season ticket dollars, I want you to apply those as a gift this next year to assist during that time. And I want to just express my appreciation to so many of our supporters of intercollegiate athletics at WSU for their generosity during a time that's really tough on everybody, so thank you. And we'll continue keep everybody posted. But great question, Phil.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Kirk. Provost Chilton, I'd like to turn to you. This was a fairly specific question, but again, I think, a question that is on the minds of parents and students. And that has to do with grading that will be associated with our courses in the fall. In the spring, we did allow students to use pass/fail. Are students going to be able to take a letter grade for their fall semester courses if they want to?

ELIZABETH CHILTON: Well, thank you for the question.

[COUGH]

Excuse me. You know in the spring when we made a very quick shift to remote instruction as was acknowledged previously, it was a little bumpy for everyone. We were trying to get everyone access to technology. And really the entire nation and the entire world really was struggling with how to do this. And so a lot of people talked about the asterisk, meaning that everyone understands that the spring transcripts for everyone involved in an educational institution are going to have to be remembered as the semester where COVID hit us all really hard.

But we've had time to work through some of the issues, talk to our peers, talk to leaders, take a look at best practices, and it's clear that some students want the option of being graded to continue, especially if it's a senior year and they're applying for internships or post graduate school. Others want the pass/fail option. So what we've decided to do is provide the same options that we would every semester.

So for fall 2020, students can choose a pass/fail option up until September 4th. Or they can switch from-- so if you do decide to choose pass/fail, you can actually switch from the pass/fail back to a letter grade until December 11th, which means that you have the whole semester. If you're really concerned about it and think you might want to pass/fail you can always change it back if things are not going the way that you thought that they would.

So also there's the option that you can drop a course without any record on your transcript at all until September 24. So that gives you almost a month to really get immersed in the road experience, make sure that that particular course, that each of your courses is working well for you. And then the last date to withdraw from class completely would be November 20. So by then, we will be moving after Thanksgiving, really even classes that do have some online presence, that should be plenty of time to make sure you have the grading option that suits you.

If you have any question or concern especially, you know, we've heard from pre-law students or pre-health students about what impact might having a pass/fail versus a letter grade have on my future. I would really strongly suggest you talk to the academic advisors and get their take and then make your informed decisions.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you, Elizabeth. I want to echo what you said there at the end. I really encourage students to touch base with an academic advisor before you make these kinds of decisions, just so that you understand all the implications. We don't want you to make a decision that you're-- that's going to end up harming you in some way in the future academically. But it does sound like again the watchword is flexibility. Students have a lot of options. I encourage you to touch base with those academic advisors, understand what those options are, and then make the best choice for you personally.

I'd like now maybe to turn to Mary Jo, if we could. Mary Jo we heard about the services that are being provided to students from the academic perspective. We talked about academic advisors, career counseling, tutoring, and the like. Can you tell us a little bit about what student life is going to look like in this remote environment? I know there's something called the new Cougar experience. Can you talk about what that is and what students can expect this fall?

MARY JO GONZALES: Yeah, Phil. So all of us are having to think about what our new reality is related to the work that we do and how we engage with others. And so what our university has done, and frankly it's done it across all of our campuses is figure out how to provide some of those fundamental services that all students need, whether it's mental health counseling which is provided in a telecommute or sorry, telehealth format. I forget those words. There's so many tele's now compared to what we were dealing with last year.

And so they can get that assistance, especially. And I want to encourage as Kirk said earlier, encourage us to reach out and seek help when we need it, because now more than ever is what we need to say, I need help or I'm struggling or things aren't going well. So that's one part of it.

A lot of health services, in fact Cougar Health Services is also doing appointments. But it's not just the health and safety part or the wellness part because our recreation and Chinook facilities are open and our offering in limited fashion to be able to come in and exercise. But a lot of the programs are going remote. In fact, there's a bouldering clinic that you can watch via Zoom and learn how to do that. There's Chair Yoga, which Joanne who is our Director of the University Recreation does a phenomenal job at walking you through that.

And there are also students who are offering a variety of those options and teaching those classes as well, things that you can do at home in the privacy of your own home. I'm not sure I would want to go and exercise publicly right now. But I'm going to get to it eventually.

The other part of what we're offering is student organization support. You know student leadership and engagement with your peers on subjects that are important to you, like our women in science and engineering, like our programs related to multicultural student services or GES work, or the Women's Center. Or frankly, even in the study groups that you form and create in your own classes and in your own communities. That's the way we need to continue to have you engage.

And it's going to look a little different. We will have some drive by programming where students can have some paint nights. In fact, I'll be offering one with me. And hopefully, we'll get others involved in that. Cooking with our chefs is also available. And so you don't have to be living in a residential facility to Zoom into that and to learn how our chefs provide some amazing and fabulous meals, things even I didn't know about or didn't realize and the kind of work that they do.

And so, Phil, there are tons of options that are available to students. We really are going to ask you to do the one thing that students struggle with and that is to check your email and click on

that link that says register here, RSVP here, because that is the single most important thing that you can do to be engaged and to be available and to support other Cougs who need help from you.

And so our 400 student organizations are here to support you and engage you as well as all of our staff in all of our areas across the university, including all of our different campuses.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Mary Jo. So we've talked a little bit about some academic resources available to students. We've talked about student life resources that are available. I'd like to talk maybe a little bit about some of the financial resources that are available. And I wonder Stacey-- I know we don't have anyone from Student Financial Aid or Student Financial Services on, but can you talk a little bit about what you know about financial services available to students?

STACY PEARSON: Certainly, I can. Yes, I've been working-- my staff and I've been working with Financial Aid. It is important to us that we use the current processes that are in place. So for instance, as students have applied for their financial aid, as we identify additional resources, we can go to their same packages and see where we can allocate different funds. So for instance, we were able to allocate-- when I say we, I am referring to Financial Aid, that staff. They're just doing a great job.

We awarded an additional funds on the Washington College Grant from that initial award letter. We increased the Cougar Commitment Award to provide additional need-based aid to cover tuition increases. We provided additional federal student loans where possible. We also had some philanthropists who were very aware of the impact this was having on students. And we were able to award additional private scholarship dollars through that program.

In addition, you will recall that we received the CARES funding and half of that amount, over \$10 million, was for emergency aid for students. And so as students continued to apply for that, those are still being awarded as received. We're also hopeful to see additional moneys come in from a future awards.

We also did some policy changes. For example, we have a late fee that is in this current semester would be applied on September 7. It's about 3% of the outstanding balance. And that has been canceled for this year. So students have a full extra month to pay their tuition and fees.

In addition, we looked at-- we heard a lot of concerns from students who had received awards but were concerned about losing those awards if they deferred their enrollment to a future semester. Our policy has been that those are always-- they are eligible to transfer those to quote "the next semester". In this case, we allowed that for the next two semesters. So students don't have to worry about losing that award that they applied for and were awarded if they need to change their plans.

And the same applies for those students who had Pullman based awards. And if they decided to either stay in their hometown or go to a different WSU campus, again, those awards will be transferred to up to two future semesters, specifically Spring 21 and Fall 21.

We continue to look at ways that we can help in those respects. So again, working with a team of people-- a team people who care greatly about our student success and their ability to come to school. To be honest, it's those folks working on the ground that have forwarded those recommendations to us about what is needed most. And I would say that we've reacted very quickly to some of those responses.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Stacy. And I guess I would follow up just reminding folks that if you do have questions about financial aid, contact Student Financial Services. There are folks there whose job it is to help you navigate the financial implications of going to college. So hopefully, they'll be able to help you if you have needs.

We've talked to a lot about support that we're providing resources, we're providing to students. Theresa, I'd like to talk maybe a little bit about resources that we have for faculty and staff. This has been the challenge for everybody. And certainly it's been a challenge for faculty and staff over these last six months. Can you talk about all kinds of resources that might be available through Human Resource Services. I know that you have a survey that you're going to be sharing about that as well. Can you talk about that?

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Yes, we've been working on improving the resources for our faculty and staff. And I want to direct people if they haven't looked at the HRS website, we've tried to gather a whole slew of different resources for faculty and staff there. So we have your basic benefits information, so all of your medical plans offer well-being programs, as well as mental health programs. Our employee assistance program offers free counseling services as well as some really robust webinars all the way from what to do with COVID, how to manage children at home, K through 12 type of issues.

And then we've been improving all our training and resources that employees wherever they're at can take part in. And so Mary Jo had mentioned the Arm Chair Yoga, the Chair Yoga. During our Cougar Connect which is 10 AM Tuesdays and Thursdays, we've offered a variety of sessions, including how to preserve pickles, how to manage teams virtually, how to do yoga at home, to try to give a variety of different topics for our staff to learn from.

Additionally, we have information out there to help all of us deal with this virtual supervision, virtual as an employee. How do I connect with my colleagues? How do I lead as a manager? And so that information is out there. Most of the sessions are available via video also or zoom. You can participate live and then we have those sessions taped. So those are just kind of an overview of resources.

But we recognize we can always do better. So this morning we sent out a survey to all faculty and staff just to gauge what resources they are aware of, what resources they aren't aware of,

what suggestions they have for us to improve on for them, you know, the challenges with K through 12, the challenges of just dealing with COVID.

And this morning we've had over-- it went out this morning about 9 AM and we already have over 1,200 responses from our faculty staff system wide. So we encourage you to fill that out because I can tell you this leadership team really wants to hear from you. We want to do what we can to try to make the situation better.

And then we often hear from people who don't know about all these resources. So I want to encourage you to look at our-- if you haven't signed up to receive our HR information via the Twitter account or Facebook or on our website, and then we also do a monthly newsletter that we try to put all these different resources in for our faculty and staff.

And then we really enjoy feedback. We want to know what you need to know from us. So, you know, fill out the survey, feel free to email us, feel free to contact HR if there's something you'll like, hey, you know, why aren't-- why can't WSU do this or we have this other idea.

So anyway, check your email, your inbox, check your junk mail too to see if that survey went there and get that completed as soon as possible. And go Cougs.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Theresa. As you were speaking, I was looking at Butch over your shoulder there. And he was holding the sign about attestation. I know that we do have a handful of students, a handful of faculty and staff on our various campuses. But for those who have not actually returned to campus in the last six months, can you just quickly remind us about what attestation is, and something that we're all going to need to do before we return.

THERESA ELLIOT-CHESLEK: Yeah and the attestation process is if you're being asked to report back to your WSU work location that you're to fill out the attestation every day before you report to work that you're confirming you're free of a fever or those other COVID related symptoms. It's really easy to get to. Phil's crew has created a one stop landing page for faculty, staff, visitors to go to. And you just fill it out. It takes less than 30 seconds to read through and click the information. It's another way to help all of us keep each other safe, keep the Coug network safe here. And so it's a pretty easy process, again, symptom free, yes, you're allowed to come to the workplace.

PHIL WEILER: Great, thank you, Theresa. I appreciate that. Mary Jo, I want to send this next question to you. Speaking of the fact that there are a small number of faculty and staff and soon to be students on campus, I know with Pullman being our residential campus, we have opened up the residence halls to a very, very limited number of students.

Can you talk about what were the criteria used to decide who would be permitted to return to the residence hall? And do we have a sense of what percentage of the halls are filled? What is that going to look like for us?

MARY JO GONZALES: Yeah, Phil, thank you for asking that question. We've had a lot of students and their families wonder why we made the decisions. You have to know we were guided by the decisions and guided by the information that we had learned in spring of 2020 when we went to remote instruction. And we had students who said very clearly their home is not safe or this is their home, for our students who were first gen low income, students, who had been in foster communities for a sizable time, rural students who have really no sustainable access to the kind of internet that they need to do courses and complete courses, students who only had phones and didn't have the computers and technology that they needed, as well as students who worked.

As I've mentioned before the Division of Student Affairs hires a substantial amount of student employees. And many of those jobs require them to be on campus. And so we currently have about 15% occupancy. That is 15% occupancy compared to what we would normally have in a fall. So it is a very small number. I know many students-- and I heard from a mom who said, you know, my daughter was just devastated because all of the students that she went through with live, it felt like all of them were coming back home or coming back to Pullman or starting in Pullman.

And what I said was, generally many of those students aren't going to disclose the reason why they're here and we're not going to ask them to disclose. As a part of that process, we ask students to verify specific reasons for coming to Pullman. And those were approved based on the criteria that we'd outlined. So we were really grateful to work with those students who needed the assistance that they did.

And frankly, this will also help us to build a Spring 2020 if we are able to reoccupy the residential facilities. But again, won't be able to do that if we don't start changing our behavior and start thinking about the impact of our behavior on the larger community including Pullman, which is now in a red zone for COVID-19.

PHIL WEILER: You know, one other group of students, small group, but a group that did have access to the residence halls were international students. And I know that for many international students six months ago when we had to make that shift from face to face to distance learning, travel was shut down. And so for many of those students, they weren't even able to return to home, to their home countries. And so they've been here as well. So that's another important group that really needed a place to stay.

MARY JO GONZALES: Exactly. And, Phil, you know what, I would add-- and I just want to-- I just happen to be on a call with our landlords earlier, just an hour ago. And we've been talking to them about the concerns that you all have raised, that they aren't being as flexible that they need, including some of those international students who departed and then the country shut down, and they have not been able to return.

So I want to let you know that we are working through that. The Division of Student Affairs has 14 staff who are serving in what we call transition housing coaches. And so if you're struggling

with that situation, let us know, and we can get it. But, Phil, you're absolutely right it was international students and students who are traveling who could not return home. That was a large issue for us as well. And it's important to acknowledge all of the communities that were impacted in March and, frankly, are still being impacted today.

PHIL WEILER: Well, I think that's a good point, because many students-- I said many students were here and they didn't have anywhere else to go. So anyway, I appreciate that Student Affairs was willing to keep the residence halls open during this period. I know that other universities simply said, no, we're going to shut our residence halls down. And those students who didn't have anywhere else to go where we're left in a lurch. So I appreciate that your staff was being very thoughtful and maintaining a place to live for those who didn't have other choices.

President Schultz, we're getting close to the end of the hour. I do have another question for you. And then I want to let you see any closing remarks for us. But what are the thoughts about Spring 2021 semester? Do we know yet what that will look like? Is it going to be face to face? Is it going to be virtual? And if we don't know, any ideas when you think we might know?

KIRK SCHULZ: Yeah, Phil, and we get this question a lot. And let me tell you, I wish I could look into my crystal ball and just give a really definitive answer. I think we've mentioned multiple times, I think in our planning up to the fall term, fall semester, you know, there is a strong desire by our faculty, staff, our leadership, our students to have in-person experiences. And we want to work in that direction.

But on the other hand, giving a certain date and saying by this date we're going to make that decision, if we've learned anything over the last three months is that things change rapidly with the coronavirus. And life could look much different in September and October than it does today. So while I know parents, families, students, everybody wants to know, we're just not sure what spring semester is going to look like, and we want to make sure we continue to emphasize health and safety of our faculty, staff, and students has got to be paramount. And that's what we're going to continue to do.

So sometime next semester, we'll be ready to make that announcement. But I would just tell Cougs, don't anticipate anything announcement wise for a couple of months. We'll probably want to wait until late to make that decision, so that we can take all the best data and information to have another great Cougar experience. And we want to make sure we know what that needs to look like. And it's going to take us some time. So that's the best we can give for now.

Some closing comments, one, thank you for everybody who joined us today. And just a few things out there, I'm going to ask everybody to continue to be flexible. I think most of my colleagues internally, externally have really suggested flexibility is going to be key.

Second, be kind. This is a tough time, so many people feel stressed and things like that. It's easy to kind of jump at things. But, you know, be kind your colleagues, whether that's other faculty, a faculty-student relationships, administrator-staff relationships, it doesn't matter, let's be kind. And as our first initial reaction, let's assume people's intentions are really good. And I think that's going to help us a lot.

I also want to remind all of our colleagues that we are also going to have to readjust our own personal expectations for performance. In my mind, faculty and staff who work at universities are chronic overachievers. They're used to being the people that, wow, I can't believe how much they got done. And so many people are wired that way, it is really important for people to kind of ramp back what they think they can do, whether you're the president of the university, a brand new starting as an assistant professor in a particular field, make sure that you calibrate what you think you can get done and don't over stress yourself because of the challenges associated with doing this remotely.

And then finally, we're going to pledge to keep our communications open. And whether it's these type of town halls, whether it is a social media communications, whether it's letters to campus through email and other types of things, we're going to do them all. It's not we're doing one or the other. And we want to keep communication open, keep answering questions. And we're going to keep doing these types of things as much as we can.

So something I want our Cougs to look forward to, one of the things we want to do is in a future one of these, we want you all as Cougs and parents and associated folks with WSU to see some of our exceptional faculty and staff and what they're actually doing, not hearing from administrators and leaders, but hear from some of the faculty that have spent their summer being ready to deliver an exceptional experience, not an adequate experience, an exceptional experience.

I want you to hear from some of our advisors that are doing amazing jobs and working with their students online in really interactive ways. And so instead of hearing us talk about all this stuff that we're doing, I want you to hear about some of the new things in Student Affairs and talk to the actual people interacting with our students.

So those are some things that we're going to do going forward. We're going to keep communications open, temper your expectations, be kind to each other, be flexible. And we're going to have a successful semester. But we've got to work on this together. And we want to see each and every one of our students move through the semester successfully, personally, professionally, academically, and all of us to get to that virtual graduation in December and feel that, hey, this has not been what I might have thought, but man, it's been a much better experience, and I feel like I'm ready to go. Go Cougs.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Kirk. I like your watch words of flexibility and kindness. Those are good values to live by. I just want to remind everybody, as I mentioned at the very beginning, each campus has been holding its own town hall meetings. Those are continuing. I would echo what

we heard from our panelists that you should be checking your email to find out when those are going to be happening. Please avail yourselves of those opportunities, because then you can hear about what's happening at your specific individual campus.

The other thing I want to remind folks about is that we're coming up on what is personally one of my favorite events of the year and that's convocation. Convocation is traditionally the beginning of the academic school year. And for new students, it is the first sort of traditional beginning of their academic career and that closing that book end event, then would be commencement after their four year journey. I would encourage everybody-- students, faculty, staff, and parents as well, if you're available, please join us Friday morning at 10 AM for our live stream convocation.

New students, we expect to see you there. It's not optional for you. But parents, faculty, and staff please join us as well. You can find that by going to convocation.WSU.edu. Again, it's Friday at 10:00 AM. It's going to be a great event. It's a wonderful way to start the academic year.

So with that, my thanks to our subject matter experts who are on the live chat. I've been keeping an eye on that. They have been busy as usual. I appreciate them answering questions in real time. I want to thank our panelists for making their time available. And most importantly, I want to thank all of you who've been viewing this. This is important for us to be able to have these kinds of communications, and we look forward to continuing them. So with that, enjoy your day, and go Cougs.