

# WSU Pullman Student Town Hall – November 18

PHIL WEILER: Well, good evening, everybody. Thank you all for joining us today. We are having our second of two COVID-19 town hall meetings here for Washington State University. My name is Phil Weiler, I'm Vice President for Marketing and Communications here at WSU. I'm going to be serving as a moderator for our hour-long session this evening.

As I mentioned, we did have an earlier COVID-19 town hall at 11 o'clock this morning. That first session was geared towards students, faculty, and staff as well as members of the public. The event that we're doing right now, however, is really aimed squarely at students and family members of students who are either going to be living on the Pullman Campus in spring term--spring semester, I should say, or are planning to attend in spring semester 2021. So thank you again for joining us.

The agenda for our meeting this evening has been primarily created based on questions that people have submitted in advance. So we had a number of people who submitted questions, and we thank you for that, that's helped us figure out what the most important issues are for students and their family members.

In addition, we have the YouTube chat feature that is live. We have 12 staff members who are in the background prepared to answer the questions that might be posted in chat. So these subject matter experts will try and address every questions they can. There may be an occasion where somebody has a very specific question that's unique to them individually. If that's the case, the subject matter experts may suggest that you make a call to an office in the morning so that we can work through your particular questions or concerns.

But with that, let me introduce our panel. We've got quite a few people who are making themselves available this evening to help answer questions. First off, we have Mary Jo Gonzales, Vice President for the Division of Student Affairs. We also have Colleen Kerr, who is Vice President for External Affairs and Government Relations.

Craig Parks, who is Vice Provost for System Innovation and Policy. Jill Creighton Dean of Students and Associate Vice President for Student Affairs. We have Brian Dixon, who is Assistant Vice President for Student Financial Services. Jason Sampson. He is our Assistant Director of Environmental Services, Public Health, and sustainability.

Curtis Cohen, who is President of the Associated Students of WSU here on the Pullman Campus. Jennifer Johnson, who is President of the Graduate and Professional Student Association. Christian Shaffer, excuse me, who is President of the Resident Hall Association. And finally, Jhordin Prescott, who is the Vice Chair for the Student Recreation Advisory Board.

So again, a big crew of folks who are all experts in their field, and I'm looking forward to some great conversation with them. Let me turn over to Mary Jo for some opening remarks, and after

that, I have a series of questions that I'll be asking our panelists. So Mary Jo, let me turn it to you.

MARY JO GONZALES: Oh my Cougs, it is so good to be in front of you today. Me and my lamp are absolutely missing you. I will let you know that there is a lamp competition happening on campus, so you're going to see them pop up a little bit more. I do want to share with you a few thoughts before we begin today, is, I have had the pleasure of interacting with some of you online, and it's great to still be connected to you.

I saw a few students hanging out last Thursday with speed painting. Tonight I'm going to be looking at the SEB DJ competition. Been hanging out at esports events. The online rec classes are fun. Some of the speaker series we've been having, 400, 500 people are attending.

And what it means to me is that you all are finding ways to connect in ways that are successful for you. So please remember, we're here. I also want to acknowledge to all of my Cougs out there, I know you're tired of the Rona. I said this earlier, right? The Rona has just taken a lot out of us. Some of you are full-on in Zoom fatigue and COVID fatigue. We've heard from you that it's hard-- it's really hard right now not to be together in community, and I know that you're disappointed that the plans for break won't be exactly what you wanted and that fall has not been exactly what you planned.

But I really need you to keep fighting for WSU and for our Cougar community. Wash your hands, make sure to keep that six-foot distance, and please make sure to wear your mask. We need you to keep fighting in order to keep us healthy and safe. And if you're planning to go-- if you're living here in Pullman right now and you're planning to return to your residence, please do not come back to Pullman. It's really important that you begin to stay in your spaces. Just as the governor has said, that we're really trying to minimize nonessential travel. So we want to make sure that you're staying in the place that you're going to.

I also want to let you know that we broke some records today for testing-- or yesterday for testing. It's about 500 people that were tested today. So we know that you're doing exactly what you need to make sure that your community is taken care of, including your family that you're going home to, so please continue to do that.

I do want to share a little bit of good news with you, and this is something that I have the pleasure of working with students who you're going to hear from some today, that they really engaged in this process because you asked us to reflect on the student fees and the students-- the fees that we were charging you both for mandatory and student services and activities fees.

We conducted of a wide variety of boards, and those boards as students were able to actually sit down and really think about all of the budget and finance issues that went with it. About 250 students from across our WSU system-- it was pretty impressive, and that's everything from our Student Health Advisory Committee to our CUB Advisory Board, our Media Fee Board, our Student Media Board as well as our Student Senate. And these were referendums that you all

had voted in or your prior students had voted in to make sure that you had the services that you need.

Jenn, would you mind? Jenn Johnson, is our current chair for the Services and Activities Fee, and would love to hear from you about the process and how it went for you as students.

JENNIFER JOHNSON: Yeah. Thanks, Mary Jo. And yes, good evening, everyone. So as Mary just stated, I am the current Chair of the S&A Fee Committee. And I just want to kind of put it out front that the goal this year was very different than it's been in the past. This is my second year serving, but we had heard from students, right? We had sent out surveys and listened to concerns that the services are-- because they're not being offered in-person, students were feeling like their fees weren't going to as many options as normal.

And so the goal of our committee this year was to really try to find a balance between ensuring that the groups who receive these fees are able to continue to support our students, to continue to provide those online, virtual, or any programs and services they can while also addressing that student input of reducing those fees that they're paying.

And so as a committee, I will say we were really impressed with how innovative the groups were being in order to continue to provide those services and programs to our students, and I'm really excited to see, actually, what comes about in the spring and how they use those fees. And I know the committee, we were really glad we were able to lower that total fee being collected in the spring, but just know, there was a lot of deliberation.

It was a hard discussion for sure, but we really feel that what we came to will allow those groups to continue to provide the services and also help our students a little bit. So yeah. I think overall it was good. It was good input from the students, from faculty, staff, and administration.

MARY JO GONZALES: And the great news is that several student boards made the decision to offer either credits for this fall or credits for the spring in terms of a reduced collection of that fee. So many of you will see on your statement for the bills, will see that it says, here's a credit, for example, the Chinook fee or a credit for SRC or a credit for the health fee.

Just plan and remember that you're going to have that on your statement, and those will count towards credit for your spring bill. So the great news is that you'll have some of that refunded. It'll be about \$75. And for the Tri Cities Campus if you're on here, it's about \$146. So those are some great numbers and some great opportunities to give it back.

So Phil, if you don't have any other questions-- or I'm assuming you'll have questions for me later on, but I think I definitely wanted to announce that pretty early on about fees.

PHIL WEILER: So Mary Jo, I'm looking at the chat function. Someone is asking in the chat if they get more than \$75 off their fees if they're willing to sing the fight song. I would say we need to take that under advisement.

MARY JO GONZALES: Ooh, that's an interesting-- OK, we might have to explore that further, absolutely.

PHIL WEILER: There you go. So Jenn, thank you for giving us the background on the student services and activities fees. I think that in my experience, I think sometimes people are kind of not clear on how those fees are set, who votes for them, are they things that the administration puts in place? My understanding this is essentially like a students' design to tax themselves. Is that-- could you maybe spend just a minute kind of giving us sort of services and activities fees 101 just so we really understand what it is we're talking about?

JENNIFER JOHNSON: Yeah, absolutely. I will say as a student my first few years, I really didn't know what those fees I was paying went towards, and it really wasn't until I got involved at GPSA. But yes, that's exactly it. These are groups and organizations-- Mary Jo can correct me, but 15, 16 groups on campus that receive these fees that students pay, and they use them to provide services and programs and events to the students.

So some groups that you see on this call, such as GPSA and ASWSU receive a portion of these fees so we can help our students provide programs, services, events. Same with SEB, Access Center, Women's Center, all these groups that provide really valuable services, I think, that really help our students are using those fees. So the money you pay, hopefully in the end some of that comes right back to you.

PHIL WEILER: I think that's a great description. As I've talk to students about these services and activities fees, what I've tried to explain is the fact that it is the students who decide what the fees should be, and it's-- I think appropriately we ask the students to decide if we're going to make a reduction in the fees, what are those services do you think that you can live without as a student? What are those services that we should not be funding this time around?

So I know from experience that it is a huge job to serve on that committee. You all have really long meetings and have many, many people who come to you searching for funding, and so thank you for being willing to do that and for chairing that group. Mary Jo, I want to go back if I could just quickly, you mentioned about the idea of the holiday break, the Thanksgiving break coming up. I just think it bears repeating.

If someone is choosing to travel back to their permanent address, what should they be doing now? What should they be thinking about over the next eight to 10 days.

MARY JO GONZALES: Yeah. If you're planning to return home, and frankly, we know some-- we know a lot of you are. I really wish I could actually travel home to California and see my family, so I'm excited for you to do that. But you really need to be thinking about being gone from campus for two months. Because if you go, we want you to stay there so that you're not bringing any of that disease possibly back to the Pullman community.

We also are-- remember, all of our classes, we did have some courses that were going to be-- were in-person up until November 20 and they moved to remote. So all of our operations in terms of the academic side-- Craig can talk about some of that-- are moving to that remote environment. And so we want to make sure that you're going somewhere, you're going to stay there.

You also want to make sure when you pack, you're packing your chargers. Those are classic. Any textbooks that you think you might need from now until the December-- or January when you return to campus. I also want to make sure you get tested. One of the things that we are-- it's important to know your status. It's important to know if you're positive, it's important to know if you're negative, and it's important to act as if you have the disease at all times, which means, of course, wearing the mask and doing all that we're asking you to do.

So pack for two months. Make sure that you know what you're going to be doing. Really travel safely because we also know winter weather is not that easy to navigate here on the mountains, and we always want to make sure that you're taking care of yourself in that. But again, pack as if you're going to be gone for two months, because often folks are forgetting that as a part of the process.

PHIL WEILER: And one thing that I mentioned at our earlier town hall today, and I'll say again, too, right now, you will be gone from your-- if you are in an apartment or a rental house here in Pullman and you're going home and not coming back till January, make sure you clean out your refrigerator, because if you don't, by two months' time, that refrigerator is going to be pretty nasty and it's going to be a really disgusting job to clean it when you get home back to your apartment.

So anyway, thank you, Mary Jo. I'd like to move on to some other folks if I could quickly, and I'm going to turn toward Jill if I could. Jill, there was a conversation a couple of weeks ago about the idea that we would be looking at expanding the number of students who could be living on campus, either in residence halls or apartments. I understand the deadline-- the first deadline for that was on Sunday.

Can you just talk to us a little bit about why did we decide to add additional people in our housing facilities, how many people did we have this semester, and what's our hope for next semester?

JILL CREIGHTON: Thanks, Phil. I am really excited that we're going to be able to welcome back any first-time first-year student who'd like to live on campus with us for the spring semester. This is really different than what we did in the fall. And so I want to first thank our fall semester residents for doing exactly what you needed to do to keep your community safe.

We had really strict COVID-19 regulations in the residence halls related to required face masks in public spaces, limitations on the number of folks that could be in one residence hall room at a time, limitations on how common spaces could be utilized, and those will be continuing into

the spring. But because our fall residents were able to demonstrate that they were willing to do whatever they needed to do to keep the community as safe as possible, we're able and confident that we can add more students for the spring semester.

There are a few things that are still going to look very different than a non-pandemic year. The first is that there will be no roommates. Everyone will be in single rooms. And so if you have heard stories about roommates that have gone amazingly well and have been best friends for the next 80 years, you may also have heard stories about folks who really had some struggles with their first-year roommate. So regardless of those stories, your story will be that you got to live in a single your first year.

We're also keeping the bathroom ratios very low, meaning that we are limiting our bathrooms to approximately four students to each bathroom unit. And so that gives us some more flexibility in terms of how many folks are in populations in certain spaces. And we will be opening more physical halls with low capacities for this coming spring.

We are still maintaining the sequester residence hall for anyone who may need to isolate or quarantine due to a COVID-19 exposure, and students in that space also have concierge meal service available to them and direct contact with a lot of

Staff. And we're opening our halls for two reasons, really. One is we heard from you. We heard that you want to be here, we heard that you're missing your Coug experience, and we heard that you think you can be more academically successful if you're here. So it's important for us that you have the space that you need, including infrastructure like strong internet, in order to get your academic situation in a place where you want it to be. But also because we heard you want to connect with other Cougs.

And so again, because we learned that our Cougs here were able to do that with low infection rates in the residence halls, again, we're welcoming back any first-time first-year student who would like to join us. We did have a priority deadline pass this weekend, but we still do have space available for anyone who would like to be here. So please do submit that application at [housing.wsu.edu](https://housing.wsu.edu) and we'll be able to connect with you.

Now if you did have an application that you deferred from the fall semester to the spring and you haven't yet told us what you want to do, please do that as soon as possible. As long as you have made the appropriate choice before January 18, we are able to offer some refunds from your initial payments and deposits that you made in the fall. But after the 18th-- so January 19 or forward, then our contract looks a little bit different.

If you are coming on to campus, though, you can expect to take an arrival test for COVID-19 before you move into your residence hall room. You can expect to quarantine until you receive that result, which we're hoping to get to you very quickly. And you can also expect a targeted screening and additional testing for residents throughout the spring semester. So I think those

are the big highlights for spring semester in residential housing, and if you're joining us, we really look forward to meeting you.

PHIL WEILER: And Jill, thank you for emphasizing that. If people are still interested, there is still space available. So we can hopefully-- I'm looking at our chat here. Hopefully the subject matter experts can put a link into the chat for YouTube, so if somebody does want to learn more about opportunities to live on campus, where they can go for that.

Christian, I'd like to turn to you. You are the President of the Residence Hall Association. Can you talk a little bit about what the experience has been like for those students who are in residence halls this fall semester? What have we been doing to help build community?

CHRISTIAN SHAFFER: Absolutely. It all really starts with just trying to adapt the Cougar experience-- and kind of adapt the Cougs mentality moving into a new kind of atmosphere under the COVID era. So students coming into the halls, obviously they know that they're living by themselves. Predominantly for academic reasons they're coming in and living alone.

So one of the big things that we've tried to encompass in the halls is just providing a level of connectivity, providing a level of just the normal things that would happen just obviously in a safer area. One of the real big things that we've tried to push as an organization is not only giving opportunities of resources for mental health and connectivity events and programs, but we're really trying to adapt the way that students view the situation. We really want to give ways that being like-- that you're more than just coming in and just basically trying to give that sense of community in a new way.

We've seen a lot of efforts through our Housing and Residence Life Department trying to build upon this foundation we're trying to establish. And one of the big struggles that we've seen in the past few months as it gets into those wonderful Pullman winters is that the weather does affect students' mental health.

And so not only is us partnering with groups trying to give these connectivity resources, but we're really trying to keep that connection and the Cougar spirit moving forward. And so what does that mean for residential advisors to everyday passes throughout the halls and masks? Really just trying to keep students together and keep students moving forward in a way that keeps the sense of Pullman and that community basis that we all know and love moving forward.

So yeah, that's really what we're trying to do and really what we've seen. And we're really hopeful with the testing numbers and the sense of just programming moving forward and getting people involved.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thanks, Christian, I appreciate all that you're doing to help our residents who are in the residence halls. So this is interesting. Jill, I'd like to piggyback a little bit on

something Christian said, and also something that Mary Jo mentioned at the beginning, and it's actually in reference to a question that a parent had submitted.

Mary Jo mentioned that she is going to be-- she's been participating in some events that are available remotely for students, and it sounds like she's got something going on this evening as well. We heard from a parent who was concerned that their student was not aware of the options the opportunities to be involved even-- in a virtual kind of setting. So can you talk a little bit about support services, connection opportunities that might be available for students who aren't able to be on campus and living in the residence halls?

JILL CREIGHTON: The vast majority of our student services have remote engagement available for all students right now, including spaces like the Access Center if you're in need of an accommodation, spaces like the Office of the Dean of Students if you need direct student support, Counseling and Psychological Services and our medical clinic within Cougar Health Services are open right now. Some remote appointments are available depending on your need.

Our Rec Center has done some amazing work with online fitness courses, as has our Chinook Student Center, and a number of other places around campus. If you look at our Women's Center, they've done a FemScouts program that's digital. Even our Center for Civic Engagement ran a bunch of our election events online and did some virtual town squares which were highly successful and highly attended.

The favorite one I like to keep pointing out is our Student Entertainment Board, and our Student Entertainment Board is something that is funded by student fees, and they've put on a myriad of different exclusive programs for WSU students that have been really fun and well-attended. The last one I saw, Jesse Eisenberg, who is an actor, did a Q&A with students. I know I saw the schedule for spring as it's taking place. There are comedians, there are musical artists. I think I saw a mentalist on the list. And so there is a lot of different ways to participate in those types of events.

But I think most importantly, in January, we have a new system, a new technology coming online called Presence, and Presence is a digital suite that allows our students to engage with each other across different clubs and organizations. So when Presence comes online, students will be able to go into that system and find clubs and organizations that are interesting to you, connect with students that are part of the interest that you want to be in. And there's going to be opportunities for virtual meeting spaces as well.

So I want students who have chosen to stay home to remember that we're here for you, and I know that it's really hard to think about what that connection looks like, because it does require a little bit more energy to reach out. And I know it can be really kind of overwhelming, too, just to look at the large number of choices and then just become overwhelmed by looking at you not wanting to do that digging.



So one website where you can go to find centralized information is the New Coug Experience, and that's a great opportunity for you to kind of go just-- oh, there's this one list of things and that might be where you start. But if you're feeling lost or feeling really overwhelmed about even where to begin, you can always start with the Office of the Dean of Students and you can work with a staff member who can help you find the pocket where you might fit.

The other recommendation that I always make the focus is make a study group. All of you are in online classes right now, and there's a lot of folks who would like to make those connections. So even if you don't have a group project, it'd be really great to you to use those connections to meet other people that are academically interested or academically in the same core courses that you are.

So the information is out there. I know it can be tricky to find. So again, the New Coug Experience website is the first place I would direct to you, and then in the spring when Presence comes online, that'd be the other place.

PHIL WEILER: All right. Two really good pieces of advice there. New Coug Experience, that website. Also, I really like that idea of using the opportunity to create a study group with some of your classmates as a way of kind of getting to know them outside of the actual academic setting. I think that's a really good idea. I mean, it's the kind of thing we would do if we were in a face-to-face experience and we should take advantage of it particularly now that we're in a virtual experience to get to know some folks who you wouldn't have a chance to talk to otherwise. So thank you, great idea.

I want to turn now to Colleen Kerr. Colleen has been helping lead an effort to put together a pretty comprehensive testing plan for COVID-19 so that when we do have people return in a limited basis back to Pullman in the spring, that we've got a testing plan in place to really address the needs of the individuals to keep them healthy and really to protect the community as well.

So Colleen, I'd love if you could just spend a few minutes talking to us about that plan. I know there are four main components, and I think this might be new information for some folks. So let me let you take it away. We can talk more when you're done.

COLLEEN KERR: Sure. Thanks, Phil. It's nice to see everyone. Thanks for having me. Thank you, Mary Jo, and your team for all the work you've done for our students. So Jill talked about this a little bit, so let me just build on what she already talked about. First of all, there's going to be lots of testing available for students, so I want to take that off the mind of students and families.

The first part-- the first component, really, is arrival testing. So this is as those of us who are coming to Whitman County, as you are coming, there will be some testing for those of us who are interfacing with campus, either through living on campus or using WSU facilities, participating in WSU sports. We're going to be asking you and offering you and working with

you to have robust arrival testings. So that will happen before you use WSU facilities and before you move into your halls of residence.

The second type of testing is also a type of testing that we'll be familiar with, and it's diagnostic testing. So Cougar Health Services is going to be devoted in spring semester to diagnostic testing. So diagnostic testing really captures two different instances. One is if you have any symptom that-- all of that falls under the categories that the CDC or the State Department of Health have listed for COVID-19, then you would go to Cougar Health Services, or if you've been in close contact.

And realistically, in January and February and March, we know that many of us will fall into those two categories. So students should always feel welcome and able to go to Cougar Health Services for their testing-- for diagnostic testing or for any other type of testing. We will also be offering two other types of testing very similar to what we've been doing. One of them is very similar to what we've been doing this fall.

So that's going to be a voluntary screening testing. So we'll be working to have a location once or twice a week that will be moving around Pullman so that we can get students who are living on campus, we can get employees who are living-- who are living proximate to campus. We will also make an effort to get out into the community so that it's easy and accessible.

And so this is, if you want to go the test for any reason, we want you to have a COVID test, and so we will be offering that. Very similar to what we're doing now, we're doing it this semester with Army National Guard. We're actually hopeful that we will continue to be able to do with Army National Guard. But if not, we have additional health care partners that we'll be working with.

So the fourth type of testing is the newest and most exciting type of testing, targeted screening testing and wastewater sampling. So if you are associated with a WSU building, we are going to be testing wastewater at WSU buildings. And if the wastewater turns from negative to positive then we are going to ask everybody in that building to have a screening test so that we can quickly identify, quarantine, and isolate and keep our population safe.

The other thing that we'll be doing for targeted screening testing, which Jill also talked about, is that some academic programs-- so if you're in an academic program that is a clinical program in Whitman County on the Pullman Campus or you're participating in research, and the Office of Research has some concerns about the lab and the inability to maintain physical distancing, then we will be asking you over the course of the semester to participate in screening testing and targeted screening testing, which is a little bit different than voluntary because there will be a specific time that we ask you to come in with a certain frequency over the semester.

And we have a group of extraordinary faculty. I really want to give a lot of recognition to our faculty and to the areas of expertise that WSU has on this who have been advising us on the testing plan. So I'm happy to take any questions, but there will be lots of testing in spring 2021.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Colleen. And speaking of testing, it's worth noting that the testing that's taking place now is considered voluntary testing. As of Monday, we've completed more than 8,000 tests. So since the first week of September, we have tested more than 8,000 students, faculty, and staff members here on the Pullman Campus.

Colleen, I know that testing isn't just happening in Pullman. Could you talk a little bit about some of the opportunities that are available on our other campuses?

COLLEEN KERR: Yes. So the testing plan that we have right now actually applies to both Pullman and Spokane. And the reason for that is it's different and equally important. So in Pullman, we have a residential campus and we have a rural county. Whitman County is a rural county with limited access to health care. For those of you who are in the medical school, this is the reason why we decided to pursue medical schools, because we have access to health care issues in rural Washington.

For our students and our faculty on our Spokane campus, that's a clinical student population, and those students are in environments where there is perhaps an increased risk of disease spread. So we'll be offering both arrival testing and voluntary screening testing for faculty and students on the Spokane Campus. Those are both being operationalized at the same time, and we will be offering our first test starting January 4, 2021.

For our other campuses, two of our campuses are partnering with local health districts to offer screening testing-- voluntary screening testing on campuses this fall. And so we are going to use that as a model, use that as a pilot to see what may be available to do in the spring. So right now it's being piloted in the Tri Cities. It's being piloted primarily for faculty; however, it is open to anybody-- anyone in Benton Franklin County can participate in that. And then we are working to move forward with that at our Everett Campus which is in Snohomish. So we'll be looking to replicate that model in those campuses in 2021.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thanks, Colleen. I'm just looking here at the chat in the YouTube, and one person was asking if the testing would be free. The answer is that testing will be at no cost to the individual, but the tests are not free. The university is covering the cost of each test, somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred or more dollars. So with the 8,000 tests we've made-- we've provided at no cost so far, we're somewhere in the neighborhood of about \$800,000 that the University has paid to cover the costs of those tests.

It's worth probably noting that-- I think many people are aware, back in July, WSU actually stood up a lab so that we could be testing those samples that we knew we were going to be collecting here in the Pullman Campus. The capacity for that lab is greater than just the needs for WSU. So that lab has actually been testing samples for citizens in the eastern half of the state of Washington since July, which has been really, I think, great for the entire eastern part of the state to be able to have that additional capacity.

What it means is that test results come back much more quickly than they would if we had them backed up in a small number of labs. So we can talk more about that at some point the future if we need to, but that is a great resource that WSU has available that we're extending out to the community. There was-- I guess you did cover the other campuses, so thank you with that. I know there was something else I was going to ask about testing, but I'm sure I'll remember it when I have a chance to talk to Jason.

And Jason, along those lines, maybe I will turn to you right now, can you talk a little bit about what the statistics are currently around testing and where we stand? I know that we did see an increase in positive tests right when classes got started back in August. Where are we today?

JASON SAMPSON: Thank you, Phil. Obviously the narrative has switched greatly from that initial surge we had in August, and we want to make sure people understand what our current kind of status is. Right now, WSU itself, if we just look at WSU and not the county, we're looking really good. We actually are down to about 30 or 40 positive tests in a week. That is a really dramatic decrease from that high of about 350.

So congratulations to the students, you've clearly showed some behavior changes that have actually helped impact that in a positive way. So we really appreciate you guys listening to the message and we hope you will continue that through the Christmas break and also when you come back into the spring. The good news is, we only have 40, but we've also increased the number of testing, and that means our percent positivity is going down dramatically as well.

When we had that surge, we were over 20% approaching 30%, and as of yesterday, we're actually down to about 5% in the student population over the last two weeks, which is a fantastic statistic, and we're definitely moving in the right direction. The bad news, I guess, is what we're all talking about. There is that problem that we're not on an island and we're actually part of Whitman County.

And originally when we had that surge, they didn't have a lot of cases within the community. And we've gradually got a few more cases. And so one of the stats we like to look at and compare to other counties is those cases per 100,000 over a two-week period. And right now we're at 441. Most of those are actually within the county, not in the WSU population.

The good news is that's actually been pretty flat now for about a month. And if you compare it to our neighboring communities in Moscow and Lewiston, they've seen that spike. We're doing really well. Obviously we want those communities to do just as well as we are, but it's good to know that right here with a lot of the behaviors that we've been focusing on and things like that, we have made a difference, and we actually seem to be controlling that transmission.

So please continue to follow those rules and help all your family, friends especially as we approach these holidays season where a lot of people like to get together. We really need to make sure we're just diligent in our behaviors.

PHIL WEILER: Thanks, Jason. I remembered what I wanted to say with regard to what Colleen was talking about. Colleen did mention the fact that we have testing available at Cougar Health Services as well as a partnership we have with the Army National Guard. And I just wanted to put in a plug for the Army National Guard. They have been exceptional partners to us.

One of the things that I've really appreciated is the fact that they are so mobile. They can setup one place today and setup somewhere completely different the next day. What that allows us to do is if we do see that there are increases in positive cases at a particular part of the community-- it could be not associated with the WSU campus at all, they're able to pick up and move and-- during this last semester, they've set up in parking lots at private apartment complexes. They've set up at other facilities in the City of Pullman where we've seen an increase in cases.

So that flexibility and ability to respond very quickly has been really helpful. We talked about this idea of having voluntary testing. There were two main components or two main strategies around that voluntary testing. One is, we made that decision very early on that WSU would assume the cost of those tests, because we knew that cost was going to be a deterrent, particularly for students, and we needed to get as many students tested as possible.

The other thing we were concerned about, though, is we wanted to make these tests as convenient as possible, and that's really what the National Guard has allowed us to do by literally taking the testing to where the students live. Whether it's on-campus or off-campus, students are literally able to walk out of their doors and get a test at no cost to themselves, and that's really helped us, as Jason mentioned, drive down that percent positivity rate, because we're able to test so many people and really be able to identify those people who might be ill who don't realize that they are.

One thing I'll say is if you're interested in learning more about what the National Guard has done to help WSU in this process, there is a story in the WSU Insider website. I'd really encourage you take a look at that. That just actually got posted today.

And I feel indebted to the National Guard for all the help they've provided to us, and I think-- I always have thought of the National Guard as the people we turn to when we've got a hurricane or a tornado or a flood. They are stepping up in this pandemic, in this emergency for us here in Whitman County in ways that I would have never been able to anticipate, so they're great partners.

Jason, I want to talk a little bit as well about contact tracing. Can you tell us who is doing the contact tracing for WSU? Why is that group doing it? How are they trained? And are there any things that they're learning like right now about the nature of the illness spreading in our community?

JASON SAMPSON: Sure. So WSU, just because as our Colleen has emphasized, and Mary Jo as well, we're kind of out here in a great rural area and we don't have a lot of those resources

some of the cities do. So we at WSU for many years now have an agreement in place with the Department of Health that we act as the Department of Health within our own facilities.

So my office here on campus, we actually are the contact tracers for WSU cases. Right now we've been able to train about 25 individuals, employees here throughout campus to actually assist with this, which has been very useful. We actually are able to turn cases around in about four hours from the time they actually we receive that positive data. It's really important in something that actually transmits that quickly that you need to actually contact them and make sure we get them isolated and quarantined if possible.

The training we receive, actually, is from the Department of Health. We follow all the kind of guidance. The state is all using the same form. And we get to find information that helps us with that targeted testing that Colleen talks about. What we try to do is we find try to find patterns. We're not trying to shut anything down, we're not trying to stop programs. We're trying to actually find procedures that aren't working.

So you take this information, and we're not using it-- we're protecting those individual information. We do not share names, we do not share phone numbers, we don't share addresses. What we actually do is take that information and say, you know what? At this facility, it seems like we're having a couple extra cases that we can actually stop just by having people put on a KN95 instead of a mask. Or perhaps we only need two people waiting in line versus three just because we had too tight a line at some facility.

And so that's actually what that contact tracing does. It isolates the people that need to be isolated and gets them the resources they need. It quarantines the people-- that's the people that actually were close contacts-- and make sure they know that testing is available, what the timing is to get that appropriate test to make sure it's accurate.

And then finally, make sure we are changing some of our programs at the university to limit that transmission potential. And so it has really been good to see that in a lot of our programming events. That means the in-person instruction, even in those clinical settings, employees at work, students in the dorm, there's been very little transmission in those organized events.

And so what we are actually seeing is most of the transmission is a social and gathering. And that's not just in the student population, although this is focused on students. That is everybody. That's the employees when they go home. Everybody has those same behaviors. We're very social. We love our family and friends and we like to hang out.

And so that is actually what's been really identified as the primary source of transmission, and that has had a lot to do with the governor coming out recently with some of the guidance that he's come out for the holidays.

PHIL WEILER: Well, speaking of the governor's guidance, I'd like to turn to Jhordin, if I could. I know, Jhordin, in your role as Vice Chair of the University Recreation Association-- did I get your title correct? Advisory Board, excuse me. Jhordin, I know that this is really a moving target and we might be hearing from the governor about some of the services on campus, particularly recreation services. Is there anything you can share? Anything we know where we are today and what we might hear in the next couple of days?

JHORDIN PRESCOTT: Yes, absolutely. So at the moment, both the Rec and the Chinook are open at a lower capacity. However, as the governor continues to issue orders as well as updates, that availability is subject to change. So in the event that the Rec and Chinook do have to close in-person exercise, both facilities will still be offering virtual classes.

So some of the classes right now that we're offering are tap dance, pink glove boxing, Zumba, and yoga, and that's just to name a few. So if you actually visit our website, you can find more information such as dates, times, Zoom information, and different ways on how to participate.

PHIL WEILER: Great, good advice. If people want more information, definitely go to the University Recreation website and find out about those classes, because they are still happening even though we're not altogether. Sweating in the same dance studio, we still have the opportunity to, whether it be yoga or other kinds of courses, take those things online. So thanks, Jhordin, to you and all the work that you and your fellow students are doing to keep recreation front and center for us, because I do think it's an important outlet as we deal with this COVID fatigue.

Jenn and Curtis, I want to turn to you if I could. We've had-- speaking of that sense of disconnectedness, we are hearing that from students, we're hearing that from parents as well that people aren't feeling the same level of connection they would as if we could be in person. In your roles as student government leaders, share your own interactions with students. What are you hearing? What's your advice for students who are having issues with mental health? Who are having issues with feeling isolation? What can they do to stay connected and stay focused?

CURTIS COHEN: Yeah, definitely. Thank you, Phil. And I guess my biggest advice is that there are definitely a lot of virtual events on Zoom, but for me, for example, I try to minimize the amount of time I spend on the webcam. And so something we've done as ASWSU is really try to provide those opportunities that aren't necessarily online.

So for example, last week we had Restaurant Week, which was an opportunity for students to go to a particular restaurant each day of the week, and then we as the student government would reimburse up to \$5 of the receipt. So that was just a fun way for us as students to get out and help the Pullman community, help out our restaurants, and also get a good meal out of it. And it doesn't require us to be on Zoom for a long amount of time.

On top of that, in addition to just working on projects as student government, we're really focusing on how can we work to help offer more mental health services on campus. Some of our projects we're working on, improving pedestrian safety in campus neighborhoods. And these types of projects are available to anyone that wants to join. All you have to do is just go to our ASWSU Instagram page, and you can join one of our committees. And these are really great ways to engage and make a difference here on campus.

PHIL WEILER: Jenn, anything you want to add?

JENNIFER JOHNSON: Yeah. I can first say and mirror everything Curtis just said, but for graduate and professional students is offered through GPSA. So make sure, check this out. Like I said earlier with those S&A fees, we're trying to use those to support you. So please make sure you're looking at, whether it's social media or websites, all the programs and services. Just like ASWSU, we've really tried to revamp all of that to this virtual environment.

And just on this side of feelings and concerns, as a current student myself, it's really easy to connect to these. As GPSA President, I've heard these from all the students throughout this semester, and this prolonged exposure to a virtual environment-- it's not getting easier, right? It's getting a little tougher. And we know students are tired. I know Mary Jo mentioned this. They're scared, they're frustrated. Everyone can understand those feelings.

And so for me, first and foremost, just be kind. And for graduate students, I know it's really hard sometimes to be kind to yourself. It is-- you're in front of your computer, you feel like you need to do research, you feel like you should be working, you should be doing whatever it is because it's right there, and if you're not, you're slacking. That is not the attitude to approach a pandemic where everything is virtual, right?

So take time. I actually schedule out my calendar for like watching TV, going for a run, talking to my family to make sure I do those, to make sure I get away from research, get away from the stress a little bit and try to connect with other human beings even if it's not in-person. I think that's really important.

And I just-- kind of putting out this request to faculty and staff as well, I've heard this from so many grad students. They would just appreciate a quick check-in. I know my advisor's so great about this. She'll send me just a quick text, a funny meme, whatever it is just to make sure I'm still being a human. I'm taking time to care for myself. So I play with my dogs, whatever it is just to relax and get away from that a little bit, destress, I think that's really important.

So again, just to ask to faculty advisors, check in on your grad students. It's really hard for us to take a break, to step away from our even our virtual labs now, and make sure that your graduates are staying healthy both mentally and physically. It's really a good thing for all of us, I think.



PHIL WEILER: Great advice from both of you, thank you. Mary Jo, I know you always have opinions and information to share about how students can make sure that they're staying engaged. Is there anything you needed to add to that?

MARY JO GONZALES: Yeah, Phil. I would just add saying the words "I need help" to someone. A phone call, a text. Just reach out and let us know that you need that. I know right now more than anything, being able to just reach out and connect with someone. I would also say there are things you can do. Don't focus on the things that you can't do.

One of the things-- I have a staff member who loves to go for a walk. We mask up and we walk because that's the relief that we have. Another staff member also likes to go to Ferdinand's and we go pick up Ferdinand's, and then we go to our separate homes. We also deliver Ferdinand's to some folks. For those of you who don't know, Ferdinand's is our ice cream place, the best ice cream in the country.

But do something-- find what you can do and do it. Just don't focus on the don't, and please reach out for help. You're not alone. We're here for you in all kinds of ways and can show up with you in how you need.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Thanks, Mary Jo. Sort of extending this theme of support to students, I'd like to turn to Craig Parks from the Provost Office. And Craig, I know that Provost Office has a number of programs in place to help students from an academic perspective, and also from a technology perspective. Can you share those just in case folks are not aware of some of the resources that are open to them?

CRAIG PARKS: Absolutely. Thank you, Phil. We do indeed have a number of programs that are supporting students on the academic side that have been working very well. So for example, we have a Chromebook loan program that all the student has to do is let us know that they are in need of a machine. We don't ask why, we send it to them. And we'll send it wherever they are.

We have a dedicated help desk website for our Chromebook borrowers. We have right now about 400 students who are using Chromebooks from us. Some have been using them since post-Spring Break. We also know that many students have difficulty with a good strong internet signal. They may live in a place where the coverage is not good, they may not be able to afford it, they may live in a house where other people have to be online at that same time.

To help those students out, we have a hot spot loan program that we do through-- started with Sprint, now it's through T-Mobile post-merger. We have over 900 hotspots out. And once again, all the student has to do is request it, we send it, it comes with four months of free internet access that is very strong. If the student needs to use it for a consecutive-- second consecutive semester, all they have to do is let us know and we can extend that, and we do have a number of students who have been doing that as well.

If they go-- if student goes to our main web page, which is provost.wsu.edu, and hopefully one of the moderators will post that for me, they will find the link that they need to request. It's a very simple form, we don't ask any personal information, we don't ask how much money they make or what their parents' income is. We don't want to know any of that. All we want to know is, do you need one? If you do, you'll get it, and here it comes.

So we have those things to do. We also have for Pullman students an academic hotline that can be called that will connect them immediately with someone who can answer all manner of academic questions for them. That number can also be found on the provost website. Students who choose not to be in Pullman, who choose to be wherever they are, we understand that academically that poses a real challenge.

So we are-- for the spring semester, we are going to have almost double the number of courses that offer some kind of in-person experiential component. So this semester, we had 38 courses. In the spring, we're going to have right now about 67. None of these are lecture courses. All lecture courses remain fully online. All of these courses are courses that have some kind of hands-on learning component.

We have heard from students and from faculty who tried to do fully online hands-on experiential learning in the fall that there were some elements that really didn't work all that well and they would like to have the opportunity to do them in-person potentially in the spring. As Jason pointed out, we've had no transmissions from our in-person experiences at all, and that encouraged us to be a little more willing to let some of these go forward.

Students who choose to-- who have a class like this and who choose to stay at their residence don't have to worry because the only way that an instructor could be approved for an in-person experience is to have a plan to offer an equivalent experience for students who are learning fully online. That was true for this semester as well. The feedback that we've gotten from students is that has worked satisfyingly well.

I will also note, we do have very few courses in Pullman this semester that may have some experiential learning after Thanksgiving. These are clinical courses or courses that involve care provision. And so any student who goes home for Thanksgiving and is, of course, not coming back, you don't have to worry because your instructor is ready with that and they will seamlessly transition you.

PHIL WEILER: Great. Good information there. Thank you, Craig. One thing I will add to what Craig was talking about with regard to the Chromebook loaner programs and the hotspot loaners is early in this move from face-to-face to virtual actually last semester, we recognized that Wi-Fi access was going to be critical for students.

And so WSU started a program where we were going to make Wi-Fi available in parking lots of all of our facilities, whether it be the campus locations or our extension offices in all the counties in the state. We ended up partnering with the state of Washington on that effort, and

now-- if I remember my numbers correctly, we have more than 600 spots around the state of Washington where people literally can just drive up and get access to Wi-Fi. So that could be added a WSU extension office, it could be at a public library, it could be a variety of locations.

And so if that is a need for somebody, if they are in a situation where they're needing to share that Wi-Fi signal with their parents and with their brothers and sisters and other folks in the home, that is an option where you can go to a different location to be able to get access to that free Wi-Fi.

I'd like now-- we've got-- we're running a little late on time and I don't want to stop without addressing an issue that actually was posted in the chat in YouTube, and that had to do with financial support for students. There was a concern about students being able to handle the financial hit, quite frankly, that COVID is causing. And we've asked Brian Dixon to join us from Student Financial Services. Brian, can you talk a little bit about those financial resources that are available and what your Student Financial Services staff do to support students as they're trying to navigate this really difficult financial situation?

BRIAN DIXON: Thanks, Phil. Real briefly, I just want to say, all the work that the Cougs have done and demonstrated their resiliency during this time-- I'm the parent of a student who just went away to college for the first time last year and also a senior who's going to be graduating in December, and I get the sense of sort of, I didn't sign up for this flight.

So Student Financial Services is really here to work, to help and assist with all the various needs that we have. This has not just been a health crisis, but it has been an economic crisis as well. And so some really sort of quick reminders for folks. The FAFSA is open for next year. The scholarship application is open for next year. I'm sure that our folks can put that in the chat. And here is the website-- I'm trying to point to it. [Finaid.wsu.edu](http://Finaid.wsu.edu). You can go there and get all kinds of great information.

For the upcoming spring, students who are not in the health sciences, we have sent out information that the start date of the spring semester will shift. And because federal financial aid is regulated, that we can only start dispersing 10 days before the start of classes, we will be delaying the disbursement of spring aid for those students who are not in the health sciences.

And in that link it will show the specifics about that. What we're working on creating was we were originally going to disburse all aid on January 4. That will shift about eight days to January the 11th.

We really encourage students to make sure that they sign up for Direct Deposit, update their Direct Deposit information, update their address. If for some reason they're not able to sign up for Direct Deposit, the university has shifted its late fees, which is usually 10 days into classes, has shifted that to February the 2nd. And again, I'm sure there's a link that our moderators are putting there so you can get this in case you're not scribbling it down quick enough.

We're also working on creating a short-term advance loan for students who are of high need, who that eight-day shift may cause some hardship on the level that they may not have access to basic necessities. We have as an institution since last spring distributed well over \$12 million in emergency aid to students and to families, and we are seeing a number of students and families who are finding a need for financial aid for the very first time.

We encourage you to reach out to us. We have been averaging less than about two minutes at this point in time on a wait time when you call us and you try to reach out to us. You can schedule an appointment with an advisor, and they're generally responding back to emails in the same day. Please, please, please do not wait to the last minute to the start of the term when everybody tries to call. We will do our very best to respond at that time if that's necessary, but if you're thinking that you have a concern, we really encourage you to reach out right now so we can do our best to help and support you.

PHIL WEILER: Thank you, Brian. I note that the website for financial aid is listed in the chat for YouTube. So thanks to our content specialists who are sharing all those resources. Some good information there. Mary Jo, we're a little bit past the hour. I want to see if you have any concluding remarks before I say the thank yous and let people get on with their evening.

MARY JO GONZALES: Does that mean we're going to sing the Fight Song?

PHIL WEILER: Well--

MARY JO GONZALES: It does, doesn't it?

PHIL WEILER: Let me do that, then. Let me say to everybody, thank you very much for joining us. This is an important opportunity for us to be able to speak directly to students and parents. And I know that 5 o'clock is not the most convenient time for people who are working from home. We wanted to do it in the evening, and we hoped that this time would work for folks.

So thanks for joining us. Thank you to our panelists. We had a lot of folks and really appreciate they made themselves available. Also to our subject matter experts who are handling the chat section, that was great to have you all there. And we were talking about the Fight Song at the very beginning, and hey, we can't end a Mary Jo event without singing the Fight Song. So with that, let's hear the Coug Fight Song.

[MUSIC - ZELLA MELCHER AND

PHYLLIS SAYLES, "WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY FIGHT SONG"]

COUGARS: Fight, fight, fight for Washington State! Win the victory! Win the day for Crimson and Gray! Best in the West, we know you'll all do your best. So on, on, on, on! Fight to the end. Honor and Glory you must win! So fight, fight, fight for Washington State and victory! W A S H I N G T O N S T A T E C O U G S! Go Cougs!