



Where do we go from here?

Practical solutions for private higher education in the age of pandemics



DYNAMIC CAMPUS WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Frederick G. Slabach, President, Texas Wesleyan University

Welcome everyone, and welcome to *Where Do We Go from Here? Practical Solutions for Private Higher Education in the Age of Pandemics*, presented by Dynamic Campus, the strategic technology partner for higher education since 2003. I'm Fred Slabach. I'm the president of Texas Wesleyan University, and I'll be your host for the next hour as we dive into some of the most pressing issues, and there are more than a few to choose from that are facing higher education. And in particular, we're going to be focusing on the issues as they relate to small, private colleges and universities across the country this spring and as we look to the future.

Just for a little background, Texas Wesleyan University has about 2,400 students, about 1,800 students in the undergraduate program and 600 in various graduate programs. To ensure that we get a variety of perspectives on the issues, I'd like to welcome two additional leaders of higher education who are part of today's panel. Dr. Leslie Pollard is the president of Oakwood University, home to approximately 1,600 students in Huntsville, Alabama. Dr. Pollard has served as president of the institution since 2011. I want to thank you for joining us today, Leslie.

Leslie N. Pollard, Ph.D., D.Min., President

It's my pleasure, thank you.

Fred Slabach

Dr. Mary Ann Gawelek has served as the president of Lourdes University since July of 2016, after spending nearly 20 years as the chief academic officer at Seton Hill University. Lourdes University supports approximately 1,400 students from its campus in Sylvania, Ohio. Welcome, Mary Ann. Glad you're with us.

Mary Ann Gawelek, Ed.D., President, Lourdes University

Thank you. Great to be here.

Fred Slabach

So, let's dive right into the questions, shall we? The first question that I want to ask to Leslie and Mary Ann really is a very general one, and just to ask the impact that all of this has had on your students, faculty, and staff, the effects of distance learning, remote work, and no in-person institutional services. Can each of you just share sort of a general overview of the kinds of effects that all of this is having on your faculty, staff, and students?

Leslie Pollard

Well, if I may offer, I think that the impact has been ... It's a continuum. I think the impact represents different challenges that settled upon the campus when we realized that we'd have to close the traditional classroom and face-to-face operation ... was anxiety, as I'm sure Mary could attest to, as well. Anxiety, many of our faculty did not feel themselves equipped for remote distance learning. For the students, a whole new world where the ... At Oakwood, the Oakwood ... which is a nurturing and very supportive and interactive and personal experience. On staff, we are suddenly challenged to work remotely and no institution that I know of higher learning is ... for that capacity. So I think that there were just a number of different apprehensions, anxieties, and ambiguities associated with the disruption.

Fred Slabach

Mary Ann?

Mary Ann Gawelek

I definitely would agree. The first recognition I think all of us needed to make was the affective response, both from our faculty, our students, and our staff. Unlike many crises we face in higher ed, it's also that continued unknown that has impacted people, and I think everybody has done a lot to monitor that. I think for faculty, the folks who were already trained to do online rustled up pretty quickly to get their courses prepared, but there was a whole contingent of folks who weren't ready to do online and really move to remote learning. I would encourage anybody to go to the CQ article on the difference between emerging remote learning and online, because I think that helps frame the discussion a little.

I suspect that everybody ... faculty, I think across all of our campuses, exhibited a courage to take this on with the speed that was required and that's pretty impressive. And I think our staff, also, who are so used to at our campuses being high touch, where people call out students' names, where people, when a student is distressed, is used to putting their arm around them, this was a different world to start doing that work remotely and doing it for many people by Zoom. And I think our students also dealt with this somewhat differently. Our students who struggle a little bit more academically, the idea of doing this fully online I think raised their anxiety, particularly mid-semester. And even students that have deep academic skills still had to shift how they were thinking. Obviously, our seniors particularly dealt with deep disappointment as this is the way they finished their last semester.

And I must say, because of the type of residence halls we have and because of the demographic of our student population, we technically stayed open through this period. So as was absolutely necessary, folks could come to campus for support.

Fred Slabach

I'll just add that at Texas Wesleyan, there was a sense among faculty members of disciplinary humility, the idea that they knew they were not going to be able to finish the semester and be able to cover the material in their discipline the way that they would normally like to be able to. There was a certain amount of humility that they approached, "Okay, what is it that we are going to be able to do?"

And I'll mention, too, in terms of the students, there's, as you've mentioned, a lot of anxiety and I especially hear it from our seniors, the sense of disappointment that four years has been building up to this last semester and a sense that somehow they're missing out on a lot of things. We've really tried hard to put as much of the activity that would normally be experienced in a senior year in virtual format, but it's just not the same. So there's a huge impact, I think, in our students.

One of the specific areas that I know there's been a lot of discussion about has to do with those of us that have various health professions programs on our campuses and how we're dealing with the requirements for lab and clinical support given the current circumstance. At Texas Wesleyan, we have a graduate health professions program that includes nurse anesthesia, family nurse practitioner, and counseling, and at the undergraduate, athletic training and some other programs. It's been very, very challenging to try to help those students complete their clinical activities. Mary Ann, I know you've got a lot of health professions on your campus as well that have been really disrupted. The clinicals have really been disrupted.

Mary Ann Gawelek

Yes. So about 40% of our student body is in health sciences, so this was a huge issue for us. When we first went online, we said, "Well, maybe we could do some labs face to face," and then that lasted a week and people started shifting over totally online or through remote. We were actually blessed a little because we had started a professional development training for our science faculty to fully integrate technology into the classroom, so they were already designing lab study with technology support. But there's no question about it, two issues faced it. What were we going to do with labs? Quite honestly, in the hard sciences and in the on-campus labs, faculty picked that speed up and delivered it.

The bigger challenge we still face is folks who have not been able to finish rotations. As we all know, we want to be as helpful to the students as we can to make sure that they can graduate, but these young people have to show competencies in those areas, so we're working that with a tug and pull right now to try and make sure we can get students completed.

Fred Slabach

Leslie, I know you have health professions as well.

Leslie Pollard

Yes. Of course, we've had to be extremely adaptive, everything from how we equip our professors to trying to do some of the work remotely. We purchased a virtual cadaver probably two years ago, which

was a really very helpful ... And through a combination of ... And of course, we're all finding our way on all of this, but from what our faculty report, a combination of Zoom, experiments online, conversations, graphics, visuals, some technological distancing ... We're trying to make it to the end of the semester, but again, as many institutions, we know that the work in the labs is always very hands-on mentoring and that's the piece that has had to kind of go away since ...

So I think our faculty are trying to work it out as best they can through a variety of different methods, because we do have seniors who are actually graduating and getting ready to go off to medical school and dental school and pharmacy school and other items like that.

Fred Slabach

And especially for the health professions that require the clinical placements as a part of licensure requirements. This is probably what we've discovered. We have the largest graduate nurse anesthesia program in the country and what we've discovered is that because there are fewer or in some cases no elective surgeries taking place, the nurse anesthetist students are not able to get enough procedures. The licensure requirement is actually based on the number of procedures that are conducted that the student can participate in, so for some of our health professions, it is going to actually extend the time before they can complete their clinical experience for purposes of licensure.

What's interesting is it's not even just the hard sciences. I think of our music and theater students and those kinds of students who ... it's not really labs, but it's the same sense that the way they learn is experiential. And while we can replicate some of that virtually, we're really not able to do all of it. Our music program, for example, is doing a lot of group performances and practices virtually, and some of what they've been able to do is quite remarkable. But in almost every discipline, there is some aspect, at least where we and I think most small private colleges and universities have done, that is very experiential and very hands-on. It's taken quite a toll on our ability to do that.

Mary Ann Gawelek

I think our students and faculty in the arts have done amazing work to make this work. They showed their innovation and creativity. I actually just saw a video last week of a student working on a art project at her house, showing the instructor where she was getting stuck, having the studio instructor respond. So I think you're right, Fred. I think people have tried to do those workarounds, but for folks who are used to doing the face to face, it's hard. And for those who teach, it's hard to do the delay and the response. I think that's the challenge. And you're also seeing ... I think most of us do some form of internship or experience in the field, so our teachers might be short hours, folks who were in the internships in major companies. While they're not regulated by accreditors so much, they also will miss that experience or have to make it up at some other time.

Leslie Pollard

Fred and Mary, are you finding ... just in the interest of dialogue. Are you finding that for all of the challenges of the new environment, of our having to mediate our delivery of education in the current environment, are you also experiencing ... as we are at Oakwood ... that there are some creative edges and some marvelous adaptations that we would not have undertaken had we not been pushed by this disruption? We're getting testimonies like that from our faculty. For instance, this past weekend ... we mentioned music. Our choral director, Dr. Ferdinand, who leads one of our groups called the Aeolians, put together just a marvelous piece remotely ... a choral piece of We Shall Overcome ... and adapted it

to the coronavirus and the pandemic fight in which we find ourselves. We would never have done that before, and it's amazing the impact of that piece through the use of visual and artistic media. Are you finding also this push to be more creative and adaptive than we even imagined that we could be in spite of the inconveniences?

Mary Ann Gawelek

I think you speak to what is, I'm sure for each of us, an amazing ability for faculty and staff to think creatively and be innovative in this time. And also, to figure it out with the students in the moment. So in some ways, the students figure out how to make this work, talk with their faculty, and then they can move them. We have a service learning component on campus and seniors were worried about completing their second semester. Well, our art therapy students started sending art projects to nursing homes, or our folks who needed to do something in teacher ed figured out how to do their work with their cooperating practitioners online. That kind of creativity actually just brings out what we know is the strength of our communities, right?

Fred Slabach

I think that another silver lining ... if you might look at it that way ... is that for our faculty members who were not used to using technology at all in the classroom or very limited have actually found that in certain circumstances, they get more student interaction or that there might be some things that they can do in the class that actually have better outcomes. Not to replace the face to face, but that even after the current situation passes and we go back to face-to-face classes that there will be more technology, I think, used by our faculty members. I know that's certainly something that we're seeing.

One of the difficulties for most of us in our campus is the on-campus experience is such an integral part of what we do and it's that connection with the students that's so important. I'm wondering what you're doing outside of classes to try to stay connected to students at your universities. Leslie, is there anything that you're doing that you've found to be particularly workable to stay connected with the students outside the class?

Leslie Pollard

Yes, yes, Fred. We've had to ramp up our communication with our students. So simply from the administrative side of this, we've increased our online presence in multiple ways. Every week, I do a text directed to students and employees, so we've got a text messaging service. We've ramped that up. We also have a broadcast ... We operate a radio station called WJOU, so we encourage students to tune into that. Every Monday and Thursday morning, we do an 8:30 radio broadcast called Inside Oakwood, and we talk about just a whole range of things right now during the disruption. So that's a new innovation for us. It's simulcast on Facebook as well as YouTube. So we're doing those kinds of things.

For worship experiences ... because we're a committedly religious institution. For worship experiences, we have an e-chapel that we do every Thursday morning that the students are able to log into. Then of course, we went ahead and we purchased the full suite of the Zoom technology and we use that. The faculty are using that to have conferencing and conversations with our students. So while the technology is the challenge, the technology is also the vehicle for us working to try to stay in touch with our student body.

Fred Slabach

Mary Ann, anything on your campus that you think has been particularly effective?

Mary Ann Gawelek

Yes. I'm just still struck. I had a little moment of envy about that radio station, Leslie. I think all of us are doing this. We have ramped up contact. I probably have doubled my communication with students, just so they hear from me. We have been doing joint significant people in students' lives for their advising sessions through Zoom. The students seem to like that a lot. And boy, I would give a great round of applause to our student life people who have been running contests and games and floating pictures and activities. In the beginning, I wasn't sure our students would respond, but everything that they're doing hits a small segment of the campus. So I think our students are feeling in contact. We've had special activities for our seniors, who I think have a different experience with this, trying to particularly celebrate what they had done on campus before this all hit and trying to figure out what the next steps would be.

Leslie Pollard

Fred, may I just add to what Mary is saying. Similarly, just this past weekend, we did something ... We've done Alumni Weekend at Oakwood. That's a really, really big event. We've done Alumni Weekend for 53 years. First one was 1967. But we did it virtually this weekend, and we didn't know how we were going to do this. Yes, we bumped into some glitches with the technology, but if you just happened to Google online, "Oakwood Alumni Weekend," the reviews have been just overwhelmingly affirmative as ways of staying in touch with not only our current students, but also our alumni who are so generous in their support for the institution. I think all of us are just learning new ways to do the work that in many ways I don't think we would have been pushed to do, so I see the opportunity in all of this, as well.

Fred Slabach

I'll just add one specific thing that our student life folks did. They told me they were going to run a game night, and I assumed what that meant was typical electronic games. And they said, "No, no, no. The old fashioned board games, but you can actually ..." I guess there are ways to do that virtually. And so they actually did that and it attracted quite a nice little audience that they had.

We've been talking a lot about the students and the faculty. How are you managing the operations side of the institution with everyone working remotely for the foreseeable future?

Mary Ann Gawelek

I can jump in if you want me to. I have been enormously surprised at how quickly everybody adapted to working from home. But we actually worked with folks and said, "This is a hard transition. Let's do some things." So we encouraged everybody to reach out to their supervisor or peer and kind of set their day at the beginning of the day, encouraged people to call as well as to do email back and forth. We do a check out at the end of the day. We did that certainly for workflow, but more importantly we did it because we're a highly human contact community and we wanted to make sure folks didn't feel out of touch with people. So we really tried to take that stance. We've reassured people. We think we're going to be able to hang in. So people who could work from home remotely were able to do that. There's a

couple people who also did sick and PTO time, but the majority of our folks have been on task all through this.

Leslie Pollard

Yeah ... [inaudible] I attended a meeting in early March, Alabama Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and there were 24 presidents in that room. We did a kind of around-the-room poll. Interestingly, almost to a person ... Each one made a statement like this: doing online was a fairly easy ... well, an easier transition because we had been doing some of that already. But working remotely had a far greater degree of difficulty than we could have ever imagined because we just were never designed to do that. So for us, we had a university responsiveness task force that actually worked out a design and then an implementation phase of how to quickly accelerate our ability to work remotely from the institution. Now, we still ... Again, it's a learning curve and we all are still trying to figure out how to do it and how to do it effectively, how to do supervision remotely, what do work plans look like, what should the days work product ... all of those kinds of mechanical questions.

It's a journey. I guess the answer to the question is, how are we managing it, it's actually a journey that we're on. One of the things we also did that when we saw that we could not immediately transition everyone to remote working ... We did ask our employees to begin to move into utilizing vacation time, et cetera, et cetera, because we also made a commitment to keeping our workforce intact. So we're trying to balance the financial impacts with the operational necessities and still have the kind of institution that on the other side of this is the institution that the students left and when they come back, it's still intact for them.

Fred Slabach

I'll just add that on the operations side, so much of what we were able to do so quickly had to do with the technology, and of course some of the issues that we had to deal with related to technology. I can tell you that it's been phenomenal being able to have that in campus to help us through all that. Everything from getting additional licenses for certain VPN kinds of things and some staff and even students not having the kind of technology that they need at home to be able to work remotely, all of those issues that we were working through tended to relate to the technology side. So those are the issues that we've really focused on.

want to shift a little bit and talk about recruiting new students. A big part of what we do to close the deal with so many of our students is the campus visit and because we're probably not going to be able to have ... We certainly can't have campus visits now and may not be able to in the summer. I'm curious what you're doing on your recruiting side to sort of replace that. Is there anything that has become a replacement for the campus visit? Or in what ways are you adjusting to the lack of a campus visit?

Leslie Pollard

Well, one of the things ... I'll jump in here. One of the things that we've had to do is to figure out how to repurpose some of our 300-plus employees and actually get them up to speed as quickly as we possibly could and to have them also assist our recruiting team with working remotely. So obviously, there are no visits. Obviously, all of those things have been shut down, so we've basically been using the technology. Cell phones and text messaging and instant messaging and Instagram and all of the technologies for communication. We'll see how this turns out, because again, it's a brave new world that we're trying to impact.

But one of the things we did, I think that has helped, we asked for employees to volunteer to support our call bank in reaching out to students remotely. So we were able to get at least 35 who have been doing that, and the team has been working ... I tried to challenge them to get to 100. We may get there. If we get to 70, I think we'll all be satisfied. But again, we just don't know ... We don't know at this point what this all looks like, but we're getting great responses so far from the students who say they're coming back when school resumes. We're getting good responses from them.

Mary Ann Gawelek

It's actually interesting. We, too, use technology and certainly are fully utilizing people's time. So right now, our retention efforts look like they're on track to a regular semester because we've already done registration for the fall and summer. We pray that that will actually end up being true. I think everybody is using technology in all its realm. Text, emails, phone calls, because it is in fact true that people are answering their phones right now, including high school students, which is amazing to me. We did last Saturday our first virtual registration day and got our first round of new students who were ready to register for class registered that way, which was much higher tech than any registration we would do in person because a lot of individual contact ... We have another one scheduled for a few weeks from now that we're looking at how to do visit days with that realm.

And out there ... at least for Lourdes, and I don't know about both of your institutions ... is the worry about what we will do with our collegiate athletes because our coaches close the deal on many of our students. With that unforeseen what's going to happen in fall, that's been a little challenging in this recruitment retention dilemma. Now, the only good news is they're not going to be swept away someplace else, because whatever is happening to us is likely to be happening on other campuses.

Fred Slabach

In addition to the number of things that we've mentioned, we have actually developed a separate virtual campus tour. It's not the one that generally sits on our website that anyone can go take a look at. This is something that is specific that we have to send them an invitation to participate in, so we're trying to replicate the campus tour in the same way. We actually have a tour guide who is taking the students around. We wanted to make sure that we had something that was different, something that felt as though it was in addition to the general information and the general videos that we had on our website. And we found that students have really appreciated that.

And Mary Ann, to your point about the student athletes and the recruitment there, we actually have something of a separate tour for them that actually takes them into the weight rooms and into the athletic training facilities and all of those to try and give them a sense of what it actually looks like.

I'm curious. There have been a lot of studies, a lot of research that's out there that shows that we're in very uncertain times. One of the studies showed that as many as 1 in 10, a full 10% of the 2020 fall commits have now said that they're sort of up in the air about what they want to do based on the coronavirus uncertainty. I'm wondering if there's anything in particular that you're doing to try to increase your yields for this fall among your committed students to make sure that you actually yield the results that you would normally yield from that pool.

Mary Ann Gawelek

I think this might be our greatest question that we're facing. As we're looking forward to our considerations about next year, we're doing major multiple ways of modeling how we'll move forward. So we're doing some in enrollment projections that assume that students will not be able to come and live in residence. We're doing some modeling that says there will be required social distancing in residence halls, which will lower residence numbers. And we're doing some modeling that literally says, "Okay, everything is as we knew it before except for the economy." So we're doing multiple modeling as we're doing that. We're also giving big ... again, using opportunities to rethink this. I got off a call with the Ohio independent presidents and we said maybe we should think about starting October 1st instead of when we usually start. Maybe we should think about seven-week sessions instead of whole semester sessions to make sure that we could complete courses. We're looking at and talking with our health service providers to say, are there ways we can assure that students will finish rotations and clinical work.

So we're looking at all of that as we're moving forward, trying to create what-if scenarios. We also are definitely looking at decreased projections. There's just no way that that's not going to happen because of the economy.

Leslie Pollard

One of the things that we are doing in similar ... I think all of us are thinking about yields, and to the extent that we can extend applicant interest. We ... that through the repurposing of some of our employees, as I mentioned early. As one of my friends says, "Some were volunteers and others were volun-told," that this is what they're going to be doing during the crisis hiatus that we're having. So on the front end, there's more people trying to reach more people, so we're trying to expand the applicant base and the interest base. On the back end, which is the back door of this, the retention piece is what we're trying to work on because the retention piece gets to how we are sustaining the students who should return back to the institution. Because remember, they're at risk as well. So we've got, really, two at-risk populations here and we're trying to sort our way through fortifying the bases for the interest in the institution and their potential for returning in both of these groups.

Fred Slabach

We've been working with our ... we have a consultant that we use for enrollment management and we've been working with that firm as well as our own internal folks and looking at the publicly available research that's out there, and there's a lot of it. There's so many variables. There are so many possible factors that it's so uncertain. We actually put together three scenarios, all three of which were negative potential scenarios. One was a bad scenario in terms of enrollment, one was a really bad scenario in terms of enrollment, and the third is the one I refer to as the godawful scenario in terms of enrollment, both in terms of new students and retention. There are so many. We actually made the decision to attempt to budget next year based on the worst-case scenario that we put together, and it's extraordinarily difficult.

One interesting variable in this, though, that I still don't know whether it's going to be a plus for us or a minus for us, is that her research seems to show that many students and their parents are rethinking whether they are going to go long distances away to college and that they are actually rethinking whether they might want to stay closer to home. Our particular situation is that we are in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, one of the largest, fastest growing in the country, but many of the potential

students typically go far away from the Dallas-Fort Worth area and we're wondering whether some of those students we may have the ability to recruit better because we are a local option. On the other hand, schools that have students that come from long distances, that may be a negative option. I'm curious whether you've seen any of that research that you think might affect your campuses one way or the other in terms of that potential that especially parents might have of wanting their children go to school closer to home.

Mary Ann Gawelek

I think, Fred, if we can go face to face in fall, I think we will, like you, likely pick up some students who traditionally have gone more than four hours away. So we might pick up some from other Catholic colleges who don't quite want their sons and daughters to live in large metropolitan areas, and we may pick up some students who are in major universities whose families are worried about what will happen through this fall semester. I think just because of our fingerprint, that's a good possibility for us. Of course, that comes with the liability of it will mean if we're able to bring students on campus for residential life, that would be a lower residential population, and I think all of us count on residential students to give both vibrancy but also as part of our revenue stream.

Leslie Pollard

Yeah, I think again, the efforts to be creative and to be responsive and to work with families very closely. As someone said, the winds that blow away from you also blow at you, and if in fact there is a desire to be close to home as Mary's pointed out, there will be people who would want to be close to home at our institutions.

I also think, though ... and I've been saying this on campus and you all can tell me if you think this prognostication is valuable or virtueless. I have a sense that, with this being so foisted upon communities, that the enchantment ... you know, the sexiness of online learning and all of those things, which we've always been fighting against ... I'm wondering might there be a reaction for the next few years, after this is all over, of students and families saying, "You know something? This wasn't what we thought it would be," and they will want the in face, in person, on campus, the kind of experiences that our three institutions and the others who are on the call actually mediate, which is a very personal, interested, nurturing, mentoring experience.

And if that's true, if there's any germ of truth in that, we may struggle a little bit coming out of this in the immediate future, but I think maybe for the next three or four years, there will be a group of students who will say, "I think I really need to be on a campus because the online thing completely wasn't what I thought it might be." I don't know. I don't want to change the conversation, but it is something that I've pondered and I'd be curious to see what my colleagues think of that.

Fred Slabach

We certainly have received a lot of feedback from our current students that they much prefer the face-to-face class, although there are certain aspects of the virtual technology that's being incorporated that they seem to enjoy. But I think overall, at least our existing student population certainly prefers and hopes that we're going to be able to get back to more of a face-to-face model. I don't know whether that's a general student perception across the entire country, or whether it just means that we attract the kind of students that prefer that. I know there is another segment of the population, especially

working adults, that do prefer the totally online learning for very practical reasons. So it may be that there are just segmented markets that we may need to appeal to in the future.

Mary Ann Gawelek

It's actually interesting. I think absolutely the majority of students that we serve, because of who we are as small, close-knit communities want to do face to face. They want human contact. But I do think that what is likely to be maintained through this is much better integrated technology, teaching, and learning in the classroom. So I think everybody has tested that. Our faculty understand it a little bit. I think that's a good outcome of this. I think that the students who really like the online, quite honestly we might lose to different schools or will take our adult learner programs that we do online. I don't think the majority of our students are going to flee to online study. I think they like human contact in a very particular way, and they need the holistic development that a face-to-face campuses allows.

Fred Slabach

We've got one more question before we start going to the questions that have been posed by folks who are attending, and that has to do with ... Have you thought about how the coronavirus going forward in the fall and the spring of next year might affect us? The fact that there could be ... if it's similar to the 1918 Spanish flu, that there were multiple waves of infection ... Have you thought about how that might affect the university's operations, and do you have contingency plans? And specifically, a question that I have and we talk about on our campus is, mechanically, how do we go about actually reopening the campus if we have easing of restrictions? How do we go about accommodating to those eased restrictions. Are we going to be requiring students to be wearing masks, are we going to be taking temperatures, and what happens if we reopen school and then we have a positive case? Have you thought about contingency planning along those lines for next fall and spring, assuming that we are going to be able to reopen at least to some extent?

Leslie Pollard

Well, we have thought about it some but certainly not as extensively as the question assumes. We have tinkered with a few what-if scenarios, at least I know I have in my head. I've tinkered with a few what-if scenarios. For me, much of my attention has been focused on how does our university response task force and those 30 people who are helping guide all these processes ... We were meeting initially three times a week, now we're down to two a week. We're going to be moving to one a week. We think we've got some stability now. But of course, anything could change in this environment. But we've been focused on, how do we keep the current spring semester operational for the students.

There will be a moment ... We've already started thinking that ... We do something at the end of every school year immediately after graduation, a day or two, called university think tanks where we look back on the previous year with all of our faculty and all of our staff. We look back upon what we did well, where we were, then kind of project into the future. And speaking with our provost and some of our other leaders on campus, there is a strong sense that we need to begin to move all of our coursework into the online environment and to have it on the shelf ready just in case there's an August surprise. Right? So that's kind of how we're thinking about it, but our thinking has been in stages. We're just beginning to exhale enough to be able to say, "Okay. Now, what if August does so-and-so." So that's kind of where we are with it.

Mary Ann Gawelek

I think we're probably all thinking in a similar pathway, right? Two weeks, or maybe a week ago now, we announced that we would do all summer online. I think the notion of being prepared to do online and remote learning for fall is something we're saying, "Oh yes, we should be ready for that," in a way that might boost up professional development for faculty during the summer or those kind of options. I also think some of this is driven by what state you live in. In Ohio, we have a very aggressive governor on physical safety, and so I think there could be other parts of the country who say, "Oh yeah, you can have your students return," and our governor would say, "Well, I'm not quite sure." So some of this may be situational to where home is for us, right?

Fred Slabach

I think there's a real potential for a lot of political pressure to build to reopen the economy ... and by that they include us as well ... and the pressure point being between that political idea that we need to open the economy and what the public health officials are saying. And if it's a stage or phase reopening in terms of the size of gatherings and that kind of thing, how does that affect us? One of the things that we're especially focused on is contingency planning for bringing back athletic activities. Because I think even if you can see reopening classrooms with some sort of social distancing involved, the particular problems of athletics and the close proximity that athletes have to have with each other make the athletic program contingency planning extraordinarily important, especially when you think about the fact that many of the programs actually begin practices or at least conditioning before the fall semester starts classes. So we've been putting a lot of attention to contingency planning for athletics as well as our academics.

I think that we've just about gone to the point where I promised that we'd try to save some time for questions that have been proposed by the folks that are participating. Looking at the vote chart that I see here, the number one question that is up asks that in the new realm of the reality of remote learning, has there been any discussion to how budgets will be amended and what percentage that we should figure in terms of attrition. We addressed this a little bit.

Let me just say that from our perspective at Texas Wesleyan, we have assumed about a 15% reduction in retention as a part of our worst-case scenario, those three scenarios that I mentioned, and we're looking at an overall revenue reduction next year of 20% as our worst-case scenario. I don't know, Mary Ann, if you and Leslie want to add anything specific about what your plans might be on that front?

Leslie Pollard

Mary?

Mary Ann Gawelek

Oh, so it's my turn. Leslie, I'm glad that you're keeping track. We are also looking at percentages. We're not looking quite at that high of a percentage for retention. We're actually looking at a more challenging first year admit percentage. Again, that's if we go totally remote. All of our residence halls are apartments. If they let us bring the students back to live in the apartments, that would mitigate this big time, right?

Leslie Pollard

Yeah. Again, we are still trying to calibrate what the future will look like if the majority of our students or some significant percentage of our students find it almost impossible, if not challenging, to return to our institution. We have a significant number of our students who are Pell eligible. I don't know how that relates to your institutions, but as an HBCU, we have a significant number of students who are Pell eligible. When we read the unemployment data and the new applications being filed for unemployment, it just causes us to shudder, because while it affects everyone, I think we know of course it affects many minority persons in disproportionate ways. So we're tracking all of this data and wondering what is it that we need to do to say that no student will be turned away because of finances. What role do our reserves play in that? What role does philanthropy play in that? What role would student employment play in that? How can we create at least ...

Colleagues, one of the things I challenge is ... My mind just went to something else. One of the things that challenges me is when we declare that we're going to open the economy, as a political and economic necessity ... I understand that it's right, what we have now is not sustainable and it's causing more and more damage every day, the closed economy. I'm not so sure that we have figured out what the antidote to the fear that the pandemic has engendered will cause. I mean, what that looks like. What does it look like to respond? That won't make the fear go away immediately, and that's what we have to navigate in our environments. So if we can figure out how to do that, I think all of our constituents will return to our campuses in a stronger way.

But there's so many different dimensions to this right now that I just ... All we can control is what we can control, and that is the budgets we have to plan in a way that says if the bottom falls out, how do we go forward? And I think that's where our thinking will be for the next three or four weeks.

Fred Slabach

And Leslie, you actually touched on another one of the questions that got a lot of votes online having to do with the planning for the financial challenges that the students and their families will be facing and the possible impact on enrollment. You mentioned that you have significant numbers of students who are Pell eligible.

Leslie Pollard

Yes, we do.

Fred Slabach

At Texas Wesleyan, more than 40% of our students at the undergraduate level are Pell eligible, and so we've also been looking at that. Of course, the CARES Act does provide some funding for student aid and we're trying to develop a methodology and objective criteria right now in terms of how to apply that funding. We've also gone out with ... Our mascot is the ram, and so we've gone out with an appeal for Ram Relief to our donor base and have received some positive response there as well. But I think there is a real serious concern because many of our students and their parents are working in service industries that are particularly hard hit by the closure of the economy. One of the concerns that we have is whether or not some of those students may simply say, "We've got to sit out for a semester and figure out how this is going to affect us."

If this were a normal recession, typically in recessions ... at least at Texas Wesleyan ... we've actually seen something of an increase in the number of students, but I'm not sure this is a typical recession. So we are assuming that there will probably be a negative impact on retention that is directly related to the issue of our students themselves losing jobs and their parents losing jobs in the service industry that may cause them to say, "You know what? I'm just going to sit out for a semester and see how all this shakes out."

Mary Ann Gawelek

It's interesting. I think all of our schools ... We're about where you are, Fred, about 40% of our students are Pell eligible and boy, we have been so worried about that group of students because there's not going to be an absolute, but there's certainly going to be a correlative means there that those families are more likely to have been hit with this unemployment. When we sent kids home mid-semester, a lot of those students were able to get some employment working in grocery stores, like that. They're not going to give up that employment and not be able to help their families. So balancing that when we look at the budget, we also are looking at is there an opportunity to do what you're doing with your Rams Relief and we would do with Gray Wolf CLAWS. We're looking for ways to help our donors make sure that these students can continue their studies.

Fred Slabach

I think we've got maybe time for one more question that's on the list, and it is a different one so we should probably really focus on it. Do you think that we will default to allowing people to work remotely? Could it become a hiring advantage to do so? What do you think? Will the current experience lead us to allow more employees to work remotely?

Leslie Pollard

That's a good, good question. Of course, we get that question all the time. We have to poll, of course, our workforce and do a little bit of survey research. My read, though ... and these are all anecdotal reports ... is that maybe it's because of ... the children and everybody are home, too, but working from home is not what [inaudible].

Fred Slabach

Leslie, you're breaking up there a little bit.

Leslie Pollard

[inaudible] from many of our employees that it's very, very difficult. It's a very difficult balancing act, and it may be because the artificiality of this work from home moment is that everybody's at home. So all of the families are at home and all of the other things are working. So this is not a good moment, I think, in reality to actually determine whether or not this is a viable model for the institution because there's so much about it that's not usual. So it'd be difficult to make a real clean determination, at least from my perspective, because there's so much artificiality around the experience that we're having right now.

Mary Ann Gawelek

We have decided when we can take a breath ... which I hope will happen in the next month or so ... that we will spend the time to look at each of the positions on campus to say how easily do those positions allow for work from home. So some are no brainers, of course you could do it from home, you just have to figure out the backdrop to make that work. Some you would never do because they're so person focused, and if we have people on campus, you want them with the students. But it certainly did raise this for us to think about. It also, I think, for us really re-raised the question as we're hiring ... which now most people are not hiring and bringing people on ... but as we're hiring individuals, once the baseline technology expectations that we have for faculty, for staff, in anticipation that ... I believe this is an 18-month event. It'll shift what we're doing over the next months, but as we think about this in the future, how do we really look at the change in expectations for skillsets, both for faculty and staff?

Fred Slabach

And that leads into actually one of the other questions that was answered, the whole technology piece of what we're doing and those questions that got a lot of votes about how our IT departments were able to handle the influx of technology service and the need for online services. I just have to say that if it hadn't been for Dynamic Campus, I'm not sure that we would have been able to handle ...

Leslie Pollard

Same here. Same here. Same here.

Fred Slabach

... the influx as seamlessly.

Mary Ann Gawelek

I would also agree with that. I did not worry about our technology support, the infrastructure, the strength. I feel blessed that we have this good, strong partnership.

Leslie Pollard

And with Mary, I feel blessed as well. For all of the concerns, that was not one of them. That was not one, and I'm grateful for that. I'm very grateful.

Fred Slabach

Well, I think we've run out of time. I appreciate ... I see there are still a lot of participants on the line and I want to be respectful of your time. I'd like to thank Dr. Gawelek and Dr. Pollard for taking the time out of their incredibly busy schedules to be with us here today and to share their perspectives. I thank both of you. I'd also like to thank our host, Dynamic Campus, for putting the webinar together. As you've been able to tell, Dynamic Campus is the IT outsourcing partner for each of our three institutions, and I think that we have all been able to attest that they've been godsend in the current situations and were before. We look forward to working with them.

If you want any additional information about Dynamic Campus, you can find it at their website at dynamiccampus.com. If you want a transcript of this webinar, you can also just email info@dynamiccampus.com and they'll be able to provide that to you.

Well, thank all of you for being here with us today. I hope it's been worthwhile. I want to wish all of you a safe, healthy, and successful spring semester and best of luck as we all navigate these challenges together. I hope you have a great afternoon.

Mary Ann Gawelek

Thank you.

Fred Slabach

Thank you all.

Leslie Pollard

Thank you, everyone.

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