

# FACULTY & STAFF TOWN HALL

THURSDAY APRIL 23, 2020

## PRE-QUESTIONS:

*Q1: Will there be on campus housing next semester? If so, how will we know who is safe to come back and who isn't, so it doesn't spread worse than it already has in Abilene. Will classes still be remote or in person if we do have housing next semester?*

*Q1.1: When can we expect a decision to be made about returning in-person for the start of the fall semester?*

**A1: (summarized) Both questions are related to fall, and it is still a little too early to know where we will be just yet. Three huge things will contribute to plans for the fall, including the governor, the mayor, and the NCAA.**

We responded today to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, outlining what McMurry plans are for May, summer, and fall. We responded with a five-tier phased come back starting from where we are now with a small number of classes in May term, a larger number of classes in summer, and then back in August if we are able to based on what the governor and mayor say, etc.

Our plan, at this point, is to be face-to-face in the fall; however, we know there are virus questions relating to it rushing back. We are planning and addressing this with different strategies. We are starting to design safety protocols, including, what they will have to do and what kind of screening process they will have to follow, etc. We have ordered a number of thermometers, a good number for athletics and the rest of the campus. They will be available and used for May and summer, as we start seeing how we allow people to come and visit campus.

There is a lot of social distancing planning that will take place to make sure people are comfortable with coming back. We know that some people are not social distancing, so everyone is going to have to take responsibility for themselves. I envision that we will have to conduct questions and a code of conduct, in terms of refusing to social distance, if students are living on campus. A student may receive a warning, and if they do not comply, they will no longer have the good fortune of living on campus. Standards will also apply to employees – these expectations will follow along with Abilene public health guidelines, CDC guidelines, etc.

That is where we are. I know that for staff trying to plan, in terms of welcome week, etc., it's slightly frustrating because right now, we do not really know. We are hoping to know more from the governor and mayor



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by the end of April in terms of what they are thinking, and then we can adjust our timelines from there. We might know more in June.

**Q2/A2:** (summarized) Another unofficial question relates to putting two big projects on hold and delaying individual appointments. We are delaying one staff and one faculty hire that we were ready to make. We haven't said no, but we are saying, not yet. We will look at fulfilling one hire in July and the other in August. We also think it is prudent to delay the faculty appointment letters that typically go out in the first week in May. They may be delayed until midsummer.

**Q3:** *Will students be eligible for more federal and state grant aid based on current family financial situations that may have changed since their 2019 tax return?*

**A3:** (summarized) The financial support of students is actually what the CARES Act is trying to address. We have not gotten the money, but we are expecting it either today or next week. We will start distributing those grants from the CARES Act. The plan does take into consideration not just the students that have already filed financial aid. We also know that there are going to be people that might not have needed financial aid. However, their situations have dramatically changed, and they may need it now. When I talked about the 200 students responding to our survey, a number of them were already in need of financial aid. Some of them, however, just got the rug pulled out from under them.

We are also looking at a fundraising campaign. Instead of fundraising for the student center, we are now looking at fundraising for emergency student aid. Our advancement committee and our board of trustees have spent some time talking about that shift.

**Q4:** *Are we going to take advantage of the name similarity and seek out MacMurray College students (the school up north that closed)? And, on the flip side, how do we make sure our students don't get confused and think we are closing.*

**A4:** (summarized) We could, but I'm guessing that most of their students will stay up in Illinois. In terms of the confusion, we have had one of our students say his heart stopped when he saw that that college was closing, but then he realized that is the one in Illinois. It had a jolting effect on him. Sam Ferguson told me that an AD from a rival school up in Illinois was saying it was "too bad that you all are closing" and wanted our athletes. Sam quickly notified him that was not us.

It is possible that we could get some students, but I guess that at this time there are not going to be many students that travel that far. We might have an opportunity if there are some local schools in dire need of closure, but I am not aware of any in the state of Texas in that bad of straits.

There is research that is saying that students are more likely to stay closer to home. This issue came up in the trustee meeting, and this is



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something to think about, that some students in the Abilene or Big Country area, who might have been thinking about going to one of these mega universities, might think that staying closer to home and in the smaller context would be good, at least for a year or so. That is something we are saying to the Coordinating Board and Abilene Chamber of Commerce. Many of our classes are smaller, and it would be easier for us to do social distancing than other mega universities. We do not have to do a one-size-fits-all approach. However, we could provide some kind of safety value for some of those students who wanted to go to the bigger schools but now are a little leery about it based on all these things. The board was discussing how we could use our small size to our advantage. Because if you look at it, the high-density places are the ones that are getting the most cases. So the lower the density, the more you have space to spread out, etc., the more likely it is to keep safe.

*Q5: Executive Order goes through April 30. What happens after April 30? Are the various shelter in places going to end on that date? Are we going to start working from campus in the beginning of May? If not, when do you think faculty and staff will be allowed to work on campus again?*

**A5: (summarized)** If the Executive Order is not extended April 30, our thoughts are that we extend our shelter in place (remote work plan) through May. Because we know that grade schools are closed through May, the additional time will give our employees another month to figure out what to do in the summer in terms of childcare. We might have a different answer if the schools were not going to be closed. Now certainly, employees that want to come back and work on campus, they are allowed to do so. We envision people who do not have children in school and are not having to manipulate childcare, may want to come on back, and start working on campus. We believe June 1 is when people need to start making their way back. This gives them a little over a month to start thinking about summer childcare and making any arrangements needed.

*Q6: Who is on the MID committee?*

**A6: (summarized)** It is a large group. The MID Team is the group that guides us on the overarching issues as we move through this situation. If it is not currently on the website, a full list of the names will be added.

Donalyn Alexander, Dean, Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing  
Carolyn Calvert, Registrar  
Marty CashBurless, University Chaplain  
Robin Daniels, VP for Marketing and Communication  
Sam Ferguson, VP for Student Affairs and Intercollegiate Athletics  
Jerri Gazaille, Executive Assistant to the University President  
Grant Greenwood, VP for Enrollment Management  
Sandra Harper, University President  
Ronda Hoelscher, University Nurse  
Lecia Hughes, Director of Human Resources  
Debra Hulse, VP for Institutional Advancement  
Jim Hunt, VP for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty

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Norm Jones, Interim Associate VP for Enrollment Management  
Charity McCright, Head Athletic Trainer  
Alaisha Montanez, Assistant Director of Communications  
Jessica Nguyen, Director of Residence Life and Housing  
Mark Odom, Director of Security  
Cynthia Rutledge, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Carl Scott, Chair of Campus Safety Committee; Director of Facilities & Campus Projects  
Tim Sechrist, Director of Student Financial Services  
Mark Waters, Director of International Education  
Lisa Williams, VP for Finance and Administration  
Allen Withers, Dean of Students and Campus Life  
Alicia Wyatt, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs  
Terry Young, Library Director

*Q7: Our partner, EDC Paris, would like to send exchange students to McMurry in the fall. By what date will we have made a decision of whether we will be conducting classes online or on campus?*

**A7: (summarized)** It will be contingent on the Texas cases. Right now, if I were a betting woman, Texas is supposed to hit its peak first week in May, if it has not already. Abilene is supposed to hit its peak the following week in mid-May. So, the models that I have looked at show that if everybody keeps doing what they are supposed to be doing, with social distancing and such, it should be going down by July 1. So, in that case, I expect a decision by about the third week in June when the board meeting takes place. Many of the decisions that we are going to make will happen midsummer. I know that people would like it before that, but we have to plan for contingencies.

We are going to be open. We are going to be partially...whatever. In the survey sent out by the Chamber of Commerce, we asked if there was any way we can get to a limit of 30 by the fall. That parameter would cover a multitude of our classes and allow for mostly normal operation on our part. They are compiling comments now, so we will see what happens.

*Q8: Has there been discussion on the impact of our Fine Arts Programs in regards to theatrical performances, recitals, choir concerts, and visual arts showings? Can the art departments design their class (hybrid, online, in person) response as long as it fits in the MID criteria?*

**A8: (summarized)** Fine Arts and performing arts present unique challenges that those kinds of disciplines have. Certainly, I think right now, the faculty in those disciplines need to be thinking: how can we do this; how can we offer classes? The question I had was, is it possible to do an ensemble that is more than 10, if the number is still limited to 10? Is it possible to do an ensemble with whatever number, you need to do thought experiments. We think we figured out that we could do audiences with social distancing and spread them out, but how can you do it with the cast? Do you do it by taking temperature checks at every rehearsal?



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Part of it is an emotional thing too, can we feel that we are doing right by our students in those disciplines? Providing as much as we can because in this life, you're not guaranteed anything. We have to conclude that we cannot hermetically seal everybody to protect them from everything. However, we can do as much as we can, and then say, is it worth going forward with this activity. The faculty, right now, should be thinking about what is central to our discipline, and we have to do this, here is a good way to do it. It is the same way with science labs.

You hear the most difficult thing in the science disciplines is the lab because those are hands-on experiences. All right, how can you safely do that? I hope that the disciplines that had these kinds of activities can present a plan to us, and then decide if makes sense and go forward. Because the best things are to try to get as much person-to-person contact that we can. That is what our university is all about. However, we have the whole scenario of social distancing. We are going to figure out how to work around it. That is what we are trying to do with this May term ease-in plan. The mayor's requirements say you cannot have groups of more than 10, so that is why we set the class size at nine with the professor, so that classes can be done. We are adhering to the guidelines, but we are not doing a blanket, "everything has to be online." That has been part of our strategy in communicating with the governor's Reopen Texas taskforce, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Abilene Chamber of Commerce. Because they are all asking the questions: how do you envision these things ramping up?

*Q9: What about the people who are asymptomatic? Some officials feel there are a percentage without symptoms like no fever? Will masks and distancing take care of this?*

**A9: (summarized)** We probably do not know that, and that is the hardest thing in this business - the asymptomatic people. Because if someone has symptoms, you tell them to go home, that is pretty simple. But asymptomatic is the thing that we are starting to talk about. Do we randomly test a portion of our workforce and student body to just see? One of the things we've been hashing around in the cabinet is that in an ideal world, we would test everybody, every day. But if you think in our country, we're not even testing all healthcare providers. Why would we be able to think we could check everybody every day. Right now, if you test me and I test negative, I'm good for today, but with this whole asymptomatic thing, if I am going outside or go somewhere, and somebody else has it, well I might not be good tomorrow. Somehow, we have to get it in her mind that testing everybody, every day is unrealistic, even if we had all the money in the world. Not even the richest companies can do that, not even the richest health systems. That leads to the fear factor of will people want to come back. I have got a good feeling, but I may be wrong. In my opinion, it is probably going to be the group on this call, the faculty, and staff, that are more concerned than the students will be. But I don't know that, it is just something I think because we've been more into it and pay more attention to it perhaps than the student body at large.



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*Q10: What are the projections for first-year students in the fall? Are we going to have any furloughs or layoffs? With the stock market volatility, how has our endowment been affected? Why do you think McMurry will come out of this surviving and maybe even thriving?*

**A10: (summarized)** We are not sure, and we think it is going to be somewhere in the low 200s for the fall. That is not what we wanted; it is considerably below where we were last fall, which was 255. We are planning for a scenario of a 15% decrease.

As far as furloughs, I think we have to understand that the biggest expense at a university is salary and benefits. So if we do not have the students, which is the primary source of revenue, that cuts into the revenue. If the students are down 15 to 20%, or if we cannot put more than one person in a residence hall room, then that cuts into revenue. Oil income is down; we have some oil interests that people have left us in their wills over the years. I wish I could say that we could take furloughs off the table, but I cannot. That has to be something under consideration.

Those of you, who were here five years ago when we had some financial issues, know we had to trim down. If your revenue is going down, you have to trim down your expenses, so there are various strategies for doing that. Furlough is one of the strategies that have to be under consideration. It will depend on all these variables that we have been talking about this afternoon.

Before this all started, I think the endowment was at about \$95 million. It went down to \$82 million, and now, I think it is in the upper eighties. Value depends on the stock market, which is going back and forth. What the endowment does, in terms of our cash flow, is that we typically take a percentage of what that endowment is as part of our spending policy. We do not ever go over 7%; otherwise, we have to get board approval. We typically like to have it around the 5% mark because then it builds up and builds up. A couple of years ago, we did borrow money from our endowment, but we have now paid it back. I think this is our last payment. It is not impossible that we could borrow, but it is something that we do not want to do.

Our monthly payroll is \$1.1 million, so if we get \$1,000,000 or \$2,000,000, that gets us one and a half maybe two months of leeway. So, you have to figure that even if we could take an extra \$1,000,000 from our endowment or whatever, that buys us maybe a month. That is why we are cautious as a university, and we need to be careful about that individually too. McMurry is saying going forward; we cannot spend money on projects now that we have been working on because we need to hold on to this money. So, we ought to be doing that with our personal finances as well. You never know what's going to happen, and we need that nest egg in case the bottom drops out. It looks like several bottoms have dropped out recently.



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*Q11: Why do you see McMurry surviving this and thriving?*

**A11:** (summarized) McMurry has a long history, including surviving the Depression. Now, if you look at the reason why we survived, it is because a lot of people made a lot of sacrifices. I have to be straightforward with you there. They did not make it without making a lot of sacrifices.

In terms of surviving and thriving, for the same reasons that I have already articulated, we are in a strong financial position. We are a strong community. I think we have bonded – bad times and tough times make people bond and come together. We are going to beat this thing; we are going to crush coronavirus – I'm sick of it. We are a tight community, and the smaller you are, the more likely you can move forward. A strong individual and a strong community – if you're a healthy person going into something bad and something kind of knocks you off kilter, you're more likely to rebound. The reason that it gives me hope and confidence is that we are strong and have lot of momentum etc., going forward. These are pretty hard blows to take, but on the other hand we were we were sturdy going into it. I think in some weird way, we're stronger now. But, we have to be super committed to get this darn thing done and move forward. We will see tough times. I have to just be honest with you there.

*Q12: Have we assessed our classrooms for capacity taking into consideration social distancing?*

**A12:** (summarize) We have not done a class by class assessment I do not believe. You can think about the classes and sizes, and which ones you could go forward with if we are social distancing. We could probably do that fairly easily. But that is a good question and something that we need to do formally and fairly quickly.

Going through and saying ok: six-feet...six-feet. The advantage is that we do not have a lot of big classes. So you think about the classes that we do have that might be considered big for McMurry, but are considered small at Texas Tech, A&M or UT, maybe 50 or 75. Matthews Hall may be getting a lot of business. Radford Hall may be getting a lot of business. Mabee may convert into a classroom. There are a lot of different things that we can do. I do think it is a good idea that we go ahead and do an inventory of each classroom and what that would look like assuming social distance. I think that's an excellent suggestion.



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*Q13: If cases are projected to peak mid-summer, why would we have classes in person before then?*

**A13: (summarized)** Cases are not projected to peak in mid-summer. It will be sooner. They are actually projected to go down to zero in July. For Abilene, we are expected to peak the second week of May. So why have classes right now? We can gather in groups of 10 or less based on the mayor's order. May courses have an in-class, face-to-face limit of nine plus the professor (total of 10). This will be a good experiment for us.

Models show cases are going to be almost to zero by July 1 in the state in Texas. The peak in the state of Texas is supposed to be right now or the first week in May, and then Abilene is the week following that. We are still abiding by the mayor's and governor's orders with gatherings limited to 10 or less. If there is a stricter order put in place, like for example New York City went down to zero – no one could gather, then we'll cancel those nine classes or put them online.

*Q14: It is often said that crises reveal things about a leader. What have you learned about yourself?*

**A14: (summarized)** I think I've learned a lot about the community (McMurry) and how I have reacted to McMurry. It's definitely worth working hard for, and I have seen everybody giving this really good thought. If I were going to say, as a leader, what is it that has been revealed to me? It is the richness of the McMurry community and the committed nature of the McMurry community. I think that it is important for somebody with my title as the leader of the University.



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