

The Extension



President's Message: Dan Abrahamowicz

A global pandemic was not the only difficulty affecting the departments of the Division of Student Affairs during the past year. From the fall of 2019 until recently, the division was absent formally designated leadership.

Finally, in August of 2020, **Dr. Chris Taylor**, formerly director of Community Standards and Student Conduct, was appointed chief Wright State University Student Affairs officer with the title of dean of students. The title "Dean of Students" is new for WSU as for the university's previous 50 or so years the head of the Student Affairs Division held the title of vice president.



According to Taylor and Associate Dean of Students **Dr. Bob Rando**, the title and the existing model for the division makes sense given the size of the university and the departments that remain in Student Affairs after massive budget cuts and shifting administration attitudes and priorities. Taylor and Rando both feel that a compact division with a strong student life focus is what is now best for WSU. The dean of students is part of the president's cabinet and reports directly to the president.

The departments that now comprise the Division of Student Affairs are Campus Recreation, Community Standards and Student Conduct, Student Involvement and Leadership, Pre-College Programs, and Counseling and Wellness Services. Additionally, Residence Life and Housing and Student Union and Events Services are a direct part of student affairs with dotted line reporting for facilities to the executive vice president and chief operating officer.

A walk through the mostly deserted Student Union is emblematic of issues associated with student affairs operations and overall student life during COVID-19. Most work is done virtually with very few in-person walk-ins to divisional offices. This includes therapy sessions for the Counseling and Wellness department with 90-95 percent of such sessions being done virtually. Student conduct hearings are also virtual, and most infractions are associated with new COVID-19 rules and regulations.

In fact, most of the duties performed by staff in student affairs are still done virtually depending upon individual preference and the nature of duties. The emphasis for staff and students is lowering the density of personal contact.

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From the Editor

As the COVID-19 crisis deepened, the Retirees Board discussed how to stay in touch with our constituency. We have three primary modes of communication: this newsletter, our website, and a monthly e-newsletter. I hope you have discovered the benefits of all three. For *The Extension*, we had no events to promote and only one Zoom pre-election talk with Paul Leonard to mention. Our usual mix of newsy, light-hearted and more serious essays just didn't seem appropriate. We decided to go beneath the headlines to produce a sense of how Wright State is coping with the biggest challenge since those first classes were held in Allyn Hall in 1964. Most of our information was gathered this fall, primarily through interviews with students, faculty, and staff. We couldn't capture the whole story, but we learned a lot about resilience, innovation, and sheer determination. We trust you will find these stories a useful addition to what you read and hear in the news.

President's Message (Cont.)

Wright State's response to the pandemic apparently is working well as far as limiting positive cases. According to Taylor, there are currently just 22 positive student cases and three employee cases identified. The downside to COVID-19 strictures relative to density and assembly is that there is some unhappiness from students regarding remote learning (especially first-year students) and residential students who are prohibited from having guests in their rooms.

In addition to issues around COVID-19, WSU students are deeply involved in matters of inclusion and racial inequality. One of the few formal, in-person assembly events during the fall was a Black Voices Matter rally held on the north lawn with 120 appropriately socially distanced participants. As far as student mental and emotional health are concerned, Rando acknowledged that there are always feelings of oppression but he has noted spikes in student anxiety and depression. On the positive side, student affairs staff have noticed, given the less than optimum college experience, a remarkable resilience in the student body. The recreation center is now open by appointment and fitness group classes are held in person outdoors.

Student organizations are managing life under COVID-19 by holding numerous virtual meetings and events. The student newspaper, *The Guardian*, continues to publish exclusively online and has won statewide awards for its work. The sororities have been able to adapt and offered a completely virtual recruitment this fall, placing 30 women into the Greek community. The potential new members created short videos about themselves and the chapters shared their own videos as introductions. Matching proceeded virtually from there.

Student affairs staff is in a leadership role in the plans for on-going COVID-19 response. The dean chairs the university's Contact Tracing and Survey Testing group. Testing is now available for students with a doctor's referral and survey testing will likely be in place sometime in November. This will include randomized testing of high-risk university populations.

Athletics Rallies

As with most other departments at Wright State, Athletics has been impacted by the twin demons of budget cuts and COVID-19. In the last three years, five teams have been cut: men's and women's swimming, men's and women's tennis, and softball. The department also absorbed a 20 percent budget cut and eliminated six-and-a-half positions. Wright State now falls below the required number of teams to maintain Division I status, but due to the crisis, the NCAA has granted a grace period of two years for schools to decide how to deal with these new realities. COVID-19 abruptly ended spring sports last March. With so much change the Athletics Department is working to preserve competitive opportunities and a supportive environment for the remaining student athletes.



The Horizon League also cancelled all fall sports, though teams were able to train and practice following appropriate safety guidelines. The Horizon League worked hard to negotiate a context for basketball to resume. There will be fewer games and different models for travel to reduce risk. Both men's and women's teams have cautiously begun play. Games at the Nutter Center will look quite different—no pep band, no cheerleaders or dance squad, and very few fans. As of December, the upper limit of people allowed in the Nutter Center (and other arenas) for a game will be 300, and that number includes players, coaches, and trainers. Who gets the remaining seats is another dilemma for AD **Bob Grant** (photo right) to figure out: Players' parents? Season ticket holders? Major donors?



One of the most important keys to having a successful season is controlling COVID-19. The department has put Associate AD **Jason Franklin** in charge of the testing program, contact tracing, and isolating those who test positive or who have been exposed. He follows all university and local health department guidelines. The Athletics Department also offers mental health services to student athletes to help them cope with the new complications of their already full lives.

Grant sees the pandemic as the beginning of a paradigm shift that is forcing almost all schools to economize and that allows Wright State "to punch above our weight." He says the worst thing about the current crisis is the uncertainty of not knowing when it will be over. Through it all student athletes have persevered in their studies, once again attaining a cumulative GPA over 3.0. Some things never change.

By Mary Kenton

Artist's Corner

The Virus

Dubbed undetectable, I can't kill
 The people you touch, and I can't
 Blur your view
 Of the pansies you've planted
 Outside the window, meaning
 I can't kill the pansies, but I want to.
 I want them dying, and I want
 To do the killing. I want you
 To heed that I'm still here
 Just beneath your skin and in
 Each organ
 The way anger dwells in a man
 Who studies the history of his nation.
 If I can't leave you
 Dead, I'll have
 You vexed. Look. Look
 Again: show me the color
 Of your flowers now.

*Jericho Brown grew up in Shreveport, Louisiana, and earned a PhD in literature and creative writing from the University of Houston. His most recent book, *The Tradition*, won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. One critic, Ilya Kaminsky, writes "His lyrics are memorable, muscular, majestic.... Brown's poems are living on the page and they give the reader that much: a sense of having been alive fully." Brown is an associate professor of English and creative writing and director of the Creative Writing Program at Emory University*

From a Student's Perspective

In order to better understand the student experience, we interviewed three students: a recent spring graduate, a current master's level student, and a first-year medical student. They all showed remarkable resilience to radical, but necessary, changes and a strong commitment to their academic goals.



Holly, who graduated in early childhood education in May, regrets the changes that COVID-19 brought to her last semester at Wright State. Her sorority, Alpha Xi Delta, could no longer meet socially or continue its community service project, Autism Speaks. All of her on-campus courses moved online, in-person student teaching terminated, and graduation postponed to a virtual fall event. "It was disappointing not to be able to celebrate with friends and family for my graduation," she says, "but Wright State prepared me well." Holly found she had the ability to relate to students remotely but wishes she had received better preparation with parent communication and job placement. Holly notes she was one of the lucky ones from her graduating class—she was offered a permanent teaching position in Beavercreek City Schools.

Isaiah graduated with a bachelor's in middle school education in December of 2019 and was not in school the first semester of 2020. He began his master's program in early June when a multitude of new rules had taken effect. He much preferred the in-person classroom setting with interactive modeling and activities. Those morphed into three-hour lectures and he found it "hard to stay focused." He feels "he was robbed" with little interaction with faculty or with the other 27 members of his class. His fall student teaching began in Tipp City Schools in his dual majors of English and math. Isaiah believes Wright State prepared him well for the classroom and that he had "gained critical skills" for his chosen profession in spite of the pandemic.

Kenzie, the valedictorian of her high school and a graduate of Heidelberg University, had always dreamed of becoming a physician. She was thrilled to be accepted to Boonshoft School of Medicine in her hometown. However, COVID-19 changed things from day one of her medical school career. The celebratory White Coat Ceremony and taking that first Hippocratic Oath became a videotaped, virtual event. Anatomy, the hallmark of medical education's first year, was shortened, student teams downsized, and time in the lab reduced. Clinical training with simulated patients continues every Friday, but with just one patient and a smaller group of students. Academic classes are held online and she only goes to campus to take exams where all public health guidelines are followed. Remote classes are not just lectures, but are "very interactive." Kenzie has found that it has been "a very good experience. I feel a bond with my classmates. While there have been some technology glitches, I do think Wright State has done a really good job of supporting us, and I can't think how it could be better." She did not even add "under these circumstances."

By Judi Engle

By the Numbers

As we reflect on the Wright State experience under COVID-19, we recognize significant successes and ongoing challenges. While multiple factors, particularly budget, have affected processes and services provided to all students for some time, it's clear that COVID-19 has dramatically altered the educational experience for many Wright State students. One quantifiable aspect of that impact is in the numbers of enrolled students. The data shown below gives a clear picture of the degree to which student, faculty, and staff ranks have been affected.

% CHANGE Fall 2019-Fall 2020	
STUDENTS	
Undergraduates	-10.4%
Graduate	-16.3%
Doctoral/Professional	-4.6%
International	-26.6%
Minority	-9.3%
EMPLOYEES	
Full-time Faculty	-6.2%
Part-time Faculty	-5.9%
Full-time Staff	-5.6%
Part-time Staff	-5.3%
Additional data at wright.edu/factsheet	

A second element of COVID's impact is less quantifiable than enrollment but equally important: the challenge of sustaining connections of students to support services. Throughout my career in the College of Science and Mathematics, I was committed to helping students succeed in their academic programs and achieve their educational goals. I and many others spent countless hours working with students one-on-one. COVID-19 has changed those in-person connections to electronic or online interactions.

While academic advisers and other student support professionals work primarily from home, they remain committed to serving students. Units such as the Academic Success Center, Career Services, Placement Testing, Pre-Professional Advising, and programmatic college-based academic advising centers continue to serve students. Creative leadership has resulted in innovative strategies for connecting with students from across town instead of across a desk. COVID-19 has not dampened the commitment these professionals devote to student success!

Faculty also have adapted in creative ways to ensure students receive thorough, quality instruction. Many students have grown up using computers and are quite content with online learning. Indeed, many are happy to go to class in their pajamas without leaving their bedrooms. Other students struggle with remote learning and wish campus could return to "normal." An important benefit of these dramatic changes to the on-campus mode of learning is that the number of COVID-19 cases among WSU students and employees has been very low. Adaptations to campus buildings began nearly immediately after the lockdown in March and safety precautions have been thoroughly and strictly enforced.

Wright State has prided itself on the quality of its opportunities for experiential learning, and providing those opportunities—science labs, fine arts and performance classes, internships, job shadowing, and more—in current circumstances has been a daunting challenge. In some cases, faculty have been able to continue offering in-person classes with modifications to accommodate best public health practices. Other in-person learning opportunities have transformed into remote instruction, as faculty have devised creative strategies for teaching their course content. Laboratory procedures have been videotaped. Data sets have been compiled and distributed for analysis. "Kits" of equipment and supplies have been assembled for students to complete hands-on activities in their homes. None of these can fully replicate the experience of in-person, hands-on instruction, but they seek to provide many of the educational objectives of those experiences.

As Wright State faces continuing challenges around enrollment, budget constraints, and the best path forward to keep faculty, staff, and students safe from COVID-19 infection, perhaps the most important indicators of success will be continuing enrollment for Spring 2021; recruitment for Fall 2021; and planning for the eventual return of students, employees, and the public to campus. These are momentous undertakings for the Wright State community. All stakeholders, from President Sue Edwards to our new cadre of students next fall, will need to work together to sustain the positive institutional environment that we all value. Many challenges remain in the months ahead, but the successes of our collective efforts reinforce my confidence, developed over my decades-long association with Wright State, in our capacity to survive setbacks and to thrive in the face of daunting circumstances.

By Joyce Howes

Theme and Variation

This edition has tried to explore the ways the corona virus has impacted Wright State University—a unique institution located in Southwestern Ohio with its own history, profile, problems, and successes. When COVID-19 hit last spring, the institution, under the leadership of newly installed **President Sue Edwards** (right photo), was already dealing with a deepening financial crisis, declining enrollments, and a total reorganization of the university. The pandemic served to complicate and exacerbate every one of those problems. If President Edwards feels a little like the Biblical Job, she hasn't said so. Perhaps she can take comfort in the fact that she is not alone. Wright State's problems are, in fact, typical of many higher education institutions, especially in the Midwest.



Fernanda Borges Nogueira, who works for a think tank that advocates for affordable higher education, says: “What this whole crisis has done to higher education is just exposed the cracks that have been there for over a decade of financial mismanagement.” Higher education is a multibillion-dollar industry and the governing boards appointed to supervise it instead act like “boosters, cheerleaders, and donors” according to Benno Schmidt, former Yale University president. The recession of 2008 should have been a powerful warning, but universities as a group “returned to operating in ways that left their institutions at financial risk.”

Between 2008 and 2017, enrollment fell by about 12 percent nationwide while the number of university employees increased overall by 5 percent—16 percent more administrators and support staff and 7 percent more full-time faculty. Universities continued to hire more people to serve fewer students, in contrast to the rest of the economy where productivity went up. Richard Vetter, emeritus professor of economics at Ohio University, puts it this way: “Teaching is the only profession, with the possible exception of prostitution, that has had no productivity improvement in the 2,400 years since Socrates taught in Athens.”

Higher education also has a poor record managing endowment funds. From 2009 and 2017, the average annual return on an investment in the Standard and Poor's 500 index was 11.2 percent while the average annual return on university and college endowment funds was only 6.8 percent. Despite sharp declines in tuition revenues and paltry returns on investments, institutions continued to build at an astounding \$11 billion clip in each of the last four years. Higher education also provides more generous employee benefits—such as health care and retirement—than most other businesses with 200 or more employees. In response to these pressures, Georgetown University will save \$47 million next year by suspending contributions to employees' retirement plans.

Yet another common problem is how to get rid of a poor performing president without damaging the institution's reputation further. Penn State is a prime example. A long-ignored sex scandal cost the university nearly a quarter of a billion dollars. The president “stepped down” with a \$3.7 million package as a phantom faculty member who did not teach or even have an office on campus. Michigan State faced a similar situation and also protected the outgoing president with a multi-million-dollar package. Buyouts don't always involve sex scandals. A Massachusetts chancellor was treated to a sweetheart deal “when he resigned after running up a \$30 million deficit.” Many institutions give performance bonuses and deferred compensation in addition to inflated salaries and expensive perquisites.

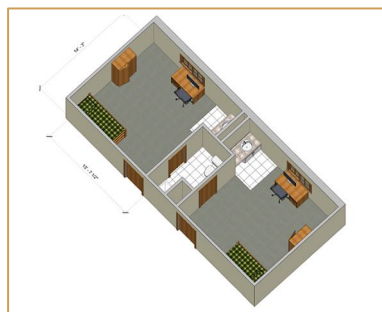
President Edwards and many of her counterparts face dire problems that they had little or no hand in making. Yet here we are. Scott McClure of UNC Wilmington observed that “the pandemic and resulting recession could finally force change. Sometimes it takes a shock to the system to see creativity happen.” Wright State has creativity and innovation in its very DNA. As bad as things are, the good money says Wright State will pass this test and face the future leaner, maybe a little chastened, but even more determined to regain lost ground and forge ahead once again.

This article is based on research by the Hechinger Report and NBC News published as “How Higher Education's Own Choices Left it Vulnerable to the Pandemic Crisis.”

By Mary Kenton

Anybody Home?

Residential Services has the capacity to house 3,000 students, and there have been years when over-flow students were placed in adjacent apartment complexes with amenities such as pools and hot tubs. Those days are long gone. The number of residents has been declining for the past five years. This fall, only 1,150 students are living on campus. Approximately 400 accepted a refund and moved back home when most classes went to online formats. The remaining residents are diverse—more than 20 percent are students of color.



The Woods and Housing Floor Plan

Every resident has a private room, and no more than two students share a bathroom. Guests are not allowed, including friends from other rooms. Strong ground rules have been implemented to mitigate person-to-person contact. Most residents have been cooperative with COVID-19 restrictions. A few off-campus incidents involved 100 or more WSU students. And at least one on-campus scheduled outdoor activity didn't go quite as planned, but no cases came out of it.

Dining Services income is down 90 percent. Residents eat alone in their rooms, often just picking up a sandwich in The Market (located in housing) or getting delivery. Up to 10 students can gather casually in common spaces, but many are wary and stay in their rooms. The staff find it hard to engage with residents who by necessity spend most of their time alone in their rooms completing on-line classes, watching videos and listening to music.

Resident advisors are learning to structure contacts and to be flexible from minute to minute. The whole situation, they say, calls for grace, tolerance, and improvisation. A notable example is how an unused lounge was turned into a dance studio with a ballet barre to help the dance majors living in the building.

Residents were allowed to stay on campus from Thanksgiving until January 11. Some feel safer on campus than at home, and others want to protect their parents and grandparents by living apart. Housing Director **Dan Bertso**s has a few words for legacy parents. Encourage your students to reach out. Donate to the Foundation. His parting words were: "This campus is safe due to hard work and cooperation!"

By Mary Kenton

WSURA Board 2020–2021

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Teaching Amid a Pandemic

When the first coronavirus cases were diagnosed in Ohio on March 9, Gov. Mike DeWine declared a State of Emergency. The next day, he asked universities and colleges to convert their in-person classes to online learning and ban spectators at indoor sporting events. The following week, Wright State sent most faculty and staff home to work remotely, and the Dayton and Lake campuses were essentially shut down until the beginning of fall semester.



“We only had three days to go to remote learning,” recalls **Lisa Kenyon** (left photo), a professor of biological sciences and faculty director for the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). “We did a pretty amazing job under the circumstances.”

During spring semester, CTL provided training and distance learning programs that enabled faculty to quickly transform their in-person courses to an emergency remote teaching mode. Over the summer CTL ramped up the training, and Kenyon led a group of about 20 committee members consisting of faculty, administrators, staff, and students to plan for reopening in the fall.

“Faculty had the choice of how they wanted to teach—in person or remotely or some combination,” she says. As a result, 70 percent of fall classes were fully online and 30 percent combined some remote learning with some in-person instruction. Only about five percent of classes were offered exclusively in person.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided almost \$14 billion for higher education institutions to support the costs of shifting classes online. Wright State was able to use CARES funding to purchase new online learning technology and convert teaching spaces so they could be used safely.

Because remote instruction has dramatically evolved and benefited from technology improvements, remote classes can still offer students a real-time, traditional classroom learning experience, Kenyon says. For example, some online technology tools enable students to work together in small groups via online “breakout

rooms” as well as participate in lectures and whole class discussions with polls, chatting, voice, video and other platforms. Some class sessions are offered in real time while others are recorded and available on demand so students can arrange their schedules around their other commitments.

Megan Rúa, assistant professor of biological sciences, teaches her ecology and evolution of disease course online. Her students can record short videos of themselves discussing the results of their simulations and then respond to videos from other students in the class.

“I’m also integrating podcasts and short videos from the actual scientists performing the experiments the students are learning about so they can better place the research with the researcher,” she says.

Catherine Hernandez (right photo), a student success coach, believes that the remote learning experience will help students in the future. “A lot of the challenges that students face at the university are really just preparation for life after the university,” she says. If students learn to be successful in doing online college and can adapt to these changes, she thinks they will be better equipped for the future.



“I’ve really had a good experience,” English instructor **Amanda Harris** told the *Wright State Guardian*. “As far as my own classes have gone, I am still excited for them, which feels great.” Still, she added, “It’s a lot more difficult to interact and encourage students, especially those who are shy.”

“None of us feel this is ideal, but I think it’s been good for us,” Kenyon says. “This has been a year of reflection. When we transition back, we will bring a lot of new tools. We’re going to see more flexibility in class design and more hybrid models.”

Wright State will offer the same combination of in-person and remote teaching during spring semester. “The faculty are working hard to make this an exceptional experience for students,” she says. “I see a lot of resilience.”

By Robin Suits



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NOTE: Do we have your latest contact information? We are working on a new membership directory to be mailed to all current members and we want it to be correct! Please let us know if you have moved since 2018 or changed your phone or email.

Email info to: wsura@wright.edu

Passages

O. Elizabeth Harden, Professor Emerita of English Language and Literatures, was interred on December 16 at Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum. Her death on December 11 closely follows that of her long-time English Department colleague, founding faculty member, **James M. Hughes**, on November 7.

They joined Wright State's faculty in the '60s and mesmerized generation after generation of Wright State students. I count myself lucky to have encountered both of these remarkable teachers in the classroom and claimed them both as colleagues and friends during my career at Wright State. Liz served on the WSURA Board for many years and WSURA awarded Jim's grandson a Nick Davis Scholarship just two years ago. They join so many others we have lost from that first generation. It feels like an important chapter of Wright State's early history is closing.



By Mary Kenton