

**Transcript: Williams Virtual Staff/Faculty Town Hall**

*Tuesday, March 26, 2020, 9-10 a.m.*

Jim Reische: In deference to those of our colleagues who can't join in real time, we'll also be putting a text transcription up for folks who don't care or prefer not to watch the video and read that. And the video will be available shortly afterwards. The transcription will be available tomorrow on the website, and we'll release that in Daily Messages. We received about, a few more than 35 questions overall through the comment portal last week, and we're going to be addressing those first in some kind of thematic order. If we get time at the end, we will certainly open it up for live questions and answers at that point, and if we do, I'll explain at that point how that works. In the meantime, if you do have something you urgently need to ask, you can either raise your hand, and if time allows, we'll get to it, or you can email me at [jfr1@williams.edu](mailto:jfr1@williams.edu) and I have that open in a separate window. But with that said, I think we're at about 375 or so people, and at 9:02, Maud, why don't I turn it over to you for a welcome?

President Mandel: Thanks, Jim. Thanks for setting this up, and thanks and welcome to everybody. The numbers are still climbing a little, so a little introductory patter here, but we do want to take full advantage of the hour. So I wanted to begin, as I often do, by saying thank you to all of you who have tuned in for tuning in, but also for everything you've been doing since the college went to

its remote format back in March. I know this has really been a challenging stretch. I've had a chance to talk to some of you remotely since then, but many of you, I haven't. And so this is really an opportunity for me to say thank you to the Williams professional community for everything you've been doing to support our students, each other, Williams, and yourselves through what I know has been an incredibly challenging moment for everybody. One of the things I've said many times when talking about this moment is it's obviously been a terrible time nationally and globally and locally. But it has been made much better, locally, at least, because of the spirit with which the folks affiliated with this community have engaged in the work. And that, for me, has been the difference between something that could have been truly a horrible experience to something that has been a workable one, and one in which I feel confident that we can go forward strongly, because we're doing it together and as a community.

I also wanted to say something about the panelists here. You have in front of you senior staff. Not all of them will speak today. The questions that came in are really targeted at about a third of the folks here. But I wanted everybody to be visible, even if they weren't answering a specific question, because, first of all, it's just nice to have somebody to talk to, and since I can't see all of you, you're just a list of names on my screen, I'd like to have somebody to look at when I'm speaking, as others do. But also, I am so grateful for the group of people assembled here, because this has been tireless work, really, and just without much pause for weeks now. And as a college president, you

often stand out alone, in the sense that you give speeches alone and you get thank yous and criticisms and all of that directed at you personally. But the truth is that everything we do is a team effort, and as you'll see, since I will defer for almost every question to somebody else in this group, it just simply couldn't be done without the labor and time and expertise and energy and big hearts of the folks on this screen. So I wanted them to be here as well.

Just before getting to your questions, a few updates. So before all of this, Dukes and I made videos of sort of the thinking to this date, and what we're doing in particular sectors. Those videos, I hope many of you had a chance to watch. So we won't cover that ground again. I did want to say that since making that video, the college made one big decision, which was a curricular decision, which was to align whatever we're going to do remotely with whatever we're going to do if we open. That is, we haven't decided yet if we can hold classes on campus in the fall. But whether or not we do, the curricular plan will be the same. And that was a big decision, because it was one that would enable academic planning to take place, and not wait for the July 1st deadline. There were concerns that if we waited for that July 1st deadline, folks wouldn't have enough time to plan their courses and do the work necessary to make changes to be successful in the fall, order books, all the things that faculty need to do in order to prepare for the fall. So we made the decision to align the two. **We're still, and I just want to be really clear about this, pursuing our two-branch tree. That is, we have not yet decided**

whether we're going to open the campus or not. We have two working groups that have now been formed, one that's focused on answering all the questions that we would need to answer in order to open successfully and safely. And that committee is knee deep in gathering all the information necessary to try and make that assessment, and another working group that's focused on what it would take to be a stellar remote learning experience for the fall if we had to go in that direction. And there's a lot of overlap between those two groups, but they're both working very well now with a wonderful group of people, and in conversation with other people about what it would take to do either of those paths. We made two other related decisions that again are not about opening or not, but will be true either way. The first is that we won't be having a credit bearing winter study program on campus in January, which only means— That was the only decision. So that just means we will not hold— Even if we are remote, we won't hold a remote winter session, and if we're on campus in the fall, we won't hold an on campus winter study program. And the other decision was to drop the minimum required number of courses in the fall and in the spring to three, rather than four. And that decision was not, that didn't mean that students are limited to taking three, but we've lowered the minimum number that we have to take from four to three. And that was based largely on feedback from about about remote learning, and also based on our understandings of the best way to use space on campus if we're all trying to be here in the fall. So it was a decision to alleviate some of those pressures. And I'll talk more about that going

forward. So with that, I want to turn to your questions, which were pretty specific. So I want to make sure we get to them. And Jim is going to read them one by one, and we'll take them from there. So thanks again, everyone.

Jim Reische: Thanks, Maud. And just so everybody knows how this works, I will read most of the questions verbatim as they came in, since I want to honor people's wording. There are a couple instances, and folks may recognize it, where we got multiple questions on the same topic. And so in those cases, we're condensing them down to avoid repetition. But for the most part, I'm going to ask these as submitted. So we'll just start at the beginning. There were a fair number of questions about workload, evaluation, retention, those kinds of issues. **So the first one that we're going to start with says, I saw in President Mandel's email that they might reduce faculty work level. What about staff? Some of us are working harder than ever.**

President Mandel: Thanks, Jim. And thanks again for everyone who submitted questions. This question, I think I would just like to start by noting that we're not actually reducing faculty workload. By dropping the minimum number of courses from four to three, what we're trying to do is recognize the fact that everybody has to redo all of their courses particularly for the remote format, and they have to plan as if we will go into the remote format, even if we don't. But even if we are on campus, some percentage, perhaps a large percentage of our courses, are going to have to be remote, because there are

faculty who won't be able to teach due to CDC guidelines around who should or should not be interacting with other people during this period before we have a [virus]. Folks who are teaching on campus, if we go that route, will in fact very likely have to redesign their courses entirely because of the smaller number of students in the class. **So I wanted to start there just by saying that the drop in courses was not actually a drop in workload.** We are thinking about how to manage what in fact has been an intense vacation of work, to try to make it manageable. But I don't think of this as a reduction of workload. I actually think everybody is working much harder, both staff and faculty. And I actually just want to recognize that. I know that that's true, and we're doing everything in our power to make this a manageable period, given the kinds of personal pressures that many people are facing also having to do with managing children who are at home or families that they're taking care of. So we're really seeking to try to manage what has been in fact the increase of work to the best of our ability. Is there anybody on senior staff who wants to add anything about that particular question? **Fred, you're muted.**

Fred Puddester: Sorry. I'll only add that we're trying to do our best to meet the needs of all employees. Someone described this to me last week as, we're all in the same storm but in different boats. And so some of us have children at home, and we're doing our best to just let them stay home and take care of their children. Other people are working from home. Essential employees have to

work every day. We have to have them on campus. And they're working in shifts so they get some time home as well. They're not working every single week. So we're doing our best to meet the needs of all staff as we work through these extraordinary times.

President Mandel: Right. But we're also really clear that none of this is very easy, and that for folks with kids at home who also have jobs to do, it is particularly challenging, and I know that's true for many others as well.

Jim Reische: Thanks. So moving to the second question, and this is a theme that we'll pick up again later, because there were a fair number of questions about childcare in the Children's Center. But this one specifically says, in a universe where Williams is open in some fashion but schools and childcare centers aren't, or aren't in a full-time capacity, how do we think about work arrangements for people who have childcare needs or are providing care? And the person just notes that this could also be applicable to folks who are taking care of family members who are ill or so on.

President Mandel: Thanks. So Fred, do you want to speak to the childcare question?

Fred Puddester: Sure. Both childcare and schools, part of the committee I'm co-chairing on returning in the fall, this is a main topic of discussion. And I think where our

thinking is right now, there are a number of things we think we must have in order to return in the fall to in-person classes and a full campus. Obviously testing, we'd have to have. But also, open schools and daycare centers. We just don't, it's hard for the committee to imagine a full complement of staff on campus, serving our faculty, students, and other staff members, if a large contingent of us don't have our childcare. So our current thinking at this point is, we'd have to have schools and daycare centers open in order to consider having us come back in the fall.

Jim Reische: Okay. Moving on to the next question, this refers to a campus email that Provost Dukes Love had sent out a little while back. It says, Dukes mentioned slowing down the rate of hiring. How will staff and faculty hiring be prioritized? What about searches already in process, especially staff positions that are student facing?

President Mandel: That one is right to you, Dukes. Go ahead.

Dukes Love: Sure. That seemed like it was going to come right to me. So of course it's a complex question. That is, that once you depart from just a hard freeze on hiring, there's a question of how you prioritize those decisions. Now for us, it's really a couple of big pieces. So one is, really how core is it to running the operation of the college? On the faculty side, is it meeting a really critical

curricular need that we can't fill any other way? On the staff side, is this a core part of the operation or something that's really fundamental to the college's operations? Obviously that's subject to a lot of interpretation, and I'll talk just a bit about that process.

And the second piece, which is really the important one, is just, can it wait for a little while? So we're really trying to resolve uncertainty. And if we can get through next year or a good portion of next year, then we'll have a better sense of our financial picture and what the academic model looks like going forward. And so for most of those positions, we're able to put them on hold, not permanently, but the idea is that we can wait and see what the conditions look like in a year. So the process is, on the faculty side, we're still using our standard committee process of Curricular Planning Committee and Committee on Appointment and Promotions to really try to work through the prioritization on the faculty side. Really, what's been dominating those conversations is the can it wait question. And on the staff side, we have our standard vacancy process where we have a small group of us that takes a look at vacancies as they open up, and then this vacancy group will make recommendations to senior staff and to Maud. And we'd make those decisions collectively. So right now we're trying to be as conservative as possible, that is, authorizing as few positions as we can, because we're at this point of kind of maximal uncertainty about next year. So thanks for the great question.

Jim Reische: Sure. Moving on to the next one—By the way, I didn't mean that sure as a way to take credit for somebody else's question. This next one, I suspect—I'm not going to editorialize in general, but this is probably a longer term question in knowing what's going on in senior staff. We may not have an answer, but I'll pose it to you just in case I missed something. With some employers embracing permanent work from home options, is this something the college would consider for those that are able to do their work remotely?

President Mandel: Oh, thanks, Jim. Yeah, I think you're right about this one. Right now, I would say we're so deeply engaged in focusing on that July 1st deadline and making decisions about the fall. And if we're thinking past the fall, it's really to February. So longer term changes in the way we do at Williams really hasn't yet made it to front of mind. But I am of course keeping a close eye on what other colleges and universities are doing, which is closer to the kind of work models that we might consider going forward. And I imagine any number of things anybody used to do one way may change as a result of this, and this too will be something I'm sure we'll end up talking about. Thank you.

Jim Reische: The next one, the person who submitted it says, this is more a money saving idea than a question. So we'll see if you have comments. But I believe the Williams community would be on board with foregoing holiday parties or recognition dinners, or anything that would cost Williams extra to put on, or

if not eliminate altogether, then scale down.

President Mandel: Thank you. All good suggestions are welcome, and as a president I think who has been quite interested in making sure we take time to celebrate together, I'm always glad to get feedback to suggest that there might be other ways to think about organizing our ways of saying thank you in a more financially strapped time. So I'm sure we'll consider such things. I did want to say though that one of the things I heard a lot when I came to campus was that folks were looking for relaxed ways to spend time together. And I think there are ways to do that maybe without spending a lot of money, but I would hate to do away with it entirely. But in the short term, I'll just be celebrated to congregate with you again. So we might do at least one or two things together when we can do so. Yeah, thank you.

Jim Reische: Sure. Moving on, I am wondering how faculty and staff with jobs that are less able to be performed can be reassigned to help other college priorities. I believe in the talent, work ethic, and passion of our faculty and staff. People really do want to be a part of making the college function effectively, and especially now. **As an example, if athletics can't happen, is there a plan for athletics faculty and staff to partner with other campus/community entities?**

President Mandel: Sure. Fred, maybe you want to start with this?

Fred Puddester: Sure. Let me just say, that's a great question, and something we've been thinking about. Danielle Gonzales in our HR office has been thinking about this, ways to facilitate this activity. It's something we'll accelerate over the course of summer once we find out exactly what campus is going to be like in the fall. In the meantime, we've been doing a little bit of this work. I'll give you one example. We're in the process of shipping back to all seniors their belongings they left behind in the residence halls, and we've enlisted a small army of folks who aren't fully occupied right now in their jobs because of the slowdown in construction, and they are helping with the packing down in the Field House. So we're already doing some of this work this summer, and that will accelerate, again, depending on what the fall looks like.

Jim Reische: Thank you for cranking through these at a decent pace, hopefully. Next one. To what extent will staff be expected to modify their skill sets to support the faculty if there's an online teaching component in the future? If that does become a requirement, will there be standards? For example, the amount of cross-learning, being in the class with faculty, etc., across the college? Or will it be determined by each department? And finally, if layoffs or furloughs become a reality, will the staff's ability or not to make the requested adjustments be a consideration when deciding who gets laid off?

President Mandel: So Dukes, maybe you want to start with this one. Thanks.

Dukes Love: Sure, thanks. And I just wanted to reiterate something that I said in the video, since I hope many of you— I was going to say, I hope many of you didn't make it all the way through that particular video. It's very hard to do these things talking into an empty screen. But to say, **what I want to reiterate is that our initial plans to manage the financial consequences of COVID-19 have really intentionally avoided layoffs and furloughs. We've placed job protection really at the center of much of what we've done. And as I always say, we just can't make any guarantees, because there's so much uncertainty about the future.** We are so far away from having that conversation that I don't think it's worth speculating about cross-training and other requirements to avoid layoffs. That's a very genuine statement. And I suspect that this will be very tailored. That is, in some cases where it makes sense, yes, of course it would be great to be able to take advantage of all of the fantastic talent that we have on campus to support other learning goals and outcomes this year. But again, it's going to be really on a person by person basis, and certainly not something that we've structured as a requirement to avoid layoffs in any way. So thanks for the question. And just, again, I want to say this as often as I can, because I know how much anxiety there is. We really have intentionally avoided conversations about layoffs and furloughs to this point. So thank you.

Jim Reische: Relevant to your last comments, Dukes. I admire the commitments to preserving staff jobs. My question is whether we're thinking about repurposing positions. Well, this seems to actually repeat some things that we've already heard. So I'm going to actually, with apologies, going to skip over that one, because it basically replicates the earlier question about what to do with folks who can't do their current jobs at the moment. The next one's about benefits, which is a bit of a shift. **Is the tuition benefit a potential target of cost cutting measures?**

President Mandel: So Fred, maybe you want to take that one on?

Fred Puddester: Sure, Maud. **So the Benefits Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee on Finances for the college have been looking at a lot of different options for reducing cost to address the financial shocks we're feeling. And they looked at the tuition benefit and decided, this is not something we want to consider at this time. This is something where families have planned for this benefit throughout their child's life, made financial decisions based on having that benefit. And in fact, we would never consider eliminating it for someone who has a child already in college. So if in fact we were to make an adjustment to this, it would take four years to get the full effect of it. We do spend a lot of money on this particular program, three million dollars a year on tuition benefit, but it's currently not on the table.**

Jim Reische: Great, thank you. If Williams has an online semester once again in the fall, how will that impact the contracts of staff members not deemed essential to operations? In other words, should non-faculty staff who are not essential to campus operations be worried about their job status if this does happen?

President Mandel: Dukes, I think this gives you another opportunity to reassure folks, so I'm going to let you do that.

Dukes Love: Sure, but I take it really seriously. I know how anxiety inducing this period has been. We have just never seen this level of joblessness in such a short period of time nationally. It's on everybody's minds, and all of you are reading about stories across higher ed, so completely get it. In our planning, we were in fact budgeting in some of the most pessimistic outcomes for the fall in our early planning to prepare for exactly that scenario. So when I was saying that our plans to reduce manager spending, capital spending, hiring freeze, and flatlining salaries, that those would be enough, we really meant that, that we feel like that's enough under the current environment. And it would take a really drastic change in resources or some really bad news, actually, the level of health and finance, to change that. So thank you.

Jim Reische: Thanks. This is a little bit of the inverse of that series of question. This says,

my question is, with us being careful financially and perhaps not filling positions, how will we keep even minimally staffed if many people have to take sick time off or possibly quarantine for minor illnesses, remembering that many services can't be done remotely?

President Mandel: Yeah, and I think Fred maybe, so one of the things I just wanted to say as we go into answering some of these questions is, there are questions that we're sort of in process to try to figure out as our working groups begin to think through all of the things that we need to take into consideration. And one of the reasons we're waiting, and I think I said this in the video, until July 1st, which now feels around the corner, in order to make the decision about whether to open in the fall or not is that we have so many unanswered questions. And my suspicion is by July 1st, they won't all be answered. But we'll be closer on many of them. And I say that not necessarily specifically in answer to this question, but just that there are others that came in early, I think that get to an answer, where really the only thing we can say is that we're continuing to think through the strategies we would do. So Fred, maybe you could say a little bit about how your committee is thinking about this issue, but also sort of works in motion. **Oh, but you're muted, Fred.**

Fred Puddester: I keep doing this. You'd figure after two months I'd be better at this. Yeah, this is one of the things the committee is thinking deeply about. All the guidance we're getting from public health officials indicates that if people

feel like they're sick, they should not come in to protect not only their college community but the broader Williamstown community. So that will probably be a recommendation coming from our committee if we do open in the fall. So it's something we're thinking about. We want people to be safe. So I think what you're going to hear from our committee is that if you are sick, you should stay home. And if you're in an at risk population or caring for someone who's at risk health-wise, you should also stay home.

President Mandel: Yeah. And the same will be true for students, which means that I know we're focusing much more on staff and faculty issues at the moment, but it means that we have to even be doing a lot of thinking about how we support learning, even as people are coming and going potentially for stretches at a time out of the classroom. So this is one of the many, many pieces that we need to navigate as we think this through. Luckily, we're not alone. I just wanted to say one other thing in this. All colleges and universities, some of which are much bigger than ours and in much more at risk locations, are also trying to figure this out, and we're all sharing ideas and thoughts about how to do this. So it feels, at times, I think, especially if you're in the thick of this, that we're each inventing the wheel. But in fact there's a whole, now, for lack of a better word, industry trying to figure out how to do this, and there's a lot of cross-fertilization in terms of— I think I'm really mixing a lot of metaphors here, but cross-fertilization of ideas as we share the best ones. So Dukes, did you want to say something? Oh, okay.

Jim Reische: The moment has passed? So this is a case where we had two questions that were almost identical so I'll condense them. But they're both asking whether, in this case, there might be an early retirement incentive or package offered as apparently the college did in 2008.

President Mandel: Yeah, Fred, go ahead.

Fred Puddester: I'm going to take this question. Yeah, once again, the Ad Hoc Financial Committee considered this one. A premise of doing an early retirement program to help us with dealing with the financial shocks is that we don't fill the positions, or some fraction of the positions that leave, the people that leave them, with an early retirement program. And we just don't think at this time we have enough slack in our staff complement that we could do the job we need to do with a lot less staff. So no, it is not part of the current response to the crisis.

Jim Reische: To keep things moving briskly, we're moving into a new category now. I suspect we might be hearing a little bit more from Denise at this point. But there were a number of questions, not just from faculty but from folks in general about teaching and faculty issues. So the first one has to do with—  
And again, I'll condense a couple of questions here, because I think we got

three on this topic, asking whether the college has intentions to plan or is making a commitment about supporting limited term academic workforce, and that includes people like postdoctoral fellows, visiting junior faculty, etc., especially given the uncertainty of the job market out there in the world, and folks asking what Williams is going to do about that.

Denise Buell: Thanks, Jim. And thanks for those questions. First I want to acknowledge that this is not just generally a hard time to be looking for employment, but that includes especially for faculty, early career faculty who are looking for employment. And definitely, we're aware of that. The CAP works as usual with each unit to try to address its staffing needs and to be sensitive to when it's possible to and appropriate to extend contracts. We have every year a very significant number of visiting faculty members, often fulfilling kind of leave replacements. We also do have some postdocs and dissertation fellows, and we try to put a lot of resources into supporting professional development for those faculty even who are here short term. In some cases, folks who are on short term contracts have, at the request of units, had some extensions to contracts. There are also, I'm happy to say, the overwhelming percentage, high percentage of our faculty in short term contracts have secured employment for next year. But there are a small number, not a nontrivial number of faculty with short term contracts who are in a tough position, and we have been talking on the CAP about what we can do to support those faculty. And the number is large enough that a blanket extension of contracts

doesn't align with the financial recommendations of the ad hoc financial group. However, there are some other ways that we can support those faculty. And I've been working with individual chairs, as well as with the CAP, and we're going to be communicating out to all the faculty who are thus affected in the next day or two to share the kinds of support that we can offer that's largely in the form of professional development support, as well as some continued affiliation with the college.

President Mandel: Thanks, Denise.

Jim Reische: Yes, thank you. This next one is fairly long, but I'm going to honor my promise to read through them. So I hope folks can bear with me. My question relates to the way that the college has been thinking about the current situation, not only as a human health crisis but as a, quote-unquote, financial crisis. What criteria is the college using other than austerity measures when its financial situation conflicts with its own mission and values? For example, given how the non-retention of contracted faculty and hiring freezes will create curricular gaps for students interested in fields of study that reflect the college's commitment to diversity, can you provide an example of how you'll ensure these students continue to receive the intellectual, curricular, and other educational support they deserve? In terms of the immediate crisis, would the college consider asking faculty and administrators who make over \$150,000 to take a modest pay cut so as to ensure that Williams is able to

invest and act in accordance with the values that make it such a special institute of higher learning for students, faculty, and staff alike? All in all, what has and what will the college be doing to create a more sustainable financial model for the future? There.

**President Mandel:** Thanks. Sorry, I was reading the question. Since the questions were presubmitted, I was reading it along and therefore on a different screen. I think, Dukes, you might want to answer parts of this. But maybe before you do, I just wanted to say a couple of things. The first is that I should note that one of the reasons the college is able to do what it's been able to do, particularly the commitment so far not to have to furlough or lay off anybody, is precisely because the college was so well stewarded financially in the past, and also because of the tremendous generosity of Williams alumni and parents who have contributed to this college the way that they have. So in some ways, it's a great question, but it also gives me opportunity to thank my predecessors. It may not always appear as much when you're looking from the outside, but we, if you compare what's happening at Williams with what's happening at a number of institutions, we've been able to do some of what we've been able to do precisely because we've been able to take advantage of the hard work of others and the generosity of others that have put us in a strong position going into this. That doesn't mean though, even in a strong position, that there isn't an impact when the world has the kind of seismic punch that has taken place over the last few months. And so

in order to ensure a healthy future, we have to make some careful and sometimes even painful decisions. But I just wanted to be clear that I— And I hope it's been clear in some of the things that Dukes has been saying that a slow, steady, and careful approach to this crisis is the one that I think is going to get us through it. Dukes, maybe you want to take up some of the more specific parts of that question.

Dukes Love: Yeah. It's a really good question. Before we headed into the financial response, I had some great conversations with past folks who had worked in a response to the 2008/2009 crisis, and one very good bit of advice that I got from an unnamed source, okay, Bill Leonhart, was to not think of the crisis as an opportunity to make changes that you wouldn't otherwise be willing to make in ordinary times. That is, don't use the crisis to either sneak through or to implement changes where you've got the temporary political will and support to do it. So on the ad hoc group, that's really been one of the premises of the work, to make sure that the changes really are commensurate to the crisis at hand, and not to overstate the size of the crisis, not undercut key parts of especially the curricular core academic mission of the college in doing it. And as Maud said, we were really blessed to enter this crisis in strong financial position. And that's why it feels a little bit different heading into this particular crisis. We had additional support. We have the endowment. We have strong revenue coming from gifts, net tuition revenue. We were really well positioned. But underlying this comment is a really

important point, which is, we want to make sure that that remains the case, that as we emerge from this crisis, that we don't just solve the challenges of the current crisis, but we keep an eye on a lot of the great work that we developed during strategic planning. So how do we really identify our core priorities, and how do we put resources toward those and make sure that we're able to exactly support the increasingly diverse curriculum and offerings that really make this, I think, a really incredible educational experience for the students? So I know that feels a little bit like a non-answer. It's kind of hard to answer some of these questions, because there's a mental model, and there are specific cases that the question writers have in mind. But just to say, I do feel like we've been able to protect a lot of the core academic mission throughout this process.

President Mandel: Dukes, thank you for allowing me, in your answer, to also just **note that all the work that went into strategic planning, it may look like, again, from the outside, like that just had to be shelved, but actually, not at all. A lot of the work that went into that helps us shape and think about the decisions that we make going forward as we navigate through this, but also as we can increasingly look towards the future, and shape the choices we make to the core values and the long term hopes and plans for the institution.** And we will absolutely continue to do that, and it gives us a great framework for doing so.

Jim Reische: Thanks, both of you. And I just want to note, because your comment

prompted it, that this goes without saying for a lot of folks. But just so everybody understands, you are welcome to follow up afterwards if you do have specific cases in mind. There are one or two questions that we won't read because they were specific to the person's personnel situation.

Obviously in those cases, reach out to Danielle in HR. But also, in cases like this, as Dukes referred, if you're thinking about a specific curricular issue or something that's unique to your situation, we're of course happy to hear from you afterwards. This is one that starts out specific, but it may have a broad relevance. One problem that was clear to me from trying to move my two classes of 20 plus students online is that it was much, much harder to maintain the same level of personal engagement with each student that we were able to have in person. To do so required a great deal more time, scheduling virtual meetings, and recording video and audio feedback for students. So I'd like to ask a question about the college's approach to attracting students and supporting their learning during a time when courses are likely to either be online or split between in person and online.

President Mandel: Thanks. So I'm hoping Marlene will take up this question. I do want to say that we also have the entire committee that Safa, Zaki, and Edonda are co-chairing, working on answering just these kinds of questions. But Marlene, maybe you could talk a little bit about what we've learned from this semester and how we can push this forward.

Marlene Sandstrom: Sure. Good morning, everyone. I think this is a fantastic question, particularly this issue of how to build engagement in a remote environment. And I think both faculty and students have been struggling with this in various ways. And I think it's a really astute observation that in order to create some form of connection, it seems like it requires a lot more effort than it did when you could see students as they file into class, talk to them beforehand and afterward, and all that. And one of the things that's been really tricky is finding the right balance, both for faculty who find themselves spending many, many, many hours trying to engage with students, and from the student perspective, feeling that balancing that engagement, which takes a lot of time, with four classes, has also been really tricky. So one of the things I think that faculty have learned over this semester is how to calibrate that in ways that work, and for students as well. And one of the things that we hope to do over the summer is reach out to departments to get a sense from them of what they've learned about best practices for student engagement. We're going to gather that. We're going to put that information together so that we can share it with faculty, so that you can learn from each other about the kinds of engagement that seem to work well. And we also plan to create a document for students as a way to help them get off on the right foot with remote engagement, which we know will be at least part of what the fall semester is going to look like.

President Mandel: Thanks, Marlene.

Jim Reische: Thank you. Maud, you're my cue. I wanted to make sure you didn't have anything to add. So if courses do resume in person next year, the college may very well have to reconsider enrollment caps to ensure social distancing. But has the college also thought about enrollment caps for online courses to ensure a more conducive online learning experience for students as well?

President Mandel: Yeah, thanks. So here too, I think this is precisely the kinds of questions that the new Committee on Remote Learning is taking up. And yes, the answer is, we're considering everything. But we also are quite aware that a blanket policy for all departments won't work. And I think one of the big takeaways so far has been to give sort of best practices and guidelines, but then to have conversations with departments about what's going to work best in their unit in order to meet students' needs, not only for the fall, but also going forward, because education is of course cumulative. And once we, whatever we do is going to have an impact on what happens for the rest of a student's education as well. So it is, again, precisely the charge of this committee to ask those questions. And I'm quite thrilled that is now launched and working, and already broken into subcommittees and taking on just these types of questions. Thanks.

Jim Reische: Thank you. Just if people are keeping track, we're doing pretty well on

getting through the questions, but it looks like we're going to go close to the hour with just the questions that are submitted. At least that's my prediction now, unless I'm way off base. The next one says, based on the video, it sounds like we're planning to have some remote students and faculty? Even if the campus is open next year, will faculty be expected to teach mixed in person and remote courses? Can you discuss the equity issues involved in this prospect? What, if anything, will Williams do to ensure that remote students have a more consistent setup to participate in remote learning? For example, providing laptops, wifi hotspots, headphones, printing, and scanning.

President Mandel: Yeah. And not to be a broken record, but again, these are precisely the questions that we are addressing, and Fred's committee is working on some of these things, so maybe, Fred, you could say a few things. But I just want to suggest that the premise of the question is true. That is, that even if campus is open in the fall, both because there are faculty and staff who won't be able to be on campus and because there are students who won't be able to be on campus, either because of immunocompromised situations in their own families or themselves or alternatively, say, international students who can't get visas or other things that I'm not detailing here. We've certainly, even if we have courses on campus in the fall, will have a sizable number of courses, a portion of the curriculum that is remote. So Fred's group has a subcommittee that's working on faculty issues, including the lists of

questions that were released here. I don't know if there's more to be said about that yet, Fred.

Fred Puddester: Not really, Maud. I think you've covered all the questions the subcommittee is pondering right now.

President Mandel: Thanks.

Jim Reische: Okay. Now getting into the category of public health and safety issues, which was unsurprisingly a popular topic. Will the reopening of certain departments be delayed based on the inability to follow precautions like physical distancing? Health and safety needs to remain our top priority, and in the absence of a vaccine and/or effective treatment, the precautions are our only defense. If the reopening of these departments is not delayed, what could be put in place that would be an effective defense to minimize the risk to these staff members?

President Mandel: So here too, I'm going to pass this one to Fred. But before doing so, I just want to say that indeed, health is our primary concern. And so we are, as you know, in the first phase of the opening plans of the state of Massachusetts, the governor has allowed certain activities to reconvene in person. We are choosing to delay the opening of offices until July 1st at the least, until we

make our determinations of what our plans are in the fall. And we continue to try to be as cautious as possible given, in fact, the good turn of events in Berkshire County around public health, and continuing to support best practices. Fred, do you want to take on the more specific parts?

Fred Puddester: Yeah, I think it's safe to say, health and safety is the number one priority and paramount concern of the committee. We're looking at the guidelines we've received from the CDC. We've yet to get specific guidelines from the state yet, but we expect them soon. But we're looking at all those avenues. As Maud said, we're going to be slow in terms of our opening. The governor's plan is a phased opening. We'll probably do the same thing on campus, is phased opening, so over the course of this summer, depending on what decision is made about the fall, we're looking at making sure we have adequate testing, contact tracing, isolation for students who, if they are infected or test positive. We're looking at isolation of faculty and staff if they're in the same situation. We're right now investigating the airflow of all our buildings to make sure they meet the new requirements under the extra standards. We're looking at social distancing in classrooms, dining halls, and any place we gather, limiting the number of people that can be in a particular room. We're looking at physical, change in our physical environment, whether they are plastic shields that, for instance, that have already been put in the Driscoll Hall for dining. So we're looking at all those things to protect the health of faculty, staff, and students when they come back to campus.

Jim Reische: Thanks, Fred. This is a related question, actually. Since the CDC has recommended that people with medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, etc., stay at home for as long as possible, how long will a faculty or staff member be allowed to continue working remotely? What type of documentation will the person be required to provide? And when is this documentation needed?

President Mandel: So, Fred, I think most of the questions in this section are going to go to Fred's committee, and it's very important to have this town hall and to answer your questions, but I also just want to clarify the fact that there are things we just don't know the answers to yet. And so if we say, I don't know, it's not because we're punting or trying to not be transparent. In fact, right now I'm trying to be transparent about what we don't yet know. Some of this is a moving target, both in terms of, for example, we don't even have guidelines from the state of Massachusetts yet. So we're studying. We're poring over the guidelines for New York and Connecticut, assuming Massachusetts will be somewhat similar for higher ed. But we don't yet have them yet for Massachusetts. So we're just, we're trying to figure out all the pieces as we move forward, and will continue to communicate with you as we have more answers. Fred, if there are particulars on this question that you can address now, that would be great.

Fred Puddester: Thank you, Maud. The short answer is, I don't know. Long answer is, we want to be as flexible as possible to protect the health of not only our individual people, individual staff faculty members, but also the entire community. Typically, documentation is just a doctor's note. We haven't determined what documentation will be needed. But that will be part of the report that we give to Maud, and sometime in June to help her with her decision for the fall.

Jim Reische: Thanks. This next one, I'm going to actually just condense it down, because I know the person and I know he'll forgive me. So I'm going to take that liberty. But the basic question is, **they're wondering how the college would decide whether and how to close campus again if we ever had a subsequent outbreak of COVID once people reconvene.** And in particular, the person says, I'm wondering which group or committee is examining these threshold scenarios with an eye towards safety, institutional stability, and communications concerns.

President Mandel: So the answer to which committee is the Working Group Focusing on Opening Safely. And I should note that the question of how, when, and if we can open safely is a question of course for September. But it goes beyond September as well. And it is both about opening, and I guess as the implication of the question is, what are the triggers that would lead a campus to close again? And so Fred's committee is the one that is charged with

thinking about those questions. And there's a subgroup that's working on operations issues like this as well. Yeah. Fred, anything else?

Fred Puddester: And again, it's the questions to be answered as part of our plan to open. It's also our plan to close again if we have an outbreak. The good news is, we were able to do it in March, I think, with very few problems. And so much of the work we did will be replicated if that happens. But we've not yet worked out specific metrics for deciding when to decide when to send everyone home if there is in fact an outbreak. But that would be, again, part of our report.

President Mandel: It certainly wouldn't be just because you used the phrase, when there's an outbreak. That wouldn't be the moment. And in fact, I think one of the questions about opening safely is dealing with the fact that it's not really an if but when there is an outbreak. COVID is going to be with us, so the question is whether we can live with it safely or not.

Jim Reische: Thank you. I'm going to condense the next few down, because we got a cluster of questions about the Children's Center, the college's Children's Center, what the process will be for determining if and when it will reopen, what guidelines and resources will be available, both to families, and I believe there's a question in there about for staff and teachers and children as

well. So folks asking about that, and then relatedly, what happens if it doesn't open. What would be done for employees who depend upon it.

Fred Puddester: I can take this as well. So again, I hate to sound like a broken record, but we do not yet have guidelines from the state with respect to the Children's Center or daycare centers in general. Carrie Gagne and I are working on a plan to reopen the center, working with staff at the center. This is a really tricky one for us. We've had conversations with a lot of parents who simultaneously want us to, desperately want us to open, but are very, very concerned and anxious about what the conditions will be like at the center in terms of the health of their children and their families. The guidance from back in March from the state indicated that they would consider allowing centers to open June 29th. And so we kind of have in our minds that it's a targeted date for eventually starting some activity. But that may change depending on what the state comes up with over the next several weeks. Most certainly, it would be a phased opening. The first thing we would think we'd have to do is have the teachers go in themselves to prepare the rooms for an opening. That may take several weeks, depending on what is needed. It's likely that we would open with reduced capacities at first. Again, we don't know what the state guidelines are going to be in terms of ratios of teachers to students, but likely it would start on a phased basis over the course of the summer. It would likely be reduced hours, because there's probably going to be additional cleaning that's required by the state. Again, we don't know for

sure. But our goal would be to have the center operational by the fall, particularly if classes were being held on campus. Again, a lot of questions to be answered. A lot of staff members are concerned about the health of their families and their family situations. So that all has to be worked out too. But I think the short answer is, we're planning to do some opening over the summer on a phased basis, and potentially with lower capacities and shorter hours to start with.

President Mandel: Which of course I should say, I know that anybody with young children who's listening is thinking, how can I possibly do my job under these circumstances? And I just want you to know that we know that. And as was true in this last semester, we're trying to figure out the most flexible ways that we can operate as an institution, meet our core mission, educate our students, and deal with the fact that people's lives, everybody's lives, student, faculty, staff, but in different order and in different ways, depending on background, needs, and particularities, has been disrupted in really profound ways. And this might be the time also where I call for your patience too, particularly with the frustrations of the questions we don't have the answers for yet. But also, with the uncertainties that I know you're facing, we are deeply aware of them and really trying to do our best to meet multiple needs across a complex institution. But it's going to take some time, and it's certainly going to be imperfect for a long stretch.

Jim Reische: Thanks, Maud. Since we're down to the last few minutes, I'm going to skip ahead a bit. There was a cluster of questions about what we're going to do or **how we think we'll be able to manage student conduct and ensure that they're safe and practicing social distancing and doing those kinds of things if and when they come back.** And maybe that would be an important thing to address, since **we haven't really spoken about the student domain quite as much in this hour.**

President Mandel: So maybe, Steve Klass, you could speak a little bit about this. We've been just beginning to think about, and this is also a subset of Fred's committee that is working on this. But I've also asked Steve to think a little bit more about it and to flesh out or thinking around this in order to support the committee and its work.

Steve Klass: Sure, I'm happy to start. Thanks, Maud and Marlene, Letitia, others if you'd like to jump in. And I know, Fred, that your group is also working on some of this. There's a lot of things that we can think about when it comes to guidelines and regulations. Some at one end are isolation and quarantine requirements, and they're very serious and more easily enforceable. And then at the other end are the everyday behavioral elements like wearing masks, social distancing, and those things. And I think we have to begin, as we do with a lot of how we work with student conduct, by thinking about it as a public health perspective, a focus on the educational components, and also, I

think role modeling as well. Right? We have to teach students that college aged people can be severely sickened by this, that social gatherings pose a significant risk to the more vulnerable people in our communities, even if you are wearing masks, etc. The large groups of students and the way they cluster in small spaces can have a strong impact. We really have to start working with students as well in terms of the grassroots approach to helping people understand what our expectations are, and I think role modeling. Even as I'm around in the community right now, I noticed that a lot of folks just walking on the streets, in stores, etc., aren't wearing masks, aren't socially distancing and doing those things. So I think we have to look at it as a community based approach to this that begins with education. And peer education is a big piece of that to start with. Marlene, did you want to add anything to that?

Marlene Sandstrom: I just would echo that as an educational institution, I think our first mission is to help figure out how to best educate students about best practices. We have fantastic students on both of the working groups, and they are key, because they are helping the rest of the working group figure out from a student perspective what is feasible, what is sustainable, in terms of student behavior. And I think that any time you think about behavior, you're thinking about the context, about the cues, about the social norms. And those are all things that students are going to have to play a central role in creating and sustaining over time. And then of course we're going to have to pair that

with some consequences for repeated behavior that puts the community at risk.

Jim Reische: Thank you. I am going to wrap up with one last very quick question, because it was an important one, and I think there's a fairly short answer to it. Former Williams president and current president of Northwestern University Morty Schapiro announced that his university is suspending employer contributions to retirement accounts to make up for their budget shortfall. Given Dukes' comments in the video about wanting to delay spending when possible, this makes me question whether such a move is also being explored by the college, and if so, how seriously.

Dukes Love: Thanks. Great question, also touches on my own research field, so just thank you for that. To say, you know, these are different ways of effectively cutting pay. They're substitutes. You could think about reducing salaries. You could think about reducing retirement contributions. It's all the same bucket of money. So in an environment where we were taking a look at not just holding pay flat but really trying to take different steps to potentially reduce pay if it got to that, sure, that would be one of the possible directions. That's not something that we've considered in this first round of changes for fiscal 21, and we didn't do that for the same reason that we thought it was important to keep pay flat, that we really think about compensation, in this case overall, and we're really trying to protect both the current and flow into your direct

deposits, and also the equivalent flow which would head into retirement accounts. It's a great question.

President Mandel: So folks, I know we're on the hour and people have their next Zoom meeting to run off to, myself included. But I did really want to first again thank the folks assembled here. But the folks assembled here simply represent, they're stand-in for so many other people who are working in these committees and in office and in classrooms that are now wrapping up in so many other places around the campus to help us answer the questions that you still have that we can't yet answer. And again, I do want to acknowledge how frustrating that is. I think it is frustrating for all of us not to know what the future holds. It's scary. It's unnerving, and we want to be able to provide answers to your questions as quickly as possible. And so we're going to continue work tirelessly to be able to do that, with the twin goals of keeping the community safe and healthy while remaining committed to our educational mission. And these are both deeply important to this institution, of course, and I am committed to ensuring both of them. So we're going to get back to doing that now, and thank you again for all of your listening and participation and great questions, and I hope to see you soon.

Jim Reische: Thank you. Maud. And thank you, senior staff. As people sign off, I'll just speak to the audience and let the people know that the video will be available later today. We'll put that in Daily Messages tomorrow, along with a link to

the transcript when it's ready. So thank all 500 of you for joining, and have a good day.