**Chancellor’s Update: Faculty Senate Meeting, March 24, 2021**

**COVID Activity on Campus**

COVID activity on campus continues to remain relatively low.  Last week we had 14 total confirmed cases of COVID-19.  On-campus, we had 9 positive cases out of 616 administered tests. This is a positivity rate of 1.5%. We currently have 5 students in isolation on-campus and 69 in self-isolation off-campus.

**WCU Regional Clinic Update and Vaccination Prioritization**

This week the clinic began giving vaccines to those in Groups 1, 2, 3 and part of Group 4. Those who are eligible in Group 4 include anyone with a pre-existing health condition that increases their risk, as well as the homeless and those who live in jails and prisons. The rest of Group 4, which includes other essential workers and those living in congregate housing, will be able to receive their shots on April 7. It is our understanding that the majority of our students will be eligible for vaccination on April 7 as they live in residence halls and other group settings off campus. We are hopeful that the majority of our students will be able to get vaccinated prior to leaving at the end of the spring semester.

**Spring Commencement**

We recently announced our plan to have modified, in-person commencement activities this spring for the class of 2021.  The ceremonies will take place the weekend of May 14-16.  Graduates will be required to confirm their participation in spring commencement exercises.  Graduates will be allowed two guests and all guests must be ticketed (tickets will be distributed in late April); Face coverings will be required of all graduates and guests; and Commencement will be livestreamed. The goal is to keep numbers as limited as possible, therefore, information on faculty participation in the commencement exercises will be communicated soon by the Office of the Provost.

**Fall Operations**

Western Carolina University is moving forward with plans to resume as close to normal operations as possible for this fall, given the current COVID-19 trends and projections, and as WCU’s clinic is helping to vaccinate the Western North Carolina region.

The resumption of residential, in-person operations for the fall will include an increase of in-person classes, fall sports, campus events and activities, community engagement, and a return to full occupancy residential living. All buildings and facilities, including dining operations, the library and the recreation center will return to normal hours and increased capacity.

**Engagement Activities**

As we move closer to the resumption of more normal operations on campus, I am increasing my internal and external engagement activities. Provost Starnes and myself have begun walking around campus to visit with faculty and staff throughout the institution. Please keep a look-out for us doing these visits and feel free to stop for a chat!

**Board of Trustees Meeting**

The Board of Trustees met on Friday, March 5 and at their meeting took action on the annual recommendations for faculty tenure and promotion decisions. They also heard an excellent presentation from Dr. Sean Mulholland on faculty and staff compensation.

**Legislative Update**

We have been hosting members of our legislative delegation on campus recently. On March 5, Senator Kevin Corbin, Rep. Ray Pickett and Rep. Jon Hardister joined the Board of Trustees for lunch before having a meeting with myself and other senior campus leaders to discuss our legislative agenda items and tour the Moore and Apodaca Science buildings. I will also be meeting soon with Senators Chuck Edwards and Deanna Ballard to advocate for our institutional priorities.

In every meeting with legislators, we are having specific discussions about faculty and staff salaries and the conversations have been positive across the board. We are hopeful that we will see movement on our legislative priorities this session.

**I LOVE WCU**

The fifth annual I Love WCU Month was celebrated in the month of February where over 800 donors gave 886 gifts totaling right at $380,000 to WCU Foundation funds across campus.  Donna Winbon, chair of the WCU Foundation Board, issued a leadership board challenge, which was met with over 50 board donors from the Board of Trustees, Foundation Board, Alumni Board, and Catamount Club Board.

The Shetland Society was launched for faculty and staff annual donors, and currently has 300 members. A gratitude breakfast was served through a drive-through to 600 faculty and staff. Students, alumni, and friends celebrated I Love WCU month online with special messaging and impact stories on our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

**Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding (HEERF)**

To Date:

* Number of students that received block grant of $500: 3,948 students
* HEERF Funds awarded on block grants: $1,974,000
* Number of students that applied for HEERF funds: 2,604 students
* Applications reviewed as of Monday: 854 reviewed, 823 students funded
* HEERF Funds awarded on applications: $972,202 (average award $1,181)
* Total awarded as of March 16, 2021: $2,946,202

**University Accolades**

* Amanda Clapp, of Sylva, has received the Burroughs Wellcome Fund Career Award for Science and Mathematics Teachers, which recognizes outstanding teachers in the North Carolina public primary and secondary schools. Clapp is a science teacher at the [Catamount School](https://www.wcu.edu/learn/departments-schools-colleges/ceap/catamount-school/). Additionally, she serves as an instructor of science education methods for the university. The award will provide $175,000 over five years for her project “Building Bridges: Using STEM to Cross the Rural-Urban Divide.”
* Blair Tormey, a coastal research scientist in WCU's Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, is working with a group of students to uncover Afrilachian heritage at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The project is a collaboration with partners [Great Smoky Mountains Association](https://www.smokiesinformation.org/), [Greening Youth Foundation](https://gyfoundation.org/), universities and community members, to document and share the stories of African Americans who lived in the region, both inside and outside what is now the park.
* Dr. Scott Eldredge, associate professor of communication at Western Carolina University, was recently granted the 2019-2020 Faculty Excellence in Community Engagement award by WCU’s Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL).
* Salem Parris, a 2019 alumna of Western Carolina University’s [College of Education and Allied Professions](https://ceap.wcu.edu/), was selected as Haywood County’s 2020 Beginning Teacher of the Year. She credits Kim Winter, dean of the College of Education and Allied Professions, and other faculty and advisers with guiding her to the middle grades education program and then preparing her to become the award-winning teacher she is.
* The Catamounts Care Ambassadors, a student-led and campus supported program to build awareness of pandemic protocols, in collaboration with Student Health Ambassadors from five other higher education institutions have been recognized for innovation in programing to stop the spread of COVID-19 within the region and on respective campuses including Western Carolina University. The team earned second place from the National Consortium for Building Healthy Academic Communities in a recent competition and will be presented an award and gift cards during a virtual summit April 21-22.

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