

Campus officials host virtual COVID-19 Town Hall

TRISTAN BENNETT

NEWS EDITOR

Campus officials hosted a virtual town hall meeting on Thursday to give an update on the COVID-19 situation and answer pandemic related questions from students, faculty and staff.

Dr. Kelly Damphousse was joined by several officials, including Dr. Shane Speights, NYIT College of Medicine dean. Speights answered many common questions the nearly 300 town hall attendees may have had about symptoms, quarantine, testing and positivity rates.

“The interesting thing about the symptoms is they could be involved with anything,” he said. One of the things that I’ll call your attention to is the loss of smell or taste. That’s new. That’s not normal with flu, common cold or any other viruses.”

Speights said that those experiencing those symptoms within the A-State community are considered to be “probably positive” even before test results come back. Those

individuals must isolate for a minimum of 10 days.

He also explained that those who came in close contact with someone who has tested positive should quarantine themselves for at least 14 days.

Many of the nearly 60 questions answered by the panel of officials centered around testing and contact tracing efforts made by A-State and NYIT. Several voiced concerns about a lag in the contact tracing protocol, stating some students filled out the self-report form and had yet to hear from a contact tracer.

Speights said, “When an individual goes to the ASU website and they fill out the form, there will be an auto generated email they’ll get that says ‘if you are COVID positive, do this, if you think you’ve been in contact with someone who is COVID positive, do this.’”

He said because of the volume of reports NYIT receives through the self-report form, there can be a 24-48 hour timeframe before a contact tracer reaches out. However, many of the self-reports can be ruled out as possible exposures or

symptoms from a medical point of view rather quickly, according to Speights. The ones they are most concerned about get the most immediate attention.

“From a public health standpoint, that’s who we want to, quote, attack first. We want to get those who sound like they’re really COVID positive or sound like they’ve really been in contact with someone, and we want to get them isolated or quarantined,” he said.

Also mentioned was the issue of individuals not answering a contact tracer’s call. Speights said they will leave a message and clearly identify themselves if the call is not answered. The number will be a local one, but most likely not recognizable.

Damphousse said, “We’re putting together a list of questions you should be expected to answer when contact tracers call you ... so you don’t give the wrong information to the wrong person, so that’s another way we’re trying to protect our employees and students.”

An attendee asked if a multi-day mass testing event on campus would be beneficial in learning a true positivity

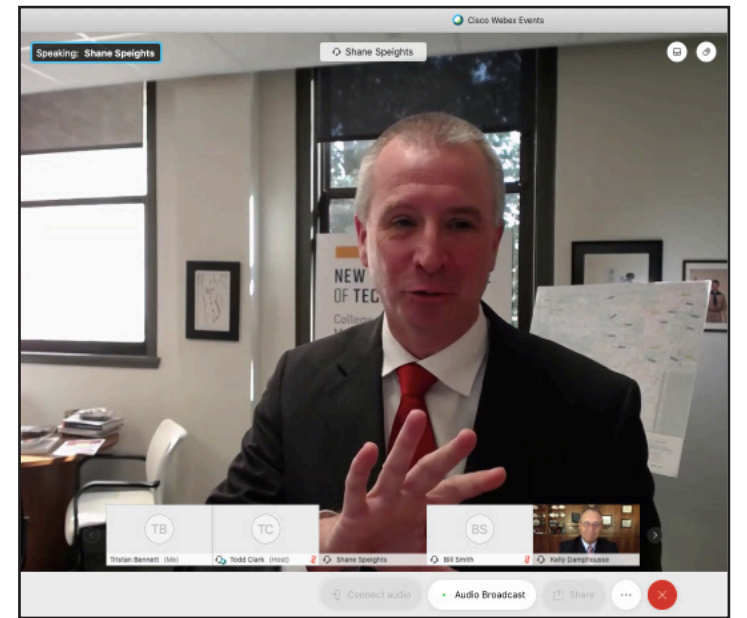
rate. Damphousse said the university is open to the idea.

“It’s not a bad idea to be honest with you. What we run into is the logistics of it,” Speights said. “It’s the amount of tests you have to have available ... but it’s certainly something that we can look at doing.”

Concerns from students centered around a possible move to all online instruction. Damphousse said while there is no set number of cases that would force an end to face-to-face learning, the university is monitoring the number of open isolation beds on campus and the ability of the county hospitals to respond. There is a possibility classes will move online following Thanksgiving break, but no decision has been made.

“When we created our plan we also involved NYIT and especially Dr. Speights, and we’ll rely heavily on local medical providers and also on Dean Speights and his physicians, at least one of whom is an infectious disease specialist, to help guide us in that decision,” he said.

Attendees also expressed concern over noncompliance with mask-wearing and



Screenshot by: Tristan Bennett | News Editor

Dr. Shane Speights explains the status of COVID-19 in Craighead County and on campus.

social distancing guidelines on campus. Martha Spack, vice chancellor of student affairs, said the university has a system in place to handle noncompliance whether it be through human resources for employees or student conduct.

“For those that don’t comply, to have an educational opportunity for them to understand why this compliance is affecting the community as

a whole,” Spack said. “I will say that when we work with those specific organizations and take that approach a lightbulb tends to go off, and the students understand a little bit better why their actions are impacting our campus.”

Damphousse urged anyone uncomfortable with confronting a situation of noncompliance to contact Pack Support.

A-State receives diversity award for third straight year

A-STATE NEWS

NEWS RELEASE

INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine announced that Arkansas State University is among 90 institutions of higher education selected to receive the 2020 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award.

The INSIGHT Into Diversity HEED Award measures an institution’s level of achievement and intensity of commitment to broadening diversity and inclusion on campus. The HEED Award is the only national honor recognizing U.S. colleges and universities that demonstrate an outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion across their campus.

“The HEED Award process consists of a comprehensive

and rigorous application that includes questions relating to the recruitment and retention of students and employees — and best practices for both — continued leadership support for diversity, and other aspects of campus diversity and inclusion,” said Lenore Pearlstein, co-publisher of INSIGHT Into Diversity. “We also continue to raise the standards in selecting HEED institutions.”

This is Arkansas State’s third consecutive year to receive the HEED Award, the only school in Arkansas to be recognized this year.

“We are pleased of the progress made by our Division of Diversity and Community Engagement over the past three years, and we are extremely proud that Arkansas State University is the only university

in our state to earn the HEED designation,” stated Dr. Kelly Damphousse, chancellor. “That said, we know we have miles to go in addressing change for our students of color and promoting a positive living, learning, and working environment at A-State.”

Dr. Lonnie R. Williams, special assistant to the chancellor and interim vice chancellor for diversity, inclusion and community engagement, noted, “Most people think of diversity along the color line, but it is so much more than that and we have shown our awareness of this with our application for the award. Two of the institution’s programs developed within the last 24 months demonstrate that point.”

First in the Pack has the intention to provide resources,

mentorship and guidance to first-generation students.

“Students who indicate they are the first in their family to attend college receive a welcome email from the administrative team of First in the Pack. This initiative is near and dear to our chancellor as he was a first-generation student,” Williams continued.

The HOWL Transition Program provides services to students with intellectual disabilities and/or autism who are transitioning out of high school into college and young adulthood. The program provides the A-State experience to students and supports students who may need mentoring and assistance with social skills, career planning and independent living.

CAMPUS CRIME

TRISTAN BENNETT

NEWS EDITOR

Sept. 9 | 1:30 p.m.

Hannah Jo Carle came into the University Police Department to file a complaint. She stated that around 12:12 that day she received a call from a man claiming to be a UAMS contact tracer. Carle said the man asked her questions related to her recent COVID-19 quarantine before asking more inappropriate questions.

Sept. 12 | 10:47 a.m.

An officer was dispatched to the intersection of Alumni Blvd. and Olympic Drive after Jonesboro Police called about a possible head injury. The officer arrived and saw that Medic One was on the scene. Yamashiro Yuka was evaluated and transported to NEA Baptist Hospital.

Sept. 12 | 2:54 p.m.

University Police were dispatched to Kaitlin McCoy, who had been laying on the sidewalk unresponsive for 20 minutes. It took officers several tries to wake McCoy, and when she became responsive, she seemed disoriented. An officer attempted to question her, but she could barely answer. An ambulance arrived on the scene and provided medical attention. McCoy refused to be transported to the hospital, and she was transported to Scottish Inn Motel upon her request.

Student Government Association hears petition to rename buildings on campus

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The Student Government Association heard a petition from a student to rename buildings on campus in their Tuesday night meeting as well as elected new senators.

Nathan Wheaten, a junior history major, presented a petition to change the names of two buildings on campus to honor minority contributions to the university. His proposed plan would change the name of the ROTC Armory to Lt. Col. Frederick C. Turner Jr. Armory and the Humanities building to the C. Calvin Smith Humanities Building.

“As you know with recent events concerning race in Amer-

ica, I do believe that it would be important for us in this year, in this decade, to hit this issue of race head on,” Wheaten said. “I feel like the best way for students on this campus to face this issue would be to immortalize some of the greats that we’ve previously had.”

According to Wheaten, Turner was the second A-State graduate of African American descent and the first in the ROTC program. He went on to serve in Vietnam before coming back as an instructor at A-State. Smith was one of the first African American instructors on campus, joining the history department in 1970 and taught for 32 years.

Brandon Turnbull, senator, asked if SGA had the power to initiate the name change, and

Katey Provence, SGA adviser, determined they could make a recommendation to the executive council.

Andy Shatley, Jonesboro mayoral candidate, also spoke to senators about the relationship between A-State and its hometown.

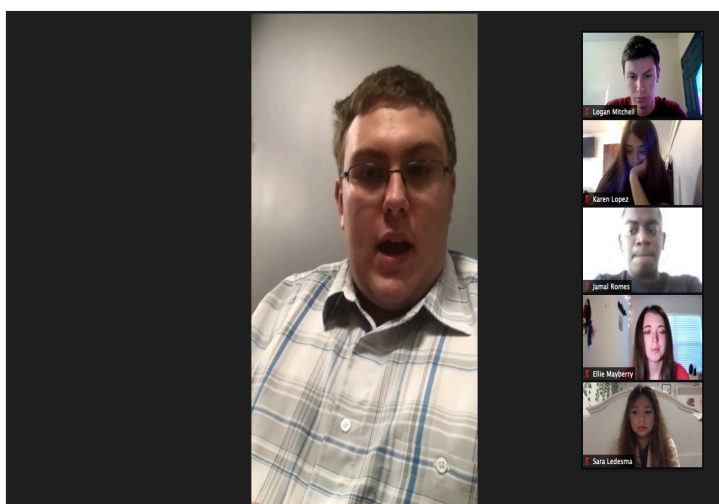
“It’s important to me as a mayoral candidate to understand keenly the relationship between Jonesboro and Arkansas State University,” Shatley said. “The city of Jonesboro plays a significant role in helping Arkansas State University recruit and retain students.”

Rashad Kirksey, SGA president, encouraged all senators to register to vote and discussed an upcoming registration drive in conjunction with VOTE A-State.

The senate had two undergraduate seats at-large to fill during the meeting. Ellie Mayberry, a junior business technology major, secured the first seat, and Izzeldin Ahmed, a junior biology major, grabbed the second one.

Other topics discussed in the meeting included:

- A resolution to implement annual Student Government Association awards
- An upcoming minority fair presented by Mikee Olegario, SGA cultural diversity director
- Projects to benefit international students, including a transportation project



Screenshot by: Tristan Bennett | News Editor

Nathan Wheaten, junior history major, explains to senators his proposed plan to rename campus buildings to immortalize minority campus leaders.