

**MONEY,
CONTINUED**

"We didn't have disinfectant. We didn't have masks. My wife was making masks on her sewing machine and handing them out to people. We weren't prepared the way we are now," Damphousse said.

STUDENTS SENT HOME

"I remember the first campus-wide email insisting people to leave hit me pretty hard," Brewer said. "I had family members deemed essential workers, so the idea of coming home with a compromised immune system honestly kept me up at night."

Damphousse said when the plans started to fall into place, the first step was sending students home. First, the university shifted to all-online instruction, giving students the option to leave campus to finish the semester at home.

However, many students had no real home outside of the university's campus. Others were concerned about access to the internet, privacy to conduct classes virtually and plenty of other variables that could negatively impact their educational experience

The administration team first recommended students return

home unless they needed to stay on campus. Though, when very few left, the university took more drastic measures. The university then required students to leave campus unless they could submit a valid reason for staying. Damphousse said around 900 students remained even after he put new protocols into place.

Brewer decided to stay on campus as long as possible, armed with a plethora of disinfectants. After sending a barrage of emails explaining her decision to stay put, the situation was going in her favor until the next round of campus-wide announcements came through.

Now, students still staying on campus would have to relocate to different campus areas to combat the virus's spread.

The uncertainty of what was to come finally became too much. Brewer decided to pack her bags and head home. She still held out for a few more weeks, but she knew returning to her hometown of Walnut Ridge, Arkansas, was her best option.

"To put it as delicately as possible, I felt like an animal in a cage about to be thrown into an ocean, and I can't swim," Brewer said.



Photo by: Hannah Risker | Photo Editor

Dr. Bill Smith (left) and Damphousse have been vital in getting information out to students about the coronavirus on campus.

UNIVERSITY SHOULDERS FINANCIAL LOAD

"We didn't want people to stay here just as a financial incentive. We wanted to remove that," Damphousse said.

In response to sending students home, the university decided to refund room and board fully. According to Dr. Len Frey, executive vice chancellor for finance and administration at Arkansas State, the university refunded \$2,809,676 in room and board charges for the Spring 2020 semester. Brewer received her refund over the summer

Over the next few months, the university also spent an

excess of \$2 million on personal protective equipment for the upcoming summer and fall semesters. These funds went toward masks, disinfectants and any other equipment needed for the "Return to Learn" plan to see students return to campus for the fall semester.

"For how scared the students were, I couldn't imagine being in the administration's footsteps. Trying to keep thousands of students and faculty members from contracting the disease is about as overwhelming as I think it could get," Brewer said. "With how in the dark we were, I don't think anyone could have handled it differently at that point in time."

UNCERTAIN FINANCIAL FUTURES

According to Damphousse, the university suffered from budget cuts from Arkansas' state government when the virus hit. When informed of the budget reduction for 2020, the A-State administrators made "significant cuts" to fit the new parameters for the 2021 fiscal year, which started July 1.

"In the end, the estimate for our budget was almost \$12 million less than we had the year before," Damphousse said.

Fortunately for A-State employees, the university did not have to lay off any faculty or staff and kept all current academic programs intact. Other universities across the country weren't so lucky.

The university did, however, install a hard hiring freeze. In other words, if any faculty member left, their position was not filled unless not filling the position would "hinder A-State's mission" significantly. Instead, certain roles within departments were filled by faculty members already in the department, at least for the time being.

COVID-19's future impact on finances at Arkansas State

is still relatively unknown. The state of Arkansas has proposed a return to full funding for the 2022 fiscal year, but there are plenty of new hurdles to cross first.

For now, the state is allocating 85% of A-State's usual funds for the 2021 fiscal year, with the possibility of issuing the remaining 15% in 5% chunks. However, Damphousse said the delivery of those funds could come at any time and may not come at all. Even if the state issues funds before the end of the 2021 fiscal year, it may be too late to apply them to the budget, and they would thus roll over into the next fiscal year.

As for housing, there are just as many unknowns.

"The final impact on the housing budget for fiscal year 2021 is not known at this time. Earlier this semester, we estimated the residence life budget would be negatively impacted by roughly \$1,006,000," Frey said. "We now anticipate the impact will be more than this amount. However, we will not know the final impact until we move into the spring 2021 semester."

**GRADUATION,
CONTINUED**

Damphousse said he did not have a set definition for what kind of worsening in the COVID-19 situation would cause graduation to be postponed, but Arkansas Department of Health guidelines will definitely be taken into consideration.

No matter if the ceremony is in Centennial Bank Stadium or in the SAC, graduation will be broadcast for people to watch.

Spring plans

Damphousse said the plan is to start the spring semester like the fall semester started with a mixture of in person, hybrid and all online classes.

"What I'd like to do is avoid that huge spike that we had in the fall," Damphousse said. "We're going to encourage students that when they go home or wherever they go, that after New Year's Day, they be careful about who they interact with and where they go. I don't want to say go into quarantine for 14 days but to limit your exposure to other people."

Damphousse said that way when students come back to campus after Winter Break, students are less likely to be exposed and a spike like the one at the beginning of the fall semester might be avoided. Although the current plan

is to have Spring Break as scheduled, students' Spring Break could be altered depending on the coronavirus situation.

"We have decided right now to stick with Spring Break as is," Damphousse said. "Several schools, even in our state, have already decided not to have Spring Break. I think there's something important about Spring Break. I think it's useful to have a break in the middle of the semester for folks."

If the plans for Spring Break were to be altered, Damphousse said the two most likely possibilities would be either A-State has Spring Break then goes to all virtual instruction after the break or

Spring Break gets totally canceled and A-State ends the semester a week early.

Study abroad

A-State's study abroad programs have taken a big hit since the start of COVID-19. A-State recently canceled summer 2021 study abroad trips. Damphousse said it's hard to reserve places and put deposits down as destinations across the world are experiencing the effects of COVID-19 as well.

"This has been one of the tragedies of COVID-19," Damphousse said. "We had people who were actually studying abroad in the spring and we

had to bring them back early. Then we canceled the summer, then we canceled the fall, then we canceled the spring and now just recently we canceled summer study abroad because you have to start planning for study abroad now for the summer."

The university is still holding on to the possibility of studying abroad in the fall 2021 semester.

"I anticipate the biggest study abroad experiences will start in the summer of 2022," Damphousse said.

For Damphousse's praise of the campus community, head to The Herald's website.

**GREEK,
CONTINUED**

External Vice President and Philanthropy Chair member of Lambda Chi Alpha, Owen Leible added his perspective on IFC's response.

"With the IFC side, we got lucky, because Will (Wilkins), who is the president of IFC, he really, really tried to make sure we can get a rush in this year, even though it was completely different than years past, obviously because of COVID," Leible said.

While the week-long rush events for NPC and IFC have been spectacles of bonding and connecting in the past, COVID-19 has significantly drained a lot of momentum for them this semester.

"Normally, it's a week-long event, where guys are coming to your house and you're introducing yourself to them. You're having rush events, to have like barbecues and stuff like that," Leible said. "With this year, all of that was gone."

Vice-President of NPHC and member of Zeta Phi Beta, Inc. Chelsea Taylor discussed NPHC's situation with COVID this semester.

"It has been like a huge struggle," Taylor said. "And

I know I personally don't like attending virtual events, because you don't get the same experience as you do as in-person events. So, I feel like that kind of plays a part in why there is a lack of participation. But, at the same time, we got to do what we got to do to make sure everyone's safe."

In regards to that particular challenge, this allowed creative opportunities when it came to setting up virtual events.

"I know a lot of things have been put to a different perspective, because you got to, like Princess said, be more creative," Taylor said. "You can't stick with the same stuff, you have to come out the box, do something new to make people actually want to participate. Because you have to do something, you can't just not do something."

Sergeant at Arms for NPHC and member of Phi Beta Sigma, Inc. Benjamin Mack expressed similar feelings with the other Greek Life members.

"It has been a damper, especially knowing that a lot of organizations have different views, especially since it does put a damper on trying to do collab events and you don't

know who's able to do what and at what time and who's allowed to do X, Y, and Z," Mack said.

COVID-19 inserts another challenge particularly on NPHC fraternities and sororities, not just as Greeks, but also as Black students at

"I feel like everything with COVID and just the climate of today's society, it has put a hold on things, so to speak," Toney said. "And I think with the Black Lives Matter protests, and the election, and just everything, just trying to



A-State. Given their smaller numbers and a lack of a central housing, COVID adds to the struggles and marginalization many NPHC members may experience on campus.

Although there have been talks about possibly getting housing for NPHC, with Alpha Phi Alpha, Inc. members Blake Moore and Rashad Kirksey leading the Student Government Association, COVID has put those discussions on hold, adding onto the stress many members might feel.

get people registered to vote and counted in the census, it's just been a lot for us. Like, we have taken a lot of responsibility over the last couple of months as students. And African-American students with that being at a predominantly white institution, it's hard daily."

But even with these struggles weighing on them over the past few months, Toney said, "I think we're doing the best we can. We're trying to make lemonade out of lemons."

Taylor and Mack do

share the same feelings with Toney, as the pandemic does reflect the struggles of being Black Greek members in a predominantly white institution.

"There seems to be a sense of discrimination and microaggression and such like that, and it's one of those situations to where it's like 'Where do we go from here and what do we do next,'" Mack said. "It's a wave of emotions that goes across all boards."

Taylor expressed the same sentiment. "Being at a PWI and being African-American, it does have a huge effect, and I wrote a paper about this in one of my classes, and it kind of opened my professor's eyes," Taylor said. "We deal with something differently, because I guess there is a lot of discrimination, and sometimes we can't get away with stuff other people do."

As a member of an IFC organization, Leible gave his thoughts about the struggles NPHC members go through.

"I guess the best way to answer it would be one: I didn't know," Leible said. "I didn't know, obviously, because I guess, just the obvious, I'm a white dude. Like a white male

in today's society. You kind of just forget, you know. Like, I'm just going about living and you don't even realize until it's kind of brought up to your attention."

Leible is a part of the current SGA administration with Moore and Kirksey. With this, he said he feels the frustration of how COVID slows a lot of progress, especially for NPHC.

"We're planning on making a lot of progress. And it keeps getting halted due to COVID," Leible said. "And it's tough, because you can't progress in anything currently, because it is such an easy answer to say 'no' due to COVID or 'We can't do this due to COVID.'"

While normally an in-person rush week can create a strong-bond amongst a sorority, Foucault recalls how the virtual version went and the challenges associated with it.

"We had to totally do away with that. We ended up going fully virtual, which was definitely a learning curve," Foucault said. "But, we ended up doing it all through Zoom, and we had breakout rooms. And it honestly turned out to be better than our in-person recruitment. We had really good retention. It was really great."