FAQs Panelist Questions and Answers

(4/28/20)

Q1
We are all concerned about the implications of this pandemic on the long-term health of CAU. As our President, what can you share about our current financial health and how that may influence decisions about moving ahead with the next Academic Year?

ANSWER
PRESIDENT FRENCH RESPONSE (See Town Hall video for complete answer)

Q2
While we know that a certain percentage of the CARES act must be spent to directly support Pell eligible students, what is the process for deciding how the discretionary portion of the funds will be used and how are the CAU Student Emergency Fund dollars being distributed?

ANSWER
PRESIDENT FRENCH RESPONSE – The U.S. Department of Education has allocated approximately $6M dollars to the University under the CARES Act. At least one half of the allocation or $3M dollars must be disbursed in emergency aid grants to Title IV eligible students in greatest financial need (e.g., Pell grant recipients). CARES Act Student Emergency Aid dollars will be disbursed to students via direct deposit or check. Mr. Phillips, our Chief Operating Officer, can provide an update on the use of the discretionary portion of The CARES Act dollars.

OUR CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, ELI PHILLIPS RESPONSE – Thank you Dr. French. Of the University’s $6M dollar allocation from The CARES Act, $3M dollars is considered to be the discretionary or the institution portion. The University will use the remaining $3M dollars to reimburse itself for the cash refunds disbursed to students for room, board and fees which totaled approximately $4M. Mr. Burston can provide an update on our local, CAU Student Emergency Fund that our alumni and other friends of the university have donated to.

OUR CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER, SAM BURSTON RESPONSE – The generosity of our donors has enabled us to provide critical support for our students. (See Town Hall video for complete answer)
Q3
The pressure to keep up with work and manage my personal life with all of the uncertainty about what is next and when we will get back to normal is making me feel anxious and worried. Where can I go for help?

ANSWER

CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER DEBRA HOYT RESPONSE - This is an extremely difficult and unprecedented time for our nation and unlike any that many of us have faced in our lifetimes. In the best of times the demands of work/family life balance can be daunting and we understand that it is particularly so with disruption to routines that have been imposed by COVID-19. I would encourage all of you to take full advantage of benefits that are available to you at no additional cost through Employee Connect as well as through Teladoc. Information for both of these programs is available through the Office of Human Resources as well as on flyers sent via email on April 7th.

FACULTY ASSEMBLY CHAIR, DR. KURT YOUNG RESPONSE – Response to include some of the anxieties faculty have been expressing and the things you are hearing that people are doing to help manage their stress... if you have heard someone say they feel supported by their colleagues share that....

STAFF ASSEMBLY CHAIR RON BROWN RESPONSE - One of the saddest things we suffer in our human experience is being alone, particularly during times such as these. I encourage each of us to create community. Be a lifeline to those that you know are alone. Start a video chat, make a phone call, or send a letter via email or postal mail. Let’s all be there for one another! Your presence and encouragement can go a long way.

You can also connect with other faculty and staff on Wednesdays between 12:15 and 1:15 via ZOOM for the “Experiencing God Bible Study” as well as some laughter and conversation. There are several facilitators and I am one. The log-in info will be posted or you can email or text OUR Chaplain, Rev. Dr. Miles, via email or phone.

Remember, your presence and words of encouragement can go a long way!

Q4
Faculty are concerned about our contracts. When will our faculty contracts for 2020-2021 be issued?

ANSWER

PROVOST AND CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICE BOWLES RESPONSE - Let me begin by stating that I understand that this is a difficult time for each of us and we are all working hard to make the adjustment from being on campus to working from home. The demands are incredible. The University President will issue faculty contracts no later than June 15th. Faculty must return contracts to the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs by July 1, 2020. Faculty who are not able to return contracts by July 1, because of extenuating circumstances should contact the Office of the Provost by phone or email to request an extension.
Q5
Has the administration determined a date for staff employees to return to campus and if not, is there a timeline for making that decision, since we are hearing so much conflicting information about the virus and its projections.

ANSWER
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER ELI RESPONSE –
Thanks for the question, Jolene. The first responsibility given to me at the University was to chair the Coronavirus Task Force. The individuals on the Task Force include campus leaders from across the University. They have been an awesome group to work with.

Because there is still uncertainty about when to reopen all businesses, out of an abundance of caution we have decided to extend teleworking through May 31st. Please keep in mind that this timeline may be shortened or extended as more information comes out about the status of the virus in the city and state. If a decision is made to change the May 31 date, we will give everyone an advance notice. We want everyone to continue to be safe by following all CDC guidelines, which include frequent washing of your hands and practicing social distancing.

Dr. French would you like to share any additional information about coordinated efforts among the AUC institutions?

Q6
Once that decision is made, will employees be allowed to continue teleworking in cases where they may be in an at-risk category or have school-aged children at home who are not able to go to school and/or summer camps?

ANSWER
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER DEBRA HOYT RESPONSE While we have targeted June 1st as the date we are planning to return to campus, we are still developing a more detailed tactical plan as to how to do that in a way that gives consideration to employee safety and support systems for childcare. Based on what we know now, employees will be able to apply for an extension of the temporary teleworking policy and a decision will be made on a case by case basis. We are also considering flexible scheduling to ease the return to work for those employees who are sharing in the care of young children or elderly parents. Specifics on both of these options will be finalized and communicated within the next two weeks.
Q7
Looking ahead to when we do come back to campus, what are the plans to ensure that our offices and classrooms are clean and safe? What is the plan for mitigating the risk of exposure to sick / asymptomatic faculty, staff and students?

ANSWER

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR FACILITIES AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT SHELTON ANDERSON RESPONSE – There is currently a plan in place that addresses the employees who are currently accessing campus. Under this plan, buildings and offices are being cleaned and disinfected in accordance to the guidance provided by the CDC and World Health Organization. A modified version of this plan is being developed to support the larger body of faculty and staff returning to campus, once the university believes it is a safe and manageable time to do so. We are considering several different approaches as we may need to implement a phased approach towards our returning to campus. Working with our public safety leadership team, we envision enhanced precautions necessary to ensure our health and safety. These precautions will include adding additional sanitizer stations thorough campus, controlling access to campus, limiting the number of users per building/gathering area, and adhering to the six feet rule as well as wearing Personal Protective Equipment such as face coverings. There may also be some physical modifications to seating/work areas and work schedules across campus to ensure the practice of social distancing.

CHAIR OF STAFF ASSEMBLY RON BROWN RESPONSE – Being blessed to be one of the essential team members I have seen the sanitizing teams in action by view our camera system that we have in our state of the art Security Operations Center. Facilities has been on the case cleaning, wiping and ensuring our safety.

Q8
Our faculty researchers are in the midst of doing work that is dependent upon us being able to access our labs. What is being done to help us return to our labs?

ANSWER

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FACILITIES AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT SHELTON ANDERSON – So this is a very good question. Earlier this year, we met with our research department chairs to review the renovation work that will be taking place within Thomas Cole and Biology buildings this year. We discussed the need to renovate a number of labs in a phased approach – which would essentially allow our researchers to continue operating across a designated number of labs. We will follow this same methodology, and leverage a comprehensive approach towards scheduling to ensure that social distancing, cleaning and disinfecting our lab environments are a priority in addition to the renovation work that will take place.
Q9
Our faculty and staff colleagues have questions about the next academic year. Will decisions about the timeline for students to return to campus be made as a consensus for the AUC as a whole? When we do begin the Fall semester, are we considering online or remote teaching for the Fall?

ANSWER
CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER AND PROVOST BOWLES – The AUC Presidents and Provosts are committed to considering what is in the best interest of all of the institutions and are listening to CDC, the scientists and medical professionals for information regarding the virus. As you know, CAU Summer school will be fully Online and all summer faculty who have not been T-TEC trained are currently working on completing the T-TEC certification requirements. We are proud that, to date, 45% of our full time and adjunct faculty members are T-TEC certified. We fully expect to be on ground this fall with our opening workshop scheduled for August 17 & 18 with classes starting on Wed., Aug. 19th. As a contingency plan, all faculty who are to teach this Fall, including adjuncts, will need to be T-TEC certified so that CAU can be prepared for online teaching in the event that any part of Fall 2020 needs to be moved online. Dr. Hooper and the CITLE staff will offer T-TEC courses during May, June, and July to ensure that each faculty member has the opportunity to complete the certification requirements.

CHAIR OF FACULTY ASSEMBLY DR. KURT YOUNG – Response will address: distinction between remote and online; Contract implications; and acknowledge faculty expertise in their disciplines and preferred pedagogies; look forward to continued opportunity to discuss the concerns we have.

Q10
Is the administration considering any impact to salaries or benefits? Have there been conversations around temporary layoffs or furloughs due to COVID-19? Will we continue to have regular Town Hall meetings with the President and other campus leaders so we can stay informed and ask questions?

ANSWER
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER DEBRA HOYT – I assure you that, at the moment, the tremendous intellectual energy of this institution is first focused on sustaining and building on the impressive heritage and legacy of Clark Atlanta University, not shrinking or downsizing it. You have heard our President speak about how in the span of two weeks, with tremendous teamwork and commitment, we have taken an on-ground campus to an environment of e-learning and instruction for nearly 4,000 students. Since none of us know what the future will hold in the near term, perhaps most immediately we devote ourselves to delivering an exceptional virtual classroom experience for our students. This can only be done if we also have exceptional and seamless administrative processes at the front end of the value chain.
Q11

Students have said they were told there are multiple dates under consideration for Graduation. Can you share these dates and how the final decision will be made?

ANSWER

DEAN OF STUDENT SERVICES & CAMPUS LIFE, DR. OMAR TORRES RESPONSE – CAU staff discussed potential dates for the May 2020 graduation in depth with the presidents of the graduate and undergraduate Student Government Associations and the president of the 2020 senior class. We identified multiple potential dates and are continuing to consider multiple factors as we move toward a decision.

Possible dates include:

- Friday, September 25, 2020 – Combined Convocation and Commencement (Entering Freshmen and 2020 graduates.
- Friday, October 9, 2020 – Homecoming week and Graduation
- Monday, Dec. 21, 2020
- Monday, May 17, 2021 – Combined Graduation for Classes of 2020 and 2021

We were challenged to think flexibly as we seek to find a way or make one, and even discussed a 5th option for a Virtual Commencement. We will keep everyone posted as we are able to narrow down our decision.