

Leadership Update for University Staff

Friday, February 12, 2020

FEATURING

- **Sarah Mangelsdorf**, president and the G. Robert Witmer Jr. University Professor
- **Mark Cavanaugh**, director of environmental health and safety and cochair of the Coronavirus University Restart Team
- **Kathy Gallucci**, interim chief human resources officer
- **Ralph Manchester**, vice provost and director of University Health Service
- Moderated by **Caterina Caiazza**, director of career curriculum initiatives at the Gwen M. Greene Center for Career Education and Connections and cochair of the Genesee Staff Council.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you for joining us today. My name is Cathy Caiazza I'm the Director of Curricular Initiatives at the Greene Center for Career Education and connections at AS&E. I'm also co-chair of the Genesee Staff Council and will be moderating today's University update. The questions posed today were submitted by elected members of the Genesee Staff Council on behalf of our district constituents.

The questions touch on a variety of topics that we have heard directly from staff are top-of-mind for them. I'm honored to be facilitating our conversation on behalf of the Genesee Staff Council, with several University leaders today, including President Mangelsdorf. We are recording this conversation and making the video available for viewing on-demand so that University staff may watch it at a time and place that's most convenient for them. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce our panelists.

Joining us today are Sarah C Mangelsdorf, President and G Robert Witmer Jr. University Professor; Professor Mark Cavanaugh, Chief Safety Officer and co-chair of the Coronavirus University Restart team; Kathy Gallucci, Vice President for Human Resources of the Medical Center and Executive Director for Human Resources at the University; as well as Ralph Manchester, Vice Provost and Director of University Health Services.

Our first question is for the President. President Mangelsdorf, we recently received a message that provided some very good news for staff, specifically the reinstatement of salary and benefits. This is also on top of the recent adjustment for wage compression at the end of 2020. Does this mean our financial situation has stabilized, or are there other challenges you see on the horizon?

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: You know, it's still difficult to know with certainty what financial challenges may lie ahead. But we are optimistic enough about our financial position that we have restored salaries and benefits, specifically all employees, except the poor souls on my senior leadership team, will have full salary reinstatement starting July 1, 2021. And the University will return to the full standard, two-tiered retirement formula for all eligible employees beginning July 1, 2021.

Caterina Caiazza: It's great that we can start to give some relief to staff by restoring wages and benefits and increasing our minimum wage to \$15. Are there any assurances you can offer at this time that there will be no furloughs or layoffs predicted or planned for the future?

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: Unfortunately, Cathy, those are the promises that administrators just can't give. I mean, if you had asked me when I started here in July of 2019 whether in my first year as president I would have thought that we plan to furlough close to 5,000 people, I would have said, "Never, no, that won't happen." But of course, I couldn't have predicted the pandemic. And so you know, obviously, we're pleased that almost all of our employees have been brought back. And actually, the majority of our employees were brought back from their furloughs last summer.

But we don't know what lies ahead. We certainly hope we never have to go through that again. But we can't make absolute promises because there are lots of things in the future that we just can't know about.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you, Sarah. So I want to touch base about the minimum wage adjustments. You stated in the past that as the region's largest employer, the University has a responsibility to offer a living minimum wage. Can you talk to us about what's involved in making a change like this? And why can't it be done more quickly?

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: Well, it can't be done more quickly because we are a big, complex organization. And at the University, we employ over 1,200 people who are currently earning under \$15 an hour, as well as there are many more people in our affiliates like the home health aides and so forth. So it's a big cost. It's a logistical logistically complicated thing to do. And it also isn't just about raising the minimum wage. Because as you raise the minimum wage you need to raise the salaries of the people above the minimum wage and the salaries above them. That's what the compression increases that you're referring to were about in December.

Otherwise, you have supervisors earning as much as the same as the people they're supervising. And so these are complicated and expensive things to do. And we're not a small organization. It's not like we have 12 people who are earning under \$15 an hour. You know, we have hundreds. So we're doing the best we feel we can and still be financially responsible.

Caterina Caiazza: Well, we're very glad to hear that the University remains committed to reinstating salary and benefits and really working towards adjusting the wage compression that you referenced. Kathy, I'm going to turn it over to you. I'd like you to help give us some insight into current work environments and workloads our staff are experiencing. Some staff are reporting feeling on the verge of burnout, while others say that they have an unbalanced workload or otherwise feel underutilized in the remote environment. How is University leadership assessing changing work situations, workloads, and environment for staff?

Kathy Gallucci: Thanks, Cathy. I first want to thank everyone across the University. There's just been a tremendous commitment to our missions in education research and health care. It's really been nothing short of inspiring. I would say that right now we're re-imagining our work at a time when we are still uncertain about what lies ahead and what changes may be temporary or permanent. And I think, nonetheless, our community is innovative and forward thinking. And our deans, chairs, administrators, faculty, and staff are all looking toward the future and redefining how we deliver excellence to our community under these new circumstances.

I think that part of this process is to work to understand how these new circumstances change the way that we work and what that change means to the way each of us operates every day. As we move forward, we're going to be partnering with leaders, faculty, and staff to understand where work's been added and where the need to modify processes, and procedures, have changed, or eliminated certain tasks, or created the need for the development of and use of new skills.

While this is challenging, I think that, fortunately, it's happening at a time when we're poised to do this work. This past fall, we officially launched our career modernization project, which will re-imagine our job classification structure and career pathways. This work will literally have us examine each staff role in the organization and define the essential task skills and requirements of those positions.

This then places those roles on a new career path, a new overall career path framework. And this work will examine and account for all of the change we've experienced. And ultimately, the structure will be transparent to all. So while we won't complete it overnight, it moves us forward with critical input and feedback from leaders and staff. And the timing of the project, frankly, couldn't be more perfect, from my perspective.

Caterina Caiazza: I would agree with that, Kathy. Thank you. And also, for those who may not be aware, there is a fantastic website that really does layout the entire process of the career path modernization project. And I encourage folks to take a look at that, as the transparency is a critical part of this as well. A follow up question for you, Kathy. We do hear that some departments have begun hiring new employees again. Could you tell us what the current policy is related to the previously announced hiring freeze?

Kathy Gallucci: Sure. So I think that where we are right now is we certainly are acknowledging where workload has increased. We are prioritizing and trying to look at where work units have taken on additional work and volume. And where we've been able to shift staffing, we are certainly doing that. And we've made decisions to hire based on workload needs. And this includes replacement for staff who have left the University.

So we're really trying to account for—we want to continue to be cautious and responsible in our decision making. But we also want to account for where workload has really increased.

Caterina Caiazza: Dr. Manchester, we're going to move over to you. We're going to speak to some health and safety issues on our campuses, in particular, the River and Eastman campuses. You recently announced that the number of positive cases among students in the past couple of weeks, alone, was as much as the totals from the first two months of the fall semester, as well as the conversion rate, the rate at which exposures turn into positive cases, is much higher. Can you explain why you think this is?

Dr. Ralph Manchester: Sure. And in fact, since we made that announcement, we've continued to see additional students test positive. And we're now at the same number of cases as we had throughout the fall semester up to the point before Thanksgiving when students mostly left campus. And I think there are three main factors that explain this. First of all, the infection rate, not only in the Rochester area, but nationwide, in January, as students were returning to campus, was several times higher than it was in August when students came to campus for the fall semester.

So, statistically, there was just a much greater likelihood that they could arrive here with an infection that might have been asymptomatic. There was no reason for them to believe they had COVID. And even though we were doing testing on all the students who were moving in to campus housing, no test is perfect. And almost certainly, some students arrived here with infection. And to the extent that they were doing anything in the community, there was just that much higher likelihood that they could encounter someone who could transmit COVID to them.

Another obvious difference is that, in August, we had nice weather and students could spend a lot of time outdoors during the day and well into the evening and night when they were socializing with other students. We simply don't have the climate to make that possible in January and February. So there's a lot more indoor interaction. And we know that the risk is much higher indoors than it is outdoors.

And I think we're all experiencing COVID fatigue. We know what the rules are. We know we're supposed to be wearing masks, staying six feet apart, washing our hands frequently, et cetera. But there's just a point at which human beings get tired of having their social interactions restricted. And that's not something that's unique to students on the River campus. And at Eastman, its faculty, it's, staff, it's the people we're around when we're not on campus. So that's certainly playing a role as well.

An unknown factor, at this point, is whether any of the higher infection rate is explained by some of the variants of COVID that are more contagious. We're working with the county health department to determine how much of a factor that is in the Rochester area right now. Unfortunately, we have not yet had the opportunity to actually test samples from infected students to see if that is the case. The prediction is that that's going to be more of a factor in March. So we're going to have to remain vigilant for that and, COVID fatigue notwithstanding, do everything we can to prevent the spread from one person to another.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you for sharing that with us, Dr. Manchester. Staff are wondering if our testing strategy has changed at all since last semester. Was there anything that we learned in the fall that has changed how we're currently operating for the spring in regards to testing?

Dr. Ralph Manchester: Yes. Our testing strategy in the fall was, in addition to making testing available to any student with symptoms, we were also randomly selecting 400 students a week to come in to have a PCR test. And this is the test that's done in the hospital lab. It's considered the gold standard test for detecting COVID infection. And then, in fact, in November, we increased that to 800 per week, as our numbers started to go up.

And then you may recall, we got access to rapid test kits right before Thanksgiving and used them to test students before they departed campus. We were very successful during the fall semester in keeping the infection rate low. It was under 1%. And we were very pleased with that. And it's a testimony to students, faculty, and staff doing their part, but also supported by the fact that we had a relatively low infection rate in the surrounding community and, for much of the semester, nice, warm weather to be outdoors hours per day.

We knew that coming into the spring semester, we would probably be facing higher infection rates. And that, in fact, happened, and the colder weather. So with the availability of the rapid test kits, which cost one tenth the amount per test as the PCR test in the hospital lab, we use those to test the arriving students. And now we are doing 2,000 randomly selected students per week using these rapid test kits.

We're going to evaluate our outcomes with that approach at the end of February and see if we need to make any adjustments to that plan. But we've got five times as much testing going on

now as we did during the fall semester. And we are reasonably optimistic that that will allow us to keep infection rates under control.

Caterina Caiazza: Great, excellent. Thank you so much for giving us some insight into that. Mark, we're going to move over to you. And Dr. Manchester mentioned that folks are spending a lot more time indoors because of the weather. And that is certainly a factor in regards to the number of cases that we're seeing. In regards to safety, are there adjustments that we've made in regard to common spaces, dining halls, or other facilities? I recently read students were going to be able to move about more freely. Does a recent surge in cases and what we heard from Dr. Manchester change all of that?

Mark Cavanaugh: Right. So you know, it's a balancing act. So you know, first we have to start with some adjustments we made in order to address some of the concerns that we're hearing about the student's emotional well-being. When we started planning in the fall for the return of students, we wanted to maximize the minimization of close contacts. And the way we did that was eliminating the triples altogether in the residence halls and to reduce the amount of doubles as much as possible.

We also closed the residence halls, and kitchens, and kitchenettes, to reduce some surface contamination concerns and high-frequency touch points. So we did relax that restriction a little bit by opening up the kitchens. And we opened them up for microwave food only so that we don't have the cooking activities and then all the kitchen utensils and cooking utensils that would be left behind as potential exposure points. So we did reduce some of the exposures there and opened up and gave some more freedoms to that part of it.

The other thing we're taking a look at was that we've followed New York state guidelines for low risk activities. So we work with the student activities to design ways that would allow students to work more closely-- or to work in groups of 50 or less, which was allowed by the New York state guidelines. And I'd like to take this time to really recognize what a great job our student activities has done and is doing to keep our students engaged.

Now, again, during the summer, there was a restriction put on. The governor put Monroe County into the orange zone, which then reduced our number of people to 10 per activity. But again, student activities continued to think of ways to keep the students engaged during the summer. And that has been recently relaxed. So as the governor has given us some more freedoms there, we've gone back to 50. And additional activities now are occurring with larger groups.

And we've also had a very successful Winter Fest. And the ice skating rink appears to be very well received by the students. So those are all things that we're trying to do to keep students engaged and reduce our risk. And I guess the last thing I want to talk about or discuss was the visitors and the residence halls. So we did relax our graduate housing to allow visitors of people that are affiliated with the University. We are still only allowing students who live in the same buildings to visit each other in that building.

We don't want students going from one residence hall to the other residence halls. And we've actually seen some upticks as a result of the virus spread that when we did the contact tracing, it

was attributed to students visiting other residence halls that did not live in there. So again, we want to keep that in place.

Caterina Caiazza: Great. Thank you so much. And I just want to clarify one thing, quickly, in regards to the levels. The orange level designation, I believe, was in November, December. Is that correct? I just want to make sure. OK, not over the summer.

Mark Cavanaugh: I'm sorry, you're correct.

Caterina Caiazza: Yes, very good.

Mark Cavanaugh: It all blends together.

Caterina Caiazza: Yes, it does this past year. COVID blur, for sure. And agree that the student activities, and Res Life, and all of our folks who have been working so hard to ensure that our students are safe and their well-being is taken care of. We're so appreciative of all of the work that they've been putting in. And I do want to discuss what would happen if the University needed to implement a pause. So what will be used to determine when and if we need to implement a pause? And if it goes into effect, what would that mean for our students and University employees?

Mark Cavanaugh: Right. So we don't want to jump right into a pause. So, it's the preference of the University to implement an incremental operational curtailment, more in a targeted method, and a methodical method than to just do a general pause. So, University Health Services, in coordination with the Monroe County Public Health Department, would assess the extent and severity of exposures of our campus, or on our campus, and through contact tracing.

And then if all potential exposure have been accounted for and successfully contained, we would then just continue as we do now and keep business as usual. But what we're currently seeing is a number of COVID positive cases that have begun to rise more significantly. And we sent a letter out from President Mangelsdorf. And we put something in that Rochester to just raise the awareness of students that we are seeing this uptick.

After that went out, the emergency operations center felt that the student's behavior wasn't changing as much as we wanted. So we want to send a stronger message out. And the intent of Dr. Manchester's message was to get the attention of the students so that we wouldn't have to go into a pause. And a pause could be required by New York state. And what that says is that if the University of Rochester accumulates 100 COVID positive cases on our campus, which includes faculty, staff, and students, over a specific 14-day average, then we need to go on a pause.

So we were trying to, and we are trying to do, the best that we can to prevent that pause. So the pauses' intent is only to be temporary. It's a few weeks within the semester. And students and residential life housing would remain in their rooms. There would be hope that the pause would limit the further spread of the virus and that the pause offers the University time to assess the situation and craft a remediation plan. So all educational activities would be reverted to online modalities.

All scheduled activities or events would be canceled or moved to an online format. And all non-essential employees would work from home. And campus and non-residential will remain in their off-campus residences. So it's pretty restrictive. And that's why we want to approach it in a more systematic way. So even though there were only one third of the way to a pause, we wanted to, what I would call, throttle back some of the activities and raise awareness.

So part of the throttle back strategies that we used was to reduce our dining from six people down to four. If we see certain groups where their social activities appear to be a high potential for exposure, we might suspend some of those activities so we can get a better handle on the outbreak. But again, it's our intent to avoid a wholesale closure of the University and go through a progressive reduction, such as we're seeing right now, of throttling back a bit and then trying to avoid the pause in totality.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you. And thanks for all the work that you're doing to help ensure that we don't get there. We want to make sure that we can avoid that as much as possible. Dr. Manchester, is there anything you would like to add on to what Mark shared?

Dr. Ralph Manchester: No, I think he covered it very well. And I'd just emphasize that we are approaching this proactively. And as Mark said, during this current 14-day period, which ends today, we're not going to even be halfway to the 100 case threshold that would result in the state potentially putting us on pause. And the count starts over tomorrow. But we want to approach this in as an intelligent a way as we can so that we're not, in the next two week period, also approaching these higher numbers that would cause concern for us.

So the new measures with only four students per table in places where eating is permitted is one of the things we're doing, and just getting the message out that it's, to a large extent, what students are doing in residence halls and other buildings outside of classrooms that will make the difference.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you. So this question is really for either Dr. Manchester or Mark Cavanaugh. Staff are really interested in understanding how they can best protect themselves, and particularly those who don't have access to the vaccine yet. Can you speak to how they can protect themselves in this environment?

Mark Cavanaugh: Sure, I'll start. I mean, there's nothing special about this in my mind, right. So you need to continue to monitor your health. And that's by using Dr. Chapat. And any signs and symptoms that you see, consult with your primary care physician and UHS. Social distancing is a key player. It's been identified that the further away we can stay away from people, especially if we're in area where we might be unmasked, such as dining spaces, that the greater the distance, the better protection it's going to afford you, good hand hygiene, as Dr. Manchester alluded to, cleaning your workspace at the beginning and the end of your day, all the things that we've been typically preaching. So, there's no there's no magic bullet here.

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: And wearing your mask when you're not eating. Now they say you need two masks. Have you heard that guidance?

Dr. Ralph Manchester: Yes, the CDC put out, I would say, a refinement on their mask advisory this week. And especially for people who are wearing a cloth mask most of the time, consider wearing a second mask along with that on top of it. Cloth masks are helpful. But they are not as effective in protecting people and reducing the spread from an infected person out into the surrounding air as the medical procedure masks are. The medical procedure masks are all two or, in some cases, even three layers.

So that would be something for people to consider, but not to get to the point where you think, well, if I can't wear two masks, there's no point in wearing a mask at all. No. Wear a mask. And especially if you are at increased risk yourself or if you need to spend some time in an environment that might be a little riskier, then, sure, consider wearing two masks. And the other part of that CDC advisory was emphasizing the fit of the mask. It is important that it touch your skin as much as possible around the covered part of the face.

To the extent that it is not touching your skin, air is moving out of you into the surrounding space and what you're breathing in from the surrounding space into your lungs without going through the filtering effect of the mask itself. So there are now devices on the market that are a piece of plastic that fits around the edge of the mask that more tightly presses it against the skin. That's something that's worth looking into. And with the paper medical procedure masks, making sure that metal piece over the nose is folded so that it does keep the mask, as much as possible, on the skin.

Caterina Caiazza: Great, thank you. We're going to jump back over to President Mangelsdorf in a moment. But just to clarify, Dr. Manchester, could you go back and confirm with us the date of the recount and what happens after that, with restarting our counts of cases?

Dr. Ralph Manchester: Right. So the state requirement is a fixed 14-day reporting period that-- Mark can correct me if I'm off by a day-- but I believe resets at the end of the day, every other Friday.

Mark Cavanaugh: I believe that is the right, yes, the right reset date.

Dr. Ralph Manchester: Right. So, we will have a count of cases at the end of the day today (February 12). And it will be well under 100 and we won't go on pause. There will be a new count that starts tomorrow. And then that count will come to an end Friday the 26th. And then that will just continue throughout the rest of the semester.

Caterina Caiazza: Excellent. Thank you for clarifying that for our viewers. So, President Mangelsdorf, I do want to ask, the University of Rochester Medical Center is playing a large role in vaccine distribution. We're very grateful for all the work they're doing with the distribution, their responsibility of vaccinating health care workers, and other eligible employees, and patients. There was recently a news story that indicated that didn't happen as well as it should have. Can you talk about how the University is ensuring that the vaccination process is equitable for all populations, and most especially, for those most vulnerable.

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: Well, Cathy, when vaccines first became available in December of 2020, our hope was that over time, the University of Rochester Medical Center employee health clinics would be able to provide COVID-19 vaccines for all eligible University faculty and staff, similar to how the process works when we're offering the flu vaccine. However, the guidance we have gotten from the state has changed over time. And that was what, it seemed, they wanted to hospitals and clinics to be doing to be responsible for vaccine delivery in their communities.

But there's been evolving direction from New York State. And of course, there's been a national shortage of vaccine. And I understand how incredibly frustrating it is. New York continues to direct our employee health to focus on health care workers. And early on, we were getting quite a few doses per week. But these days, we're only receiving a few doses of the vaccine.

So the guidance is changing. We're continuing to work closely with Monroe County Department of Health on vaccine supply and distribution, including how all 1B-eligible individuals and those with co-morbidities-- so underlying medical conditions that may make them at greater risk-- will be able to receive vaccines as quickly as possible. Because you might recall, the state issued a statement saying, I believe, it begins on Monday, that those co-morbidities, regardless of age, would be eligible. But of course, there's a difference between being eligible and actually having access to a vaccine.

And our government and community relations team is working very closely with the Commission on Independent Colleges and University to advocate for University employees with New York state. For now, our current guidance is that we're encouraging eligible University of Rochester faculty and staff to look for appointments at vaccine clinics run by the county, or by the state, or offered by local pharmacies. And the Finger Lakes COVID-19 Vaccine Hub is the best source of the current information.

I know this is not, this is not what people were hoping for. This is not what we were hoping for. We hoped that we could vaccinate all our employees. But that is not the case. You can go to this website. And my husband did it the other night and made an appointment to get a vaccine in Utica. I said, honey, that's not very close. He said, well, I can get the vaccine there. So I'm driving to Utica. So I'm afraid that, at this point, that's what we're telling people to do.

I've read some recent press coverage that suggests there'll be more and more vaccines coming to our state. I've also read that CVS and Walgreens are going to be-- not in Rochester, yet-- but in other parts of the state, are offering the vaccine. So I think soon, we'll be in a better position , particularly once the Johnson and Johnson vaccine gets approved, there'll be a larger supply of vaccines for the country, the state, and our community.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you, Sarah. I have a closing question for you. We have heard from staff members that working remotely has had a negative impact on their sense of community, their ability to separate work from home, and a struggle to juggle all of life's demands from the same physical setting. We've also heard from staff that the flexibility of working remotely has improved their lives greatly and has provided an even better work-life balance. As the situation improves and our campus begins to open back up, do you anticipate any shift in policies that will

allow some positions to continue remote work or otherwise rethink how we can do our jobs differently with continued flexibility? Cathy mentioned this a little bit earlier. Could you elaborate on that?

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: Well, actually, this is something Kathy and I have been discussing. I've also discussed it with our general counsel, Donna Gooden Payne. So what will our work from home policy be? What about if some people say, hey, I like this better, can I just keep doing it? And we'll have to think through this carefully. Because, of course, some of the jobs at our University, you can't work from home, right? If you're a dining service worker, or if you're one of the environmental safety, like Mark, or public safety, or heading up University health services, or anyone working at our medical center. And then there are other jobs where the work can be done from home.

So there is no blanket answer. We all, of course, should be mindful of maintaining a healthy work life balance. This is something Kathy and I have been deeply concerned, about how stressed so many of our employees, including our senior leadership teams, have been. Because work can feel really overwhelming. And we need to figure out ways to maintain some sort of balance and mental health.

Kathy and I have both talked about skiing recently. I do cross-country. I think she's done downhill. And she said, I shouldn't have done it. I have so much work to do. I said, no, no, no. You should have done it. So we hope that we can help our employees find that balance. And I urge anyone who needs help and is very stressed with their work environment to seek out our University's wellness resources. Faculty and staff can get help through our Well-U program, which can be found on the University's human resources website. And students who are seeking help should reach out to University health services.

Caterina Caiazza: Thank you. And yes, we all need, every single one of us needs to make sure that we're taking time to take care of ourselves. There will always be work. We know that. But we do want to make sure we're taking care of ourselves. So for any of the panelists, is there anything else that you'd like staff to know or to take away from today's session before we end here?

President Sarah C. Mangelsdorf: Well, I'd like to just thank the staff for everything they do every day. We know this is, as I just indicated, we know this has been a really difficult time for everybody. And we just can't thank people enough for how hard they've worked and what they've done. In particular, I look at some of the people on this call and all the extra work they've done during this time because of COVID, in environmental services, and University health services, the work that Cathy's been doing. Their jobs, they're doing on top of what they were already doing.

And you know, I just can't thank people enough for that work. And I hope, as I said at the beginning, I hope I'm beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. And I hope that we'll actually all be able to get together in person someday.

Caterina Caiazza: And with that, we have come to the end of our time together. I'd like to thank our panel for participating in this important dialogue today. Remember, the University's coronavirus website is updated regularly with the latest case numbers. And all other news and bulletins, you can find at rochester.edu. On behalf of the Genesee Staff Council, I want to thank all of our staff for the work you have been doing this past year. As President Mangelsdorf said, we know it has not been an easy feat. And we are very grateful for all the work you do each and every day. Thank you for watching everyone and stay safe.