

Date: 12/02/2020

Subject: Effects of COVID-19

Interviewee: Mark Andrew Hudson

Interviewer: Benjamin Robert Drake

Place of Interview: Zoom

Drake: Okay, getting right into it. in your own words, what is your role at the university?
Well, my,

Hudson: My responsibility as Housing and Dining Executive Director is sometimes referred to as the campus landlord, I take care of all residential environments, both in the traditional residence halls and our Greek court, and also our two apartment complexes. And also, our dining operation: in the three residential dining centers, our food court, which is our retail operation, as well as catering, and Java, which is our coffee operation. So those are the things that fall under me. And my responsibility is to make sure that the things we do within those environments are supportive of students, so they can be academically successful, while developing their social skills and in their comfort with the university.

Drake: Perfect, perfect. So, how do you think as a whole COVID-19 has impacted campus?

Hudson: I think it's a dramatic impact. The things that are normal can't be done in a way in which they've been done for decades or hundreds of years, actually, you know, the University exists to bring people together, both for education in the formal

sense of a classroom experience, but also the education and social development in the residential community. And I think both of these have had been impacted greatly. For example, a lot of classes that are traditionally taught in person are now taught online or in a hybrid situation. And the residential environment, which traditionally is a majority of double rooms with roommates, has been converted all singles in order to get people more space. So the downside of that is that there's not a natural socialization, where with your roommate, where you develop connections with them, but also connections with their friends, and the things that you can do with each other, are severely limited, where you can't gather in groups of more than X, whatever phase we're in, 10, 25, 50, whatever that might be, you know, you're wearing masks all the time that has a great impact on being able to visually know who people are and remember them. You know, because we look different with masks, you have to be socially distant, you have to be careful about so many things, even people who would socialize in off campus environments. So, I can't hardly do that anymore because of the negative potential ramifications. So, it's changed things dramatically as far as the campus landscape.

Drake: (Pauses then resumes Recording)

Hudson: I think the other thing that's been dramatically different is, you know, there was no homecoming this year, and there was no in person family weekend, or at least the homecoming was all virtual. So, there's no parade, there is no, there's been no fall football games, you know, the things that that make college, you know, kind

of come alive, what's so unique about it, this has not been able to happen. So, I think this, so many things have impacted the campus. But I think our students, especially our incoming students, you know, this is a group that that had no high school graduation, they couldn't go to prom, they didn't have spring sports, they didn't have all kinds of things they normally have. And then when they came to college, they're in this more isolated situation, that also feels different. So, I think I think the impact is going to be long lasting, especially on those folks that are impacted directly by the experiences.

Drake: So, for you as the executive director, what do you think has been the biggest challenge/change for you and your position over the course of the pandemic?

Hudson: Well, it's really a matter of crisis management, how do you deal with this particular set of variables that we've never had before? And figure this out, we're getting lots of information from the CDC and the Illinois Health Department and in trying to translate that into operational needs. So, you know, started in March when we when people went away for spring break, and then they couldn't come back, you know, unless they absolutely had to, so we had to run a process where people could come down and get their educational materials, but do so socially distantly and without community contact with others. And we knew so little about the disease at that point, you know, we were just really, you know, kind of trying our best to use our common sense. But then we had a couple 100 people on campus that had to be here because they needed internet access, or they didn't

have a home to be in or whatever. And we had to feed those individuals, you know. And we had to set up a protocol for how to isolate people if, you know, if they were to come down with COVID. And that was just the spring semester. And then we had all the people that had all their stuff here that had to come back and get it all. So, we had to run a process in May, where we only let five people come per hour per building. So, they could stay, spread out. So, they wouldn't come in contact with each other. So those are just the things that were in the initial process, then the whole summer conference program got wiped out, because you know, they couldn't bring them to campus. And that obviously has a big impact on people. And then it's all the protocol development. You know, we couldn't do dining the way we did dining, because you can't have salad bars, because you can't self-serve, because that's a cross contamination issue. How do you, you know, how do you do all those things that you need to do but still stay safe? You know, all the protocols for how do you deal with a person who's positive and has to be moved into isolation? And where do you put them? And how do you feed them? And how do you make sure when they're done, the next person gets to go in with a clean environment and ready to go? What do you do with the space they moved out of? And how do you clean it? And how do you make sure the bathrooms are in good shape? How do you have cleaning protocols for general restrooms because, you know, people use these restroom share space. And we had to up our sanitation process where we are cleaning every day, but now we're sanitizing twice a day, you know, so that and then when someone gets moved out of environment, another crew comes in to sanitize it again to make sure there's no

cross contamination again. So, my goodness, there are so many things that we've had to work on to figure out how to develop the very best product we can for our students with a great number of restrictions.

Drake: So, you've talked about a lot of different policy decisions that you've had to make, i.e., like the single room occupancy that Housing has implemented. What factors have gone into those decisions? Like where does it come from, like, the CDC and the public health department? And then you make those decisions or to somebody higher up on the, "food chain" make that decision?

Hudson: Well, that's an excellent question. You know, really, what my responsibility is, is to make sure that I have explored with my colleagues across the state, as well as in other states that that what's their approach? And then I look at what our challenges are our central senior staff come together and brainstorm what these issues are. We were meeting started in March three times a week, as a central staff meeting, as a central staff group, you know, working on all these issues. And plus, in addition to that, I was meeting twice a week with the dining staff, because we were trying to figure those issues out as well. So, the decisions are really formulated, or that the options are formulated at our level. And we make recommendations to the Vice President for Student Affairs, who then carries those recommendations into the President's Council, because the President's Council is the one that's overall responsible for the operation of the campus. Since we were all trying to figure it out. They wanted to make sure we had a good, coordinated

effort of how we're trying to do it. For example, one of the things we did is for those people that couldn't come back between after spring break and into the end of the semester, you know, we did refunds for those folks. And that was three and a half million dollars that we had to give back, you know, to those folks, and obviously, I'm not personally making that decision, you know, that decision has to go to the President's Council. But in fact, it had to go all the way to the Board of Trustees because it was a significant financial impact on the university. Even though the money I have is the money that came from our resources of people living with us and buying services from us doesn't come from the state or come from tuition or fees. It still is an important part of the university's cash flow. So, you know, in that case, the Board of Trustees had to weigh in on that particular decision.

Drake: Cool. Um, so you talk about working with people from different states. Are you talking about other executive directors of housing in different universities?

Hudson: Yes, you bet. You know, I have a, in fact, during this whole process, we have met virtually, sometimes every week, sometimes every other week, and the housing directors just compare notes. You know, say, "Okay, what are you doing with this? What are you doing with that?" Plus, we're emailing each other several times a day. And especially those early days when oh my gosh, everybody was trying to figure it all out. And they were just an invaluable resource to the process. So, I'm so pleased that we have a good community with our housing directors in the state,

because that really pays dividends when you've got to face such uncertainty. And then of course, we have colleagues in other states that we also tap into both where people have worked before, and just where they have far more Eastern people that are there or whatever. So, we did everything we can plus our national organizations, you know, did a lot of things to push information out and you can participate in these national and regional roundtables, where we are talking about all these issues as well.

Drake: And just for the record by national and regional organizations, you mean ACUHO[Association of College and University Housing Officers-International and GLACUHO[Great Lakes Affiliate of College and University Housing Officers], right?

Hudson: Correct. ACUHO-I is that is the international organization of housing officers, and GLACUHO is the Great Lakes region, which is the states right around Illinois, that that also meet and have an annual conference as well as lots of services to help connect the schools in support of each other.

Drake: And just again, GLACUHO refers to which states specifically?

Hudson: It's Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio.

Drake: Okay, cool. Thank you. That's what I needed. And then one final question on that last one. You mentioned the central housing staff meeting. And in that meeting, who was there, obviously, you, but like, other housing staff?

Hudson: The structure of our department is my responsibility as overall executive director is to manage all the sub areas of the department. I am currently without a dining lead person. So, I've been doing that for 20 months. So, I did the dining piece, as well as the overall piece. Then there is a Senior Associate Director for Residence Life that deals with all of the hall staff and in administration of the department, I have an Associate Director for Business Operations, who manages all those business functions, I have an Associate Director for Facilities, that manages all the things that deals with our facility. So, three direct reports. Ordinarily, four, because that dining person is not currently there, and I'm doing that. So typically, the central staff is a group of five, and then and then the other person, I guess, I should mention, who's on central staff is also our Associate Director for Marketing that reports up to the Senior Associate, but that marketing person has a plays a very big role in that because he was our technology person, who man helped us with so many communications to residents, Mach forms, you know, how do you tabulate all these things that people are doing? How do you figure it out? How do you have people have been able to sign up for these move-in slots, move out slots, you know, and he was the guru of that. So, we are very blessed to have great talent on our team.

Drake: Yeah. Cool. Um, so, during the pandemic, it's very, it's a very stressful time for everyone. Um, but you mentioned how you try and create a community where students feel supported. So, during the pandemic, and what do you have? What is housing done to make sure that their supported?

Hudson: Well, if you're talking about how do we externally help our students connect with each other? You know, certainly this has been a major topic of conversation execution amongst our residence life staff. You know, they're training a lot of us virtually as well. And how do you build a community? How do you connect with people on a floor that you would typically knock on everybody's door and all go eat dinner together or go to an activity or go to orientation activities that typically are 5000 people hanging out together, none of which you can do? So, a lot of that contact happens through our staff structure. I think the only thing that happens, though, it's not unique, that you know, we have a hall governance structure. And every hall council every Hall has a council. There's the Residence Hall Association in the National Residence Hall Honorary, RHA is the representative governance and they've had their meetings all year with you know, virtually meeting and taking care things and, and that's all part of the connection as well, because as they work with their individual halls, those people feel a part of something. And lots of extra challenges to be sure, like one of the traditional activities we do in the past was called ROC Fest. And ROC Fest was many things, like a campus scavenger hunts and cardboard boat races across the pond. And all this, you get spirit points, and the halls compete against each other. And we did

something more virtually. But you know, it's hard to replicate the amount of enthusiasm when you have, you know, 400 people standing around the pond cheering, you know, for their boat, and all the things that those things caught. So, yes, I think we've tried a number of things, I think that we've done our best, I just don't think it is at the level that we would all like it to have been.

Drake: Yeah. Cool. Um, so you've mentioned students having to isolate a few times. And when they do have to isolate, where do they isolate?

Hudson: Well, the whole isolation process is sort of fascinating in its own right, because the Senior Associate Director and I are the two people that manage all the moves for people that are in the on-campus population. So, when we initially tried to figure out how to do this, we knew we would prefer not to put them in a traditional residence hall. So, what we did is we were able to tap into our university apartment area, which was many years ago was called married student housing. But it's been more recently called, the University apartments, and is used by small families, but also by a lot of grad students. And, frankly, the need for it has fallen off. So out of 90 apartments, you know, we're only renting about right now, we capped it early, so we had more spaces, but we're only using about 35. So that gives us about 55 apartments out there, that we can utilize for this purpose. And these apartments are self-contained, have a bedroom, bathroom, a kitchen and a living room. And the students can stay in that space and take care of everything, we pre make the beds, you know, we put towels there, we deliver

meals out there to them. So, we do our best to provide maximum of service. But some of the challenges are, you know, say the person's in Thomas Hall, and they we find out that they're positive, so we call them, and we say, do you have a vehicle, and if they don't have a vehicle, then we have to provide transportation for them to get there, but doing so safely. So, the person who's given transportation isn't exposed, you know, we have to deliver a medical kit, which includes a thermometer, and then gloves and a KN-95 mask, so that we can help them, you know, make the transition out to that new location. If they have a car, how do they know how to get there and, and so there's a lot of people involved making those steps happen. Jody [Senior Associate Director for Residence Life] and I are kind of quarterbacking it all. But we've got you know, the staff on duty who are in an in an area, who's going to get the medical kit and the key and taking it to that person, so they have the things they need to transition to the next place. So, you know, it's a complex set of moving parts. But I'm really proud that our staff is really stepped up, our catering department has totally shifted itself from catering events, which there are none of to doing this process. I mean, they've done close to 6000 meals that they've delivered in the fall semester. And as well as another 1000 plus snack bags that they take out upon request, people get beverages and extra snacks, so that people feel like they have what they need. That includes dealing with specialty diets like gluten free and dairy free. And you know, there's a lot of stuff going on with all that. And then and then the staff of University Apartments that work so hard, that as soon as people move out, we have to, we have to clean the apartment, we have to strip the bed, we have to get

that linen out, we have to get it prepared and turned over. And we can do that in like 12 hours. And you know, we've done that many times. We also have two other locations on campus. We have one Greek Court house that is not being used this semester, because we move those people to a smaller environment. And so that environments is used, it's Greek Court 2B, Building 2 on the B side and that gives us about 20 more spaces, 25 more spaces you can use there. Plus, we've rented 10 apartments off campus at Campus Pointe. Those are 10 three-bedroom apartments where we can put people in those apartments have to have a shared exposure. So, they can ride out their isolation or quarantine. together. So overall, we have 101 *[interviewee later corrected, the real number is 110 spaces]* that we manage for quarantine. And we've, we've been as high as 58% in usage, but a vast majority of the time, we're in, like loads double digits, like between 10 and 15%.

Drake: Awesome. Well, you took the next question, which was what was the process? So, thank you for that. Awesome. Well, Mark, that's all of them. We want to give, the last thing we do is we want to give you a space to kind of just add anything that you think would be of use. So, is there anything else that you think would be important to put on the record, or anything else you'd like to say in general?

Hudson: Well, I think that the pandemic has given us incredible number of challenges. But I also think it's been able to show us a way in which we can do things we couldn't do before, like zoom meetings and connecting with people across the country, not to mention just on the campus, and how do we do that. And, you know, I think

some of those traditions will live on to help people stay more connected. I think that there's a very serious concern about just COVID fatigue, you know, this is nine months, you know, of this. And, you know, from March until early June, I worked from home, doing these things, and, you know, there was no separation between your workplace in your home place. So, you know, we were working 14 or 15 hours a day, you know, trying to keep up with all the things that had to be done. And everyone had something we called protocol fatigue, because you'd write a protocol, get it all ready, you know, work with all the labor unions get it approved, and the CDC would change direction on based on latest information, and you'd have to go back and start over again, to make those things happen. So, I think, but I think the university has really worked well together, the faculty and staff and the administration, and the students, I think the students have done an excellent job of adhering to the masking standards, social distancing, the way in which they're using the dining centers. And I think that's a, that's a big win. I mean, I'm not sure everybody would have thought we could have gotten 18 to 23-year-olds to conform in such a positive way. But, you know, our numbers have been low, much because they, the students, have done a great job of this. And I think our president, our President's Council has given us very solid leadership and trying to work through it, you know, it's not easy. And it's some decisions are controversial, but you're always err on the side of what's in people's best health interest, and how can we help them make sure they're here for the next school year. And, you know, we're going to come out of this, and when we do, you know, everyone's going to have a COVID story or 10. And, and I think the, the,

the things that will have an impact is this shared experience of how we went through this together.

Interview Terminated