

Date: 11/19/2020

Subject: Effects of COVID-19

Interviewee: Noor Ul-Hash Khamisani

Interviewer: Benjamin Robert Drake

Place of Interview: Zoom

Drake: In your own words, how would you describe your role as Student Body President?

Khamisani: My role is basically a bridge between students and the administration. I collaborate with students and figure out what the problems are and try to tell the administrators, or work on, and solve it. So basically, a bridge between students and the administration.

Drake: How do you think COVID-19 has impacted campus?

Khamisani: I think it has impacted a lot. We have enough students; we have enough students on campus but still it's hard for them to interact. College is a time when you actually interact and you make those social connections, but because of COVID it's not possible. We have had a lot of events in the spring and the fall but because of COVID all of those were cancelled. It has impacted a lot, but at the same time we are trying to do it virtually and it's not working the same, but it's helping students to build and grow and have some sort of college experience.

Drake: *(pauses then resumes recording)* What do you think the role of masks and social distancing is in limiting the spread of the virus?

Khamisani: Since the virus is spread through non-physical contact, but also spreads through when you talk, when you breath, so if it's 6 feet it's not going to be that much, I feel like. I don't know that much information, like the scientific information. I feel like the distance helps because you're not going to breath in someone.

Drake: Over the course of the pandemic, obviously everything has changed a lot. What do you think the biggest challenge for you, personally, has been?

Khamisani: I feel like I am still active, but when there was no COVID, I was more active. I was so excited to go on campus, I was excited to go to my office, to do office hours, work on things. Right now, it's like ok I can do it online. I'll take the class online. I'll sit her and take the class. I feel I am lacking the motivation to do anything. That's one of the things that is difficult.

Drake: Follow-up question, you mentioned office hours for student government, I presume?

Khamisani: Yeah.

Drake: How many office hours did you have to have before COVID-19, as an executive officer?

Khamisani: We used to have eight office hours and we still do have eight office hours. But sometimes we do part online, part face-to-face, in the office working on things.

Drake: What do you think on campus, what do you think the biggest change for the university has been?

Khamisani: The biggest change is classes. For example, in classes we used to have group discussions, and group projects, and we would interact with others, and smaller group activities every day. Now we don't because it's six feet and masks, and even participation. It's so hard for me to talk just because I feel like that nobody can understand because I have a mask and I'd have to take off the mask. I just feel like participation in-class and group projects, they were really helpful and now we don't have them.

Drake: Over the course of the pandemic, Eastern Illinois has put in a lot of different policies to help limit the spread, an example of policies being the mask mandate, dining halls have changed a lot. What do you think about the policies do you think they keep you safe? Do you think they have taken too many steps, they're too extreme, or do you think they need to do more?

Khamisani: I think we're right at the spot that we need to be, for now at least. Just because we have important policies, we have the six feet, we have the masks mandate. But the thing is, it also depends on the students. On-campus we're supposed to wear masks, we're supposed to do all that. But off-campus we don't know what students are doing. We have policies we need on-campus, but it just depends on how students are doing. If we add more policies, it just going to make it harder for students to keep up with it. We already have a lot of policies.

Drake: Last semester what was your role?

Khamisani: I was Vice President of Academic Affairs

Drake: For Student Government?

Khamisani: Yeah, for Student Government.

Drake: In the spring we transitioned from in-person to online. How do you think your role as Vice President of Academic Affairs had to evolve because of the pandemic?

Khamisani: It was supposed to evolve but it didn't. In the spring, we were supposed to have a "Prowlin' with the Pres," which is a series with the President. We did it before COVID. After COVID, I was supposed to produce a newsletter, but the responses from people decreased so much that I was actually frustrated that nobody was

responding online, so I wasn't able to produce that. It was really hard, but I made the transition, I wasn't able to do a lot, wasn't able to do anything, because of the participation, and student or faculty or administrative engagement.

Drake: To piggyback off that, how do you think that the Student Body President Position has had to evolve because of the pandemic?

Khamisani: Last year, or this semester?

Drake: Over the course of the whole thing.

Khamisani: I think that is, for me and the previous Student Body President, is really challenging. It is really challenging for the whole organization. A lot of our programs were face-to-face, and a lot of things were supposed to be face to face, that's how the real thing will happen. Even consider the Student Government Meeting, everyone had to attend this 7 p.m. meeting. Now we have the meeting, but it's online, so there's no participation, there's not a lot of business. But we're still having the meetings because we need to run as an organization. When I started running for this position, I had a lot of things in mind, I had a lot of goals. I'm not able to do anything because of this. We're trying to find loopholes as an organization, to work things out but still it doesn't work out, especially because of this whole online fatigue. Students are not ready to participate online, but we're still figuring out ways.

Drake: How have you been struggling with Zoom fatigue?

Khamisani: As I said, I don't know why, but I have easily adjusted to this, because I lack the motivation to get up and go to on-campus. So, I think getting ready her and getting on a Zoom call and talking, or participating, or working is not that big of

deal right now. I feel like now when the time is to transition back to that face-to-face college, it will be hard for me.

Drake: Last semester, we went from in-person to online, how do you think that transition was for academics as a whole but then for you personally?

Khamisani: I think at first it was really smooth because a lot of professors were very lenient and they were very understanding of everything because some students also got the virus, so they were understanding, students are suffering they are going back, everything is online, this is new, professors were understanding. But, after a certain time over the summer or semester, professors are not that understanding. They are to a certain extent. But not really. It depends. Sometimes I'm struggling and a lot of students are struggling too. Student Government, Executive Members of Student Government, went to Faculty Senate and talked to them about this topic, how we are struggling as students, or how the student body is struggling academically. We all came up with this conclusion that professors are not that lenient, they are understanding but they are also frustrated and tired of getting the same excuse, "Oh I was going through this exposure" or "Can I submit this late?" I feel like professors are lenient to a certain extent but not really. It's kind of hard but we have to deal with it.

Drake: Do you have any in-person classes this semester?

Khamisani: I do. I had two in-person classes but recently my professor was exposed, a week or two ago. She was in quarantine, so it just went online. The other professor, that class was hybrid, but it was mostly face-to-face. She said, "It's getting kind of scary, let's just meet online."

Drake: Back to Student Government, you mentioned a few things about it being different. Can you go more in-depth on how the organization has had to change, or has had to evolve?

Khamisani: We used to have, talking about my last year's role which was Vice President of Academic Affairs, I had to form this Student Dean Advisory Council, and all the Deans and I would meet and discuss, once a month or twice a month, it just depends. We would discuss what is happening in which college. This semester they were meeting online and they just met online. You're new to the role because you just started, and everything is online. They don't know anybody from Student Government. First it was really hard. Secondly, we did Panther Shuttle Surveys, we can't do that because only five people are allowed, we cannot get data. We used to have Prowlin' with the Pres in person, we cannot do that. Now the President cannot meet with students. There's no connection between the President and the students. Then we used to have tabling events, we cannot do tabling events anymore. This semester one of our big things was to get feedback, which we can't because we cannot get feedback because we cannot put boxes on campus, especially now. Because of COVID, we started late. Our elections were pushed back. As an organization we are struggling because I've been in this position for a month and I feel like I haven't done anything. But we're still doing a lot of things. It like planning, planning, planning, planning. We were supposed to record videos for our YouTube Channel. One of our exec members, people around him got COVID, so now he can't leave his house. We cannot do recordings. Everything is based on meeting in-person. We were supposed to do

this kindness wall in-person. A display of kindness wall, of kind words and things like that, before things gave in. But senators cannot do face-to-face office hours, they can't get any help to do things. It's a lot of things. The solution is we're trying to do this virtual kindness wall, but it doesn't feel like people are going to want it. We're not going to get the same amount of participation as we used to.

Drake: A follow-up question, you mentioned senators have to do office hours too. How has that changed for the senators?

Khamisani: We are just letting them do it online. We used to have this, at 5 p.m. on Wednesdays you were to put your timecard in the box. This semester, what we told them was, "Just submit this form to the Speaker, with whatever you did." We're asking them to research or asking them to talk to the professor, whatever the task is do it online. Right a short report about it and submit it, with some sort of proof.

Drake: Do you live on-campus or off-campus?

Khamisani: Off-campus?

Drake: How has that been different? How do you think your experience with COVID, and the University has been different because of you being an off-campus student rather than an on-campus student?

Khamisani: I feel like there are a lot of restrictions and policies on-campus, there are no restrictions or policies here, the place where I'm living. But at the same time, I try to follow those policies. I try and still wear a mask whenever I go outside and follow the six feet distance thing. It just depends. It is dramatic. It's too different. I know a person, a friend who was living on campus, and somebody came to see

her, and they didn't have a mask. They got in a problem with the Student Conduct, and they got a warning, and they had to go through all of that, because they weren't wearing masks. But I see a lot of residents in my apartment building not wearing masks all the time, and it's fine obviously because it's off-campus. I feel like it's different, but I would still want to stay here, because when the university is off, I have somewhere to stay.

Drake: That is all the question I have. But do you want to add anything for the record anything at all. This is like you have the floor, so say what you want, or we can just end it here.

Khamisani: Last thing I would want to say is that I feel like whatever I said is basic. Everyone is going to complain about the same things as I just did. But I feel like in order to change it, in order to stay motivated, we cannot repeat these things. All we're is just saying, "Oh my God, we're just doing so much. Now I cannot do anything, and I'm frustrated. I'm going through this; I'm going through that." But actually, we're going to push ourselves way back. I'm not saying we should stop complaining, I'm just saying to look at the positives. We're still able to get our education, we're still able to interact in some ways and I'm really glad I'm still going to college and trying to finish my degree on time. I feel like we should see the positives right now. If we start looking at negatives and the things that are frustrating us it's just going to be hard.

Drake: You're a senior correct?

Khamisani: Yes, correct.



