

Date: January 26, 2021

Subject: Effects of COVID-19

Interviewee: Abby Nicole Wahl

Interviewer: Benjamin Robert Drake

Place of Interview: Zoom

Drake: So, starting off, what's your role on campus in your own words?

Wahl: My role on campus, I would say I'm a student here attend classes, and then I'm a student athlete I'm on the women's basketball team. So, I'm doing that pretty much every day as well.

Drake: Cool, wonderful. The point of this project as you're aware is, to document the impacts of the pandemic on Eastern. So, have you seen any impacts and what are those impacts?

Wahl: Yeah, I've seen lots of impacts. It started, well, obviously we got sent home last year, but we luckily got to finish our season out, so it didn't affect us too much. But then the next major impact is we're usually here June and July practicing all summer with our team, just getting to know each other and getting in shape and all of that. And we weren't able to do that. So, we were at home all summer, so that was a major adjustment for us. And then when we did get back to campus, we couldn't practice right away. And then when we did start practicing at first, we had to wear masks the entire time: practicing, conditioning. So that was obviously a change. We weren't allowed to use our locker room because they didn't want us all together. And then we just had temperature screenings. So, like from six to 8:00 AM every day we still do this. We just have to go in, the trainers take our

temperature and all that. And then we get like a wristband (motions to wristband on wrist) every day just to say that we're screened. But yeah, the, I think that's been the major change. And then obviously we can't have any fans at our games, so that's been a big adjustment as well because we're used to my parents came to every single game last year, so that's been a change too.

Drake: So, do you think that, so you mentioned having to like in June and July coming to practice and then practicing, as soon as you, the school year starts, do you think that's affected like your performance within the games at all? Or do you think it's pretty much the same?

Wahl: I don't think it's affected us too much. I think it's pretty much the same with our performance, just because we are, I mean, obviously we're all Division 1 athletes, so we held each other accountable and worked on our own a lot, but I think it was a little bit more of an adjustment, I would say for our freshmen just coming in because usually they have the summer to get to know us and build relationships with us. So, it was definitely harder for them coming in, not knowing the campus and not knowing us as well, but we we've adjusted well. And obviously they're good now.

Drake: So, what do you think the biggest challenge has been because of the pandemic in relation to sports academics? Pretty much anything.

Wahl: I would say the biggest challenge for me, which is not, not being able to see my parents and my family as much. Like I said, they came to almost every single

game. So, during the season last year, I would get to see them twice a week, at least. So that's been a major change just playing in an empty gym and finding the motivation, you know, to keep going and you can't go home and see them as much. So that's definitely been a challenge, but I think we've adjusted to it, well.

Drake: Yeah. So, from your perspective, have you seen any challenges that the university as a whole has faced and what do you think those are?

Wahl: I would say probably just classes like moving to all online classes has definitely been a challenge. And I know even, especially in education last year, like they weren't able to go into schools and observe and do work in schools, which I think is challenging for them not having that experience. So yeah, I would say that as a whole, just moving from in-person to online is a big adjustment for everyone.

Drake: Have you seen any of the curriculum, because I know you're an education major, so have you seen like any of the curriculum change around education because of the pandemic?

Wahl: Not necessarily for me, but I'm just in Core 1 this semester. So, like I haven't been in it majorly, but I've just heard other people talk about not being able to go into the schools and teaching lesson plans, like is a big change in all online, as an adjustment, but for me personally, not so much, I mean the teachers have done a really great job of, you know, transforming it on to online.

Drake: Yeah. So, you are a junior?

Wahl: Yes.

Drake: Okay. So, you were here in the spring last spring, Spring 2020, where the pandemic really started to take off. How did you feel that the transition was from going all in person to all online and everybody being sent home?

Wahl: Yeah, it was definitely interesting because I can remember like at first it was just okay. The spring breaks two weeks, so we just thought we were having an extra week of spring break and then it just kept getting pushed back and pushed back. So, like all of my teammates, like we had only taken home enough stuff for like a week and then we couldn't come and get it until May. So that was interesting. But as far as my classes go, all of my professors were super understanding when it switched online and some we met like in-person over zoom and some, they would just put the materials up online, so it wasn't too bad for me. But I'm sure it was different for every person in their classes.

Drake: So, a broader question is like, what do you think the historical impact of the pandemic has been? Not even just really on Eastern, just in general.

Wahl: I would just say just everyday life. I mean, with the quarantine and I'm from a smaller town in Southern Indiana. So, when I first went back there, like right after spring break, everyone was just like, "Oh, it's not a big deal." Like no one really took it that seriously. And then like my town personally, like not a ton of them were masks. And that was like a huge controversial issue, whether you should wear masks. And then all of a sudden it was mandatory. Everyone's wearing

masks, stuff was shut down, we were stuck in our houses. So, I would just say like how fast it changed, like normal life to this. And then who knows when, or if it will ever go back to normal. I just think it's such a unique time and it's crazy, the unknowns of what's going to happen.

Drake: Right. Totally. So, over the course of the pandemic Eastern has implemented a bunch of policies, not just on campus and that we're not just like for the on-campus residents, but also for like just everybody in general, for an example, would be making mass mandatory and the implementation of like classroom settings and stuff like that. Do you think that these policies are effective, and do you think that they may be too extreme of a policy? Or how do you feel about that?

Wahl: I think the policies, I mean, I think they're pretty standard. Like the wearing the mask obviously is across the whole country. Like, I think that's pretty necessary right now. And I think they handled like the classes, well, you know, like we're all spaced out. It's all good. And I that's really important for me because especially like being in season right now, if I'm even around someone who ends up testing positive, like I'm automatically quarantined for a week. So that's huge for me because you know, that's a whole week practicing games. That's already happened to me once after Christmas break. So, I think just as safe as we can be as awesome. And obviously I'm a little biased, but I think like the, no fans at any games, that's not just Eastern, that's the whole state. I mean, I don't completely agree with that just because we've been to games like Tennessee, and I feel like

parents could space out. They could all have their own section of bleachers. So, I mean, I don't completely agree with that, but I also understand why they're doing that and they're trying to protect us in our bubble, so I get it. But I think every state's different and it's kind of interesting to see how they handle it

Drake: Yeah. So, do you think that like for the fans, that that policy, do you think, what do you think would be, what am I trying to say? What do you think would be the right policy? Do you have like an idea? Do you, you mentioned having parents, do you think limiting it to just family coming? What do you mean?

Wahl: I think, well, I know like we played in Tennessee last week and they just have like a 15% capacity maximum or things like that. Like I understand that there's procedures that need to be followed, but I think just like even having two, two or three or four tickets for each person and just having, you know, family or friends and just having them spaced out, I think it would work. I mean, Lance, it's not huge, but it's big enough. Like we could, we could socially distance, but I completely agree, like our trainers stresses the bubble and keeping us safe. So, I understand. But

Drake: Yeah. So, you've mentioned this bubble a few times. Can you go a bit into like what your trainers mean by that?

Wahl: Yeah, so they're trying to, I mean, obviously we're all going to class, so it's not really a bubble, but they're trying to create a bubble as much as possible where it's just like athletes. We get screened every day and the ones who haven't tested

positive for COVID in the last couple of months, they get tested like two or three times a week. As soon as like, before we travel somewhere, we get tested. When we come back, we get tested and we wear masks everywhere we go and we socially distance. So, they want the athletics and like the basketball team to be in a bubble so that, you know, we can protect ourselves. And when we play other teams, like we're all protected, but obviously, you know, we can't, it's not like the NBA or anything. We can't create that much of a bubble, but we're doing it as best as we can.

Drake: So, for you as an off-campus student, do you, have you noticed any differences in a way where you off campus last year?

Wahl: No. Last year I lived in Stevenson and this year I'm, I mean, I'm off campus, but I'm super close to campus.

Drake: So, I guess, have you noticed any difference in a way, anything really about since being an off-campus student because of the pandemic than your experience being an on-campus student without the pandemic?

Wahl: Not majorly. I mean like last semester, almost all of my classes were online, so that was just unique because besides for practice, like I never went onto campus. So, it just different like being in Stevenson, I at least walked. I walked to class, I walked to the gym. Like I saw people, I was in the facilities, but yeah, this last semester was definitely different. It was just a lot of isolation here and I didn't really get out much. So that was, that was the major change.

Drake: So, moving along so you're a student athlete, like we've talked about where was your, where was your head when you heard about like the cancellation, the postponements of everything? Like I know like, obviously you're playing now, but I know I'm pretty sure it was like up in the air for a little bit. So how did you, how was, where were you at when that?

Wahl: It was definitely nerve wracking, but honestly, we were getting kind of used to it because over the summer we didn't know that we weren't going to be here all summer. Like, it was kind of more of a, in two weeks, we'll let you know. Oh, and two weeks we might be able to, so we always thought we were coming back and then it just kept getting pushed back. But I would say pre-season we were practicing. And again, didn't really know for sure if we were going to get to play and other schools canceled their seasons and some still are as we speak. So, it was definitely nerve wracking because, you know, if they did cancel, like that's a whole, whole other year you're you here pushing back. Like I know for me personally, I have to student teach and I can't do that with basketball. So, I have to wait an extra semester to do that. So that was just nerve wracking knowing that my whole, you know, plan would be pushed back another year. But luckily, it's been going smoothly so far.

Drake: Right. And do you have a scholarship with basketball or anything?

Wahl: Yes, we all have there's 15 full rides for basketball.



Drake: Okay. So, I guess my, my question is: was there anything that because of the pandemic and like the, the unknown of the season, was there anything that changed with your scholarship or did that stay the same?

Wahl: No, our scholarships stayed the same. We all still have full rides, which is very nice. So that worked out.

Drake: That was something we're curious about. So obviously because of the pandemic stress not just of college life, but being in a pandemic, stress has been a very huge part of our lives. Do you have, do you have any like thing that helped you through the stress? How did you handle the stress, that kind of stuff?

Wahl: I think definitely just, you know, my team has helped me a ton because we're all going through the same thing, you know, we're all handling COVID and basketball and classes, so just being close to them and talking with them through it has been super great. And then honestly, just my professors have helped me out a ton. They're all like, completely understanding about the situation and, you know, let us know, like if we need any help or assistance or deadlines moved back, like most of them are very understanding about that. So, I think that's helped kind of ease the process.

Drake: Yeah. So as this project is also centered around not just the campus community, but also the Charleston community as an off-campus student, you probably have more interactions with the Charleston community than I have. So, what do you think, how do you, that the Charleston community has reacted to the pandemic?

Have you've seen a like, I don't know what the word I'm trying to see is like, they kind of allow the changes to take place? Or do you think there was, like, you still see pushback from the restrictions and everything?

Wahl: I haven't seen a ton, like personally, I don't, you know, I'm not super involved with like the Charleston community itself. I think I will be more once I can go into schools and stuff, but I just know like some of my professors last year talking about like the ones who lived near Charleston talking about like how not a ton of people were taking it seriously at first. Cause I know the numbers in Charleston were super high at one point in time, but I mean, from what I've seen, like everyone's been following the procedures, you know, like at the stores and stuff, but it could be different. I'm not really sure. I haven't had a ton of exposure to that.

Drake: Yeah. So, with the other students we've talked to you, we've, we've seen a lot of them talk about the change of the college experience. So, in your opinion, what is the traditional normal college experience, pre-COVID, and then what do you think that college experience has shifted to now post not post-COVID, but like, because of COVID.

Wahl: Yeah. I mean, I would say my experience is a little bit different just because even pre-COVID, like with basketball and stuff, I can't do everything that I would like or you know, that a normal student would get to do, but I would say a major change is just like having to worry about, you know, like going out and hanging out with friends, like just worrying about, "Oh, I have to wear a mask. Oh, I have

to be socially distanced. Like, I don't know if I should go here. I don't know if I should do this." So, I think that's been the biggest change is just like the second guessing and doubting, like what you should do, because obviously it's still college. Like it's still your college experience. So, you don't just want to stay in your room the entire time, but at the same time with basketball and everything, like you have to be super smart and aware of, you know, who you're around and what they've been exposed to. So, I think that's been really challenging.

Drake: Okay. It looks like we're getting to the end of the questions. That's all I have, but I wanted to give you time to really say anything else you want to say. So, our last thing is, is there anything else that you'd like to put on the record or anything else you'd like to say in general, this could be about the pandemic, what you've seen really pretty much is up to you.

Wahl: I think I pretty much covered everything that I wanted to include, but I just think that, you know, Eastern has been doing like all they can to you know, help protect us and follow the procedures. And I just think the professors have been doing a really good job of adjusting and the students obviously adjusting, but I think it'll just be very interesting to see where this goes and how everything ends up and what our new normal will look like.

Drake: Totally okey-doke.

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Interview Terminated

