

Transcript

Challenges and Opportunities

The effects of coronavirus on Clark and philanthropy

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RHONDA MORIN: Welcome to Penguin Chats, a production of Clark College Foundation. I'm Rhonda Morin, bringing you this remotely recorded edition.

LISA GIBERT: Well, I think it's really important to concentrate on today, but recognize you have to keep looking out for the future. Otherwise, you won't be relevant.

RHONDA MORIN: In this podcast, we're exploring the effects the pandemic is having on Clark College and in philanthropy in this region our college serves, from changes in how the college is now offering its courses to students to how our community is stepping in to offer that immediate financial help, and also long-term investment. We're joined today by Clark's interim president, Dr. Sandra Fowler-Hill, Clark College Foundation's CEO Lisa Gibert, and vice president of Development, Hal Abrams.

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RHONDA MORIN: In March, the college, like all Washington state colleges and universities, made the decision to switch to having all of their courses online. What would have taken years to prepare instead took a few short weeks. Clark delayed the start of the spring quarter to give themselves more planning time. The result? The courses are all remote and will stay that way through December. Here's how Sandra Fowler-Hill describes where Clark is today.

SANDRA FOWLER-HILL: All of that equipment, all of that technology, all of those tools are now going to be in our toolbox—that I think will make us a more accessible college. All of our student support services are now offered remotely. Students are able to access us from all over our district—well, quite honestly, from all over the world—where they never would have had access to those services remotely before. They would have had to come in for face-to-face advising or face-to-face enrollment. And now they're able to do that from their home.

RHONDA MORIN: But as you can imagine, there are a lot of technology gaps to fill.

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SANDRA FOWLER-HILL: The first thing that we did was do an assessment of what technology needs do our faculty and our students have, and then immediately put in orders to be able to distribute over 300 laptops and hotspots, and getting that equipment to the students to be able to have those tools at home. We dismantled every rack on campus of classroom laptops and have redistributed those to students and our faculty, as well as additional purchases that were supported by our student government tech fee.

We were able to increase our online tutoring, our online library services, our online tech support. And that's a 24/7 service that we're able to offer our students. And then we're able to offer those student services that are supports around counseling, around meeting with their nurse practitioner, in an online environment that is confidential and safe. So we currently have a survey posted on our campus site for all of those 2,000-plus sections to provide us with immediate feedback on, how are you doing, what do you need, and what can we do to continue to support you?

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RHONDA MORIN: Part of that support comes from Clark College Foundation. For 47 years, the foundation has provided private funding for the college. During this outbreak, the local community has stepped up to help students and faculty even more. Lisa Gibert explains.

LISA GIBERT: These dollars have gone directly into the hands of students and faculty and staff to adjust to this whole new way of life that we just never could even imagine. It's been able to provide them with the ability to keep going to school, to make sure that their households are maintained, through emergency grants and support, and to make sure that they have the access, that you talked to, to online learning.

RHONDA MORIN: But giving dollars hasn't been the only way people have helped the college, she says.

LISA GIBERT: We have found such an amazing outcry of compassionate and creative giving out there. We have an alumnus who has provided apartment housing on a temporary basis, that is giving health care providers, our first responders, a place to live to protect their families and still follow through with their jobs. We have found that some of our companies, when students needed computers, were able to provide those computers. They had extras, so why not give them to us and put them to work?

And then, of course, we have others that are recreating their manufacturing floors and creating PPE for not only our first responders, but we're also looking at gaining some of that so when we come back to campus we can be protected by wearing face shields. So it really has been inspiring.

RHONDA MORIN: Stories about donors and alumni are nothing new. However, during this unsettling time, these nuggets are as good as gold.

LISA GIBERT: I think that as we provide examples to our community as to how their donations have impacted and positively move the college forward, so that we can keep providing the services that are needed, that's what's resonating. And in turn, the donations have come in.

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RHONDA MORIN: The federal government passed a bill in late March that included billions of dollars in aid for higher education affected by the circumstances surrounding COVID-19. Known as the CARES Act, Clark College received \$5.2 million, half of which is being disbursed directly to students who qualify. The other half goes to operations affected by the stay-at-home orders. And though this money is important, it is not a long-term solution for Clark. Early on in the outbreak, the foundation identified three specific funds that fill the void left by federal funding. Hal Abrams explains.

HAL ABRAMS: We have a scholarship fund, but it's a flexible scholarship fund that really allows for educational expenses to be covered wherever dollars drop off. There may be enough funds, for example, for a vet who's working with our Veterans Resource Center to get tuition covered. But there may not be funds for that student who's just lost their part-time job in the service industry to buy books or to buy other educational supplements.

The second one is emergency grants, but same thing. We are fortunate enough to be receiving some state and federal funds that are covering many students. But also, they have limitations. And so we are positioning an emergency grant fund, on number two, an emergency grant fund to fill in the voids where the dollars are not addressing certain students within those groups. The third one fits in the same categories of filling in the gaps, and that is this, most broadly, an unrestricted fund, that allows us at the Clark College Foundation to work with the college and identify where there are other voids and gaps, and make sure that we can do all we can to support our students.

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RHONDA MORIN: Undoubtedly, the student experience has changed. Sandra Fowler-Hill explains it as a different paradigm of time and place.

SANDRA FOWLER-HILL: The experience of trying to be a successful student at home takes a lot of self-motivation, as well as managing one's own time, to be able to get assignments in on time and be able to do the work that you have to do pretty independently. The faculty are committed that our learning outcomes will be met and the courses will be completed in a shorter amount of time—we have eight weeks now instead of 10—and that students will successfully earn credit for these courses. But the work that is done is all done at home, which is very different than, perhaps for an art class of doing your sculpture on the kitchen table instead of doing it in the sculpture lab. And so it's a whole different paradigm of time and place that students are experiencing.

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We've recorded over 1,000 lectures that are then distributed through Canvas, or whether it's just putting exams into the Canvas shell and quizzes and notes that are going to be covered that week in assignment. And doing that two weeks ahead of spring quarter, yet keeping up on that every week for multiple sections that every faculty member teaches, I think that's been our biggest challenge. They've worked extraordinarily hard to pivot and to deliver on a timely basis, and creatively to think of ways that they might be able to do things differently.

I've heard from our science faculty that they were able to create the outcomes for experiments in labs by using household items. The applications might be a little different, but it gets to the same theoretical concept or the same experimental concept. Our baking instructor has a pop-and-go concept, where she's put together learning packages that the students drive into the parking lot, pop their trunk, and she puts it in their trunk so there's no one touching anybody or coming into personal contact with anybody, yet getting the supplies or ingredients, in this case, that they need in order to do their projects at home.

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Our art faculty produced videos of, you come to the college, you pick up your clump of clay, and you use your wooden spoon from your kitchen drawer and you use your knife from your kitchen drawer and your dental floss. These are the tools that you're going to use this quarter. And you essentially create the projects on your kitchen table.

RHONDA MORIN: Clark College Foundation has assisted the college through fundraising for nearly five decades. And the current pandemic doesn't change its overall mission. But it does shed light on the importance of long-term investment. Lisa Gibert explains what this means.

LISA GIBERT: Well, I think it's really important to concentrate on today, but recognize you have to keep looking out for the future. Otherwise, you won't be relevant. We actually encourage people to give both currently and over the long term. Generally, when you think long term, you think of different types of giving strategies, which would involve, say, estate planning or giving during your lifetime to an endowment, and create a fund that's there for perpetuity that will continue to provide support for the institution forever.

RHONDA MORIN: What donors want to know right now, Lisa adds, is what are the obstacles that students are facing during this pandemic and how can they best support them?

LISA GIBERT: So there's all these factors that create barriers for these students that we need to try to break those down, because we don't ever want a student to walk away from their educational goals because of a few small dollars. If we can help and keep them engaged and moving towards their degree, we know that they will be so much farther off and able to obtain a workable wage out there in the workforce and keep themselves relevant.

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RHONDA MORIN: Giving a gift from your estate is one way to provide to Clark for the long term. There were some tax provisions in the federal CARES Act that make it easier for people to give at a time that's best for them. Hal Abrams explains one of those recent changes.

HAL ABRAMS: There is an opportunity for donors to give from their IRA without penalty. It used to be that the individual, if they were over 70 and ½— or actually, it was over 72 years old— could give from their IRA and satisfy their required minimum distribution. That will probably be a provision that returns. But at this point, for this year, that requirement connected to the required minimum distribution has been removed. And so individuals can get from their IRA and roll it straight over so it's not taxed, without any penalty.

SANDRA FOWLER-HILL: Abrams also says there's a way to give what's called above the lines, allowing people to give \$300 a person. With the new rules in place, individuals who give this way can get a tax savings. Then there's a third way.

HAL ABRAMS: Individuals can give their entire income away in a given year and have their tax return show up with a big 0, owing no tax. In normal years, you're limited to using a charitable deduction to offset only a certain amount of your adjusted gross income. But this year, you can actually deduct up to 100% of your adjusted gross income.

RHONDA MORIN: Clark College Foundation offers this type of tax expertise and many other services related to philanthropy. And as Clark faces mounting budget pressures, as all state institutions are facing because of the COVID-19 outbreak, philanthropy is going to play an even bigger role in the college's future. Here's what Sandra Fowler-Hill predicts is in store for Clark.

SANDRA FOWLER-HILL: About 48% of our total budget comes from the state of Washington, based upon the revenue that the state gets from their businesses and industries, and our sales tax. And with this crash of our economy due to the pandemic and looking at the state, being in our fiscal emergency, then that's going to impact—what I'm being told by our electeds, our legislators, that is going to impact higher ed over the next two bienniums. And when we are already looking at cuts due to low enrollment, and then the impact of funding the additional expenses to respond to the pandemic, my greatest fear is that the resources that the state has supported higher ed in the past will dwindle and create a greater impact than what we have now to deliver a high quality education. For Clark College, I think it's more important than ever to work with the foundation around looking for other resources, looking for opportunities, to be able to leverage funding and to leverage supporters, so that we can continue to deliver quality education.

RHONDA MORIN: And this is exactly where philanthropy does its best work. Building bridges between the community and Clark is at the very core of what the foundation does. Lisa Gibert explains.

LISA GIBERT: Because as you see the tightness of our state and federal dollars, we can't just turn around and put that on the backs of students. Philanthropy is going to become increasingly more important as time goes on. We're just going to have to really rely on philanthropy. And I believe that that philanthropy is going to have a profound impact on education. Because what it

will do is it will almost challenge and push higher education to become even more bold, adapt to even more technology and more different ways of adapting to providing an education, and really becoming comfortable in building those relationships between the private and public sectors. And so you're going to find that the relationship's going to become so much tighter. And not only is this going to be helpful from a resource standpoint, but it's also going to make that education so much more relevant, because it's going to be tying the companies and the skills that are needed directly with that education in an even closer fashion than it is today.

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Education is a cornerstone of our way of life. And whether you are in a K through 12 system and getting your primary education, to advanced learning, you always need to be building your skill set. And so higher education is needed. It's needed to make our community relevant. And it is necessary to make sure that our community is vibrant. And so I really look at education, both Clark and Washington state, as cornerstones to making sure that we have the people here that can make a successful and a holistic healthy community.

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RHONDA MORIN: Well, thank you, Dr. Sandra Fowler-Hill. Thank you, Lisa Gibert, and thank you, Hal Abrams. We've been talking with leaders of Clark and Clark College Foundation about the effects the pandemic is having on Clark and on philanthropy. There's so much more, of course, that we could talk about. But we're going to have to leave it there for now. So thanks for being part of this really critical conversation in a time that just has so many unknowns for all of us. So thanks to each of you and take good care.

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