

Jennifer Anderson:

Good evening, thank you for joining this special class of 2024, and transfer student virtual Town Hall. We are thrilled that your family has chosen Fairfield as the place to call home for the next few years. I am Jennifer Anderson, Fairfield's Vice President of Marketing and Communications. I am also an alumna of the College of Arts and Sciences and earned a master's degree from Fairfield Charles F. Dolan School of Business. I have the pleasure of moderating tonight's panel discussion.

Jennifer Anderson:

Over the next hour, our executive leadership team will frame your students journey at Fairfield University. During your upcoming orientation sessions, you will have a chance to learn more about joining the Fairfield University family and hear details regarding this upcoming semester in the context of this current environment.

Jennifer Anderson:

For now, I want to start by first introducing our panelists. Kevin Lawlor is our Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer. Mr. Lawlor is an alum of Fairfield University. He joined his alma mater in the role of Chief Operating Officer in 2013 following more than 25 years in senior executive roles at United Technologies Corporation. Christine Siegel, PhD is our provost, a title commonly known as chief academic officer. Dr. Siegel joined the Fairfield university faculty in 2005 as a professor in the Graduate School of Education and Allied professions. Since then, she has assumed increasingly significant administrative responsibilities at the university before being named provost in 2018.

Jennifer Anderson:

Mark R. Nemec, PhD is the president of Fairfield University, a graduate of Loyola High School, Jesuit College Preparatory in Los Angeles, President Nemec earned a BA in English from Yale, where he was an all Ivy League rugby player. He received an MA in education and a PhD in political science from the University of Michigan. Early in his career, he taught American politics as a visiting assistant professor at Davidson College, and as an instructor at the University of Michigan.

Jennifer Anderson:

Before joining Fairfield, Dr. Nemec served as the Dean of the Grand School of Continuing Liberal and Professional Studies at the University of Chicago. As Dean, he led the school's significant growth and evolution by focusing on innovative ways to extend the university's reach to broader student populations. Prior to his tenure at the University of Chicago, Dr. Nemec served as president and chief executive officer of Edgy Ventures, a Boston based information services firm providing research and advice to the higher education community. He previously had been a member of the executive team of Forrester Research, a provider of similar services to the technology industry. I will now turn it over to President Nemec for opening remarks.

Mark R. Nemec:

Thank you, Jen. And thanks to all of you for joining us in these very busy times. To our class of 2024, as well as our record number of transfer students in our families, again, welcome to Fairfield, we are thrilled to have you with us. I realized that this virtual environment is less than what we had expected in terms of how we would kick off our orientation. But I think it's fair to say that this will give us all an opportunity to fully discuss the Fairfield experience and where we are going. As the father of four

children who are 10th grade and younger two of whom are starting new schools in the fall, I personally recognize that there's a lot of uncertainty right now, about the fall. And over the course of this session, as well as a number of sessions in terms of this orientation, we are certainly going to address what is going to be happening in the fall.

Mark R. Nemec:

But I would also ask us to all be mindful that our conversation here, as it always is with orientation isn't simply about preparing our students for what's going to come in the next three to four months, it's about preparing our students and our families for what's going to be happening over the next four years. And it's with that context that would ask all of us to frame this conversation here with myself, the provost and our EVP.

Mark R. Nemec:

And one of the things I would underscore is that as we approach a Fairfield education, even in these times that have obviously changed a lot about how we think about our approach, our overall philosophy has not changed. Our overall philosophy continues to be grounded in a value based students centric outcomes focused approach towards education. And at the core of that is a commitment to ensuring that our students can maintain their academic continuity as well as get the most of the vibrancy of the community. And I won't detail and regale you with all the specifics of that here. But please know that Provost Siegel in her remarks and EVP, Lawlor, in his remarks are going to talk at length about how that remains so essential to a Fairfield education. That this vibrancy of community and its academic continuity, all dedicated to making sure that our students are educated and formed as men and women, for and with others in pursuit of social stewardship, and productive citizenship has remained at the core of all that we do.

Mark R. Nemec:

Additionally, I think it's important to understand that we at Fairfield are committed truly to the formation of our students, the mind, the body and the spirit. This comes from our Jesuit Catholic [tourism 00:05:49], and it is instantiated in any number of ways. Probably most notably in terms of the freshman experience and in the overall classroom experience is how these characteristics of core personalities find their way into our core curriculum, a core curriculum that is predicated on three particular commitments. The commitment that every student who graduates from Fairfield will be able to communicate. The commitment that every student who graduates from Fairfield will be able to think across disciplines and fields of study. And lastly, the commitment that every student who graduates from Fairfield graduates with an ability to think of the other.

Mark R. Nemec:

It is these core Ignatius Jesuit values, which inform our curriculum and inform our community. And that is why we are so excited to welcome you all, because we are a very vibrant community. This is one of the single largest incoming classes we've ever had, our enrollments continue to be as strong as they ever have. And the reason for that, I believe, is again, that in addition to this commitment to being value based students-centric and outcomes-focused is that we recognize that we are shaping our students not simply for graduation, but for a lifelong of engagement in society. A lifelong commitment to learning, a lifelong commitment to others. And a lifelong recognition that the capacities they develop here at Fairfield will carry them through.

Mark R. Nemec:

The capacity for mindfulness, the capacity, the resilience, the capacity for community, or as the Jesuits would say, discernment, fortitude, and companionship. Those all are at the core of a Fairfield education, both in our academic curriculum, and in our community. And to highlight how we do that, I'd like to turn it over to my colleague, Provost Siegel.

Christine Siegel:

Good evening. Thank you, President Nemec, and thank you to all the parents and students and families who are joining us tonight. As my Provost, it's my distinct honor to oversee the academic enterprise here at Fairfield University. In this role, I work with the president to define the division and direction for the university and with the deans, professors, academic staff to make that vision a reality for you, our students. I'm most concerned with ensuring that you have an optimal learning experience, one that allows you to bring forward your unique abilities and talents, one that helps you discover new ways of thinking about yourself, others and the world around you, and one that prepares you to become thriving and contributing members of the next community you will enter.

Christine Siegel:

The unique and optimal learning experience we provide here at Fairfield depends both on the scholarly vibrant community we create and our ways of proceeding within that community. Through radical hospitality, we welcome and invite all into our learning community. We are committed to respecting and valuing one another, finding the common good among us and working collaboratively to achieve our potential as a modern Jesuit Catholic university, while we work to help you achieve your potential as a person made in all the varieties of God's image.

Christine Siegel:

This community seeks knowledge and understanding by engaging a broad range of ideas, perspectives and identities within our ever changing world. During your time at Fairfield, you will hear much about our way of proceeding in this community. One thing that you might hear often is the term Ignatian pedagogy. That's an approach to teaching and learning that's grounded in the wisdom of St. Ignatius Loyola. This approach emphasizes the essential elements of experience, reflection and action.

Christine Siegel:

Experience: At Fairfield, we provide the context for you to connect your prior experience unique, varied and special as they are two new learning opportunities in ways that move you toward insight and higher understanding. Across your multiple living and learning experiences in physical and virtual classrooms, in residence halls and dining halls, wherever you might engage our community of scholars, you will be encouraged to reflect on those connections that you are making. And we hope that the heightened awareness that comes from these reflections moves you in action to the service of others.

Christine Siegel:

We do all of this to help you become persons of integrity, ones whose lives are integrated. Throughout your multiple experiences at Fairfield, you will be faced with dichotomies that sometimes may feel like tensions. Students at Fairfield are known to work hard and play hard. Through the core curriculum, you will be encouraged to immerse yourself in and explore a variety of Liberal Arts subjects, while at the same time you will identify and pursue a specific major or pre professional area of study. You will be

living perhaps for the first time independently of your parents, yet for the most part within the boundaries of our campus and its guidelines. Guidelines, which this fall will be more restrictive as you manage life on campus in the time of a global pandemic, or establish yourself as a virtual learner from home.

Christine Siegel:

Work and play, breadth and depth of study, freedom within boundaries. Rather than approach these choices as ones of either or, we ask you to consider them as both and. My goal is that during your four years at Fairfield, you learn to work and play. You are curious about many subjects while you find your passion and direction in one.

Christine Siegel:

You enjoy the freedom and embrace the responsibility that comes from your growing independence. So by the time you leave us, you are not different from, but a more fully realized version of the person you are today. We, all of us have Fairfield, your professors, your counselors, your deans and your fellow students are ready and excited to take that journey with you.

Christine Siegel:

Our Jesuit tradition also calls us to recognize that journey starts with you, whoever and wherever you are. Typically, when we say Jesuit educators meet learners where they are, we are speaking figuratively, referring to connecting with students at their particular level of understanding. This year, our tradition called us to also meet students where they were literally, when they could not be with us on campus.

Christine Siegel:

As we look to the fall semester, professors are preparing to meet students both where they are figuratively and where they are literally. We are preparing each course to be flexible and adaptable. All students will have access to all course materials virtually. In addition, those who are here with us on campus we'll have opportunities to connect with professors and students in small learning groups to engage course content in depth. While students who are unable to come to campus will have online engaged learning experiences. We ask that you bring your full self to the journey at Fairfield, in whatever ways the current and future situation allows you to participate. We will meet you where you are, walk alongside you and unlock discoveries together.

Christine Siegel:

Although this time all of what that journey will fulfill is not entirely known to us, but I'm confident that each and you will be great. We're so excited to have you joining us.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you, Provost Siegel. Would you be able to provide some details around the academic support services that Fairfield provides specifically in the areas of career counseling, job search and tutoring?

Christine Siegel:

Sure. We're going to start with tutoring. And so at Fairfield we provide a number of tutoring services. We have a writing center, which all students are encouraged to access as they are working on papers or written projects for classes. We have a math center, also open to all students in all classes. Our library

support staff has really wonderful research librarians and each student coming into Fairfield gets a personal librarian who he or she can identify with and that person is their librarian if they're just support students as they work on research papers and projects.

Christine Siegel:

We also have subject specific tutoring there are some subjects where students find tutors more helpful in economics per se, in some of our chemistry classes, and then peer tutoring is available on an individual or one on one basis. All of these services are located in our academic Commons, which is located in the library to help students have one place to go. This semester in the fall, all of those services will also be available online for students to access them as well.

Christine Siegel:

When it comes to career counseling and job placement services, we have a variety of different ways we approach that within the Dolan School Business and the college and there are specific career counselors that help students in those schools. In Dolan in particular, those counselors helped place the students in internships prior to graduation.

Christine Siegel:

In engineering and in nursing, the courses themselves and the curriculum themselves have internships, experiences, real world practical experiences built into them. At the university level, we also have a career center that runs a career fair every year that brings hundreds of employers to campus to interview our students from across all of those locations. So we really have a great range of services that support students from beginning to end.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you. Can you also talk a little bit about our core curriculum? So we hear from employers all the time about the strength of Fairfield graduates being able to think critically, being able to communicate and write. And we recently revised the score now referred to as the merger score. Can you talk to the benefits, why employers value these skill sets and what we believe the merger score provides our students?

Christine Siegel:

Yeah. So the merger score is based on the 400 year old Jesuit tradition of exploring a variety of subjects. And across literature, math, writing, philosophy, history, those are all subjects that students are exposed to and have been exposed to across the years in the Jesuit tradition. When we went to revise the core curriculum, we wanted to make sure that we kept those important core subjects in place, but also had a course of study that responded to what employers were telling us that they wanted from graduates.

Christine Siegel:

And you mentioned some of that Jen and President Nemecek talked about that before. But the key things we heard from lawyers is that they wanted employees who are able to communicate, who could write and who could speak to others. They wanted employees who could solve new problems and who could think outside of the box about things. And they wanted employees who could work with others in respectful ways and value what everybody brings to it.

Christine Siegel:

So in our core curriculum across those traditional subject areas, we emphasize writing, which is a key to good thinking and speaking. So students will take a series of writing across the curriculum courses. And then in their major, they'll take courses that are focused on writing in their specific discipline. We ask students in the core to have at least one interdisciplinary experience, that's one opportunity, where they are bringing together different subjects to solve a new problem. And that's what employers really wanted is that students could get outside of thinking in just one area, bring multiple ideas together. And so are interdisciplinary courses that students take will address that.

Christine Siegel:

And lastly, increasingly in this world, we know we need to work with each other across differences, races and cultures, with a full understanding of who we are, how we got there, and where others come to the table. And so students take what we call Social Justice courses that help them understand these different worldviews that different people bring to a learning or working situation. We're excited to be rolling out this core in its second year with the students who are coming into us. And we've had positive feedback about that already.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you, Provost Siegel, we will come back to you, but I would now like to ask EVP Lawlor to speak about the community vibrancy here at Fairfield.

Kevin Lawlor:

Thanks, Jen. And let me first add my welcome to 400 of my new best friends who are arriving here on campus. Believe it or not, 45 years ago, I sat in that same chair as an incoming freshman. It seems like it wasn't that long ago, but apparently the calendar keeps rolling, and wondered how this journey that I was embarking on was going to materialize and how quickly I would begin to feel at home at Fairfield.

Kevin Lawlor:

Fairfield is a community first and foremost, and that community extends from the janitors, to the cooks in the dining hall, to the faculty in the classroom, to the administrators and so forth. Many people you'd be pleased to know make careers at Fairfield and they do so because it's an environment that's warm and welcoming and strives almost universally to improve the overall learning experience and life experience that new students have at the university.

Kevin Lawlor:

It's the beginning of a lifelong of learning. It's hard to believe sometimes, that when you set foot on this campus, it begins a journey that many times not only last through the four years on campus, but often quite into your alumni careers, into your career as graduate students, into any number of different avenues. And I think we're set up as a university to support you in whatever choices you make about the directions you want to take.

Kevin Lawlor:

I think I have a little bit of a perspective, a unique perspective in that I'm not only an alumni, I'm also the father of Fairfield students. I have four daughters, two of which have gone through already, one of which is still at Fairfield University. So I hear from the ground up about what's going on in campus, so I'm

able to react to that ASAP. But I think to a person when you measure the four years experience at the university, you'll find how quickly you come to think of Fairfield as home. You walk on campus and you may immediately begin to experience all these strangers who will quickly begin to connect with, whether that's through our 24 clubs, sports, our 20 intercollegiate sports or 90 clubs and organizations. There's the ability to connect in so many ways, and I urge you to do that.

Kevin Lawlor:

One of the things that the student life staff stresses and is proud of is the fact they're bridge builders. And for anybody who wants to become part of this community, there's a way to do so. Whether it's connecting on your dormitory hall, or whether it's connecting through our campus ministry programs or club or organization, all different ways of building a community and building a sense of home for you here on campus. It's a really exciting time to be on campus here at Fairfield.

Kevin Lawlor:

For those of you have walked around campus, you've begun to see the fruits of \$250 million renovation that has taken place with new buildings, new dormitories, new dining halls, new RecPlexes, all of which had been delivered over the last four to five years, making it probably one of the youngest, most vibrant campuses on the eastern seaboard.

Kevin Lawlor:

We're very proud of what we have here in Fairfield, but most proud of the students that come here and make their home here. The transformation that you'll find over the course of four years is significant. Always I'm astounded when I see new freshmen arrive, and that same freshmen come across the stage on Bellarmine long to accept their diploma at the end of four years. It's just a magical kind of transformation and the maturity and life experiences that are formed here last you for a lifetime. Many of the friends I formed when I was here are still friends today. And I expect you'll have the same kind of experience.

Kevin Lawlor:

So welcome and I look forward to meeting you in person and showing you some of the wonders of Fairfield.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you EVP Lawlor. A return back to campus in the late summer is a really exciting time at Fairfield. This summer preparations for returned are looking a little bit different than normal. Can you talk a bit about what our preparedness task force looks like and how we were planning for a safe return?

Kevin Lawlor:

Right. As many of you know, this COVID virus which has really become a global issue has certainly driven many new challenges to any college campus and ours is no exception. We had to pivot very quickly last year to move away from campus into our online environment. And I'm very proud of the fact that we work hand in glove with everyone across campus to deliver a great online experience to those who couldn't be on campus. We're happy to announce that this fall we will be on campus and we will do so reaping the benefits of 16 different COVID task forces which have been hard to work since February of this year, preparing the campus to be a safe and environment as we could make it.

Kevin Lawlor:

These tasks force run the range from our dining halls, to our living arrangements to our classroom spaces to our gymnasiums, our outdoor activities, and so forth. We use state of the art cleaning techniques in each one of our dorms. We're practicing social distancing, in each one of our dorms, and in our classrooms, that's going to mean new hybrid learning kind of environments where our classroom space is both online and in person.

Kevin Lawlor:

I know there's some apprehension in all of your hearts about being on a campus in the midst of this pandemic. But I can tell you that we have literally poured thousands of hours into thinking about the different elements that impact you in your life on the university campus. And I think we're prepared as we can be, the guidelines coming out of the state are helpful, but quite frankly, they don't cover the whole gamut of things that we need to think about. And I think we're prepared now and we will be increasingly prepared over time. So we look forward come August 24th for you to begin your move on to campus. It's not going to be the one day kind of event has traditionally been, we'll move on to campus on a measured basis to maintain social distancing and avoid large crowds and things like that. But we'll have you on campus and we'll be able to begin to experience in person and we'll be monitoring the situation throughout the year and making improvements to our overall process as time goes on.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you EVP Lawlor. So when everybody comes to campus, and even beforehand, they've heard a lot about mind, body and spirit. Co-curricular activities are a large part of a student's college experience. Can you talk about Fairfield's strengths in this area?

Kevin Lawlor:

I think you heard President Nemec refer to the term cura personalis, which is really the Jesuit term, meaning care of mind, body and spirit. And I think we take that to heart throughout the campus. Many of our co-curricular activities are designed to pick up where the classroom leaves off. Whether that's building communities on the dormitory hall, or finding challenges for you your spiritual life, finding opportunities for you to experiment and explore different other learning kind of venues outside of the classroom. We really feel that we are full partner in the area of co-curricular activities.

Kevin Lawlor:

And I'll give you one example, on Wednesday afternoons, we have a yoga class, co-taught by a mental health counselor and certified yoga instructor. So each day we launch a whole series of different activities designed to attract, and challenge the different personalities we find on campus. So I urge you to reach out to the campus life staff and kind of construct not only your academic curriculum on campus, but your co-curricular curriculum, we expect to ... it's really challenged our creativity going forward knowing the limitations that the COVID virus presents to us, but we have some of the most creative people in the world working on those kind of projects. Whether it be late night on the Friday and Saturday night, or early Saturday or Saturday morning yoga classes or Zoom classes or things like that.

Kevin Lawlor:

So some exciting array of things and I can promise you, you won't be bored. There's always going to be something for you to do. I just encourage you to engage as quickly and as often as you can.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank You EVP Lawlor. I'm going to now shift back to President Nemec. So based on your experience, your research, where do you see private universities changing to cope with this new environment? And do you think there's going to be any long standing changes that come with it?

Mark R. Nemec:

That's a great question. And I should mention Actually, I'm excited as I'm teaching in the interdisciplinary core on the history of the university along with the Dean of Arts and Sciences. And I think one of the things that I would note is that the current moment is demanding of us a nimbleness and a responsiveness. And so one of the things that I think Fairfield as a university, our scale allows us to do two things. One ensures that we have the resources to be responsive, but at the same time, it means that we have an intimacy across the campus where we can really understand the situation.

Mark R. Nemec:

And I think one of the things that we are almost proud of as a team is that we have very significant retention in graduation rates, some of the best in our category. And I think one of the reasons for that is that we are a community and a family where we are fully responsive to and engaging with our student population. So I think one of the things I would note that ... not for all private universities, but certainly for institutions of our scale, is that we have the ability to really make sure that we are keeping in touch and sort of really keeping all of our student body engaged in a way that is most productive. And I think that's one of the things that our particular size as a master's comprehensive institution, really allows us to do.

Mark R. Nemec:

I would say the second thing, and EVP Lawlor alluded to this is we are fortunate being in the state of Connecticut that we have some very specific guidelines about how we are going to reopen. And the nice thing is that every benchmark we have to hit, we continue to hit going forward, so I'm ever more confident, about our plans to reopen with the beginning with August 24th, with classes starting on September 1st.

Mark R. Nemec:

At the same time, we recognize that this reopening will allow us to really find new and different ways to engage our students across all elements of the experience. And I think one of the things we've already seen is the extent to which our own students have been exceedingly creative. Our FUSA, which is our student government, which is a very robust and active group, and all the student organizations that fall under that umbrella, our sports teams, and any number of entities, have taken this moment in time and remained engaged.

Mark R. Nemec:

And I think that's one of the things that is so hard to quantify, but it's so real, and that is the Fairfield community and the vibrancy of that community is so essential to who we are. And though we've been separate physically over these last few months, that community has not waned. And I think one of the

things that is so exciting is the eagerness for everyone to get back to campus and for us to really then further instantiate that community and fully welcome this class of 2024. And as I said, a record number of students who are engaging with us as transferred students, because I think one thing that everyone will find and hopefully experienced in making this decision is that Fairfield is a community that is really seen some exciting things go on, EVP, Lawlor alluded to all the construction on campus. But even more than that is the purposefulness of this institution.

Mark R. Nemec:

Again, as a private institution, as a Jesuit Catholic institution, one of the things regardless of the ambient environment we have not lost sight of, is our core mission, and that is the formation of young men and women. And that continues to be front and center for us and it's what excites us as we look forward to the fall.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you, President Nemec. EVP Lawlor, this year we are opening a new Wellness Center located in Jogues Hall which is in our campus quad. Can you speak to how this creates a holistic approach to our health and wellness, and why this move to the center of campus will help that approach?

Kevin Lawlor:

Sure Jen, I'll be happy to. This year, we're happy that a new wellness center and a new media center are going to open those will be the newest additions to the master plan going forward. This new health center will be right at the center of campus and Jogues Hall, readily accessible to the students that are on the quad, in those dormitories surrounding theirs, and will be a new state of the art 9000 square foot facility that's split about 50-50 between the health center and our counseling center.

Kevin Lawlor:

More importantly, I think, is an organizational change we made about a year ago where we've taken our recreation department including club sports and activities and combine it with our counseling and health center. So, programmatically, we're addressing the complete needs of developing students, whether it be a sprained ankle, that happens on an intramural field or some anxiety about the beginning of classes that needs to be dealt with in our counseling center, to mindfulness classes that take place in our rec place on a Saturday evening. I think we intend to have the programs reinforcing, so that one program builds on the other. We want the health center to be a welcoming place. It's used to be on the far corner of campus and our students had to travel a good distance to get to that. So we moved it to the center of campus, we refreshed it. We grew it by about 50%. And hopefully, this is just one more place that people will feel welcome and be able to find the resources that they need when they need it.

Kevin Lawlor:

It's similar to our Academic Commons development, which opened last year, where we concentrated within the former library, which current library, all the needs that you would have from an academic standpoint, whether it be the Writing Center, or any kind of tutoring that goes along with that.

Kevin Lawlor:

So that moved into the Academic Commons to make it easier to find those resources all in one place. Same thing true with the wellness center now with available counseling, available APRN doctors, nurses,

et cetera. So we have a strong relationship with some of the major hospitals in the area if we ever need that kind of support. So students will be well cared for over the course of their four-year career. And hopefully participate in a lot of the different exercises and activities in our new state-of-the-art RecPlex has a brand new equipment cardiovascular equipment, has a eight lane swimming pool where there's a lot of activities that goes on. And there's an event rooms and in the Field house, where we have a lot of different in a variety of different activities.

Kevin Lawlor:

So we are being very creative and progressive in designing our co-curricular activities around wellness, we really want to take that to heart. That also includes our dining hall where we're offering more and more nutritious offerings to our students, so they can work on that part of their wellness game plan. So we're excited for it to be open. It's going to open the 23rd of June, and you'll be the first class to take advantage of it.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you EVP Lawlor. Provost Siegel, Fairfield has continuously been recognized as an institution with exceptional post graduation outcomes. Can you talk a bit about how Fairfield prepares students for after college success? And also touch upon specifically our achievement gap success?

Christine Siegel:

Yeah, thank you so much. So I think really what you've heard throughout this webinar tonight are all the different ways in which we prepare students for success post college. And it's again forming that integrated person in the academic division, we're particularly focused on the development of the mind. You just heard from EVP Lawlor about health and wellness activities to support the body. And then spiritually, we have campus ministry, the Murphy center for Ignatian spirituality and other spiritual supports that support our students spiritual development.

Christine Siegel:

These come together in my personal active in that formative experience that helps our students bridge that gap of late adolescence, where they again have opportunity to gain independence from parents. And so over the first to the fourth year, they become increasingly independent and self sufficient. They've opportunity to explore and then identify the vocation that they are called to be. And they have through internships, service learning and other experiences, have opportunities to practice being that contributing member of society.

Christine Siegel:

In addition to this academic support services, and career counseling that I talked about before. All of this comes together to have us achieve outcomes that are very strong during the time our students are with us, and then post graduation as you said. So important metrics that we look at are the percentage of students that after the first year return Fairfield in the second year. At Fairfield, we're proud to say that that is just about 90% when the national average in higher education is closer than 50%.

Christine Siegel:

We also look to how many students complete their undergraduate degrees in four to six years and the large majority well over 80% of Fairfield university students year after year, complete their bachelor's

within four years. Once they complete with us, we look to see post graduation six months later, what percentage of our students are employed, or in graduate school or in full time volunteer service through the Peace Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps. And again, it's close to 90% of students six months after graduation, are gainfully engaged in adult experience. And then across the country, and one of the metrics people look at or that it's important are default rates on student loans. And we have very low default rates on student loans.

Christine Siegel:

So that the holistic experience we offer puts us well above national averages and quite high on first, a second year retention four-year graduation, employment or graduate school, six months after graduation, and then quite low on student loan default. Those are averages overall. Anybody who knows how an average works knows that sometimes there's variability in that average. And if you look to groups within that, sometimes you see that well, there's a high overall average for certain groups of students. That's not the case. And that's called the achievement gap, often in higher education, students who are first generation to go to college students from low income families or historically underrepresented groups in college do not achieve outcomes at the same rate. And there's a gap between their achievement and the achievement of the majority of students in higher education.

Christine Siegel:

At Fairfield, we're really proud to say that we have little to no achievement gap. So when we're talking about first or second-year retention, four-year graduation, or employment post graduation, that's the same across all the demographics of students that we have. And I think it speaks to the ways in which our vibrant community is supporting all of our learners at Fairfield. And as EVP, Lawlor said, that connection exists quite long after they leave us.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you, Provost Siegel. EVP Lawlor, we're going to come back to you. We are coming to the end of our first master plan at Fairfield University. Can you talk about future planning?

Kevin Lawlor:

Sure. Let me start with a little bit of a review of our master plan which was really was an integral part of our strategic planning process that began in 2014. As we were building our strategic plan for the university, we felt it was critical that we have the facilities to support the kind of strategic plans we were making. And as we took a look across campus at that point, while we're very proud of some of their buildings, we readily conceded that some had grown a bit stale and needed to be refreshed and we were lacking in certain capabilities. So we set about in that time to address in a real systematic way, the combined needs of the student body, in dining, in living, in spaces, in classrooms, spaces, laboratories, et cetera.

Kevin Lawlor:

It gave rise to 25 or more multimillion dollar projects that we undertook to enhance the overall campus experience. And we did it very carefully because we wanted to maintain the total campus. Some development, it's a check kind of gives you that sort of crowded field on campus. We know some of our most beautiful spaces on campus are our green spaces. So we were very purposeful in designing and placing new buildings and facilities on campus to leverage that. So we have our new beautiful tele dining hall and for those of you that have seen that on your tour, I think you will find that it's a great to have

dinner with your friends at the end of an evening. And the Sodexo team that we have up there is constantly searching for new menu choices and other things to make that experience an exciting one.

Kevin Lawlor:

Something near and dear to the hearts of some of you is three new Dunkin donut facilities that we have scattered around campus. So you won't be more than 100 yards away from a cup of coffee if you need it as you start to take on finals going forward. I already talked a little bit about our new Academic Commons and the work we've done there to place in one building, all the different things you'll need for your academic support. We have our new RecPlex which has the new state-of-the-art equipment and the activities that go on there, run the gambit, from squash to tennis lessons to basketball, pickup games, et cetera. And there are many people that spend many, many hours on the cardio equipment thing in shaping, burning off the freshmen 10 if you will.

Kevin Lawlor:

We have a new E-gaming facility that we are opening this year, RecPlex so that we'll be able to feel teams and E-gaming going forward. And we've got a lot of advice from other university colleges in that regard. We automatically upgraded our dormitories. We're not complete with that process yet, but we've got a game plan for each one of them that will provide air conditioning, new laboratory facilities and more adhoc meeting spaces so you can meet with your friends for a group study or any kind of activity like that and have spaces scattered around campus that are comfortable and conducive to that kind of learning. Going forward, we have more to do. I think one of the things we discussed with our board this afternoon is a new home for our varsity basketball team and a new convocation center, which is in the offing very shortly, and we'll be announcing something about that in the near term.

Kevin Lawlor:

We have more facilities in the engineering and STEM field that we're looking very hard at. And we'll be making announcements of that. But right now we're involved in the same process we were involved in 2014, where we take an inventory of what we have, what's lacking, what's needed improvement and enhancement, then we set about to deliver the best potential college campus on the eastern seaboard. I think you'll agree the campus looks terrific we just need kids right now. And I think we're hopefully in some September when the campus starts to be occupied again, you'll be able to leverage some of the wonderful facilities we've been putting together over the last several years.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you, EVP Lawlor. President Nemec, it most certainly has been a of great adaptation, fluidity, and innovation. Will you provide us your perspective regarding the future of higher education? And any last comments you wish to make about the future of Fairfield?

Mark R. Nemec:

Certainly. Thank you, Jen. And again, thanks to everyone for joining us for this webinar. I think it's worth noting again, that this is a very special class. This is arguably on the incoming metrics by far the most competitive class we've had in the modern era. And I think it speaks to a theme that we've had before my arrival, and that is Fairfield as an institution on the rise. As both Provost Siegel and EVP Lawlor pointed out, we continue to follow success upon success. And yes, we are facing some daunting challenges as every institution. We're thinking creatively about how we manage through, but we are fully expecting to welcome you all to campus.

Mark R. Nemec:

And one of the things I would note ... And again, it actually just occurred to me reflecting upon this little webinar this morning, is that you unique amongst many of our institutions having been on the leadership team at the University of Chicago, every one of us on the leadership team actually has school aged children, interestingly enough. And so I think what that speaks to is the fact that when we are thinking about how we are going forward in this future, we are not just thinking about how we as administrators want to manage through, we are also thinking always is how, as we, as parents would want to see an institution managed through. And I think one of the things I can assure you is that Fairfield as an institution, and as you'll see over the course of this orientation, is committed to your sons and daughters. Is committed not just to this moment in time where we want to make sure and ensure their safety, but also is committed to ensuring that they are graduates of Fairfield University who go on to find their vocation and are successful at it.

Mark R. Nemec:

And if there's anything that this current moment in time has done for higher education, is it's really taken what was going to be seven years of evolution and truncated in some cases into seven weeks. But I can say without any hesitation that Fairfield is well prepared to evolve, is well prepared to innovate, while at the same time remaining true to our core values, ensuring that your sons and daughters and new students have an experience that is first great and exceptional. So we are thrilled to be welcoming you and we look forward to seeing you on campus in the fall.

Jennifer Anderson:

Thank you President Nemec. On behalf of Fairfield and our executive leadership team. I would like to thank all of you for attending today's panel discussion. I would encourage you to visit fairfield.edu/reopen where you can find FAQs and additional information regarding fall 2020. We wish you a wonderful orientation and look forward to seeing you on campus in August. Have a great summer.