NASFAA’s “Off The Cuff” Podcast - Episode 185 Transcript

Speaker 1:
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Justin Draeger:
Hey, everyone. Welcome to another edition of Off The Cuff. I'm Justin Draeger.

Allie Arcese:
I'm Allie Arcese with our communications team.

Megan Coval:
I'm Megan Coval with our policy team.

Jill Desjean:
And I'm Jill Desjean, also with the policy team.

Justin Draeger:
Welcome back, everybody. It has been one year, I think, since we did our pandemic episode. Allie, you today described it as cringy.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah, and-

Justin Draeger:
Because a half million people hadn't died yet.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah. This was like the first episode where we even mentioned coronavirus.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah.

Allie Arcese:
And then, Justin, you said that-

Justin Draeger:
I mean, I don't know if we need to quote it, but go ahead.
Allie Arcese:
Oh, no. I was just going to say, you said cringey is your favorite emotion. And I was thinking, if I had to
derscribe Justin to someone who didn't know you, I would say, "Yeah, that's my boss. His favorite things
are awkward situations and hand sanitizer."

Justin Draeger:
And especially when those two things are combined.

Allie Arcese:
It's like a dream situation.

Justin Draeger:
I do love a good awkward moment. I do love it. But this was like a year ago. And I remember, I was
thinking about ... We were all on the same page, Allie, because you brought this up as we were thinking
about this podcast today. I was remembering last year, and I didn't remember the parts with you,
Megan, but I do remember with Jill, because I asked you, "How concerned are you on a scale of one to
10?" And I remember you said ... I can't remember the exact number.

Jill Desjean:
16.

Justin Draeger:
16. I remember you said something above 10. And then Megan, you went the complete opposite. You
went zero.

Megan Coval:
Yeah. I remember feeling that way.

Justin Draeger:
But I think it was because there was so much happening last year. It was a very busy time.

Jill Desjean:
Well, I don't want to gloat, but I feel like I was right.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah. And it all happened so quickly, because in the beginning, I think I was like Meghan, and then the
next day I was like, "Well, this is maybe not so great."

Megan Coval:
Yeah, from zero to 100.

Justin Draeger:
That was also the last episode we taped in person, right?
Megan Coval:
Yeah.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah.

Allie Arcese:
I think the one after this, and we have a clip that we can play too for the discussion from last year, but I think the one after this was also in-person, but after that it was just ... Because I remember the episode after this being in-person and being like, "Should we be here?"

Justin Draeger:
I also remember in the spring catching a bit of a cough that was not COVID-related, but I could not stop coughing, and I felt like ... I don't know. I felt a lot of ... There was a lot of unknown and judgment going on. And of course, even if you catch it, it's sort of like ... People can follow all the precautions and still ... It's a virus, so ...

Allie Arcese:
So here's just a brief glimpse into where we were this time last year.

Justin Draeger:
All right. How worried on a scale of one to 10 are you of the coronavirus? Jill, you’re married to a doctor who must be talking about this nonstop.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. His primary concern is with the stock market.

Justin Draeger:
Oh, really? Okay.

Jill Desjean:
Which is driving me insane.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. He has told me that I should not be as worried as I am, but I’m a bit of a-

Justin Draeger:
Worrier?

Jill Desjean:
Worrier. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
So, where are you, one to 10? You're like at a nine?

Jill Desjean:
16.

Justin Draeger:
16? Oh, you're very worried, okay.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah, I worry about everything.

Justin Draeger:
There's a neurosis underlying some of that.

Jill Desjean:

Justin Draeger:
How about you, Megan?

Megan Coval:
I am shockingly at a one, and I'm-

Justin Draeger:
Is it because you're just so busy you're not really informed on the matter?

Megan Coval:
I mean, I feel moderately informed. I probably could be doing more. But I worry a lot about things, and for some reason, it's just not-

Justin Draeger:
Not worried about this?

Megan Coval:
No. Mm-mm (negative).

Justin Draeger:
Rachel?

Rachel:
Yesterday morning, I was a one to two, and today I am at or above a 10.

Justin Draeger:
Oh, very concerned.

Megan Coval:
Something happened.

Justin Draeger:
But you also do public ... Well, you all three do public transportation.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah.

Rachel:
I wore my gloves on the bus today. I was like, "I will not touch you"

Justin Draeger:
Like latex?

Rachel:
No, just my regular gloves. I haven't gotten to that point.

Justin Draeger:
Well, latex you can throw away.

Rachel:
I listened to a couple podcasts when I was getting ready this morning, and it ... 

Justin Draeger:
So it's fair to say the president's press conference did not set you at ease last night?

Rachel:
He's not concerned.

Megan Coval:
He's at a one.

Rachel:
He's at a one and he should be at or above a 10.

Justin Draeger:
The CDC seems much more concerned.
Justin Draeger:
And we did check with Rachel. She stands by her statement that we should have been way more concerned last year than we were. All right.

Megan Coval:
I agree.

Justin Draeger:
I am very relieved ... If you guys have been watching, the Washington Post has the whole thing where they post the ... I mean, it's really fallen off in the last couple of weeks. I don't want to get into all the politics of it, but ...

Allie Arcese:
It's plateauing.

Megan Coval:
Yes, I listened to The Daily this morning. It was very just ... It's flat. They were very like, "Yeah, this is plateauing. Don't everyone get too excited." But it has decreased. You're right. That's great.

Justin Draeger:
It's not growing exponentially. So the growth rate is down. I don't know. Knock on wood. We'll circle back to this at the end of the episode; talk about the last normal thing we did pre-pandemic.

Justin Draeger:
But Allie, last week; let's first get into member comments. What do we got?

Allie Arcese:
Yeah. So last week, we've talked a lot about student loan forgiveness, and last week, Justin, you shared NASFAA's position on loan forgiveness. So we did get quite a few comments on that.

Allie Arcese:
Jennifer Stevens from Indiana said that the opening remarks on loan forgiveness were fantastic. It was well constructed and balanced in the explanation of a rational and carefully considered position.

Allie Arcese:
Christina Grammans from Sheridan said, "Thank you for addressing NASFAA's standing on student loan forgiveness. I could not agree more. Forgiving student loan debt without fixing loan issues for future students is like replacing the tires on a car with a bad transmission."

Allie Arcese:
So a lot of that. You know, some questions getting a little bit more into the weeds about things to do with income-driven repayment and parent PLUS loans, and where all of that falls into the picture of loan forgiveness. But I think that's a discussion for another day.
Justin Draeger:
Yeah. Well, that certainly cuts against one of the things we talked about, which is simplicity. It does sort of get complex when we have these really big ideas.

Justin Draeger:
The other thing I'll say is, this was kind of like a series. We did the podcast with the panel, then we did our own editorial, and then we published something on Monday. So folks can go look at that. And I'll just say to the people, you know, the number of people who reached out to me as well, who talked about how well-reasoned the argument was, I'll say, you know, often I'm a mouthpiece for the organization, but the well-reasoning part comes before all of that. It's our board of directors and our policy team working together to sort of hash through issues and look at data. So that well-reasoned part had a lot of people who were involved in it.

Justin Draeger:
We'll continue to work this issue and keep our eyes on everything, but let's move on with today's episode and start with the new Secretary of Education. Allie.

Allie Arcese:
Sure. So Dr. Miguel Cardona was confirmed by the Senate on late Monday evening. The approval was bipartisan. It was 64 to 33. And there were 14 Republicans that joined Senate Democrats to vote in his favor, including Senator Richard Burr from North Carolina, who is the ranking member on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. So he received more opposition party votes than obviously Betsy DeVos, it was split 50/50 and needed a tie breaker, but also received more opposition votes than President Obama's second Secretary of Education, John King.

Allie Arcese:
Oh, interesting.

Megan Coval:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah., so ...

Allie Arcese:
It was definitely a less controversial nomination process.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. And I think one of the things that really paved the way for him was he's been a pretty big proponent of schools opening back up. And when he went up to Connecticut ... Was he in Connecticut or Philadelphia, or Pennsylvania?
Megan Coval:
He went to both.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Okay. Because Dr. Biden, Dr. Jill Biden, went with him, right? To one of those?

Megan Coval:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Allie Arcese:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Justin Draeger:
And it was all focused on getting schools to reopen obviously.

Justin Draeger:
That feels, I don't know, to me, a little less political nowadays. I mean, there's an acknowledgement, and maybe there always has been, that getting schools opened is intrinsically tied to our economy and parents being able to work and all of that. So I think that sort of paved the way for this bipartisanship. That said, there are plenty of partisan issues ahead.

Justin Draeger:
But his first day on the job, I think it's worth highlighting, we sent up a letter to the new secretary, Secretary Cardona, with our colleagues over at NCAN. These are the College Access and Attainment folks; they represent over 500 college access programs, school districts and institutions. And our joint letter up to the secretary was really about the federal methodology changes that are scheduled to go into effect in the 2023, 24 year. And that seems like a ways off for anybody who's not involved with the FAFSA, but the reality is that's almost tomorrow in terms of, when you back out, how quickly we have to redo the federal methodology, get the form updated.

Justin Draeger:
And so we posed several questions to the secretary in terms of, "Welcome aboard. This is something we don't want to put off or ignore." And so, trying to be helpful, we encouraged him to ask, "What does the roadmap for implementation look like? What are the resources that federal student aid is going to need? What can be implemented early? Could this be an iterative implementation so we can make forward progress?" And then of course, "How can we, as our respective communities, financial aid administrators and access professionals, work together to get this off the ground?"
So we've talked about this before, but this is a huge lift for federal student aid. And one that affects 19 million applicants every year. I'm having nightmares of healthcare.gov, the rollout, which I think we all remember was rushed and challenging and websites crashed.

Allie Arcese:
It was not a great time.

Justin Draeger:
It has to be smoother. It was not a great time, especially if you were seeking health insurance. So we don't want for our schools, and most importantly our students, to face this sort of disruption in 2023.

Justin Draeger:
So we will be following up with Congress to make sure that FSA is appropriately resourced, but also with the secretary and with our department colleagues about making sure this goes off without a hitch.

Megan Coval:
Yeah. And we're also going to pull together a group of NASFAA members who will serve as a FAFSA working group for this implementation process. And they will be there to kind of be on the ready to provide feedback. You know, we might be asked at some different times to work through some simulations of what the FAFSA might look like and just really give that perspective of implementation on the ground. So we'll be getting that together soon and you can stay tuned for more details on that.

Justin Draeger:
Great. Thank you, Megan. We'll be on the lookout for more details.

Justin Draeger:
The department is also meeting this week, the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, which the acronym is NACIQI. They're doing a review of some accreditor issues. Allie, you want to catch us up here?

Allie Arcese:
Yeah. Come with me on a journey with a lot of acronyms and a lot of twists and turns. So bear with me, if you can follow.

Allie Arcese:
ACICS is sort of the embattled accrediting agency that oversaw a number of for-profit colleges and came under fire during the Obama administration and actually had its federal recognition revoked in 2016 because it was being found out of compliance ... Just situations with a couple of different schools. And in-

Justin Draeger:
If I remember right, Allie, one of them was they ... So accreditors, of course, have lots of power, right? If you're not accredited.

Allie Arcese:
But they also have standards that they have to meet.

Justin Draeger:
And one of the schools they had accredited back then was

Allie Arcese:
Reagan National, something.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. Reagan, something, that had no faculty and no students, which seemed a little, if you have
standards, a little out of character, out of the ordinary for you to be accrediting a school that has-

Allie Arcese:
Exactly.

Justin Draeger:
... No institution

Jill Desjean:
And were they also the accreditor for the Dream Center?

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. And that whole collapse and why they didn't flag it early.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Yes. So their schools had some issues.

Allie Arcese:
So the Obama administration revoked their federal recognition. It was reinstated under the Trump
administration in 2018. And actually there was a court case where a federal judge sort of ruled that the
Obama administration didn't follow the proper procedures because they didn't take into account a
bunch of evidence that was submitted by ACICS. So since 2018, they have had their recognition
restored.

Allie Arcese:
Come to present day. Politico reported that there is a Inspector General report, the department's Office
of Inspector General, that sort of sided with that federal judge, saying that the Obama administration
acted inappropriately in its termination of their recognition. And then combine all that with today,
NACIQI is meeting to discuss their status yet again, and kind of finding that they were out of compliance
for five years straight, I think it was; 2016 through 2021.
Justin Draeger:
Yeah. Yeah. So NACIQI is the advisory group that tells the secretary which accreditors should have good standing or not. ACICS is the accreditor that keeps getting drawn into these political and quality battles. And the OIG report, this is like an independent part of the federal government, basically said ... Didn't weigh in on whether ACICS.

Allie Arcese:
Right. It didn't get into any of the issues for which they initially came under fire, just looking at the process.

Justin Draeger:
That's right. So the Obama folks, the OIG said, revoked it without actually going through the policies and procedures they should have gone through. And the Trump folks restored it in accordance with the policies and procedures of the department. But it didn't make any opinion about whether ACICS should be in good standing. And right now, up at NACIQI, as we are speaking, I guess, NACIQI is meeting, and it seems like the career folks are bashing ACICS all over again for their oversight.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah. So department staff have recommended terminating ACICS recognition, finding that they were out of compliance for five years straight. The ACICS CEO, Michelle Edwards, referenced the new OIG report to defend the accrediting agency. But that, as we've said, leaves out all of the issues for, you know, whether they're actually meeting their standards or not.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. So we'll see what happens, but there are pretty big implications here for schools. Let me highlight three that I see. One is, if you're an ACICS accredited school, you're in for a world of hurt again, because if your accreditor gets pulled and is no longer recognized, then you have to find an accreditor or state approval to be able to continue to offer federal student aid. So there's one implication.

Justin Draeger:
The second though is, I think this is sort of a roadmap about what the Department of Education expects of accreditors, and then the continued implication is what schools can expect from their accrediting body. And that is additional oversight, additional compliance, you know, oversight, and then sort of all the things that go along with disclosure.

Justin Draeger:
And then the third implication is just where the Biden administration is going to go on institutional oversight. And I mean, one of the big levers they have is the accreditors. They hold the accreditors to a higher standard, the accreditors turn around and hold the schools to a higher standard. So I would put all of this under the heading of "institutional accountability."

Justin Draeger:
And we're in a different regime, and the Biden administration is, I think, going to be taking a lot of plays from the Obama playbook in terms of holding accreditors' feet to the fire to hold schools' feet to the fire. So more to come there.
Justin Draeger:
That was a journey.

Allie Arcese:
It was.

Justin Draeger:
All right. So we will keep our eyes and ears open there.

Justin Draeger:
Sticking with the Inspector General just a little bit, Jill, we have the OIG weighing in on HEERF reporting?

Jill Desjean:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
You want to catch us up here?

Jill Desjean:
Sure. Yeah. So just last week, the Department of Education's Office of Inspector General released this report looking at institutional compliance with the Quarterly Budget and Expenditures Report, which is one of the several reports that institutions have to submit about their HEERF spending, and this one details how they spent their HEERF institutional share dollars.

Jill Desjean:
So this report focused on the first quarterly submission, which covered spending from whenever schools got their funding allocated by the Department of Education, which would have been April, May, you know, spring of last year, through September 30th of 2020. And the OIG looked at the 20 schools that got the largest institutional share awards and then they randomly selected 80 other schools with representation from all sectors so that they had a total of a hundred schools in this sample that they looked at.

Justin Draeger:
Were they looking at whether they had actually reported? And did they report correctly? Is that sort of the basis of what they were trying to see?

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. Yeah. That was a big part of it. They found 19 out of the 100 institutions, as far as they could tell, this is a report that's not submitted, it's posted on your website, so for 19 of those institutions, OIG could not find their quarterly budget report. So maybe they posted it ...

Justin Draeger:
But they did find them for 80.
Jill Desjean:
81. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Okay. So Jill, let me ask you a question there; how does that strike you? For me, I feel like the spring and summer was such a cluster. I'm pleasantly surprised. I don't know. Are my expectations too low there?

Jill Desjean:
Well, remember, this report really got kind of thrown at financial aid offices, really last minute, at institutions last minute. I think the report came out October 15th and it was due on October 30th. So not shocking that a school might not have been able to comply within two weeks. I don't know exactly when OIG was looking, but it might've been harder for institutions to report without having enough time.

Justin Draeger:
So let's say you are elected to Congress and you're on the Education Committee, Jill, and you're looking at that report. Would you see that as a good thing or a bad thing? How would you view that?

Jill Desjean:
I'd say not too bad.

Justin Draeger:
Not too bad.

Jill Desjean:
Considering everything else that's going on.

Justin Draeger:
All right. Jill Desjean for Congress. NASFAA can't endorse you, but ...

Jill Desjean:
Oh, that's unfortunate. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
I mean, I just sort of feel like ... Yeah, that's actually better than I thought. Obviously there's room for improvement though.

Jill Desjean:

Justin Draeger:
Okay. All right. Any other findings?

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. Well, for one thing, they looked at commonly reported expenditure categories, which were not super surprising honestly. They looked at most dollars spent and they also looked at just the most commonly reported expenditure categories. And the most commonly reported expenditure categories were campus safety, distance learning and tuition reimbursement, which none of those are very shocking.

Jill Desjean:
The other thing that was interesting and that institutions should definitely pay attention to, is that 22% of the institutions they looked at didn't follow the department's instructions or just didn't give adequate detail on this one field; there was an "other uses" field. So the schools had to list out, you know, "Did you spend your money on tuition reimbursements, campus safety?", blah, blah, blah, and then there was this other category, and schools were supposed to detail how they spent their money. And they either were reporting things that should have been in another field in this "other uses" category, or they just kind of said, you know, X thousand dollars for one word description, or a very short description. So institutions, when they're submitting future reports, should be careful to make sure that the "other uses" is strictly for other uses, not things that are already detailed on the report, and that they provide detail.

Justin Draeger:
All right. So they had mislabeled dollars.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
You know what? I'll take it. Besides it being a new program thrown together and dispersed all within like three to six months ... You know, some of this is going to have cleanup.

Justin Draeger:
I have a question though for you, Jill. So the quarterly reports, they just update. Do they freeze those in time and archive them as well? And should they go back and correct them if they need to, or do you just sort of move forward?

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. I'm not sure, to be honest with you. You do save your one quarter and do another quarterly report. So they do exist individually of one another. I don't know if there is the requirement or the opportunity to update those.

Justin Draeger:
Speaking of COVID relief. Megan, we talk about this every week, but how are we doing? How is the next COVID bill snaking its way through Congress?

Megan Coval:
Yeah. It's chugging along. We might see a final bill within the next week.
Megan Coval:
So since last week's podcast, we had the House pass their version. That was early Saturday morning they passed that, and it was pretty much along party line votes, which was what was expected. So then it was officially kicked over to the Senate. And there's been some debate in the Senate this week over issues outside of higher education, primarily related to the stimulus checks and a phase out of the income. But that's been resolved, and I think the Senate may vote as early as Friday or Saturday.

Justin Draeger:
So the Senate will vote. Then it has to go back to the House. This is pro forma, I guess, right? At that point, the House has the votes, they'll sign off.

Megan Coval:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
So what? This could make it to the president's desk by the end of next week?

Megan Coval:
Yeah. And I think the goal is to get this to the president by March 14th.

Justin Draeger:
Right. There are benefits that are expiring in the middle of March.

Megan Coval:
Yeah. So they have that deadline there. So yeah, it looks like it's going to happen soon here, and it could be ...

Justin Draeger:
All right. So if I'm an institution, there's more funding on the way and it could, what? Hit their ... ?

Justin Draeger:
So first of all, let me just back up and ask one question, Megan.

Megan Coval:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Justin Draeger:
In this bill, is it changing any of the eligibility criteria that schools have to follow in order to disperse their funds directly to students or spend them on institutional expenses? Is anything changing or is this literally just like a rubber stamp of more money from the last allocation?

Megan Coval:
Yeah. Everything is pretty much the same. The only thing that's different from HEERF II is that schools are going to be required to spend, again, 50% of their funds on their students. So it's kind of going back to HERF I there.

Justin Draeger:
So whatever their allocation is, 50% will be direct grants to students.

Megan Coval:
Yeah. And I think we still anticipate that there'll be questions and things to resolve with regard to student eligibility. So no specific language here. There was a version where there was some specific language saying schools could decide who was eligible, but that was ultimately stripped out for procedural reasons.

Justin Draeger:
So based on the total amount of funding, how would a school ... ? Has the allocation formula changed? Should they expect around the same amount that they got last time? More or less?

Megan Coval:
The allocation formula is the same. So you can kind of just extrapolate, you know, "We had 23 billion last round, this is 40 billion." But otherwise they're using the same formula. So we kind of estimate using that as a basis.

Justin Draeger:
On average?

Megan Coval:
I think on average schools should get more money since the overall pot is larger.

Justin Draeger:
Okay. So our headline here for the schools is, "More money is on the way and it's going to equal and/or be more than the last allocation that you received in January or February."

Megan Coval:
Yep. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Okay.

Megan Coval:
Almost double, because the big pot is almost double, so ...

Justin Draeger:
Okay. Well, schools will want to start mapping some of that out now, knowing that more money could be there as soon as the end of the month or into April. So we will keep members informed through here, and then obviously, in Today's News.

Justin Draeger:
Speaking of HEERF funds, continuing with this topic, Jill, do we have any update on HERF II or MSI allocation tables?

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. So the MSI allocation tables came out last week. No real surprises there. The department was required by the law to release those within 60 days, and the law was signed on December 27th. So they got that in in the nick of time. The allocations are based on the formula and the law. But those are out there.

Jill Desjean:
And ED is working on the last pot of HERF II funds, which was funding for institutions with the greatest unmet needs related to coronavirus, including those with large populations of graduate schools. They actually put out a list of criteria, and they're thinking of using out for comment and NASFAA is going to be commenting on that this week. And I think they said that they were trying to have applications available, I think it was April 26th.

Justin Draeger:
Okay. So people can be on the lookout.

Justin Draeger:
All right, Jill, we also got another cache of answers from the Department of Education this week on outstanding HEERF questions. Do you want to hit, just at a high level, what are the topics they cover and where can people find them?

Jill Desjean:
Sure. Yeah. So first, it hasn't been publicly released yet. So this is information that we got that the department has said that they will officially release soon. It's been about a week, so hopefully "soon" means really soon from now.

Justin Draeger:
I always have a hard time knowing what the timetables are when they use amorphous words like "soon" or "imminent."

Jill Desjean:
It is pretty vague. Yeah. Imminent sounds a little sooner.

Justin Draeger:
Sure does. Yeah.
But who knows? Who knows?

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. So big things. They confirmed that institutions have a year to spend their HEERF II funds from when the funds came. A lot of people got grant award notifications that had the HEERF I deadlines on them. So that solves that for people who were confused or whose business offices were fighting the financial aid office about the spending deadlines.

Jill Desjean:
They clarified some student eligibility pieces, not for DACA and undocumented students. That’s still outstanding. But for non-degree seeking non-credit dual enrollment students and continuing ED students at least.

Jill Desjean:
And they did a lot of clarification about dates. You know, this December 27th date, which was the date that the law was signed. A lot of the HEERF II spending and the terms and conditions under which you could spend it, and the expenses that could be covered, whether they were incurred before or after; there’s a lot there. And they did clarify some things. And by clarifying, of course, introduced some new questions. So definitely check out our Today’s News coverage on it. Our AskRegs questions on these topics have all been updated. And keep your eye out for the official guidance when it comes out. We’ll have that in today’s news.

Justin Draeger:
That’s great. Thank you. People can go to our COVID-19 webpage, nasfa.org/covid 19. And then we have our two, HEERF I and HEERF II, centers there with all of our AskRegs Q&As. So thank you very much for the update, Jill.

Justin Draeger:
Hey, I wanted to ask you all before we signed off; speaking of one year into the pandemic, the last normal thing that you remember doing before the pandemic hit.

Justin Draeger:
Allie, let’s start with you.

Allie Arcese:
Yeah. So we celebrated Pascal’s birthday, which was just on the second. So on his actual birthday, we went out for dinner to a restaurant out here in Vienna and we sat at the counter where you’re near the kitchen, which is always fun, because pro tip, they sneak you free food. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Oh. What restaurant is this?

Allie Arcese:
Clarity. So definitely sit at the chef’s counter if you go to a nicer restaurant. Yeah.
Justin Draeger:
I can't wait to go out to eat again.

Allie Arcese:
And then later that weekend we actually went to BARMINI in DC with my brother and his girlfriend, because Pascal had been wanting to go there for a really long time. I'm glad we did it last year. But that was probably a great thing to do as our last normal thing, because it was a crowded bar and you can't do that anymore.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. Seriously. And when everything closed down, we didn't know it at the time, but COVID was already running rampant through our population.

Justin Draeger:
Okay. All right, Allie. Well, we look forward to going back out to eat again.

Justin Draeger:
How about you, Jill?

Jill Desjean:
So it was March 14th last year, so right when we knew things were getting bad, but for some reason, I guess, despite my 16 on a scale of 10, I still was living my life the way I always had. I had been on the waiting list for an interview for Global Entry for like two years, and I found out about this travel expo at the Washington Convention Center where CVP was going to be, and they would be conducting interviews. So I dragged my whole family on the Metro down to the convention center to this travel expo. So it was all of these people from all over the world who had flown in for the weekend. We talked to all of them.

Justin Draeger:
So all the worst things that you could do during a pandemic.

Allie Arcese:
That is a cringey moment.

Megan Coval:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
You did them all in 24 hours, yeah.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah, we went to Chipotle after that. And then we went to the portrait gallery.

Megan Coval:
Oh my God.

Allie Arcese:
Oh, you got it all in.

Justin Draeger:
Super spreader.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. I mean, I am sort of glad that we had our last hurrah, but I am shocked just that I was willing, after saying that I was freaking out about COVID, to just do all of those things the day after a national emergency was declared. But it had been a two-year waiting list.

Justin Draeger:
That is crazy. So after the emergency was declared, you just did it.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. Yeah. Also it's a Global Entry Card, so I haven't used it. It expires in five years. I don't know if I want to use the thing..

Megan Coval:
One year.

Justin Draeger:
One year down. Okay.

Jill Desjean:
Yeah. But I think I can renew it without an interview. So hopefully someday I'm going to use that thing. It's still shiny and new.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. Good for you.

Megan Coval:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
All right. How about you, Megan?

Megan Coval:
I went to the Wisconsin State Conference. Yeah. So the airports were ... I don't know. I feel like maybe you were traveling sort of around this time too, Justin, but the airports were fewer people, all the hand sanitizing stations, but yeah, that was like two or three days before we started working from home. And
I was also, I think you mentioned this at the beginning, I was also really sick. I had a bad cold. So I remember being on the plane trying to stifle sneezes.

Allie Arcese:
Was it a really bad cold, Megan?

Megan Coval:
Well, I didn't have any respiratory stuff, but I just remember being like ... On the plane, so people wouldn't think anything about me. Like judge.

Justin Draeger:
Freak out? They didn't have masks or anything at that point?

Megan Coval:
No, this was like ... No.

Justin Draeger:
Free for all.

Megan Coval:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
That's it. I do remember, didn't Karen have a trip also planned that weekend and we were like, "Don't go?"

Megan Coval:
Yeah. Yeah. I remember, we were all kind of on the road during that time.

Justin Draeger:
So the 14th, was that a Sunday?

Megan Coval:
It was a Saturday.

Justin Draeger:
It was a Saturday. So I was at a boys basketball game. My son was playing basketball. So a gymnasium full of kids who always are coughing anyway in March. And I remember the national emergency declared and then I jumped on the phone with National Chair, Paula Luff, that night. We had a board meeting scheduled to start on Monday here in DC, and so we scrambled and I remember calling all these board members.
Justin Draeger:
I called Ashley Monroe, who was the WASFAA president, I think. She lives in Alaska. I got her as she was about to leave her house with her suitcase to go to the airport and fly here. And then two of our board members already came and they were checked in at the Gaylord, which I don't know if you remember, but in that first weekend, that's where there was a COVID outbreak. And we told them to-

Allie Arcese:
Get out.

Justin Draeger:
Go to another hotel, get out, flee. And I think they actually went home the next day.

Justin Draeger:
But I just remember it being like, I was at a basketball game and I had to step out because the national emergency was declared that evening, and we had to change everybody's plans.

Megan Coval:
Wasn't it that CPAC was being hosted at the Gaylord, and that's where the outbreak was?

Justin Draeger:
Yes, you are right. That's right. It was CPAC. There was somebody who was infected there.

Megan Coval:
Yeah, a lot of people. Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
Yeah. At the time it was like, "Oh, there's just one person." Obviously. Self-contained. Uh-huh (affirmative).

Justin Draeger:
All right.

Megan Coval:
I mean, it feels like, in one way, 10 years ago, and the other way, I remember it so vividly. Is that how you guys feel?

Allie Arcese:
Yeah.

Justin Draeger:
I remember that night vividly. And I also remember thinking, "Well, this'll be like, what?" At the time, I think Fauci was like, "If we just lock down as a country for three weeks ... "

Allie Arcese:
And even that was too much to ask, but ...

Justin Draeger:
Right. So I kind of thought, "Well, we'll be back in the office probably."

Allie Arcese:
No, I still have moments where I think it's 2019. Someone was asking me how old I was and I was like, "I'm 29." And Pascal looked at me and he was like, "You're 31." I was like, "No, I'm not."

Justin Draeger:
You went down into that basement, Allie. You haven't come up for two years. It's like a time warp.

Allie Arcese:
Oh, man.

Justin Draeger:
Thanks everybody for listening. I want to put out a solicitation. We are thinking about doing some articles and/or podcasts on things that have changed in your financial aid office, whether it's operations or how you're serving students, that you will keep on the other side of the pandemic. So maybe you've made a change to virtual, maybe you're doing mobile first, maybe you've made changes. We want to hear about the ones that you've changed, but you think are good and will keep even on the other side of the pandemic. So send those comments in. We may be reaching out to you.

Justin Draeger:
Otherwise, tell a friend, remember to subscribe, and we will see you again next time.