

Reflections from WT with Angela Allen & Deandra Murray

- Randy Ray: Hello everybody, and welcome to episode number 19 of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. My name is Randy Ray, and I'm joined today by the 11th president of West Texas A&M Dr. Walter Wendler.
- Dr. Wendler: Hey Randy. Good morning. How you doing?
- Randy Ray: Good, I'm good. This is 2020 and we have started a new decade, a new year, and lots of changes have come to the campus of West Texas A&M. Let's talk about some of those.
- Dr. Wendler: Sure, sure.
- Randy Ray: Let's talk about our new Provost, Dr. Neil Terry.
- Dr. Wendler: Yeah. Dr. Neil Terry, formerly Dean of the Paul and Virginia Engler College of Business. Is now the Executive Vice President and Provost, and it is a little different. Wade Shaffer was the Provost. This is the Executive Vice President Provost, so it doesn't change the organizational structure but it's a clear indication that Dean Terry, or now Provost Terry, is the second in command. He's a clear second. Whereas, before that wasn't always the... Certain areas, of course, weighing academic affairs, and that's the purpose of the whole university, is what we do in the classrooms, work with students to help them attain their aspirations. But Dr. Terry's job is a little more broad ranging, and he'll be looking at affairs [crosstalk 00:01:29].
- Randy Ray: So, in addition to academics what else is he [inaudible 00:01:32]?
- Dr. Wendler: Well, he's just going to be more engaged with the other VPs in terms of finance, in terms of marketing the university fundraising. He'll be more engaged with the other Vice Presidents than I think has previously been the case in the past. Wade was very engaged. Whenever I talk about this, I always want to make sure that people understand that Wade Shaffer was a remarkable provost when I came here. This place was well-oiled and especially the academic affairs side of the thing. Not perfect, but it moved along, people communicated and so on and so forth. And that voice of a reason and deliberateness and so on in the campus communities is absolutely critical. Critical.
- Randy Ray: Yeah. I agree. We also have a changeover in the Alumni Association with Ronnie Hall coming on as Executive Director.
- Dr. Wendler: Absolutely.
- Randy Ray: Tell us about that. Why do you feel that Ronnie Hall's the best guy for that?

Dr. Wendler: Well, it's interesting. I wasn't involved in the search process, and when I heard it was Ronnie, and I met him a couple of times and I knew him to be involved in residential life and so on. As a matter of fact, he still lives in a dorm, or lived in a dorm. He was a resident advisor in a dorm as well as everything else he did. And the fact of the matter is, I thought, "Gosh, that's odd to bring somebody out of the dorms into alumni relations." But then when I thought about it, I said, "Wait a second, that's where alumni build relationships is in the dorms. It's where you start to meet people and know people from other places." I remember in my own college life, I mean, that's where I met people. I met people and established long-term friendships in that dormitory. So, in some ways it was a perfect fit.

And then, I had a couple of calls from around town and people said, "That's a stroke of genius." Of course I said, "Oh yeah," but I had nothing to do with it. But somebody did, and he was the clear choice of the committee. He's absolutely committed to West Texas A&M University and the people that populate it, and I think that's perfect for an alumni director. So, I think he's going to do a very fine job.

Randy Ray: We've talked about some changes. One thing that has not changed on the campus of WT is our safety. I want to talk a little bit about how important safety is on the campus at WT. Do you think that's an important to an campus?

Dr. Wendler: I do. It's exceedingly important. It's important for everyone, but especially these 18-year old's that are leaving home, the parents come to visit the campus, they want to know that their offspring, their children, those that are in their charge, are in an environment where we look after things and make sure that that environment is safe. Because if you're not safe, if you don't feel safe, you're not going to be able to do your best studying because it's going to be a distraction. And we are a remarkably safe campus, and part of that is the campus, part of it also is the Canyon community. We work very closely with the Canyon community, with the mayor, and the commission. We work closely with them to try to make this environment a safe and secure environment for study. Now, I say all that. I get a police report every morning on stuff that's happened overnight in the last 24 hours.

Randy Ray: Yeah. And we have a fantastic police department on campus.

Dr. Wendler: We do. We do. And they report every incident to me just so that I'm aware of it. And sometimes I think, "What are these people thinking?" And sometimes they're not thinking. You put 10,000 people, college students, together, and sometimes they'll do something that's not very well thought out. It's just the way life works. I mean, I find that when you put 20 faculty members together, and sometimes we'll do something that's not very well thought out. So, that's just the nature of the beast.

Randy Ray: Well, I want to commend again Chief Sean Burns and all the guys that work over, guys and girls, that work over in the University Police Department. They do

a fantastic job keeping us safe. I wanted to mention some things that they suggest.

Dr. Wendler: [inaudible 00:05:39] I'm going to... Oh, you're going to stand safety for a minute?

Randy Ray: Yep.

Dr. Wendler: Okay.

Randy Ray: Let me just hit these points that they... They said that when you are on campus, if something makes you feel uncomfortable, it's pretty simple, just exit. If you can't exit, contact UPD. They said, be really careful not to share personal info with people you don't know. Don't get into a vehicle with someone you don't know. Don't go to a meeting location without letting a trusted person know where you're going and why. And it's always best to go in a group if possible. So, those are just some tips that UPD wanted us to share, and I think they're really smart. And if people keep those in mind as they are doing things across campus, it's going to keep us safer.

Dr. Wendler: I would agree with you. As a matter of fact, I tell all parents that students, I don't care male or female, I don't care ethnicity, I don't care anything, at night when they walk from point A to point B, when the sun goes down, they should always be in groups of at least two, and I think three is even better. I think that provides a kind of safety, and that's not admitting that you can't take care of yourself or anything. It's admitting a reality. Somebody could sneak up on you, and thankfully it doesn't happen very often at WT. This is not one of the crimes that I read about here. I've been at places where robbery and assault occurred on a too regular basis. Even if it's once a month, that's too regular. It's not right for campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah, we rarely hear about things.

Dr. Wendler: No. And we're not keeping them... We attend to the Clery reporting and all of the other requirements of being a public university very diligently to make sure that we're honest in letting people know. Otherwise, if I brag about safety and it's not the truth, then that's not good, but I'm willing to talk about our safety on campus. It's imperfect, but it's pretty good compared to other schools.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, that's one of the things that I appreciate about your administration is everything you're talking about is the transparency.

Dr. Wendler: Well, that's kind. Kind.

Randy Ray: Transparency.

Dr. Wendler: Appreciate it. I was going to mention one other thing about things you said that haven't changed. Safety is one of them. I'll tell you another one that hasn't changed, and in thinking about the transition from Wade Shaffer and the Provost job to Dr. Terry, Neil Terry in the Provost job, there has been and will be a commitment to academic excellence. It was Texas A&M university. It is first and foremost. That's why we're here. We're an academic organization, and I think Wade did an exceedingly good job with that. And I think Dr. Terry can learn some of the ins and outs of that, especially when you're in various disciplines. Your discipline here, radio and television, it's different than history or, say, engineering or nursing. Each one is a little bit different, but excellence is excellence. And I think that we have stayed the course on trying to be a good university.

Randy Ray: I agree, and I think you're so right. One of the things I love about WT is how our different departments and our different programs are so different, but at the end of the day, we're all Buffaloes around WT.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I like that, too.

Randy Ray: We're going to take a break, and when we come back we're going to talk about another thing that WT really, really, really believes in and that's diversity. We'll be back in one minute.

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Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. This is a special segment. Today, we're talking to Angela Allen, who is the Chief Officer for Diversity and Inclusion here on campus, and what an honor it is to have you.

Angela Allen: Thank you. Thank you, I'm glad-

Randy Ray: Yeah. Thank you for being here.

Angela Allen: Thank you. I'm glad to be here.

Randy Ray: So, Angela tell us about what you do on campus.

Angela Allen: Well, for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, I work with student organizations, I work with faculty, staff, programming on campus so that our students not only

get a well-rounded education academically in the classroom, that they get a good background in education co-curricular about cultures and diverse issues. Because that's one of the things that when they leave WT and they apply for a job, they're going to ask them, "What is your experience working with diverse populations?" So, we want to make sure our students are well-rounded.

Randy Ray: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I preach that over here in the Communication Department. I believe in diversity, and I have said 100 times that the world would be a boring place if everyone was just like me. So, I believe in diversity.

Dr. Wendler: You could say that again.

Randy Ray: Hey, hey. So, there's something exciting in your area that just opened. Tell us about that.

Angela Allen: We have the Multicultural Suite that just opened, it's called the Nathaniel and Helen Neil Multicultural Suite. It's something that's been in the work for about four or five years. I've been dreaming about it. And along with the University Diversity Committee and the JBK a management staff and a lot of other people on campus, we were able to take some space and make it a multicultural suite for our students, faculty, and staff.

Randy Ray: Tell us about Nathaniel and Helen Neil.

Angela Allen: Well, Helen Neil was the first African American to graduate from WT. And in all actuality, when I was searching, I was searching all cultures for someone to name the suite after, I came across that, and so she was on my list. And as I researched history about her, I found an article that said Nathaniel Neil, who is her husband, was the first African American faculty member at WT. And then, I thought, "This is a no brainer." That's the best kind of representation of diversity and moving forward that we could show.

Randy Ray: What year did she graduate? Do you remember?

Angela Allen: She graduated in 1962, and he came to WT in 1970.

Randy Ray: Well, you brought along someone with you, and let me introduce Deandra Murray. Deandra, hello.

Deandra Murray: Hello. Thank you for having me.

Randy Ray: Yeah. So, tell us how the Multicultural Suite, what does that mean to you as a student?

Deandra Murray: To me it means a safe place. Every student has their spot that they go have fun, mingle with their group, and for us, for my org, for my friends, that was our spot to go relax, study. There's a wall to do homework on, there's people we can talk

to, new cultures entering this building, so it's a learning experience, it's a learning space. It represents every culture there is. Anybody can go there and just relax and find a family, not just a friend, somebody you can bond with for the rest of your life, and that's what it is for me. I've met multiple people, I've met multiple friends, people that became my family, and I was there before it even came along. Just sitting in the diversity office was a representation for us, it was a family to us. And one day Ms. Allen would allow us to sit there and just bring more people to it just represent it. We needed this space.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Where is it? Where is it located?

Deandra Murray: It's connected to the Diversity Office where the technology-

Randy Ray: Which is in what building on campus?

Deandra Murray: The JBK.

Randy Ray: Okay.

Deandra Murray: Yes. It's where the electronic building used to be.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Yeah. So, how much time you spend there every day?

Deandra Murray: I'm there every day. Before I even go to class, I was there this morning after class. That's where all me and my friends meet up to eat, to study. That's where I have my executive meetings for my officers there. If any friends want to meet up just to talk, I would go there. When I take my ASL class, me and my class members study there. I'm there every day. It comes in handy.

Dr. Wendler: What organization do you belong to? You've mentioned it. I just want to-

Deandra Murray: I'm President of Black Student Union, and then I'm a member of Diversity Ambassadors.

Dr. Wendler: That's great.

Randy Ray: Angela, let me ask you something. So, you've been at WT since 2013.

Angela Allen: Yes.

Randy Ray: And you went through the communication program here on campus-

Angela Allen: Yes.

Randy Ray: ... which I'm very fond of. What does WT as a university mean to you? Because you've been here as a student and as a member of the faculty and staff, so what does WT mean to you as a person?

Angela Allen: Well, when I came to WT, got my Master's in communication at WT, and I was one of those students that, after I got off work at 5:00 o'clock I would drive to WT, get out of my car, go to class, get back in my car, and go back home. And that was the extent of getting my Master's. Since I've gotten here, I've seen so many programs for transfer students, so many programs for graduate students, so that you're just not that person that drops in and drops out. I think that they encourage students to be involved and be a part of the university.

As far as diversity is, it has grown tremendously. WT has a tremendous support for diversity, and not just in our students but in the community. We're an HSI. That means we have 25% Hispanic students here. Our African American percentage is about a little over 5%, and we have a little over 1% of international students. So, we are growing, and WT is encouraging diversity in the classroom with our students, our organizations, the support that they give. So, it's changed tremendously, and not only that, it's a beautifully visual school to attend because it didn't look like this when I was here.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Do you agree with me that college is really like a crossroads for a lot of people? And I think back to how I was such a different person when I left WT than I was when I got here, and I appreciate what you do to help open people's eyes to things like diversity.

Angela Allen: I think that it is definitely a crossroads. We bring students here from all types of backgrounds, all types of cultures, all types of neighborhoods, all types of economics standings, and we get to bring them here and show them that what they learn, they matter in the world and they can go out and change the world. They can do great things. And WT takes pride in all of their leadership activities for students, the things that they let them go out and take part in. I just really believe that it is a crossroads, and our students, if they do what they need to do, they will grow tremendously and be successful.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I agree. I wanted to point out something that you should be very proud of. You had been recognized by the Texas A&M system for your commitment and dedication to diversity, and you got a special award from our Chancellor. Tell us about that.

Angela Allen: The Chancellor's Medallion, I had no clue that that existed. It's an exciting time, and that's all about diversity. It was for my work with diversity and inclusions, and I thank Dr. Wendler. He nominated me. And it's just one of those once in a lifetime awards that you don't see coming and you appreciate it so much.

Randy Ray: Well, it was very deserving. Congratulations on that.

Angela Allen: Thank you.

Randy Ray: All right everyone. It's curve ball time. You ready? Every time we do a podcast I throw Dr. Wendler and our guest a curve ball, so I'm going to throw this out to

everyone. If you won the lottery and you had one day to spend the money, what would you spend that money on?

Deandra Murray: Can I answer that first?

Randy Ray: You're ready to go, aren't you?

Deandra Murray: Well, if I was to hit the lottery, the first thing I would pay off is my college debt. I got that question before. I would pay off college debt. And then, I always said if I got that kind of money, I would take care of the four women who raised me, so I will make sure that they're taken care of. And then, after that, I would start preparing for my future. I'll try to invest in stocks. I'll try to like bring more money back to me that I have to spend, and then I'll try to pay for my younger siblings education because I didn't have that so I would make sure they have it, too. So, that would be my answer.

Randy Ray: Well, that's very honorable. She didn't think about herself. She thought about other people.

Dr. Wendler: Other people, that's right.

Randy Ray: Angela, what about you?

Angela Allen: I would probably invest in my community, and I would probably invest in some of the initiatives here at WT, simply because I've always been a person to help people grow, watch people grow, mentor students, and I want to make it easier for students, the pathway easier, and to provide for the initiatives that they want.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, what would you do?

Dr. Wendler: Oh, that's a good question. I want for nothing, actually, in my life. I mean, I just-

Randy Ray: How many people can say that?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I don't have any material wants anymore. Maybe it's because I'm an old man, but I just don't have them. So, the first thing I would do would be commit a significant portion of it, I don't know how much, it'd be something I'd have to pray about, but to the work of the Lord in the world. That's one of the things I would do very early on. I tell you this, and what I do after that, I'm not sure, but I get rid of all of it. I've read studies on what happens to people, they get badgered. And if I won that lottery, which wouldn't happen because I don't buy lottery tickets, but if somebody bought one in my name and gave it to me and I didn't know it, they call me and say, "You won the lottery," I'd say, "Okay." And within 24 hours, it would all be given away. And I put a recording on the phone, "If you're calling about money for the lottery, it's gone. I've spent it all already. It's all gone."

Randy Ray: Well, I'm going to tell you, everyone here has made me feel bad because my first thought was a motorcycle.

Speaker 6: I'm going to buy one of those.

Randy Ray: Yeah. After I bought the motorcycle, then... My wife and I have started a scholarship. I'd probably get that funded, and we're close and get that going. But I'd have to get a motorcycle first. My wife wouldn't like that, but I'd get one anyway. So, yeah.

Angela Allen: And I would pay my tithes. That's always first and foremost. Right?

Dr. Wendler: Well, you know, me too. The LeTourneau family who founded LeTourneau University, a private Christian school, he got to a place in his life, he was in oil field equipment, big heavy drilling equipment and stuff. I don't know what it was, but I read this story once. It was kind of interesting. He didn't give 10%, which is what Angela refers to with the tithe, he gave 90 and lived on 10. Yeah, it is amazing. It is amazing. But anyway-

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well, thank you all for listening to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. This has been episode number 19. Please join us next time for episode number 20. We will see you then.