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### **Kluck takes on his latest leadership challenge**

Brooke Zimny

Office of Communications & Marketing

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*Lead photo by Tyler Rosenthal*

For immediate release

**Kluck takes on his latest leadership challenge**

*By Brooke Zimny*

March 12, 2021

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at [comm-mark@obu.edu](mailto:comm-mark@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5206.

Dr. Wesley Kluck did not have a restful 2020. As university physician and vice president for student development at Ouachita, he led the university's health efforts in response to COVID-19, chairing Ouachita's Health Monitoring and Action Team (HMAT).

"The worst thing was waking up in the middle of the night, thinking of things," he said. "There was a lot of that. Sometimes I would get up and make a PowerPoint real quick, just type it all down and go back to sleep."

HMAT, a group of 13 faculty and staff members as well as the Student Senate president, worked through a planning guide of more than 625 items to prepare Ouachita for on-campus learning in the fall, collaborating with colleagues across campus to check off each one. It's no wonder he couldn't sleep.

Kluck, a 1977 Ouachita graduate, was serving as chair of the Board of Trustees when he was invited to return as vice president for advancement and university physician in 2005. His many hats also have included team doctor for the Tigers, volunteer photographer, instructor, college ministry leader at his church and philanthropist, and he still oversees his local pediatrics clinic.

It's clear Kluck loves Ouachita and loves a challenge. Helping steer the university through COVID-19 may have been his biggest one yet.

“Serving Ouachita has been a calling for 15 years, and this is one of the fruits of that calling,” he said. “It looked like I was at the right place at the right time. I hope I was. God didn’t write it on the wall, but it sure made sense.”

“I’ve had confidence that if any university could operate safely in a pandemic, it would be Ouachita, because of the commitment and resilience of our faculty, staff and students,” said Dr. Ben Sells, Ouachita president, “and because we had Wesley Kluck, an experienced, trusted medical doctor and deeply devoted Ouachitonian, whom the Lord had prepared, it seemed, all of Wesley’s life for this moment.”

" SERVING OUACHITA HAS BEEN A CALLING FOR 15 YEARS, AND THIS IS ONE OF THE FRUITS OF THAT CALLING. "

Dr. Wesley Kluck

Ouachita was one of few universities in the nation to complete in-person learning in the fall. But to pull this off responsibly, a tremendous amount of planning had to be done.

“I didn’t realize we were an outlier,” Kluck said. “I never felt like we were taking a chance. To me, really back in April or May, it was very clear we had a blueprint for what we needed to do. It was a lot of work over the summer, but I never felt like we were taking a chance with our university, our students, our faculty.”

While Kluck’s counterparts at other universities were getting up to speed on medical terminology, he was in his element.

“Being a physician helps the learning curve,” he said. “I just had to learn about a new disease, and I’ve been learning about new diseases for years. I educated myself and kept following the changes.”

Kluck collected information from reputable sources, analyzing the original scientific research on which health recommendations were based and comparing notes with colleagues at other universities. He participated in weekly meetings with pediatricians across the state as well as meetings with the Arkansas Department of Health and all Arkansas colleges. These data as well as collaboration with colleagues on HMAT and across campus informed Ouachita’s approach to in-person learning for 2020-2021.

“We didn’t take anyone’s word for it. We looked for proof,” Kluck said. “We weren’t gambling with the students or the university.”

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Dr. Ben Sells

In addition to the burdens of COVID-19, Kluck and his wife, Debbie, balanced personal highs and lows as their daughter, Jennifer Hopkins ('08), delivered their second grandchild and as Kluck’s father later died. Again, his medical training Christian faith were assets, allowing him to process both the joys and the sorrows.

“You learn how to do that in a meaningful, compassionate, real way,” he said. “And I was able to not let the sorrow affect the things that needed to be done in other ways, and not affect the joy of a grandbaby. I was able to see that expressed in the joy of my dad, who got to hold her several times before he passed.”

Meanwhile, the work didn’t stop at Ouachita. After the focus on campus shifted from high-level planning, Kluck led implementation efforts in a variety of ways. He built a team for rapid on-campus COVID-19 testing and contact tracing, with four staff members in the Office of Health Services and new COVID-19 Testing Center plus eight additional staff members and 46 students serving as contact tracers. These efforts ensured swift action to identify positive cases quickly and limit the spread. His student development staff also led in implementing health guidelines across campus.

“We had a protocol based on science and the latest proven recommendations that we enforced uniformly,” Kluck said. “As I find out, most schools didn’t do that. It came across like we were very strict,

but we were just uniformly enforcing protocols to stop the spread. “We had three little bumps in cases, and each one of those came down in a couple of weeks, which is fast in a COVID timeline,” he continued. “Across the state, that’s not what happened. Their bumps kept going up, and ours came back down to zero. I think that was a success, and that’s just due to everybody being a part. That’s where everybody had to be a team player.”

Sells affirmed this collective effort of Ouachitians, as well.

“Faculty and staff worked nonstop to create the conditions for students to have a safe and meaningful experience. Our Board of Trustees walked alongside us, wisely providing their governance and stewardship responsibilities by Zoom,” he said. “But, from a human perspective, we’ve only been able to have a fully in-person experience because our students made it happen.”

Sells established a 175-member President’s Leadership Circle of student leaders to improve communication between students and administrators, provide additional support to the student members, who are in key roles across campus, and to influence campus culture for the better.

“I’m especially grateful to these student leaders who have led by example and encouraged their peers and who provide us ongoing feedback,” Sells noted.

This concept of working as a team is the biggest variable in battling COVID-19. Even with the weeks of planning and work put in by Kluck and hundreds of faculty and staff on Ouachita’s campus, limiting the spread came down to actions of individuals aligning. And we’re not finished yet.

“Our greatest challenge is ahead of us, I think,” Kluck noted in mid-January as the Spring 2021 semester was about to begin. “We’re not celebrating. This is halftime. We’re regrouping.”

### **Advice from the Doc**

*Drawing on piles of data collected over the past few months at Ouachita, here is some of Dr. Wesley Kluck’s best advice as we continue to battle the coronavirus. Kluck serves as Ouachita’s university physician and vice president for student development.*

#### **If you follow protocols, you don’t have to sit at home.**

Wear a mask, keep your distance and wash your hands. These simple practices work.

#### **Get outside.**

We have shown that outside is probably the safest place to be, but you still have to follow the rules, especially physical distancing.

#### **Don’t wait until you have fever and a cough to get tested.**

Most people who had COVID this year on campus said, “Oh, it’s my allergies; oh, it’s a sinus infection; oh, it’s a cold; oh, I’m just tired.” – including myself! Only 23% of Ouachita cases had a fever, and only 20% had a cough. The three most common symptoms for our positive cases were nasal congestion, throat irritation and headache.

#### **Take public health seriously.**

It’s very difficult to get your head around the principles of public health when you’re used to individual healthcare. We have to realize with public health, the things you do affect other people around you, and you have to respect that.



*By Brooke Zimny, assistant to the president for communications and marketing*