

The Impact of COVID-19 on Lincoln University of Pennsylvania

**Testimony before the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee
Senator Wayne Langerholc, Jr. - Chairman**

Pennsylvania State Senate

Tuesday, June 9, 2020

Senate Chamber

10:00 am to 12:45 pm

Dr. Brenda Allen, 14th President of Lincoln University

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony before the Pennsylvania State Senate Education Committee. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lincoln University placed top priority on (1) the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff, and (2) continuity of instruction.

Lincoln University suspended all face-to-face classes for the remainder of the spring semester beginning March 11, 2020, making it among the first institutions of higher education in the southeastern region of the state to do so. Students were given until Sunday, March 15, 2020, to vacate the campus. Soon after, all nonessential employees were asked to work remotely. In order to provide adequate time for faculty to move from face-to-face to alternative modes of instructions, courses resumed beginning March 30, 2020. The modalities for instruction utilized included; Zoom meetings, YouTube, instruction through Moodle, email, and telephone instruction where needed. All faculty received support from Lincoln's Center for Education and Teacher Learning (CETL) and assistance from staff across the area of Student Support Services to ensure that all students could be contacted for follow up on any issues regarding the alternative modes of instructions. Our students were offered the option to choose a letter grade or pass/fail for any course to limit any negative impact of the instructional response on their GPA.

The administration, faculty, staff and students met throughout the spring semester and continue to meet extensively via Zoom and teleconference to discuss processes and programs in place, evaluate actions taken to ensure the viability of the University through these unprecedented times and into the future, and to gather input on the way forward in this age of COVID-19.

Operating the campus in the age of COVID-19 requires that we all enter into a "social exercise" to design a "new normal" for engagement both inside and outside of the classroom. The current draft reopening plan that we are working on for Lincoln University-Main Campus is designed in concert with several guidelines and best practices provided by various sources during the continued threat of the COVID-19 virus. Primary are the guidelines put forth by Tom Wolf, Governor of Pennsylvania and the CDC. These emerging guidelines, precautions and best practices are being used to inform how Lincoln University repopulates its main-campus and designs protocols to monitor and contain any potential COVID-19 outbreaks.

Lincoln's top priorities for reopening are ensuring the health and safety of the Lincoln University community and providing continuity of education including maximizing the student experience. Our plan seeks to build in the flexibility, precautions and social responsibility needed to offer a great academic experience in spite of COVID-19's threats.

In order to develop a comprehensive plan for reopening the campus, we have formed working groups of faculty, students, and staff to devise protocols and policies based on best practices for managing the continued public health concerns. Discussions regarding the academic calendar and delivery of instruction are also taking place with faculty, as well as academic and student success administrators and staff. These plans are contingent upon continued reductions in the spread of COVID-19 and the state support required to mitigate, monitor, and contain any health risks to our community. We are also putting alternative plans in place for providing continuity of education for our students should we receive guidance dictating the need to continue remote instruction.

The University's plan for continuity in the delivery of classroom instruction begins with a slightly altered schedule designed to mitigate the threat of a second wave of the COVID-19 impacting campus life. Many believe that a second wave is most likely during the height of the influenza season, namely late November through the month of February. In devising our plans, we have been informed that we must work within our current two-semester structure. One option under discussion is to adjust the academic calendar so that students are not present on campus during peak influenza season, yet it still considers the importance of offering campus life when the threat of the virus is lower. This would include scheduling on-campus instruction until the Thanksgiving break and then delivering instruction via alternative modes through the end of the fall semester while students remain at home. A similar schedule would be followed for the spring semester. I am pleased to report that the University has recently contracted with Canvas, a Learning Management System (LMS), to provide enhanced delivery of online course work and instruction.

We have also created the LU COVID-19 Taskforce of faculty, students and staff to plan for the return of students. Members of the Board of Trustees have also been invited to participate in this planning process as part of the Taskforce. The Taskforce is working collaboratively across the campus areas to establish protocols and processes to:

- Reduce the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak on campus
 - Cleaning protocol for campus facilities
 - PPE protocol
 - Social distancing protocol
 - Repopulating campus strategy
- Monitor the threat of COVID-19 outbreak on campus
 - Daily health checks
 - Periodic monitoring
- Contain the threat of COVID-19 outbreak on campus
 - Test-Trace-Isolate protocol

- Reporting and updating on containment efforts

To date the Taskforce has accomplished the following to assist with its mission:

- Identification of Contact Tracing Course for students, staff, and faculty
- Received a \$7,000 grant from Honda for COVID-19 testing efforts
- Identified potential COVID-19 rapid testing materials

The University's office of Human Resources has also developed guidelines for faculty and staff as they return to work on campus. The guidelines include:

- Guiding principles
- Health and safety protocols
 - At home health screening
 - Employees who need to take extra precautions
 - Physical distancing

Lincoln University, as are other institutions of higher education, is committed to working in concert with the Commonwealth during this pandemic to create best practices and policies to continue to lower the spread of COVID – 19 and prepare for any flare-ups or outbreaks of COVID-19 on our campuses. We are committed to doing what is necessary to continue to provide quality educational experiences for our students.

I want to close by saying that, unfortunately, the COVID-19 Pandemic has hit African-American communities especially hard. As the nation's first degree-granting Historically Black College and University, Lincoln University is committed to leveraging its credibility and stature within African American communities throughout the Commonwealth to inform and educate this sector of the population of the PA Department of Health's efforts to implement the Commonwealth's contact tracing program.

I will be pleased to answer any questions and provide any details you would like regarding the plans and protocols outlined above.