

**Senate Education Committee Public Hearing
Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education in Pa.
June 9, 2020**

Opening remarks by Temple University President Richard M. Englert

Chairman Langerholc, Chairman Dinniman and members of the Senate Education Committee:

I want to thank you for the support you have shown us in the past, as we work together to keep our communities safe, educated and successful. And I want to thank you for your support for the non-preferred appropriation approved two weeks ago.

We are making excellent progress in our plans for the summer and fall, and could not have done so without the Commonwealth's support, advice and partnership. I especially want to thank you for this opportunity, because it offers me the chance to look back on this extraordinary time, to consider where we are today, and to articulate our plans for the summer and the 2020-21 academic year.

It seems hard to believe, but the first message we sent to the Temple community about COVID-19 was on January 30, just a few weeks after classes for the spring semester went into full swing. At that time, we were carefully tracing the impact of the virus on our study abroad students and on our very active campuses in Rome and Tokyo. As we watched the Asian and European nations cope with the virus, it became clear that those of us in the United States would not be immune from its impact. So we started planning for how we would handle a pandemic in the United States.

Early on, we developed a set of guiding principles that have endured as we shifted from an in-person teaching environment to an alternative teaching one.

First, we must do everything we can to ensure the safety of the students, faculty and staff of the Temple community. Even in the early days, when there were many things about this disease that were unknown, it was clear COVID-19 was deadly and dangerous.

Second, we needed to make sure that our students continued their academic progress. Our students deserve to keep their education on track and on time. We also needed to ensure that the many student services that are basic to a contemporary education continue, from emotional health counseling to career advising.

Third, we committed to refunding students the money they had paid for services they no longer could use. For most students, this meant the costs of student housing, meal plans and monthly parking fees. Temple was one of the first schools in the Commonwealth to complete this process.

Finally, our healthcare enterprise needed to prepare for the impact the pandemic would have on Philadelphia, and especially its most vulnerable residents, many of whom live in the area

around our North Philadelphia campuses. Our hospitals geared up like never before to prepare for the heavy patient load. We also shifted our research focus to finding the most effective means to treat the virus and help in any way we could to find a cure.

The big news for us came March 11, when we announced the shift to remote learning. Temple University's U.S. campuses ended in-person instruction on Friday, March 13. We began online and alternative learning methods on Monday, March 16. Because we had already gone through this transition at our Japan campus, we were able to implement many lessons learned. Faculty did an amazing job of bringing their classes online with three weeks' notice. Our students were able to complete their spring term studies, and last month we had our largest graduating class ever, more than 10,400 graduates.

During this time, we never completely shut down our campus. More than 200 students remained in Temple housing, largely because they had nowhere else to go. We fed them, cleaned their rooms and the entire group remained healthy and successfully completed their classes.

Not long after the move to alternative learning, the city of Philadelphia asked us for help in establishing a temporary hospital to handle the potential overflow of patients from the city's hospitals. We immediately agreed and within weeks a 180-bed surge hospital was established in Temple's Liacouras Center basketball facility. At the same time, Temple established one of the first drive-up testing facilities in the region at our Ambler Campus.

While the city's hospitals were hit hard with COVID-19 patients—and Temple University's Hospital handled the highest number of patients in the region—great planning by all the hospitals in our region prevented the medical nightmare that hit many other cities around the world.

Even as we were handling the challenges of the spring semester and the height of the medical cases, we knew we needed to look forward. We established a team of professionals from around the campus to prepare for the summer and make plans for the fall. That effort has involved more than 120 members representing all of our schools, colleges and medical expertise as we established plans for our return.

The same guiding principles that helped us through our successful transition in the spring are being used to plan for the summer and fall terms: Keeping our community safe, ensuring the continuity of student learning, keeping our education affordable, and continuing research.

We've built a phased plan that emulates that of the Commonwealth. This step-by-step approach allows us to assess the effectiveness of each phase and make the needed adjustments before we move to the next phase. Attached for your information is a set of slides that provide details on our plans for returning to campus, including the phases that lead to the fall semester return.

Right now, we are planning for a pilot program to bring a select number of students back to campus for the Summer II session which begins June 23. They will be the first to experience in-person classes and the four pillars to a healthy campus:

- The use of face coverings.
- Frequent hand washing.
- Maintaining a safe distance.
- Monitoring their own health on a daily basis.

Protocols for everything from how to deep clean a bathroom to safety measures for researchers “at the bench” are being created and communicated each week. Plexiglass is going up at counters where employees interact with the public, hand sanitizer dispensers are being installed, and signs are going up and distancing and directional markers are being laid on ground.

Students returning to their off campus housing will mark the start of phase four on August 1.

Our final phase will begin as students move into university residence halls in mid–August on dates as they are assigned, followed by fall semester classes beginning on Aug. 24. We will offer a blend of in-person and online instruction.

Very large classes will occur online and in various break-out sessions. Other classes will occur in person and in hybrid fashion. While our campus will look different, we do believe a campus presence is not only possible, but can be done safely.

We’ve made plans to handle students who become ill without shutting down, as many schools experienced in the spring. We’ve also adjusted our fall calendar so students will go home the week before Thanksgiving and stay there to complete classes and finals. Doing this will offer several advantages, not the least of which is giving us an opportunity to assess the fall semester’s success, minimize the possibility of a recurrence and finalize plans for the spring 2021 semester.

As you can see, this effort is extensive, data- and science-based, and is founded on the principles which helped us with a successful end to the spring semester. While we are confident of moving forward, we also know that COVID-19 can surprise us. We have all learned to be nimble when it is necessary to preserve the health and safety of our community. We will be ready to pivot to primarily online instruction at any point during the fall semester should it be required.

I also want to emphasize that we have taken multiple steps to lessen the financial burden of attending college for our students and their families. We will hold tuition flat for the coming year for all undergraduate and graduate students. This will mark the second consecutive year of flat tuition undergraduates who are Pennsylvania residents. In addition, we were one of the first universities to put in the hands of students the emergency CARES funds, totaling over \$14 million. We also continue to invest in student financial aid and in counseling services to keep student debt as low as possible.

Yet, the COVID pandemic has produced great financial strain on the university in the tens of millions of dollars, and we enter next year with a budget gap of over \$50 million, which we are addressing through budget reductions and enhanced revenue even as we face the uncertainties that COVID could bring.

I want to close as I began, by thanking the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's leadership for its guidance and support over the last six months. We hope we've earned your ongoing confidence as we move through the summer and look forward to the best fall semester experience we can offer.