

**STATEMENT BY
DAVIE JANE GILMOUR
PRESIDENT OF PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY
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With an overall graduate-placement rate of 97.3 percent that reaches 100 percent in many of our majors, Pennsylvania College of Technology delivers an educational model that is being emulated by more and more colleges and universities. We already knew that technology education, with its dependence in-person instruction on state-of-the-art equipment, is inherently more expensive to deliver than a liberal arts education, and we deeply appreciate the support of this body in that regard.

But remote delivery of that model has been another challenge altogether for our 5,000-student, open-enrollment, hands-on institution. Our academic approach is rooted in real world experience and a heavily lab-based curriculum that evolves just as quickly as the industries our students study; further, in many cases, program accreditation is based upon this standard.

During the challenging times this spring, the irony was never lost on us that across our 100 certificate, associate, bachelor's and master's degree programs, all were directly aligned to essential, life-sustaining services, and that more than 80% of our graduates remained in Pennsylvania, largely working in fields considered essential during pandemic.

COVID-19 Actions, Spring 2020

As it became apparent in late February that COVID-19 was spreading from Asia and across Europe, Pennsylvania College of Technology started planning for multiple contingencies and began communicating with students, parents, faculty, staff, and stakeholders for the College's ongoing response to the pandemic.

Initially, before there were confirmed COVID-19 cases in Pennsylvania or Lycoming County, the College moved to cancel Global Experience student/faculty trips to countries substantially affected by coronavirus and began communicating those actions directly to those involved.

In early March, as Spring Break (March 8) approached, the College began sending email communications on a regular basis to students, parents, and the College community from Student Affairs, Academic Affairs and the President's Office. The messaging offered information from the health agencies (the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the World Health Organization), as well as the U.S. Department of State regarding travel advisories, coronavirus symptoms and FAQs, disease precautions, guidelines to prevent the spread of infection, and more. Posters and signage with similar information were posted campus-wide.

Also in the first week of March, the College launched a COVID-19 [website](#) and linked to it from a banner on the home page of the College website. This site features the latest (and a full archive) of our COVID-19 response updates, as well as a full menu of information and resources for coronavirus, including enhanced cleaning/disinfecting protocols from our General Services department and instructions about how to proceed if someone is presumed or confirmed to be infected.

Later, this site was supplemented with a [COVID-19 Student Resources Page](#), where students can find answers to their questions about how COVID-19 is affecting academics, financial aid, student life,

scheduling, commencement, and other aspects of the college experience. We also communicated information and provided responses to questions on our various Penn College social media platforms, including a particularly active parents group on Facebook.

On March 11, the College communicated to students planning for remaining Global Experience trips, that all College-sponsored international travel had been canceled through July 1. Later that same day, the College, in an abundance of caution, extended Spring Break – which was to have ended March 16 – to March 23. Career Fair, a recruiting event featuring hundreds of employers on campus March 17-18, was canceled. Any students or employees traveling to affected countries over the break were directed to self-quarantine for 14 days upon return. And, taking a cue from other colleges and universities, the College initiated training sessions for faculty on strategies to move content to remote platforms; most had never taught online before.

On March 13, the College canceled its Spring Open House event, scheduled for March 28. That same day, when Governor Wolf ordered the closure of K-12 schools statewide for 10 business days, the College communicated with employees impacted by childcare issues and addressed provisions for them to participate remotely in meetings on campus to balance work and family obligations. Similar remote provisions were implemented for student advising and scheduling.

When subsequent word was received that colleges were also to close until April 6, Academic Affairs communicated that most coursework would be delivered remotely from March 23 to the end of the Spring 2020 semester and asked for everyone's cooperation and patience as plans were developed and implemented by Academic Affairs.

At that time, the College still planned to resume in-person lab and clinical instruction on April 6 for courses that required it. Following the Governor's guidance that non-essential business operations be limited throughout the Commonwealth, the College moved to minimize on-campus operations to essential services only, while making provisions for most employees to work remotely during the period.

A video communication from the Office of the President to the Campus Community on March 17 urged everyone to cooperate with guidelines and remain safe, and addressed a moral obligation to reduce the curve of COVID-19 spread, an ethical obligation to provide the best possible educational outcomes for our students and their families, and a professional obligation to provide future workforce leaders to the Commonwealth and our industry partners. This became a recurring theme in much of our subsequent messaging.

On March 31, based on the latest guidelines from President Trump, Governor Wolf and the appropriate health agencies, the College announced May 4 as the date when those select students still requiring lab and clinical instruction to complete their coursework would return to campus, with that cohort's semester extended until May 29. The message added that Spring Commencement was postponed until August, and summer sessions were being moved to remote delivery announced initial refunds for room and board costs, and offered Pass/Fail grade options.

On April 21, when the governor announced that his stay-at-home order was being extended statewide until May 8, our target date for the return of students in need of in-person labs or clinical experiences to complete coursework was moved once again – to May 11.

By this point, the College completed 93 percent of Spring coursework remotely, a remarkable feat for a college of technology whose hallmark is hands-on learning and in-person instruction. Still, the labwork and clinicals that were unable to be completed – but are required in order for the institution to give academic credit – fall across a spectrum of degree programs, from nursing to dental hygiene to welding, and from automotive to baking and pastry to aviation maintenance.

On May 7, when it became clear that we would not receive state approval for our plans to return that group of approximately 500 students to campus as planned, we notified the affected students directly that course-by-course completion plans would be forthcoming. And on May 14, the College announced its plans to finish Spring 2020 makeup, in-person coursework – tailored by specific program – later this summer.

In addition to coursework, a variety of resources were delivered remotely to students, including those from Career Services and the Academic Success Center. Human Resources regularly updated employees on work expectations, and professional development was offered to assist workers in adapting to remote operations and interactions. Massive and burdensome procedural changes had to be developed for vouchers, withdrawals, academic review, scholarships, Dean’s List, and many other student-focused activities.

No employee furloughs or layoffs were undertaken during this timeframe, and employees continued to be paid.

Going forward – Fall 2020

As announced on May 29, and absent direction to the contrary from state government, we will reopen July 27 for students returning for three weeks of makeup, in-person instruction. On August 3, students needing two weeks of makeup, in-person instruction will return. On August 10, students needing one week of makeup, in-person instruction will return to campus, along with any returning students wishing to refresh/supplement their lab skills (voluntarily, at no cost) before the start of the Fall 2020 semester. On August 17, the Fall 2020 semester (with in-person instruction fully anticipated) begins for all first-year and returning Penn College students. Our messaging around this important step was sent to and formed the basis of an [op-ed](#) published in the *Williamsport Sun-Gazette* on May 30.

In this messaging, we emphasized that adaptability remains a Penn College trademark, and we will keep everyone as safe and protected as possible in these fast-changing times. Beyond conforming with the latest guidance and protocols set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, there are additional institutional characteristics that clearly distinguish Penn College in regard to health and safety. These are crucial, because we know that students are expecting us to provide a secure environment in which to pursue their studies and career aspirations. We know that their parents are seeking the same assurances.

First and foremost, we will comply with – and clearly communicate – the most up-to-date government and health agency directives for social distancing, masking, enhanced cleaning protocols (for facilities and equipment), classroom and lab sizes and capacities, and much more. Our [COVID-19 website](#) will provide details, serving as repository and archive for all pandemic messaging, and a [COVID-19 Student Resources page](#) continues to direct students to various sources of practical information.

Penn College is extremely fortunate to have a premier health-system resource like UPMC Susquehanna, a frequent partner with us for various initiatives, located virtually in our “backyard” in Williamsport. UPMC offers access to robust COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, pandemic guidance, and much more.

Additionally, we have a considerable number of Penn College faculty and staff who are health-care and/or emergency management professionals, we provide a College Health Services facility on campus, and we can offer quarantine facilities as needed.

Some other factors that enable us to mitigate risk and offer safe interaction on campus:

- Our rural location affords a higher level of protection than colleges in larger metropolitan settings.
- The size of our campus/physical plant allows for more optimal spacing of people, offices, classrooms, labs, and facilities.
- Our industry-standard labs are expansive, offering ample spacing opportunities.
- Our average class size (16) facilitates social distancing.
- Blended coursework offers additional classroom-scheduling and spacing flexibility.
- Our industry partners are able to offer solutions that have worked for them in real-world settings.

Above all else, our response must provide a safe haven for those who have entrusted us with their education. But we are mindful, as well, of our commitment to provide students with the type of instruction for which we are renowned, and of our responsibility to fulfill the needs of employers, who desperately need our skilled graduates to continue operations in uncertain economic times.

I welcome your questions and comments.