



House Education Committee

**Opening Remarks by JoAnne Epps,
Executive Vice President and Provost**

The last 12 months have been unlike any we have experienced in our lifetimes. And while there have been hard lessons learned, I am pleased to say that we can see a brighter future, where Temple University remains a strong and vital part of the Commonwealth's higher education world.

Rather than go through a point-by-point discussion of the last year, allow me to summarize the changes that have taken place at Temple, offer some highlights, review the economic impact, and give you a look at how we see the university moving forward.

Academic experiences from March 2020 through today.

Like other colleges and universities in the state, Temple went completely virtual in March, 2020. As soon as we could, we brought back our clinical students in the health sciences in our Schools of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Podiatric Medicine and Public Health. We then invited a small number of students to campus in the fall. After a quick growth in positive cases among our students, we scaled back our fall in-person teaching, but were able to leave our essential clinical programs in place.

Here's where we are right now: While the majority of spring semester classes remain online, we have expanded the number of courses with an in-person component beyond those that require critical hands-on training and experiential learning. All courses offered with an in-person component are taught in de-densified classroom, lab and studio settings that are as safe as possible. Many schools and colleges are also holding an array of co-curricular and extracurricular in-person activities that will continue to provide opportunities for safe social interaction with faculty and fellow students.

The good news is that our positivity numbers have remained low, and our students are making progress towards their degrees.

Highlights of our response

How have we been so successful? Here are a few highlights:

- We offered our faculty critical training on how to successfully teach online courses through the CAT, our Center for the Advancement of Teaching. That process continues.
- We tapped the Student Emergency Aid Fund to provide access to the internet, computers and other necessary devices for students in need.
- Students living in the area with food insecurity were able to take advantage of the Cherry Pantry throughout the pandemic.
- We have been supplying critical support services online, including counseling and academic advising.
- The university also implemented an extensive flexible grading option (pass/fail) for all students in spring 2020; and a modified flexible grading policy in the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters for undergraduate students.
- We formed a group of student Community Health Ambassadors who logged more than 5000 hours since August monitoring indoor and outdoor locations on campus to encourage compliance with mask wearing and physical distancing through positive reinforcement.

As you can see, we have put the needs of our students first, and implemented the best practices possible to ensure that students stayed on track and on schedule.

Economic Impact

The economic impact of the pandemic has been serious, but bearable. Last summer, we tightened our belts across the board, enacted a hiring freeze, reduced departmental budgets by 5 percent, eliminated salary increases for non-union employees and reduced the salaries of our highest paid workers. These actions and others resulted in more than \$50 million in budget savings and have been essential to Temple's stability and overall financial health.

This comes, however, in the context of a projected loss of more than \$120 million due to COVID. We suffered significant losses in revenue from housing, parking, rentals and lower than expected enrollment. We also incurred significant expenses due to COVID, including the costs

of COVID testing and securing PPE for students, faculty and staff. The reality is that we cannot cut our way out of these losses and that is why we have requested an additional three percent in Commonwealth Appropriation. As we have done in many ways, we are trying to insulate students as much as possible from this hard reality. For example, we have been able to hold the line on tuition for Pennsylvania undergraduate students for the last two years.

We also have been able to reduce the economic impact of the pandemic in some remarkable ways. This spring, we have the ability to conduct up to 20,000 COVID-19 tests per week among students, faculty and staff. Our ability to conduct these tests is the direct result of a new testing facility at Temple's Lewis Katz School of Medicine. By using new technology at the medical school's lab, the unit cost of testing dropped dramatically, from more than \$100 per test to approximately \$12.50 per test. This will allow Temple to save about \$26 million over the course of this semester, while conducting an aggressive testing plan at a cost of approximately \$10 million. In our budget request, we have asked for \$5 million to compensate for some of our COVID-19 testing costs.

Community Impact

Approximately one year ago, when Philadelphia was in the grip of treating the first wave of COVID-19 patients, we agreed to let the city use our basketball arena to set up a surge hospital. In a matter of weeks, Temple's Liacouras Center was transformed into a medical facility that—had patient load risen to the levels seen in New York or Los Angeles—would have been a lifesaver for many. It is fortunate that the city's hospitals were able to absorb much of the first wave. Even so, medical leaders from across the country studied our work and learned a great deal through the experience. Those lessons are now being used at makeshift facilities around the nation.

More recently, Temple Health partnered with Penn Medicine under the guidance of the Commonwealth's Department of Human Services, as part of a statewide effort to provide COVID-19 tests for, and support the healthcare needs of, seniors in group facilities. Penn Medicine and Temple worked with the staff and residents in roughly 300 skilled nursing facilities, assisted living and personal care homes in Bucks, Chester, Lancaster and Philadelphia

counties. As of January, through this partnership, Temple Health served close to 2,500 residents and staff of long-term care facilities and responded to more than 100 facility outbreaks. These efforts helped reduce the morbidity rates at these homes, gave their care staff valuable help during outbreaks, and built a solid relationship we hope will continue as vaccinations become available to staff and residents alike.

We are now working with the city of Philadelphia to vaccinate the residents of North Philadelphia as more vaccines become available. We hope to go out into the community and set up clinics at churches, community centers and other areas that are convenient and trusted by local residents. The vaccine for these clinics would come from the city of Philadelphia's allotment.

In addition, if we were able to gain a supply of vaccines from the Commonwealth, we would be willing, able and prepared to establish a point of distribution on our campus for the Temple community. We would follow all guidelines on setting priorities for this distribution and ensure that it would be done under the same high-quality conditions we are now using to test our population for COVID-19.

Conclusion

With a firm commitment to our mission, and the help of partners like you, our reality is this: While COVID-19 has presented us with serious challenges, including ongoing economic challenges, Temple remains strong and stable. While the last year has been demanding, we eagerly look to the future.

We are working on our plans for the fall of 2021 now. The significant challenge is in accurately predicting where the threat of COVID-19 will be at that time. Our hope is that we will be able to have a significantly larger number of students back on campus. We are exploring options that will allow us to make that happen, while at the same time ensure their continuing good health.

With your continued support, Temple University will remain focused on helping its students persevere through this difficult time and find success in a brighter future.