



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

QuickTakes!

TCNJ's Barbara Gitenstein Will Retire in June 2018, After 19 Years as President

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The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) President R. Barbara Gitenstein, the first woman to serve as the school's president, announced at the July 11 meeting of the college's board of trustees that she will retire in June 2018 at the conclusion of the coming academic year. It will mark the end of a nearly 20-year tenure, the third longest in the college's 162-year history. She is the first woman to serve as president.

"This was not a decision I arrived at easily, but the timing is right for the institution, for my family and for me," said Dr. Gitenstein, who assumed office on January 1, 1999. "It has been the highlight of my professional career to have served as president of this extraordinary institution."

"With deep respect and admiration, the board of trustees has accepted President Gitenstein's intention to retire," said Jorge Caballero, chair of the board. "Under Dr. Gitenstein's leadership, the college has continued to pursue a path of excellence ..."

TCNJ has experienced much success throughout President Gitenstein's tenure. The accomplishment, however, that she believes set the foundation for much that followed is the transformation of the academic program that took place early in her presidency and positioned the college as an exemplar in public higher education.

The changes aimed to deliver an education of the highest quality, the kind most commonly associated with the top private colleges. Central to the experience was the opportunity for students of all disciplines to conduct mentored research with faculty. It also exemplified the kind of decision-making that marked her administration – collaborative and aspirational.

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“We sought to reinforce the relationship between faculty and students,” said Dr. Gitenstein. “Our faculty thought deeply about their research and how they could engage students in it so that students could learn by serving as junior colleagues while conducting research.”

The success of this transformation has been well documented. The Association of Governing Boards and the National Association of College and University Business Officers have both published case studies detailing the achievement.

In January 2016, the Washington, DC-based Council on Undergraduate Research awarded its inaugural “Campus-wide Award for Undergraduate Research Accomplishment” for Master’s-level institutions to TCNJ. As its name suggests, the honor recognizes institutions that have devised exemplary programs providing high-quality research experiences to undergraduates.

The school’s initiative has been noted nationally. TCNJ was recognized in 2007 as a Phi Beta Kappa campus, and new National Science Foundation data rank TCNJ highly among undergraduate institutions whose graduates have gone on to earn a PhD in the last decade. On a percentage basis, TCNJ is second in New Jersey only to Princeton in terms of the number of undergraduates who have received a doctorate.

The emphasis on quality also has had a dramatic impact on student success. The college has seen a dramatic improvement in four-year graduation rates. The shift illustrates a central tenet of Dr. Gitenstein’s presidency: continuous improvement.

“We had a six-year graduation rate of 85 percent and could have rested on our laurels,” said the president. “Instead, we said that’s not good enough. Let’s stop talking about six years and focus on four years. That’s how long families expect a baccalaureate degree to take. That’s what we need to deliver.”

During her tenure, TCNJ’s four-year graduation rate has climbed from 58 percent in May 1999 (for the class entering in fall 1995) to 75 percent in May 2016 (for the class entering fall 2012, the most recent year for which data is available). TCNJ ranks fifth in the nation among all public colleges and universities for having the highest four-year graduation rate.

Even with this improvement, Dr. Gitenstein noticed that the four-year rate for certain underrepresented populations was lagging. Though it was relatively good compared to other institutions, she was not satisfied. As a result, the college put new programming in place to provide additional support for these students. The results have been striking: the four-year graduation rate for students in the Educational Opportunity Fund program has jumped from 21 percent in 1999 to 69 percent in 2016.

Dr. Gitenstein noted that these figures represent a dollars-and-cents difference to everyone.

“Time to degree matters,” she said. “Students who finish in four years will pay less, borrow less, and get started in their careers more quickly. State support per degree is less and graduates begin contributing to the state sooner, both financially and socially.”

Curricular innovations have been supported through improvements to the campus’ physical plant. Over the last 18 years, Dr. Gitenstein has broken ground on six academic buildings (Art and Interactive Multimedia, Biology, Education, Science Complex, Social Sciences, and STEM). The college has built two new residence halls (Hausdoerffer and Phelps) and renovated nine (Allen, Brewster, Centennial, Cromwell, Decker, Eickhoff, Ely, New Res, and Norsworthy), constructed a new library, undertaken a transformation of its student center, and completed the mixed-use Campus Town, among other projects. A total of more than 1.6 million square feet of new and renovated space has been created.

“These facilities greatly enhance the living-learning environment we are able to offer our students,” said Dr. Gitenstein. “But beyond the quality of the facilities, I’m proud of the fact that we’ve been able to arrange partnerships to help make some of those investments.”

The \$120 million Campus Town, a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership, is a mixed-use development that provides housing for 612 students as well as shops and restaurants that benefit both the campus and community. The privately funded project, the second and final phase of which was completed a year ago, was enabled by New Jersey’s Public Private Partnership law. President Gitenstein was an advocate for the law’s passage.

The start of the fall semester will see the opening of a new STEM Building and an addition to the Chemistry Building, both of which have been funded in part through the state’s Building Our Future Bond. These facilities will greatly improve student and faculty research in fields critical to the state’s economy.

Also nearing completion is a two-year renovation of Brower Student Center that was funded in partnership with Sodexo, the campus’ food service provider. The reimagined building will include new meeting and dining spaces and will meet the technological needs of students.

Recognizing the need for increased outside support for the college, President Gitenstein led TCNJ through its first comprehensive fundraising campaign. The five-year effort, which wrapped on June 30, exceeded both its original \$40 million goal and additional \$5 million stretch goal. The majority of the money raised will benefit student support (\$24.8 million) and the student experience (\$16.9 million). Academic enrichment and capital improvement rounded out the priorities.

“When we were in the planning stages, our consultant told us that we might be able to raise \$25 million, but it would be a stretch,” noted Dr. Gitenstein. “But I felt that if we were going to make the effort, we had to do better, especially given how great the need is for student support. When all the dollars are counted, I expect us to be well north of \$46 million.”

More than 13,000 individual gifts were received during the campaign, ranging in size from \$1 to \$6.6 million.

Dr. Gitenstein has seen her share of challenges over the past two decades. One of the first came just a year after her arrival when she learned that the New Jersey Department of Education was investigating the college for failure to disclose several cases of sexual assault. Characteristic of her leadership style, President Gitenstein saw in the challenge an opportunity for positive improvement.

“I was certainly concerned,” she said. “But at the same time, the investigation provided the resolve to take a hard look at a very difficult issue and identify thoughtful, substantive means to address it.”

While noting that there is still more to be done, Dr. Gitenstein noted some of the major achievements, such as the college’s creation of the Office of Anti-Violence Initiatives and the Title IX office, a bystander intervention initiative, mandatory training for all students, completion of a campus climate survey, and other programming. Fourteen years later, she was one of a handful of college presidents invited to the White House for then Vice President Biden’s unveiling of the recommendations of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. TCNJ had already or was in the process of implementing those recommendations.

Most recently, President Gitenstein displayed the same determination and transparency, when confronting two challenging issues this spring: the college’s relationship with the city of Trenton and the closing of the TCNJ Clinic.

“When an institution of higher education is confronted with a difficult situation of any type, it is essential that the values of the institution remain the lodestar for communication,” Dr. Gitenstein said. “And during that time, the voice of the president must be heard. In those difficult times, I have always tried to reinforce our commitment to inclusion and diversity, collaboration and transparency, compassion and humility, self-reflection and aspiration.”

Dr. Gitenstein emphasized that the successes and accomplishments of the past 18 years belong to the community.

“I have been blessed to work with extraordinarily talented leadership teams, faculty, and staff,” she said. “Everything that we accomplished, we accomplished together. I thank the volunteer boards that support the college’s work, including the Alumni Association, the Foundation and the Trenton State Corporation who have been instrumental in the college’s progress. But it has been the members of the board of trustees whose confidence, enthusiasm, and vision who made it all possible.”

In a [message to the campus community](#), TCNJ Board Chair Caballero announced the appointment of Trustee Susanne Svizeny '79 to chair the Presidential Search Committee, which will comprise campus stakeholders.

“We will pursue this task with the goal of ensuring that the good work laid out by Dr. Gitenstein be continued and further strengthened,” he proposed. “We look forward to identifying the 16th President of The College of New Jersey to lead us through the institution’s next chapter.”

Dr. Gitenstein looks forward to being able to spend more time with her family, especially her husband, Dr. Donald Hart and her granddaughter, but she will continue to be involved in shaping higher education in this country. She will join AGB Consulting, a Washington, DC-based firm specializing in assisting universities and their governing boards navigate challenges and more effectively lead their institutions.

“I look forward to being able to think about higher education from a global perspective instead of an individual institutional perspective,” she said. “This new role will allow me to continue to contribute to an industry that I believe is the pride of our nation.”