

Press Release
For Immediate Release: August 24, 2020

County of Union and Kean University Announce Innovative COVID-19 Initiative: First of Its Kind to Involve Research, Lab Work, Academic Student Employment Opportunities



The County of Union will continue to operate its free COVID-19 testing site at Kean University throughout the Fall semester partnership that will provide testing for the campus community as well as opportunities for research and student employment. Chair AI Mirabella and Kean President Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D., announced today.

The County, which was the first in New Jersey to operate a COVID-19 testing site, will expand the partnership to provide Union County residents and first responders from across the state while enhancing academic coursework, internships and student employment.

"The pandemic presents challenges on every front, but it also creates unique opportunities like this one for government and academia to work together," Mirabella said. "Combining forces like this not only helps the County to fight the spread of COVID-19, but also provides hands-on experience in fields ranging from data analysis to public health management to crisis communications."

President Repollet said the decision to keep the testing site operating on campus through the

Fall semester was made in keeping with the University's longstanding commitment to public service and in response to the campus community for efficient testing and contact tracing. The combination of significantly reduced campus density and continued operation of the Union campus to operate successfully throughout the semester, he said.

"This partnership is an opportunity for Kean to demonstrate its innovative nature as well as its strength in applied research and academic pursuits," Repollet said. "Working together, this initiative can show not only the campus community but also the county and the state of New Jersey."

Governor Phil Murphy acknowledged the "one of a kind" partnership between Union County and Kean University.

"I congratulate and thank Union County Freeholder Chairman Alexander Mirabella and Kean University President Dr. Lamont Repollet on this exciting new jointure," Governor Murphy said. "This partnership shows those in public office and in our higher education settings to work together to not only defeat this virus, but to train the next generation of virus-fighters."

Ada Morell, chair of the Kean Board of Trustees, also noted that the partnership moves the University forward in areas of research, public health and public service, and provides students with internships at a time when such opportunities are scarce.

"It's good to see Kean and Union County taking a challenging situation and turning it around to benefit our students and faculty," Morell said. "This initiative will further enhance the world-class research and service where it is needed most."

The University and the County also are pursuing plans to create a unique and efficient one-stop COVID testing center by seeking certification for Kean University laboratories to process samples at the testing site. Kean currently has the technical ability to process samples, but it requires federal approval to operate its labs for such a purpose. As demand grows for this type of processing, the University hopes to secure the approvals later this year.

"With leadership and support from the state of New Jersey, this one-stop Covid-19 testing center would be the first its kind on a New Jersey college campus and would enhance the county's ongoing efforts to combat the coronavirus," Repollet said.

Chairman Mirabella said the possibility of using Kean's labs to process nearly 2,500 to 3,000 samples each week would revolutionize the current operation by significantly reducing wait times for

"This could be a game-changer for County residents and really all of New Jersey," Mirabella said. "The faster we can provide people with test results, the more effective they can be in isolating and preventing the spread of the virus."

Senator Joseph P. Cryan, whose district encompasses Kean University, stated: "History will mark this moment with the observers and the doers. And while around the country, institutions of higher education have moved to remote instruction – Kean University is adapting its programming to move beyond classroom teaching and into a real world practicum."

Senator Nicholas P. Scutari, an alumnus of Kean University, stated: "The development of these services will be absolutely essential to managing the pandemic in Union County with the fall semester. We will be able to diagnose those who use the test center quickly, and it creates an opportunity to draw upon expertise of the Kean faculty, and the energy of its students. Once again, Union County is leading the way against COVID-19, and I applaud the many partners who have come together."

Union County opened its COVID-19 testing site at Kean University on March 23, 2020, and has administered over 43,000 tests since that date. The county also has expanded community testing information on the Union County COVID-19 Center at Kean, please go to www.ucnj.org.

About Kean University

Founded in 1855, Kean University is one of the largest metropolitan institutions of higher education in the region, with a richly diverse student, faculty and staff population. Kean continues to play a leading role in the region and is a hub of educational, technological and cultural enrichment serving more than 16,000 students. The University's six undergraduate colleges offer more than 50 undergraduate degree programs in academic subjects. The Nathan Weiss Graduate College offers seven doctoral degree programs and more than 60 options for graduate study leading to master's degrees, professional diplomas and certificates. Campuses in Union, Toms River, Jefferson and Manahawkin, New Jersey, and Wenzhou, China, Kean provides an affordable and accessible world-class education.

