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# Temple University is raising its standards

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As any applicant to Temple University knows all too well, it's getting tougher and tougher to get in.

A decade ago, seven of every 10 applicants made the grade. This fall it's just six of 10.

And that's by design.

As Temple celebrates its 125th anniversary, it continues to grow in academic prominence, its SAT scores and graduation rates climbing and honors program expanding.

An academic plan unveiled by president Ann Weaver Hart's administration in the spring calls for greater gains in student quality over the next five years and a walloping 50 percent increase in faculty research - enough to catapult Temple into the top 100 research schools nationally.

"We're striving to be one of the best universities in the world," said Temple board chair Patrick O'Connor.

But its ambition has a price.

While pleased that Temple is improving its stature, some faculty union leaders worry more research will come at the expense of teaching.

And, as the university increasingly finds its students outside Philadelphia, some argue that it is turning away from its traditional mission of helping African American students get a college education.

It disheartens some academics that while Temple sits in the heart of North Philadelphia, a predominantly black neighborhood, its black population is one Temple number on the downswing.

Over the last 25 years, Temple's share of African American students grew to a peak of 26 percent in 1999. Today, however, they make up just 16 percent of the university's 26,618 students.

During that period, the campus also became more diverse as Temple attracted more Asians, Latinos, and other minorities.

But Temple points with pride to another trend: The minorities who do enroll are more likely to graduate in six years.

The graduation rates for blacks and Hispanics at Temple have doubled and tripled respectively in the last decade to 64 percent, about the same rate as the overall student body, Temple officials said.

And that, too, is by design.

Since Hart's arrival, the university has added 18 academic advising positions to help keep students on track for graduation, said Peter Jones, senior vice provost of undergraduate studies.

Temple is looking for the same success for minority students from Philadelphia.

Through a new partnership with the Philadelphia School District, Temple plans to jointly run an "early college" high school in North Philadelphia that officials hope will produce more qualified neighborhood students.

And Temple is taking increasing numbers of transfer students from community colleges - nearly 1,700 this fall. The strategy, university officials say, works because the students are ready to do college work. Of the 361 students from community colleges admitted under dual-enrollment agreements, 80 percent graduated in six years - higher than the 65 percent rate of students overall.

But what they aren't willing to do, Temple officials say, is lower standards and accept students who can't do the work. Temple has reduced remedial help for new students in line with that policy shift.

"It does no one any favor to enroll them, help them borrow money, and then say goodbye to them when they flunk out at the end of three semesters," Hart said. "That's a grinder that eats people up."

### **On the rise**

Temple's major push for better-prepared students accelerated under former president David Adamany.

Since 1999, the combined average verbal and math SAT scores of enrolled freshmen has risen 83 points to 1110. For Philadelphia students, the increase was greater: up more than 100 points to 1046.

Applications have spiked 50 percent since 2000. As a state-related university, Temple's in-state tuition of \$11,764 is modest compared with higher-priced private schools.

The school's six-year graduation rate has jumped from 59 percent for freshmen who started in 2001 to 65 percent for those entering in 2002. That's higher than the 2001 national average of 54 percent.

Hart's "academic compass," a multipronged plan 18 months in the making with widespread campus input, calls for more growth: increasing the graduation rate to 70 percent; boosting average SATs by 40 points; bumping up average GPA and class rank by 10 percent.

Helping to fuel the academic rise, Temple's honors program is growing - 453 freshmen this fall, up from 422 - with more prominent young scholars.

A woman from the Poconos was a Rhodes scholar finalist, the seventh from Temple. A Truman scholar from Temple serves as vice consulat of the American Embassy in Cairo. A Temple alumnus will clerk for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy next year.

In the last two years, Temple has added more rigor: Students have the option to be an "honors scholar," which requires completion of a project or thesis. They can also do independent study and take graduate classes for honors credit.

Senior Candace Moses, a sociology and African studies major from Brooklyn, came to Temple for the honors program, and for its diversity.

She was surprised to find she was one of a few or the only black student in her honors classes. Six percent of the 1,690 honors students are black; more than two-thirds are white.

But then she became involved in university life and found many black students in leadership positions.

"It makes me feel as though we're making our impact," said Moses, Temple's 2009 homecoming queen.

### **A new focus on research**

Temple is raising the bar for faculty, too, by encouraging more research. Temple spends approximately \$134 million on research funded by outside groups and aims to increase that amount to \$200 million over five to 10 years.

To help support research, Hart is proposing an ambitious \$1.2 billion building plan, dubbed Campus 2020, including a science research center and a signature library on Broad Street to help support more research.

Over the next decade, 30 percent of the faculty is expected to retire, and provost Lisa Staiano-Coico said she would look to replace them with more research-oriented professors.

"The ones we've recruited over the last 21/2 years have been much more research-intensive," she said.

The university also is awarding \$50,000 grants to interdisciplinary teams of faculty for

preliminary research to win federal sponsorship.

Staiano-Coico said the push for research would not hurt teaching.

But Arthur Hochner, Temple's faculty union president, worries teaching will suffer and class size will grow. "There's not enough faculty, frankly, with the number of students we have and the aspirations we have," he said.

Besides a push for research, Hart's academic plan also calls for more courses that take students into the city and its institutions. Hart wants to increase from a third to two-thirds the core courses known as general education that include city interaction.

At the same time, Temple is expanding partnerships with international universities and offering more scholarships to send students abroad in line with Hart's plan for more global connections.

### **Fewer from Philadelphia**

Temple founder Russell H. Conwell - a Baptist minister and lawyer - advocated the importance of cultivating the "acres of diamonds" in a community's backyard by offering educational opportunity.

Over the last 25 years, and especially in the last decade, Temple's student population has become more suburban and whiter.

Philadelphia students are down 27 percent, while students from the Pennsylvania suburbs are up 56 percent and those from elsewhere in Pennsylvania are up 192 percent.

Of the Philadelphia students, fewer are from the school district. Many that are hail from magnet schools, including the rigorous Central High - Temple's biggest district feeder.

Some of the shift reflects the exodus of population from the city to the suburbs, officials said. It also reflects the fact that fewer students who graduate from the city's high schools can meet Temple's higher admission standards.

Karen Turner, a journalism professor who heads Temple's faculty senate and speaks highly about the university's overall direction, said she is bothered by the decline in black students.

"All universities want to get the best and the brightest, and certainly we should go after those students," she said. "That's why we have the honors program, but we can't forget our mission at Temple, our acres of diamonds."

But she also acknowledged that Temple alone can't be blamed for the change.

"Obviously, the problem is larger than Temple. It speaks to the inadequacies of our public schools," she said.

Jamira Burley, 21, a junior and graduate of Philadelphia's Overbrook High, said she wasn't prepared.

"I didn't write a research paper until senior year. Now that I'm at Temple, we're writing one almost every week. It was a huge disadvantage," she said.

In the last few years, Burley, an international business/legal studies major minoring in Chinese, has seen more of her city district friends get rejected by Temple.

Rhonda Brown, who heads Temple's multicultural office, also contends that the university hasn't tried enough to recruit promising suburban minority students to make up for those lost from the city.

"But you also can't give up on the city," she said.

Temple officials say they have recruited intensively from the suburbs and remain committed to the city.

The proposed new high school in partnership with the district would open in 2011. It would serve 300 to 500 students.

"Temple has a mission in this city," said Terry Halbert, Temple's director of general education who was on the school's planning committee, "and this is a wonderful way for us to fulfill it because we can create a pipeline, and it's a pipeline that's going to succeed."

Temple last year began a dual-enrollment program with Carver High School for Engineering and Science, near its campus, and Temple's also working to attract minority students from elsewhere, said Jones, the vice provost.

The admissions office employed 12 students to call applicants, including targeting high-achieving and ethnically diverse students. As a result, 700 applications came from schools that typically do not send students to Temple, said Karin West Mormando, admissions director.

Board chair O'Connor said Temple's strategy makes for a good balance.

"You don't want to, quote, go to a dummy university," he said, "where you're all dummies. You don't want to go to a university where you're all elite scholars and Mensa. That's not the world. . . . What Temple does is combine the best of all worlds."

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