

Avijit Ghosh Interview

Retired University of Illinois System Chief Financial Officer and Controller, Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Wednesday, February 8, 2023 • 51:05

SPEAKERS

Rebeca Escamilla, Avijit Ghosh

Rebeca Escamilla 00:01

My name is Rebeca Escamilla. I am a graduate student representing the University of Illinois Archives, and I will let the interviewee introduce himself.

Avijit Ghosh 00:14

Hi, I'm Avijit Gosh, I'm just retired from the University - previously I've held a number of positions. With the System office, I was the Chief Financial Officer and Controller, as well as the Executive Vice President and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Rebeca Escamilla 00:36

Thank you. So, today's date is Wednesday, February 8, 2023. We are here at the University of Illinois Archives meeting over Zoom. We will be discussing how COVID-19 pandemic impacted the University of Illinois System and how SHIELD Illinois was developed throughout the pandemic. This interview will be used for inclusion in the University of Illinois COVID-19 Documentation Project. So, I'll just go ahead and start with the general questions. So, for the first one, can you tell us in your own words, about your previous role as Vice President, Chief Financial Officer and Controller; and what type of responsibilities do you have in this role?

Avijit Ghosh 01:20

Well, in this role, I was responsible for all the financial management of the University's resources, especially in coordinating all activities at the different - financial activities at the different universities, as well as the System office, and I acted as the controller of the Board of Trustees. So, I had to essentially be the fiduciary, who was responsible for making sure that we were using our financial resources in the right way.

Rebeca Escamilla 01:59

So, for the next question: when did COVID-19 pandemic come onto the radar of your office? So, this would be around March 2020; and what was the general field in your office regarding the COVID? And how business would be followed through?

Avijit Ghosh 02:18

I think I became aware of the COVID situation even before March, you know, in February, because I was also at one point the CEO of the University of Illinois Hospital. And so, I frequently spoke to folks at the hospital, and they were making me aware of their seeing these kinds of cases coming up. We were also reading about what was happening at that time in China and a little bit in Europe, too. So, we became aware quite a bit in February, but it was a question of, it didn't really hit the US till about March of 2020, as you said. You know, frankly, in the beginning, nobody was really clear as to what the implications of it was, and how long it would last. And I can very safely say that, at that point, nobody expected to last for as long as it did last; that it might be a short-term thing. And then, of course, the governor issued the state of "stay at home" order on March 19 of 20; at some time around then, and if you recall, at that time, it was only up to April 15. So, the expectations were not very clear at all as to what that implication might be. But I do remember the big discussion about okay, when we became aware that there might be a stay-at-home order, then how are we going to manage through the whole thing - about students and how we're going to deal with students and classes. So, my office, and me personally, was very involved right from the beginning. And we can talk about that a little bit in terms of there were two groups which started meeting weekly at that point. One was a group which included the Chancellors and some of our health experts, especially from the hospital, as well as myself, President Killeen, and at that time, Vice President Bob Wilson. We started meeting on a regular basis along with a few other people to talk about what the implications are and how we're going to deal with it. It was at that point, first of all, the first decision was that if there's a stay-at-home order, we need to shift all our classes from face-to-face class to online classes. and that, of course, had a big implication. And then there was another group, which included myself, Dr. Wilson, all the three Provosts from the three universities, the student representatives from the Student Services Office, representatives from the Research Office, as well as from the hospital, to talk about how we're going to manage through this. So, the first group was more - sort of dealt with more of the overarching policy issues. And the second group dealt with the implementation of how we helped faculty to get to online courses. Although a lot of the work was really being done through the Provost's Office at the three universities, but we wanted to make sure that all the three universities were approaching it with some very similar kinds of principles.

Rebeca Escamilla 06:16

And during this time, were you still working in the office or had you yourself too gone remote?

Avijit Ghosh 06:24

Once the stay-at-home order came out, we all had to, because that was what was required of us to do - to start working remotely. So, we all learned Zoom, we became very familiar with Zoom and started doing that. All our staff was asked to work remotely. And I think, you know, sometimes we don't realize how much effort it took and how resilient everybody was in terms of making that kind of a shift. You know, often people talk about universities not being very innovative. But everybody had to innovate at that point, and we had to sort of learn how to do things in a way that we had never done it before. I always point out that this was a tremendous achievement, in terms of how you turn around a university, which for history, for 150 years of history has operated face-to-face, how you turn it around, in operating remotely. This was a tremendous achievement. And you know, other people, the two other institutions, and other organizations also went through that. This is a great achievement nationally, in terms of being able to do that kind of a shift.

Rebeca Escamilla 08:02

So, for the next question, you already touched upon your role as a CEO, the University of Illinois hospitals. But if there was anything more that you wanted to say, of how this experience from working as a CEO in a hospital, how did it influence your professional decisions during the pandemic?

Avijit Ghosh 08:23

Well, one of the things that it became very clear that, you know, a lot of the brunt of the patient care activities that was going to be taking place in hospital became very important. So, managing the hospital, making sure that we are working with the hospital leadership in ensuring that we can deliver patient care and also take care of the safety of our own people was very paramount, you know, especially the frontline people who are working at the hospital, how do we keep them safe? So, for example, you know, we were very much focused on ensuring that we have enough supply of protective gear, and things like that, and helping the hospital get supplies. So, there was a lot of interactions with the hospital leadership that I represent. You know, I was very much involved with it.

Rebeca Escamilla 09:33

So, I just wanted to ask you a clarifying question. The University of Illinois hospitals and clinics, it's a University Systems network. Where is it only for the University of Illinois, Chicago?

Avijit Ghosh 09:45

No, it's part of the University of Illinois, Chicago, but all of it is part of the System, right.

Rebeca Escamilla 09:57

Thank you. I'll go on and then start with the SHIELD questions. So, for the first one, what was your role in SHIELD? So, this would be before the SHIELD Illinois expansion and sort of the timeline - when did you join and what sort of responsibilities you had in SHIELD.

Avijit Ghosh 10:18

So, one has to clarify, you know, when the word SHIELD is used in different ways, right. So, when you talk about SHIELD, are you talking about the testing and everything else within the Urbana campus?

Rebeca Escamilla 10:32

Yes, yes, specifically -

Avijit Ghosh 10:34

So, you know, I was not directly responsible for implementing SHIELD per se, that was being led by the Provost Andreas Cangellaris and Mike Delorenzo and others at the Urbana [campus]. But I was in quite a bit of discussions in terms of making sure we knew what was going on and what the plans were. And then also trying to connect all three universities together. So even though SHIELD was there, we very quickly helped in University of Illinois Chicago and University of Illinois Springfield, in implementing the same kind of testing regimen that Urbana had already thought through and was going to put together. So, my role was not directly running SHIELD, per se, or part of the direct SHIELD team, but I was very much involved in discussions with them to make

sure that the same thing, same procedures can be implemented in the other universities and helping facilitate those things.

Rebeca Escamilla 11:50

So, were you asked to join SHIELD in a non-official way? Or were you official?

Avijit Ghosh 12:04

Well, I don't know if there was anything official or unofficial about it, right? People pitched in, people worked together, people did things; I don't think there was ever any official designation of okay, you're an officially a SHIELD partner or you're not; I don't think there was any kind of designation like that.

Rebeca Escamilla 12:29

Thank you. Yeah, it's just that during President Tim's interview, we had that question of your responsibility, since he did mention you in his interview. But yeah -

Avijit Ghosh 12:50

I was very much involved in a lot of the discussions that were going on at that time. You know, they were - both the President and myself and Dr. Wilson, we were all involved in a lot of the decisions that took place. You know, the implementation of the testing regimes and things like that. The actual implementation part, it was led by other folks, not by me.

Rebeca Escamilla 13:20

Okay. Thank you. So, a question that isn't here, but just a more of a follow up question: how would you describe that COVID-19 pandemic affected the financials of the University of Illinois System, not just UIUC?

Avijit Ghosh 13:44

Oh, it definitely affected tremendously. Actually, you know, what you should be probably also putting into the archive, I made some presentations to the Board of Trustees a number of times about the impact of COVID. And those PowerPoints are probably very illustrative of the kinds of issues that we were working with, in terms of the financial impact. So, there was financial impact, because, you know, two or three things: one is the cost of testing itself. The tests were not free. There's a cost associated with delivering twice a week tests; we did millions of testings. So there has a cost associated with that, and the University had to bear that. There's also a cost associated with the fact that we emptied out in March, all the students were - had to leave the dorms and everything else, and we refunded all those the fees that the students had paid, so those are costs. And then there was a cost also involved in shifting from face-to-face instruction to go to an online instruction mode, there were costs associated with that. So, there was a lot of cost involved in that. And the costs ran into hundreds of millions of dollars. Now, the federal government also enacted the Cares Act, which provided financial support to universities. Then there was a cost, if you look at the whole System, beyond the three universities, there was, of course, the big cost involved in the hospital, to provide care. So first of all, the cost of providing the care. And secondly, because most of the other non-emergency procedures in the hospital had to be closed down. Okay, only emergency cases were being dealt with at the hospital, so there was a tremendous loss of revenue also at the hospital. So altogether, they run into hundreds of millions of dollars. Luckily, the federal government did

help, both the hospital and the universities. But despite that, even with the federal government help, the net impact on the universities was quite significant, again, in over \$100 million. But, you know, if you can't get access to it, I can send you the presentations that were made to the Board. But all the Board presentations are archived, so we should be able to get that in part of the archive.

Rebeca Escamilla 16:46

Yeah, thank you for mentioning that. I wasn't aware of these presentations, and I'll look into it.

Avijit Ghosh 16:53

If you look into especially, you know, later in 2020, and early 2021, more, a lot of the Board presentations include some of the COVID financial impacts.

Rebeca Escamilla 17:10

Thank you. So, another follow up question would be: how did the University of Illinois Systems recuperate or recover from the financial strains of the pandemic? Or is it still experiencing and going through those challenges?

Avijit Ghosh 17:32

Well, it recovered in the sense that, you know, the University - people did a lot of good things. People controlled costs, people - one of the great things is that even all through the pandemic, our main focus was really, first of all, keeping people safe. So, we were willing to spend the money to keep people safe, the students, faculty, as well as staff. So very few universities, did the kind of testing regimen that that we did, and I'm sure you've heard about that already. This was very unique amongst institutions. Others followed us after that, but we started this whole process very early on. So that was important. But we also tried to manage our finances in a way that we have some kind of a financial balance at the end of the day. I think we had to use a lot of our reserve fundings that we had, we had to stop doing certain things to be able to get through the financial impact. But I think we have come through that financial impact very well. And all through this period we protected our staff; we did not put people on furlough, we did not lay off people. And that was very important to us to that we shouldn't push the financial burden onto a staff - usually, that's what happens in organizations, you lay off everybody, which is the worst time to lay off people, during a pandemic. So, we were able to make sure that all our staff were taken care of.

Rebeca Escamilla 19:27

Yeah, that's very thoughtful. So, I guess I'm gonna jump to some other questions; not necessarily going in order; just as a heads up. So, speaking of the hospitals, how did the University System - how was the process for the supplies involved for testing and everything? What were the challenges of -

Avijit Ghosh 19:59

There was a lot of challenges; we were continuously trying to source different people, different places, especially all the - in the hospital, the big challenge was protective gear; how to get protective gear for everybody, especially the nurses and the physicians who are meeting - were trying to treat the people with the disease, making sure that there was always protective gear. And there were times when we were very worried

that our supplies were running very low. Because those protective gear also vary by sizes, it's not just getting the protective gear, you have to get it for the right size for the person who's going to wear it. So, ensuring that you have adequate supply of the different sizes of protective gear was a big challenge. And people worked hard - procurement people, our administrative people, worked hard in trying to find different sources everywhere. And whenever we could identify places we ordered, trying to get the supplies in. But it was always a constant challenge throughout the whole process, both the protective gear side and then making sure we have supplies for the testing.

Rebeca Escamilla 21:29

Thank you. So, one of the specific mentions during President Tim's interview was that he mentioned that - it was - he alluded to the idea that it was your idea to order the PCR machines early on in the pandemic. So, I just wanted to ask, how early were these orders inputted? And just how did you -

Avijit Ghosh 21:56

That's connected with our decision to try to provide testing. You know, once we started doing our own testing - and it was very clear that we had found a way of testing our own students and faculty and staff. There was, every week, all the presidents and chancellors of all the public universities, we'd have a weekly meeting, and I often attended those meetings. And so, the other universities started asking about how we're doing these tests because they did not have access to similar kinds of tests. And there was a desire for them, from their part, that we try to help them provide those tests, and we wanted to do that. And then they asked the state government to intervene and start talking to us. And so, the governor's office started talking to us about how these tests can also be provided to other universities. And that's when we decided to form SHIELD Illinois, to provide testing for the other universities. And when we started talking about how we can actually do this, it was very clear that we'll have to open multiple labs to do the testing in different parts of the state. And so, once that discussion started, I did make the decision about purchasing a large number of PCR machines, because that's what was going to be used in these labs. So, I was worried that we might not be able to get hold of them because other people who are doing testing were also asking for the same PCR machines. So, I tried to make sure that we had enough number of PCR machines for all the labs that we were going to require. So, we ordered about 30 or 40 PCR machines early on. And a follow up question, were these decisions of purchasing supplies, were they unanimous or were there any conflicting voices within the management? No, that I don't think there was any conflicting voices. I was responsible for making sure that we can stand up SHIELD Illinois. When the decision was made to create it, I was responsible for getting it started, and the in discussions it was very clear, as I mentioned before, that we need multiple labs. So, I made the decision and there was no dissension about it.

Rebeca Escamilla 25:01

Thank you. I guess continuing with the SHIELD Illinois and the financial aspects of this whole management, were you - did you have any direct duties regarding SHIELD Illinois finances? Or was that something you did on the side?

Avijit Ghosh 25:29

Well, that's a part of the CFO job. Because SHIELD Illinois was a System project. So, in that sense, yes, I had responsibility for that. So, we created a team, I recruited Ron Watkins to be the, you might say, the director, or

manager or whatever, or CEO of SHIELD Illinois. And we also started discussions with the state, and the state, you know, agreed to pay us a certain amount for providing those tests. So yes, managing the finances of SHIELD Illinois was definitely my responsibility, as well as working with Ron Watkins very directly on a day-to-day basis to ensure that we can succeed in providing the tests that we were promising to provide. That was part of my responsibility. Yes.

Rebeca Escamilla 26:37

Okay, and when you say that you brought Ron Watkins - was that a decision only you made, or where other people's -

Avijit Ghosh 26:49

I suggested that notion to the President and others, and then I had to convince Ron to take on that responsibility. Yeah.

Rebeca Escamilla 27:03

Yeah, because I remember Ron also mentioned that you asked him to join. So that was a question I also had.

Avijit Ghosh 27:12

Yeah.

Rebeca Escamilla 27:16

So, I guess going on to the government and SHIELD relationships. Um, so I guess before this clarifying question would be, when it comes to the state of Illinois, would that have been a SHIELD T3 -

Avijit Ghosh 27:33

So no, there were two entities we formed, right? One was SHIELD Illinois, and one was SHIELD T3. SHIELD Illinois was for within the state of Illinois, and SHIELD T3 was for outside the state of Illinois. Okay. We were getting requests also from other universities outside the state of Illinois to provide this kind of testing, and that was done through SHIELD T3. Okay, and everything within the state of Illinois was done through SHIELD Illinois. And SHIELD Illinois' focus was mostly - initially it started off - when we first started, the focus was just going to be the public universities. Okay, then it slowly started expanding from the public universities: then we added the community colleges also, made the request, and the governor's office wanted us to help the community colleges, so we agreed to do that. And then ultimately, about six months later, when the K-12 system started trying to think about bringing students back from completely Zoom, there was a request to do - for us to expand even broader to provide support to the K-12 system. So that added about - ultimately, at one point we were doing 1700 schools that we were testing at. So, this is was a massive operation, testing at 1700 schools. And it was, you know, people think about this as the big challenge was testing - the testing was hard, but that's not the whole thing. It's really the logistics involved in collecting specimens from 1700 schools, bringing it to the lab, processing and then sending back the results to those schools. That's what's really the real crux of the matter here. So, we almost created an entire logistical system that spanned the entire state, collecting samples and bringing it to different labs. We ultimately had about nine labs all over the state. So, I think it became - when we

first started, we had no concept that it would become that big. But ultimately by the Fall of - the Spring of 2021, it was a huge operation.

Rebeca Escamilla 30:25

Okay. Yeah, the reason why I had asked that question was because in one of the SHIELD T3 Board meetings, I believe that you were present.

Avijit Ghosh 30:41

I was present in a lot of the meetings. I was not a member of the Board. But I was present in a lot of the meetings.

Rebeca Escamilla 30:55

Also, for one of these meetings, President - I mean, Governor Pritzker was mentioned - how involved were -

Avijit Ghosh 31:04

The governor? No, neither the governor nor the governor's office was directly involved in any of the T3 activities.

Rebeca Escamilla 31:15

Where - was the governor's office involved in SHIELD Illinois or -

Avijit Ghosh 31:19

SHIELD Illinois, the governor's office was very much involved because the IDPH was involved - the Public Health Department. And the state was obviously - you would say the state was providing the resources for us to provide these things. So, there was a lot of discussions with the state, especially a lot of discussions with the state in terms of helping with the K-12 schools, because the governor's office was making rules about how often K-12 schools need to be tested; how often the students will be tested. So, there was weekly meetings with representatives from the Department of Public Health as well as the governor's office in terms of SHIELD Illinois.

Rebeca Escamilla 32:15

Okay. Thank you. So, for SHIELD was the Public Health Department the only partnership that it had formed, or were there other entities that SHIELD had partnered with?

Avijit Ghosh 32:34

Well, SHIELD Illinois, really the partnership was with the Department of Public Health and the governor's office. But obviously, it had to form partnerships with, or work with a lot of logistics companies and things like that. But the real issue - policy issues were in partnership with Public Health and like, how often people are going to get tested and things like that. These were - these rules were really Public Health Department rules.

Rebeca Escamilla 33:17

So, one of the things that when I was looking for SHIELD and your role within SHIELD, one of the first things that popped up was an interview between Illinois representative Deanne Mazzochi and Tim Killeen - President Tim

and you were also present in that interview. And one of the reasons why this interview stood out to me was because the questions that the representative was asking, I assume that those questions would have been asked early on in the pandemic response of SHIELD. So, for example, the financial questions of that she alluded to having concerns with SHIELD and the Discovery Partner Institute. So -

Avijit Ghosh 34:12

I don't think SHIELD has anything to do with Discovery Partners Institute. Unfortunately, some of these questions were based on information that was not correct. So, there was a concern between connection with between DPI and SHIELD Illinois and SHIELD T3 - DPI is a separate entity, is not connected at all. Now, the executive director of DPI was also involved in SHIELD T3. But they're separate organizations. They're not a [inaudible] or there's no connection there. They each have their own separate entities, okay. So, I think representative Mazzochi maybe did not have the complete picture and complete knowledge of that. I think the hard questions also were to deal with what are we doing with the samples. And I think we followed the guidance the Public Health Department gave in terms of how to dispose of the samples; the samples were disposed of as in accordance with the rules. And it was kept for I think, for a short period of time, and then they were destroyed. So, her concern was that we were doing DNA typing and things like that, which is not true. None of that has performed that.

Rebeca Escamilla 34:13

So, was this the only instance of misinformation that SHIELD had encountered or did it have to change its policies to fit with the public discourse, since a lot of people had reservations with testing and the vaccines?

Avijit Ghosh 36:04

Well, that was, again, that was the issue for the public health; once the Public Health Department, you know, provided the guidance, that guidance was followed, because the K-12 schools had to follow that guidance, right. Our goal was to help the K-12 schools. So, the K-12 schools were following the guidance. And if they said they needed a test twice a week, we provided a test twice a week. If they said they needed to test once a week, then we provided a test once a week. Yeah.

Rebeca Escamilla 36:42

Thank you. So, another question, going back to the financial aspect and financial operations of SHIELD would have been between Illinois companies and for example, when partnering with companies would the companies do business with SHIELD Illinois or SHIELD T3?

Avijit Ghosh 37:08

There were a couple of Illinois [inaudible] - besides the - we talked previously about SHIELD Illinois providing services to the universities, community colleges and K-12 school system. In addition to that, they also were requested to provide services to the federal court system in Chicago and others as well as to legislators in Springfield. So, we opened spots there. And even early on, there was a request from a couple of companies in Illinois, and we provided those services to ADM and Revere. They were a couple of those companies to which we provided services to. Then also, in the end, IDPH, the Public Health Department asked us to open community sites where anybody could come in and get tested. And they will provide - those tests were provided free, free

meaning the Public Health Department paid SHIELD Illinois to provide those tests to the customer - to anybody, any citizen who walked in.

Rebeca Escamilla 38:35

So for the - just to clarify, for the companies, would they be expected to pay for the services?

Avijit Ghosh 38:42

Oh, yes. Yeah, companies were all - they needed to pay.

Rebeca Escamilla 38:48

Okay. Another clarifying question, was there a priority system for who would be given service, or was it just a first-come-first-served type of situation?

Avijit Ghosh 39:01

No, we kept expanding our capacity so that nobody - we didn't have to say no to anybody.

Rebeca Escamilla 39:27

Are there any questions? Okay, I guess we can now go on to the final questions. So, for this pandemic, it has been a roller coaster of changing phases, guidelines, and different variants of COVID-19. How did the University System as a whole deal with the changing evolution of the pandemic?

Avijit Ghosh 39:56

Well, yeah so, it was a, as I mentioned to you, and previously, we met weekly to discuss how things were changing. Okay. So, as you have noticed that things - our requirements, expectations also changed in terms of, you know, it's not just about testing, but about how classes will be performed, how many students could be there in a class to keep their social distancing? How do we keep social distancing? Or even things like, should we allow audiences in football games and basketball games? All kinds of these issues were being discussed on a weekly basis, and decisions being made based on what's the latest information as well as the latest guidance from both our own internal scientists as well as from the Public Health Department and CDC. So yeah, there was continuously being monitored and then decisions being made in relationship to what the situation was at any given time.

Rebeca Escamilla 41:22

And a follow up question: are the weekly meetings still ongoing, since the pandemic is technically still?

Avijit Ghosh 41:30

No, we still had periodic meetings, even you know, a couple of months ago. But now it's more each University is dealing with it. We, as you know, we made even some decisions about whether to test unvaccinated people; there was new guidance given out very recently. So those decisions were made as a part of those meetings.

Rebeca Escamilla 42:01

And as the COVID-19 pandemic kind of winds down., in your opinion, do you believe that SHIELD will have a concrete end, or if it will continue?

Avijit Ghosh 42:15

Well, you know, first of all, I don't think COVID-19 epidemic is winding down, frankly. You still have - people are still getting sick and people are still dying from COVID-19. What has gone away is the regimen of testing. People are no longer testing the way they did a year ago, two years ago. Yeah. So right now, SHIELD Illinois, I think once the schools stop testing, it is not the intent that SHIELD Illinois will continue forever. So, I would guess that by the end of you know, this - sometime by the end of this spring semester; Public Schools closes this after the spring semester. I don't think there'll be any more testing being performed at public schools, and SHIELD Illinois will probably cease operation at that time.

Rebeca Escamilla 43:22

Okay. So once SHIELD kind of starts to end or wane a little, are there procedures for ending the SHIELD Illinois system? So, for example, for the financial aspects how would that work?

Avijit Ghosh 43:47

Well, you know, the finances of SHIELD Illinois were part of the System Office. So, it was not a standalone entity, per se. Okay. And most of it was being financed by the Public Health Department and the State paying for the tests. I think the Public Health Department is not going to pay any more for the tests, so revenue sources will close and our expenses will also go away.

Rebeca Escamilla 44:28

And for SHIELD, the workforce, will they be moved to other responsibilities?

Avijit Ghosh 44:34

A lot of the SHIELD workforce was a temporary workforce. And a number of people have - because the number of tests has gone down, the workforce has been reduced. So, we were - our workforce was like we were contracting with other companies to provide transportation and things like that. So those contracts have - they were told from the very beginning that it will dwindle down and see, so they're all very aware of the plan for SHIELD Illinois to close down.

Rebeca Escamilla 45:14

Okay. So, in your opinion, what were some of the - from your experience, what were some of the biggest challenges that you experienced in your role during this pandemic?

Avijit Ghosh 45:31

You know, I think of it different, I think of it in terms of what were the great things that I saw happen. The best thing I saw happen, how everybody responded so responsibly. I have to give the greatest credit to our students. Our students were just remarkable in terms of how they responded to whatever were being asked of them. We asked them to test they would, without complaining, they would go on test, they were policing themselves about social distancing, and things like that. The whole community came together, to really make sure that we

were trying to keep this community as safe as possible. I think that's the biggest, most important thing we learn from this experience.

Rebeca Escamilla 46:29

Yes, I remember in the interview with the Contracting Department that they mentioned that you had nominated them for an award, and they expressed their gratitude of their work being recognized from the higher-ups, management. That was nice. So, is there anything different that you would have done during the pandemic? Um, do you have any -

Avijit Ghosh 47:02

No, I mean, I'm sure there are small things we could have done differently. But in general, and overall, I think the Universities and the entire System was - and they have been recognized - for really being very proactive with the intent of keeping education active and helping the community. And I think the other important thing was, it was not just about the campus; SHIELD efforts went beyond the campus, it was keeping the entire community safe. So that was, I think, a wonderful thing to do.

Rebeca Escamilla 47:57

More of a reflective question: what are some lessons that you have taken from this pandemic, or something that you learned about yourself?

Avijit Ghosh 48:07

I think what I learned about the entire organization is we are actually a lot more innovative than we give ourselves credit for. We don't give ourselves credit for what we can do when we are required to do it. Usually, we're scared of change. But this was a situation where we were forced to change, and we did it very well.

Rebeca Escamilla 48:39

Is there anything else that you would like to add? Or some concerns that you had?

Avijit Ghosh 48:44

I think, what I would like to add and see, everybody in this organization should be very proud of how we responded to this. You know, from various aspects, not only the, you know, the scientific discoveries, starting with that, the scientists and professors and the postdocs and everybody else really created. You know, they said they were going to find a way to really find a test that is quick, accurate, and cheap to administer. Okay. And it's not easy to find all of those three attributes in a test. We have lots of very great tests, but they're so costly that you can't administer them, right? So, they were able to do all three of those. And so, it started from there, but from implementation and everybody - the way we did it and keeping our community safe. We should all feel very proud of what we did and we have to make sure that we can endure that spirit tackling other big problems that society faces.

Rebeca Escamilla 50:05

Thank you. Are there any questions you want to ask? No? Okay. So, I guess now that we're done with the questions, is there anything else that you would like to add?

Avijit Ghosh 50:19

No, I hope we are - I'm sure you're talking to a lot of different people. So, you will get a good - This is a good project.

Rebeca Escamilla 50:28

Yes. And -

Avijit Ghosh 50:32

So, for the financial stuff, do get the - If you can't get it, let me - send me an email and I'll try to get ahold of them.

Rebeca Escamilla 50:41

Yes, we'll try to find them. Yeah. So, I guess just reiterating that we're really grateful for your participation in this interview. And we really appreciate that the time and effort you have given us.

Avijit Ghosh 50:56

You're very welcome.

Rebeca Escamilla 51:00

Thanks. Thank you.

Avijit Ghosh 51:02

Bye bye.

Rebeca Escamilla 51:03

Bye.