

HOLYOKE

College vows 'epic' celebrations

HCC plans 'virtual' commencement; invites graduates to walk in 2021

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The 2020 graduating class of Holyoke Community College will have to wait a year to actually walk the walk that grads covet on commencement day.

What they will get, however, is a double treat designed to transform negative circumstances into a positive celebration: two commencements instead of one, including one virtual and one traditional.

HCC moved all classes online in late March in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The campus will remain closed for the rest of the semester.

As a result, the school will recognize the Class of 2020 with a virtual celebration in August and also invite graduates



Holyoke Community College awarded 768 associate degrees and 127 certificates at its 2019 commencement ceremony at the MassMutual Center in Springfield. (THE REPUBLICAN FILE PHOTO)

to walk across the MassMutual Center stage next year with the Class of 2021.

"Every year, one of my most anticipated moments is Commencement," HCC president Christina Royal told students

by email. She promised the next two graduation ceremonies — while unconventional, or perhaps because of it — would be "epic."

She said it was the only just

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way to celebrate the Class of 2020.

“As a first-generation college student, I remember how significant Commencement was for my family and me,” Royal said. “I take great pride in joining you and your families in celebrating your achievements, and in shaking each of your hands as you walk across the stage.”

That part won’t happen until 2021, when the 2020 and 2021 graduating classes share their “live” commencement. The spread of COVID-19 and social distancing forced cancellation of this year’s traditional ceremonies, which were scheduled for May 30.

“We must balance our desire to celebrate your academic achievements in all the ways you were expecting with the need to keep our community healthy, which continues to be our highest priority,”

Royal said.

The college plans to hold a “virtual” celebration in August, complete with special remarks, honors and recognition of graduates in ways made possible by digital communication. Each member of the Class of 2020 will receive a surprise package in the mail during the summer, and be invited to host their own celebrations to share through videos and photos using the hashtag #HolyokeCC20.

The date for the virtual

celebration has not been determined.

“The Class of 2020 will have a traditional Commencement in May 2021, where we will celebrate each of you, in person with your loved ones present, along with the Class of 2021, on what will be a truly historic day,” Royal said.

She added: “Your perseverance toward graduation in these unprecedented times deserves to be celebrated in every way possible.”