

FACES & PLACES

HCC plans virtual graduation, fall campus return

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College is planning a virtual commencement for spring and preparing to welcome students, faculty and staff safely back to campus for the fall 2021 semester.

HCC's 75th Anniversary Commencement will be livestreamed on Sat., June 5, on the HCC website and the college's social media channels. (The college was founded in Sept. 1946 and will be recognizing the milestone throughout the year.)

The virtual commencement will celebrate the class of 2021 as well as the class of 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, HCC made the decision last year to recognize the class of 2020 with a virtual celebration in August 2020 and also invite graduates to participate in a more traditional graduation ceremony this year along with the class of 2021.

Planning for Commencement begins months in advance, and HCC officials made their decision on this year's ceremony based on conditions in February before new guidelines were announced allowing for limited outdoor and indoor ceremonies.

"Unlike the 2020 celebration, the 2021 ceremony will include traditional Commencement moments with an emphasis on the elements our students told us matter most to them," said President Christina Royal. Those elements include having student orators from both classes, and keynote speeches delivered by the 2020 and 2021 recipients of the Elaine Marieb

Chair for Teaching Excellence, HCC's highest faculty award.

"We will also have a virtual procession and the traditional reading of names of graduates from both classes along with photographs submitted by members of each class," Royal said.

In advance of Commencement, HCC will be inviting students to campus on May 6 and 7 to pick up their caps and gowns, graduation gift boxes, and lawn signs celebrating their success. President Royal and members of the College Affairs committee will also be there to offer in-person, albeit socially distant, congratulations to the graduates and the opportunity to have their photos taken with the president.

Return to Campus

For the fall 2021 semester, which begins Tues., Sept. 7, HCC is offering a variety of class formats, including face-to-face, in-person, on-campus classes with a maximum of 10 students per classroom.

Following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the fall 2021 return-to-campus plan allows for maximum flexibility and adaptability, at all times prioritizing the safety and well-being of HCC students, faculty, and staff.

HCC will provide multiple course formats to suit different learning styles and personal preferences: on campus; blended on campus and remote; synchronous remote; and asynchronous online.

"HCC is paying particular attention to scheduling courses that will allow incoming students to maximize on-campus instruction if they so choose," Royal said. "The plan provides us the flexibility to make adjustments as public health conditions evolve over the months ahead."

In addition to on-campus, blended and remote offerings for Fall 2021, HCC will continue to offer a full slate of fully online courses across the curriculum. As much as possible, administration offices and student services will also be open and staffed, while maintaining safe and social-distancing protocols, including mandatory mask-wearing and Plexiglass screens in areas where students and members of the public most closely interact with staff.

While campus offices and support services will be open to students this fall, HCC will also continue to offer services and support through online chat and Zoom for students who feel more comfortable accessing college services remotely.

"I really believe the pandemic has made HCC a better version of itself," said Royal. "We have enhanced our support for students, and have amplified student voices throughout every decision-making process – always placing students first. We have made equity a greater priority across the college, enabling us to truly and more deeply serve our community."

Registration opens April 12 for summer and fall classes at HCC.