

**HOLYOKE**

# In-person pomp making a return

## Post-COVID graduations taking shape

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It's taken at least a year longer than many administrators had hoped or anticipated, but colleges and universities are poised to return to in-person graduation activities this spring.

Holyoke Community College has announced that its June 4 commencement ceremony will take place in person at the MassMutual Center in Springfield.

Graduation ceremonies for the classes of 2020 and 2021 were held virtually in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It is with great enthusiasm that I announce we will be able to celebrate this important moment for our students in person this spring," HCC president Christina Royal said. "The ceremony will include all of the pomp and circumstance and unique HCC energy we have always looked forward to at Commencement."

With infection rates in decline and community mask mandates lifting, the school's College Affairs Committee advised that an in-person commencement could be held safely this year.

Other institutions are following suit or poised to do so. Springfield College has

announced that equal rights pioneer and tennis legend Billie Jean King will be its commencement speaker on May 15. A traditional ceremony is planned, but the college website includes a caveat that states plans are subject to change if new developments in the COVID-19 pandemic occur.

The University of Massachusetts Amherst has announced its May 13 commencement at McGuirk Alumni Stadium. No reference to special protocols is made on its website.

While graduation ceremonies are headed back to traditional venues of large crowds, schools vary as to COVID protocols, including proof of vaccination. Prospective guests should check their school's website for pertinent information.

Even as the pandemic begins receding into the past, colleges and universities are keeping a wary and watchful eye on trends, just in case a last-minute pivot is needed. That appears not to include the threat of abandoning in-person plans, but it could mean a change in safety requirements.

Among those schools is Holyoke Community College, where information regarding safety measures, as well as other event details, will be posted online at [hcc.edu/commencement](http://hcc.edu/commencement).

The COVID-19 pandemic not only shut down campuses in March of 2020 but also prompted Western Massa-

chusetts graduation events to be held virtually. Showing cautious optimism at the time, some administrators made at least informal plans to stage either reunions or traditional ceremonies by the fall of 2020, or the following spring.

The sustained presence of the pandemic, however, turned a delay of a few months into two years in most cases. For most schools, including HCC, the spring of 2022 will restore the first true normalcy to the end of the school year since 2019.

As in past in-person ceremonies, HCC will honor the professor recognized with the Elaine Marieb Award for Teaching Excellence, who will lead the procession of graduates, faculty and staff into the arena and give a commencement address to the Class of 2022. The ceremony will also include student performances and speeches.

"Most of all, we will deliver a day our students truly deserve and have worked so hard for," Royal said.

Graduates from HCC's classes of 2020 and 2021, who were not able to celebrate their graduations in person, will be invited to participate in commencement this spring. As the oldest community college in Massachusetts, the institution is celebrating its 75th anniversary.

In advance of commencement, the college will host cap and gown pickup celebration events on campus in May.