

Holyoke Community College president to retire next year

HOLYOKE — Holyoke Community College President Christina Royal will retire from the college after the 2022-23 academic year, she announced this week.

Her last day will be July 14, 2023.

"It has been one of the greatest honors and privileges of my life to serve as the fourth president of this great institution," she said in a message to the HCC community, "and now is the time to prepare for the next chapter of my life."

Royal, 50, said she is not leaving HCC for another job and has no specific plans.

"One of the greatest responsibilities of any leader is to know when and why to lead an institution and also when and why it is time to leave it," she said. "I have spent a considerable amount of time reflecting about this life change, and my 'why' is simple and straightforward: I am seeking expansion and personal growth in the form of new learnings and experiences and an opportunity to pause and enjoy the present moments."

Royal started at HCC in January 2017. She is the fourth president in the 75-year

history of HCC and not only the first woman to hold the position but the first openly gay and first bi-racial person to serve HCC as president.

"President Royal's understanding of higher education and the management of higher education has been invaluable to the board and to me personally," said Robert Gilbert, chair of the HCC Board of Trustees. "She has always known what needed to be done to take HCC to the next level and she involved everyone in the process of moving the college forward."

Presidential search plans will begin immediately.

"President Royal has laid a strong foundation with her cabinet that will, I have no doubt, successfully carry out the daily activities of the college over this year and beyond," Gilbert said. "The work to advance HCC's mission, vision, and strategic priorities will indeed continue. Without question, higher education as a sector is in for a lot of change as we look to the future, but Dr. Royal has prepared our institution well and has set HCC up

for success far beyond her tenure."

Before coming to HCC, Royal served as provost and vice president of academic affairs at Inver Hills Community College in Minnesota. Prior to that she was associate vice president for e-learning and innovation at Cuyahoga Community College in Cleveland and director of technology-assisted learning for the School of Graduate and Continuing Education for Marist College in New York.

She holds a Ph.D. in education from Capella University and a master of arts in educational psychology and a bachelor of arts in math from Marist.

In her announcement, Royal cited some of the milestones of her tenure: working collaboratively to develop HCC's first strategic plan, advancing equity across the institution; and investing in programs to support students' basic needs, such as creating the President's Student Emergency Fund (to provide grants to student facing immediate financial needs), opening Homestead

Market (the first campus store in Massachusetts to accept SNAP benefits), partnering with Holyoke Housing Authority (to help students find affordable housing), and launching the Itsy Bitsy Child Watch Program (to provide HCC student-parents access to free, short-term care for their children.)

Other highlights include opening the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute on Race Street; reopening the HCC Campus Center after a two-year, \$43.5 million renovation; establishing El Centro, a bilingual center dedicated to the needs of Hispanic students; weathering a global pandemic; and celebrating HCC's 75th anniversary as the oldest two-year college in Massachusetts.

"Change, in its many forms, can feel difficult," she said. "Yet, in times of change — from our founding and in recent years — HCC has been a beacon of light, hope, and opportunity for this community. This is what matters, and it is what I am certain will continue for years to come."



Christina Royal announced this week she will step down as president of Holyoke Community College next July.
(SUBMITTED / HCC)