



HCC is open, but encouraging remote learning

Holyoke Community College's campus was closed Monday and Tuesday for an extensive cleaning and disinfecting of all buildings, but the college planned to reopen by the end of this week with limited in-person services.

Classes were on spring break this week. In-person classes have been suspended next week, March 23-27, though online classes will be held.

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According to a statement by HCC President Christina Royal, the college will undertake “efforts to accomplish remote work, teaching, and learning opportunities for the foreseeable future, in accordance with Gov. [Charlie] Baker’s recommendations for higher education. ... [and] the social distancing recommendations of the CDC and MDPH, in order to ensure the health and safety of our students, employees, and communities.”

Royal said HCC planned to staff three-quarters of its operations with remote workers this week, with the goal of “all possible offices” allowing their employees to work remotely by Monday, March 23. The goal is to reduce the number of people who must be physically present on the Homestead Avenue campus, while ensuring that all students have access to the resources they need.

At a press conference last week, Royal explained that it’s more difficult for a community college to shut down its campus than it is for some of the larger, four-year colleges that have done so in response to the threat of coronavirus.

Many HCC students depend upon campus resources for their access to the

Internet, she said, or they may rely on the food court for their meals. Some HCC students are homeless.

In a statement this week, Royal noted that moving classes and other services online may not fit every department and academic discipline, but she encouraged each department to “think creatively” about how it can limit the need for students and professors, staff and clients to be physically present.

“Postponing or canceling gatherings — and considering how we might deliver our courses and services in other ways — has taken nearly every waking moment of these past weeks,” Royal said. “This is a rapidly changing situation, and HCC will continue to provide regular updates to our community. We ask everyone to please check College Messages at hcc.edu/coronavirus, where you will also find new FAQs and important information. Additionally, if you have any questions regarding the current situation, please send them to coronavirus@hcc.edu. We will do our best to answer quickly.”

She said last week that the college’s response to the coronavirus will end up costing “millions of dollars.”

Staff writer Michael Ballway contributed to this report.