

MCLA Student Campus Update

5.22.20

Greetings from MCLA!

I hope this message finds you well and staying safe.

The purpose of this message is to provide you with an update on College operations. But first, let me acknowledge that I know this has been a very difficult semester for you. Remote learning, isolation from friends, no access to recreation or athletic activities, and many other things that the COVID-19 virus has disrupted in your lives is something none of us anticipated and that all of us wished had not occurred. I genuinely hope you are doing OK, getting the support you need, and taking care of yourself.

I think of you often. I have missed joining you for lunch in the Centennial Room, watching the softball team compete, cheering on the men's lacrosse team in their inaugural season, applauding student actors in the spring Performing Arts programs, and having you visit me during open office hours. It is simply the case that your presence on campus makes mine and my colleagues' professional lives fuller. And so, I miss you.

Fall 2020 Plans:

I know that many of you have questions about the fall semester and what it will look like. Although there is not yet an official decision, I can say that Plan A is to have students, faculty, and staff return to campus this fall. I have commissioned a Return to Campus Advisory Committee comprised of faculty, staff, and students that is working on a set of recommendations for fall. The Committee will send the report to me next week, after which I will be able to see more clearly if we can re-establish on-campus learning in the fall in as safe an environment as possible.

The Massachusetts State Collegiate Athletic Conference (MASCAC) Board of Directors has not yet made a determination of fall athletic programs. I anticipate that will occur in the very near future.

Once we know what the fall semester will look like, we will then focus more intently on two major events we postponed this past spring: Commencement Exercises for the class of 2020 and MCLA's 125th celebration event. It remains my hope that both events will take place where we can all gather safely.

Safety Protocols:

If faculty, staff, and students do, in fact, return to campus this fall, it will be with the safety protocols that we have all become accustomed to: Face coverings will be mandated (and provided by MCLA) as will social distancing of 6 feet from others when possible; people will need to wash their hands regularly and use hand sanitizer often (additional stations have been installed on campus already); people who feel ill will need to stay at home or in their residence rooms; and assigned times or blocked periods of time will be established for using college facilities (i.e. dining hall, fitness center, Freel Library, etc.). Based on the report from the Return to Campus Advisory Committee, there may be other guidance we will offer.

COVID-19 Data:

There is encouraging news regarding the spread of COVID-19 in Massachusetts and Berkshire County. Since mid-April, according to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, four major

indicators on the spread of the virus in the Commonwealth reflect a downward trend: The seven-day average of positive tests rate has declined 67% to 9.4%; the three-day average of the number of COVID-19 patients in the hospital has declined 30% to 2,508; the number of hospitals using surge capacity has declined 38% to 13; and the three-day average of COVID-19 deaths has declined 44% to 85. These statewide trends are reflective of Berkshire County data, too, according to Berkshire Health Systems.

Annual Budget:

As you may know, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts anticipates a \$5 billion reduction in tax revenues for next year. This will likely mean that the state will reduce our annual appropriation. At the same time, we know that many families of first-year students are postponing college for a year. Together, these conditions have caused us to reduce expenses in the budget for next year. Most of the reductions are in travel costs, equipment and supplies, and vendor contracts. But we have also decided to freeze the hiring of most unfilled positions and we have reduced the part-time faculty (adjunct) budget by 30%. I do not anticipate the need for furloughs or layoffs of currently filled, full-time faculty and staff positions at this time.

MCLA Resiliency Fund:

I am sure that you are aware that MCLA established a fund to support students shortly after the emergence of the COVID-19 virus. The MCLA Resiliency Fund has distributed funds to students who have applied for assistance. The funds have gone toward paying rent and utilities, purchasing computers for remote coursework, buying food and other necessities, and paying for transportation, among other needs. Funds are still available for students to use. **If you need assistance, or if you have already received funds and need more help, please apply to the [MCLA Resiliency Fund](#).**

Virtual Town Hall Meeting:

On June 1st, I will host another virtual town hall meeting with students. At that time I will offer any updates I have on college operations this fall as well as answer questions. We will send out information next week on how to connect to the town hall.

Once again, I hope you are taking good care of yourself these days, and that you will find time this summer to rest and relax. It is my great hope that I will see you on campus this fall. Until then,

Stay well,

Jaimie

James F. Birge, Ph.D.

President

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

413.662.5201

375 Church Street

North Adams, MA 01247

**“National Top Ten
Public Liberal Arts College”
2019 US News & World Report**

MCLA

