

HCC expands class sizes for September

HOLYOKE – Given the positive indicators related to COVID-19 in Massachusetts, Holyoke Community College will increase the number of students it allows in classrooms for face-to-face instruction in September.

Based on the recommendation of the college's Return to Campus task force (RTC), HCC will raise the cap from 10 to 15 students per classroom for fall enrollment in all subjects with the exception of Health Sciences.

For classes in Health Sciences, such as nursing, radiologic technology and veterinary science, the classroom caps will be removed entirely because of the high vaccination rates among students in those fields and stringent adherence to health safety protocols.

HCC is preparing to welcome students back to campus for in-person classes for the fall 2021 semester, which begins Sept. 7. While vaccinations against COVID-19 are strongly encouraged, they are not being required

at any of the 15 community colleges in Massachusetts.

In a statement Monday to the HCC community, Narayan Sampath, vice president of Administration & Finance and a member of the RTC, noted that HCC has continually adjusted to conditions in the region throughout the pandemic based on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and the state Dept. of Public Health.

"In late winter, as we began to plan for the coming registration periods, fall class enrollment was capped at 10 to allow 125 square feet of space per person, to accommodate students, the instructor, plus an allowance for additional personnel for students who have an interpreter or personal care attendant," Sampath said. "Today, the Commonwealth leads the nation in vaccination rates. The Governor has lifted all orders associated with pandemic restrictions, and there has been a dramatic drop in positive test results. The num-

ber of deaths attributed to COVID-19 has decreased from hundreds each day to weeks where there have been less than 10, or even none. School districts have announced that schools will open in the fall with students fully present, and several of our sibling community colleges have moved to increase their allowable class sizes."

"Given these very positive indicators, we believe it is time for HCC to adjust again," he said.

While the classroom caps are being increased, HCC will continue to require that students, faculty, staff, and visitors wear masks inside all campus buildings regardless of an individual's vaccination status. HCC will also continue to maintain the high standards of cleaning and disinfection it has followed throughout the pandemic, he said.

"Should vaccination rates continue to increase and COVID-19 rates decline, we hope to be able to increase class size or remove caps altogether for all classes,"

Sampath said. "Of course, should our region see a rise in COVID-19 numbers, we will again take steps to mitigate risk as appropriate."

Campus offices, including Admission and Advising, have already reopened for in-person services, and the fitness room in HCC's Bartley Center for Athletics and Recreation will reopen later this week, on Friday, July 16.

Registration is underway for fall semester classes. To maximize available options for students, HCC will continue to offer multiple, flexible start dates:

Full fall semester classes start Sept. 7 and run for 14 weeks; Fall Start II classes being Sept. 27 and run for 12 weeks; Fall Start III classes begin Oct. 27 and run for seven weeks.

For more information on HCC classes or to enroll, please visit hcc.edu/admission, call 413-552-2321, or stop by the Admissions office on the first floor of the HCC Campus Center, Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.