

MCLA Community: Update on Planning for Coronavirus

Good Evening:

Earlier today, Governor Baker held a press conference declaring a state of emergency as a result of the COVID-19 coronavirus.

As of March 10, 2020, there were seven presumptive positive COVID-19 (Coronavirus) cases in Berkshire County, and 92 total presumptive cases statewide. 70 of the 92 cases are associated with attendance at the Biogen conference in Boston.

Following Governor Baker's press conference yesterday and out of an abundance of caution, MCLA will cancel classes for the week of March 23 through 27, resuming classes on Monday, March 30. Students will need to leave residence areas by 7 p.m. on Friday, March 13 and may return to campus on Sunday, March 29. Campus offices will remain open throughout the Spring Break.

This decision allows the College additional time to clean all frequently touched surfaces and common areas in all of our facilities, including the residence areas. Moreover, this additional time allows me to work with my colleagues to organize a coordinated campus response to COVID-19.

Regarding the delivery of courses: MCLA classes will resume on March 30. We are not currently considering completing the semester through the use of online courses other than what is already being taught online. It is possible that in the future, depending on the status of the coronavirus, we will explore with our faculty colleagues the possibility of teaching predominantly in an online environment. It is unlikely that will happen this semester.

Massachusetts Department of Higher Education Commissioner, Carlos Santiago, has strongly encouraged state universities to adopt the Governor's guidance regarding travel and events:

All international and domestic college-sponsored travel for faculty, staff, and students has been canceled for the next 30 days. This means that athletic teams and campus clubs and organizations will not travel over Spring Break, as previously scheduled. Additionally, faculty and staff cannot participate in college-sponsored travel for conferences or meetings, although they may participate in meetings if they are held remotely or virtually. Further, the Governor has cautioned state employees about personal international and domestic travel.

Ongoing Campus Planning

Additionally, students will not be allowed to remain in the residence areas and access cards will be turned off in Hoosac Hall and Berkshire Towers. Residents of the Flagg Townhouses will turn in their keys before leaving for break. A petition will be available to resident students on March 11 for those who need to remain in residence over Spring Break due to extraordinary situations. Resident students will receive more detailed direction tomorrow from Residential Programs and Services.

I assure you that the executive staff of the College and the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) are closely monitoring developments related to COVID-19 and we are in regular communication

with healthcare providers, state government, and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH).

We will continue to provide you with more details on how we will move forward in the coming weeks. I know these decisions can be inconvenient for all of us; however, these actions are necessary to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. The goal is to make decisions that are focused on what is best for the health of our community, and to have minimal disruption to student education. We will continue to track alerts regarding COVID-19 and share news and information with you as it becomes available.

We have alerted all students that if they have questions related to COVID-19 or general illness, they should not hesitate to contact MCLA Health Services at 413.662.5421 or healthservices@mcla.edu and ask to speak with someone about their symptoms. If employees of the College are concerned about symptoms they have, then they should contact their healthcare provider and inform the Human Resources Office at 413.662.5596. Students and other community members are also encouraged to read this helpful [Fact Sheet](#) on the coronavirus from the MDPH.

We continue to urge the campus community to follow some simple but effective illness prevention measures regardless of your location:

- It is not too late to get a seasonal flu vaccine. (Call your primary care provider or stop by any pharmacy as many now offer flu shots.)
- Cover coughs and sneezes in your elbow or sleeve.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you feel unwell, stay at home in order to protect yourself and other people.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds to avoid spreading any virus to others, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Disinfecting commonly touched surfaces is suggested.
- A list of additional locations of hand sanitation on campus can be found [here](#).

It is my hope that you have a restful and healthy spring break.

Sincerely,

James F. Birge, Ph.D.
President