



April 22, 2020

Dear KVCC Students:

Gratitude

I am writing to thank you for your cooperation, understanding, and focus on safety as we closed the KVCC campuses in March and shifted largely to online learning for the spring semester. Your swift adaptation to our new reality is something that I deeply appreciate. I know this has not been easy for many of you who have had to deal with your own life challenges at the same time, whether by being laid off from work, having to homeschool your children, care for elderly family members, adjust to online learning, or simply cope with the anxiety surrounding life in a pandemic.

Compassion

My heart goes out to all of those in our community who have been directly affected by COVID-19. Members of our community have seen the loss of life, the loss of livelihood, the loss of family cohesion, and the rapid evaporation of social connections and celebrations such as weddings and birthdays. While everyone is affected and tested by the pandemic, some are feeling a disproportionate impact. It is important that we remain patient and kind to each other; your warmth and compassion will help others to better cope with any hardships they are experiencing. Each spring semester KVCC hosts a week known as "Pass the Kindness"; I ask each of you to continue that tradition from home and pass the kindness in any way that you can.

Good fortune and commitment

For a moment, let us consider how lucky we are. We were fortunate in the timing of the transition in that it allowed us to extend spring break to make the necessary adjustments within a two-week timeframe with little interruption.

The faculty made tremendous adaptations practically overnight. Such a rapid shift in the delivery of education also required the support of the I.T. Department to ensure that everyone had access to a laptop and internet, the custodial staff to make sure that the buildings and classrooms were appropriately sanitized, and the administration to ensure that student support services could continue in the new world of social distancing. Our Enrollment Services Center continues to register students for summer and fall courses and continues to admit new students for the fall semester.

Community

During this period of transition the KVCC community stepped up to help in many ways. The KVCC Food Pantry sought to ensure access to food for those who rely on those provisions, helping students to identify alternative sources once our own food stock was fully distributed. We emptied the refrigerators and pantries of the KVCC Cafe, Salubrious, and the culinary arts program so that this food was available to our community. The Respiratory Therapy program donated its ventilators to local area hospitals. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) from our nursing and allied health programs was quickly gathered and distributed to hospitals in need. KVCC even provided its stock of carry-out containers from the cafe so that the local homeless shelter could continue to offer meals to-go when seated dining was no longer possible. The KVCC Security staff were instrumental in helping us to distribute all of these items in a safe manner. All of this was done not because people were asked to take these actions, but because they care. This pandemic has shown our community to be full of selfless and empathic people.

Kennebec Valley Community College

92 Western Avenue, Fairfield, Maine 04937-1367 | (207) 453-5000 | kvcc.me.edu

Kind words

As others in our community are struggling with countless adjustments and isolation, many of you have taken the time to write words of support to me and other members of the KV team. Your expressions of hope, gratitude, and encouragement reminded us how extraordinary, tight-knit, and caring the KVCC community is.

Hands-on learning

One of the biggest institutional challenges has been how we address hands-on learning in the professions, technical trades, nursing, and healthcare fields. This is exceptionally important for the graduating seniors who have just a few weeks until the completion of their studies. Once again, the faculty stepped up. In some instances, faculty have been able to assess competencies or develop alternative methods of instruction and assessment. On Fridays we host a virtual gathering of faculty and staff. Each week we share stories of KV student flexibility and ingenuity in adapting to new ways of learning and assessment. The first week we heard encouraging news from the math faculty who explained that some students found online learning to be especially helpful with the ability to review concepts online. This past week we heard from the Applied Electronics and Computer Technology (AECT) faculty whose team has thoughtfully developed ways to continue some of the hands-on learning at a distance. Next Friday we will hear from our Honors Program about how students are continuing with their capstone projects, and from our Physical Therapy Assistant (PTA) program in which several students have found ways to continue their training at home leveraging YouTube. For the students whose hands-on or clinical learning has been paused, please know that the deans and faculty are developing ways to ensure the learning will take place as soon as it is safe to do so.

Share your stories

If you or someone you know in the KVCC community is doing something extraordinary or innovative that helps students continue to learn, helps keep our community together, or helps simply to warm hearts, please send an email so that we are aware of the myriad acts of ingenuity and kindness circulating among us. In this difficult time there remain many, many ways in which our community is helping lift spirits and lives. We want to hear about them.

Student celebrations

Last week the Dean of Students hosted the *KVCC Student of the Year* celebration online. The ceremony effectively captured the spirit of the students being honored. The 12 finalists are all remarkably accomplished and fully worthy of the award. We are delighted to announce that graduating senior Mason Peterson has been selected the KVCC Student of the Year. We look forward to having Mason as the Student Commencement Speaker for the Class of 2020. Each year in the spring semester we celebrate student achievement in many ways - pinning ceremonies, cordon ceremony, Evening of Excellence awards, and many other celebrations large and small that take place in nearly every program. I encourage faculty and students to find ways to celebrate achievements now if possible, but to also plan for a face-to-face celebration when conditions allow. Your faculty chairs and advisors will be in touch with you about specific celebration events.

Commencement

Many KV students, faculty, and staff have written to express their wishes for a live commencement, even if slightly delayed into summer. We know how important it is for graduates, friends, families, faculty, staff, and alumni to celebrate the Class of 2020. We recognize that changes to the timing and format are profoundly disappointing for everyone.

After careful consideration of public and private responses to slow the virus transmission and encourage the widespread adoption of social distancing, we have decided to have two commencements.

The first commencement will take place in a virtual form as scheduled on Saturday, May 16, 2020 at 10:00am. We feel that it is important to celebrate the graduating seniors in a virtual format at the originally scheduled time. I want to be clear that this is a moment in history that should be documented so that we and future generations can understand the sacrifices and challenges that you have had to

overcome. Even in the face of COVID-19, campus closure, social distancing, and online learning, the Class of 2020 has persevered and will be an inspiration for the classes that follow.

The first KV2020 commencement will be streamed from the KVCC website and also broadcast on local access television (pending confirmation) in Somerset, Knox, and Kennebec Counties so that those without internet access can still participate. More details will be forthcoming.

The second commencement will take place in person, though the precise timing and format of any eventual in-person commencement cannot yet be confirmed. The uncertainty surrounding social reintegration of our campus communities and the greater society is what makes it impossible to provide a specific date and format. Our focus will remain foremost the health and safety of our community. The lack of clarity in timing and format is disappointing for all of the graduates and the entire KV community. We ask for your patience and understanding as we work to assess the situation going forward so that we can celebrate in a climate of safety, health, and comfort. More information about the postponed live commencement will be communicated to you as soon as we have greater clarity from the Maine CDC on safe public gatherings. Again, the second in-person commencement will be an important moment to celebrate, but also to acknowledge how our society will have met this moment in history as a community.

To think of this positively: graduates from the KVCC Class of 2020 will have a benefit of two commencements that will document its historic response to the unprecedented challenges.

Summer and Fall 2020

KVCC will continue to move forward with enrollment and registration for summer and fall terms. Please understand that we are working to ensure a safe and healthy reopening of the college and are considering a range of scenarios. No matter the scenario we urge you to continue with your studies. All economic evidence shows that the people best positioned to find or maintain work are those with a higher education credential and skills. In this time of uncertainty, you should endeavor to continue with your program of study and make as much progress as possible. There will be full access to financial aid, so we encourage you to complete the FAFSA to avail of the maximum. As we solidify plans for fall instruction, we will get that information out to you. Please understand that any decisions about how and when to reopen campuses will be made in consultation with state officials, public health experts, and the Maine Community College System (MCCS).

Pride

I remain immensely proud of our students, faculty, staff, and administration. Our community also continues to support the college through contributions to the KVCC Foundation and other forms of support. Thank you all for your understanding as we work through this historic period.

Stay safe. Stay healthy. Remain kind to each other.

With every good wish,



Richard R. Hopper
President
Kennebec Valley Community College