

Dear Colleagues,

This email outlines our semester opening procedures, faculty and staff COVID-19 testing, and pertinent information that was communicated to students. This communication is long because we want to be sure we provide as much detail as possible.

The health and safety of the community is our top priority as we prepare to return to in-person learning and on campus living this semester. We are carefully monitoring a number of COVID-19 metrics as we did in preparation for the fall, including state, county and local case numbers and positivity rates, Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Department of Public Health (DPH) guidance, and guidance for higher education from the Massachusetts Department of Education (MA DOE).

We have maintained as safe an environment as possible. During the fall semester we were one of the safest places in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. *While we did have a handful of COVID-19 cases among our community this fall, we had no spread from these cases on campus and a positivity rate that was 10 times lower than that in the state.* We attribute this to the careful planning and protocols established in accordance with the best advice of DPH and CDC, and a robust testing and contact tracing process. These protocols will continue in the spring, with an even more robust testing program that will result in increased testing of all our populations.

Remote Work

MCLA most recently extended remote work through Sunday, January 17, 2021. Staff are expected to return to campus on Monday, January 18, 2021 (for most, this means returning on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 after the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday). This return date is in line with the Massachusetts DPH guidance surrounding student return to campus for the spring semester.

Academic Delivery and Calendar

Classes begin Tuesday, January 26, 2021. While residence halls will be open, during the first week all courses will be online to ensure we follow the appropriate testing and quarantine protocols for both residential and commuter students. Beginning February 1, 2021, we will return to our blended learning course design, and staggered attendance in the classroom.

Faculty and Staff COVID-19 Testing

Faculty and staff who are working on campus will have access to free monthly testing on campus. Additionally, should they wish to do so, they will be able to take additional tests weekly on campus for a \$25 fee. Testing consent forms from the fall are still valid. Those employees who want to test on campus but have not previously done so must complete the consent form and bring it with them to their first appointment: [Employee COVID Testing Consent Form](#).

Please also know that there are now free Stop the Spread sites (the Commonwealth's free COVID-19 testing program) in Berkshire County (North Adams, Pittsfield, Great Barrington). Appointments at any of the Stop the Spread sites can be accessed by calling the Berkshire Health Systems COVID-19 hotline: 855-262-5465.

Faculty and staff COVID-19 testing for the spring semester will be incorporated into the student testing times. The testing times for the first week of the semester are as follows and appointments WILL NOT be necessary:

Saturday, Sunday and Monday, January 23-25, 2021	10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Tuesday, January 26 through Friday, January 30, 2021	10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Beginning the week of February 1, 2021 testing will take place Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on most weeks. Appointments WILL be necessary for regular testing during the semester and more information will follow. Testing will take place in the Amsler Center Gymnasium.

Student COVID-19 Testing and Other Protocols

Resident student move-in will take place by appointment on January 23, 24, and 25, 2021 between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. All resident students are highly encouraged to take a molecular COVID-19 test 72 hours or less from their move-in day and bring a negative test with them. All residents will be required to test negative TWICE before release from quarantine, and then test again on day 5.

Commuter students are mandated to be tested once a month, including a test before in-person classes begin on February 1, 2021.

We have developed a Canvas Course for spring 2021 with all the necessary information MCLA students need about COVID-19 this semester, including prevention measures, MCLA COVID protocols, state mandates and DPH guidelines, quarantine and isolation procedures, and testing sign-up links. All students will be enrolled in this course prior to the start of the semester. It will be updated regularly.

The Trailblazer Agreement remains in effect for spring 2021. All students will be held to the expectations outlined in the Trailblazer Agreement, whether they have signed it or not.

Metrics for College Decision Making

Similar to the fall, the College will regularly monitor applicable metrics, as established by the Massachusetts DPH and applicable to Berkshire County, to detect early warning signs that positive COVID-19 cases may be rising to an unacceptable level that could affect decisions regarding college operations.

These metrics include, but are not limited to:

1. External/Community Metrics-
 1. Relevant Massachusetts directives for higher education
 2. Daily and 7-day average of cases in Berkshire County and Massachusetts, as applicable
 3. Daily and 7-day average of positive test rates in Berkshire County and Massachusetts, as applicable

4. Bed and ICU capacity for local hospitals
2. **Campus Metrics**- In addition to regularly monitoring external/community metrics, the College will also carefully monitor on campus metrics, including:
 1. Daily and 7-day average of COVID-19 cases by date reported
 2. Daily and 7-day average of positive test rates. If the College's infection rates begin to exceed the infection rate in Berkshire County we will consult with appropriate officials and potentially move to more assertive campus restrictions to mitigate infection spread.
 3. Daily count of students in isolation and available spaces for student isolation. If the College reaches 50% capacity in isolation beds, the College will consult with public health officials about potential measures that need to be taken.
 4. Daily count of individuals in quarantine
 5. Daily count of symptomatic testing for students at Health Services
 6. Average time for contact tracing and implementing quarantines
 7. Personal Protective Equipment supply availability
 8. Compliance with testing, daily health screenings, face masks, physical distancing, and restrictions on large group gatherings

We will reactivate our campus COVID-19 dashboard after opening weekend to reflect our tests conducted with the BROAD Institute.

Additional Employee Resources

You can continue to find additional information and an archive of communications on MCLA's COVID-19 landing page. The MCLA hotline is available from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday-Friday for questions related to COVID-19 and our campus return plan at 413-662-5550. You can also reach out to me directly with any questions.

If you are feeling stress, anxiety, depression, or anger around COVID-19 or political, national or world events, please remember our free and confidential **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** counseling line is open 27/7/365 at 800-252-4555. While EAP counselors do not deal with political issues, they can help us process feelings, deal with stress, and find appropriate ways to handle our emotions.

Please remember to monitor your health. Employees who exhibit symptoms should not report to work and should contact their primary care physician or the Berkshire Health Systems (BHS) COVID-19 hotline for guidance and testing. BHS's toll-free hotline for questions regarding COVID-19 is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. seven days a week at 855-262-5465. Employees should contact their supervisor to notify them that they will not report to work, and to receive guidance regarding their return.

Opening Greeting

We are looking forward to the beginning of a new semester. Thank you for continuing to provide our students with the best possible experience during these unusual times. Information will be forthcoming soon about Opening Greetings.

Sincerely,

Barbara Chaput
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Executive Director of Human Resources/Payroll Office
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
375 Church Street
North Adams, MA 01247
413.662.5599
Barbara.chaput@mcla.edu

**“National Top Ten
Public Liberal Arts College”
2020-2021 US News & World Report**