

# Delaware Tech Maintains Focus on Students and Community During Health Crisis

DELAWARE TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE weathered the most unusual spring semester of its 52-year history this year, as a global health crisis forced instructors to work quickly with information technology staff to transition more than 1,800 academic courses to a distance-learning format over the course of a few weeks.

“Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our entire Delaware Tech team, we saved the semester for our students and the more than 1,760 graduates who completed their degrees in the spring,” said College President Mark T. Brainard. “We learned a lot through the process, and developed some processes and resources we will be able to use even after the current health crisis comes to an end.”

One of those new resources is a Virtual Student Support Center that offers students the ability to access tutoring, financial aid, student life, library, advising and other support services through Zoom, email or a phone call. In less than two months, the center served 4,000 visitors. Students will continue to have access to this support going forward if they would like to access services when not on one of the College’s four campuses.

Delaware Tech also began lending laptops to students throughout the spring and plans to fully implement a formalized laptop-lending program this fall for students without computers at home, as well as free Wi-Fi access in campus parking lots for those without internet access. Students also continued to have access to campus computer labs and campus food pantries, both of which remained open through the pandemic with limited hours, following all social-distancing protocols.

In addition to supporting students, Delaware Tech saw an opportunity to support the greater Delaware community. All four campuses donated surplus medical supplies from their nursing and allied health programs to local health care providers, and provided an inventory of extra capacity in campus facilities in the event that health care organizations or emergency response agencies in Delaware needed access to additional facilities. A team comprised of Workforce Development and instructional faculty and staff manufactured approximately 300 medical face shields that were donated to local healthcare facilities to assist with a shortage of personal protective equipment as a result of the pandemic.

“Given our degree programs in nursing and allied health, we have many current students and graduates working in Delaware’s healthcare facilities,” said Justina Sapna, the College’s vice president for academic affairs. “We not only wanted to help them, but also their colleagues who are bravely working on the front lines in our healthcare facilities to take care of our fellow Delawareans.”



*US Representative Lisa Blunt Rochester at Delaware Tech's virtual commencement ceremonies*

This year’s graduates experienced a first for the college—virtual commencement exercises. Each campus had a ceremony livestreamed online that included a keynote speech from U.S. Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester, as well as speeches from the college president and vice president and campus directors. All graduates’ names appeared on screen as their names were read. Finally, those 2020 graduates who would like the opportunity to walk across a stage in cap and gown will have that opportunity next spring as all are invited to participate in the 2021 ceremony.

“Our graduation ceremonies are my favorite part of the year,” Brainard said, “and I wanted nothing more than for our 2020 graduates to walk across the stage this spring. However, we had to put the safety of our students and families first, and we didn’t want to delay the celebration and recognition of our graduates, who worked so hard to reach the finish line.”

Looking forward to the fall semester, faculty members have taken advantage of professional development opportunities to ensure their courses meet the needs of students in a distance-learning environment. This ensures that they are prepared for a variety of scenarios depending upon what the fall semester brings.

“We can’t slow down, because we know that once we get through this crisis, Delaware Tech will be at the forefront, connecting Delawareans with jobs as our economy recovers,” Brainard said. “In addition, we need to be prepared in the event that we have extra students in the fall. If four-year institutions are not able to open their campuses, we expect some students may opt to start their college experience with us.” ■

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