



May 6, 2020

To the New England College community:

This week marks the final week of the Spring Semester. In a typical year, it is a week of much celebration and anticipation. It is highlighted by a meeting of the Board of Trustees that is held on a Friday because the next day, Saturday, we celebrate Commencement. This year is not a typical year. This year, our board meeting will be conducted virtually, and our Commencement has been rescheduled for early October.

It feels strange to be in Henniker during a time that is normally so full of activity and excitement. Much preparation goes into our Commencement festivities, and all involved give their full energies to ensuring a successful exercise. Our speaker and Honorary Degree recipients are typically nationally recognized, highly accomplished individuals and we eagerly await their arrival on campus, “rolling out the red carpet” to greet and honor them. Our Board enjoys donning the regalia and sharing in the excitement of the day. In the morning, we see the cars arriving on campus, we see graduates toting their caps and gowns to the covered bridge, and we can hear the bagpiper tuning up as he prepares his processional music announcing the start of the event.

I have presided at thirteen Commencements, beginning in 2007. The very first time I participated in Commencement as President, I admit that I was nervous. It is such a grand production, a ceremony that involves careful planning and coordination. It is a joyous day that lives in the memories of the graduates and their families for their entire lives. After thirteen years, the jitters have subsided, but I remain quite sentimental about the day. There is nothing quite like seeing the faces of proud parents and families, and hearing the cheerful laughter of graduates as they prepare to make this final walk across the platform to complete their educational journeys. There are often tears of joy, and I confess I shed a few of these myself.

We are all relieved that this challenging semester is at an end, and I hope you share in my satisfaction with our community’s ability to accommodate to a new mode on such short notice. Congratulations to students for your good work. Many thanks to faculty for your willingness to shift to the virtual mode within a matter of a few days. It is one thing to go charging into a new phase with enthusiasm but another to maintain that enthusiasm and positive energy. Such alacrity is vital during times of crisis, and we have had this in abundant supply. As I have noted in previous messages, I am so proud to be a part of New England College and to have such dedicated colleagues.

Parents and family members, you have become more a part of this semester than you had anticipated several months ago. As a parent myself, I know how such a time creates worry and concern for one’s children. I think you know that we have always placed our students’ safety first, and we will always do so. As the virus spread, we realized it was best to finish the semester in a remote teaching and learning mode. Many thanks to all families for arranging for students to return home, for helping to maintain a sense of normalcy, and for your infinite patience. I am grateful for the many responses to my weekly messages and appreciate your thoughtful and kind feedback.

We are planning to be back on campus this fall at the usual time. Our senior team and our staff are working out a plan for a safe and productive academic year, and we will communicate that plan in the coming weeks. There won’t be a Commencement this Saturday; that is one of the casualties of this terrible virus. We intend to have our graduation in October, and if it is possible, we will do this. Unfortunately, in this new era, we must convey, “stay tuned.”

Even though we won’t have our usual May celebration, we can still celebrate in our hearts. Our world has been transformed to the “virtual” mode these last weeks but the completion of degrees, the impressive work, and the accomplishments of our students, are very, very real. Students, your hard work and your resilience during this crisis have served you well this term and will serve you throughout your entire life. This unprecedented challenge has changed you and it has made you stronger. You are the hope of the future and your experiences will guide you to transform our world. Nelson Mandela said it well: “Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great, you can be that generation.”



To our graduates and their families, we will host the traditional champagne toast this Friday at 5:30 pm, in virtual mode. I am putting some bubbly in the fridge and will pour a glass before I join you on Zoom to toast you and wish you all the best. Congratulations, graduates! You now join the NEC alumni family. We are so very proud of you.

All good wishes for a safe and healthy summer,

Dr. Michele Perkins

President

New England College

98 Bridge Street

Henniker, NH 03242