
Fitchburg State University Today

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CARES Act and emergency fund are helping students

In these remarkable times, the university is taking care of its students through federal aid and the establishment of an institutional emergency relief fund.

The university is slated to receive \$3.9 million in federal CARES Act funding, of which 50 percent will be distributed directly to students. A methodology to distribute those funds as quickly as possible is being developed so the funds can be disbursed in accordance with guidelines from the federal government.



In addition, the university established an [emergency relief fund](#) in mid-March to help students with issues ranging from transportation and technology to lost wages and housing insecurity. The university is collecting contributions to the fund through the Advancement office. [Click here](#) to contribute.

Strategic planning virtual form to be held 3:30 p.m. Tuesday

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) will host a virtual forum at **3:30 p.m. tomorrow**, providing faculty and staff an opportunity to explore the concepts of education justice and what it means to be a student-ready campus, themes that arose consistently during the strategic planning process and present possible unifying concepts for the strategic plan.

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs **Alberto Cardelle** and Vice President for Student Affairs **Laura Bayless** will co-facilitate the SPSC-hosted discussion.

In advance of the forum, the SPSC encourages you to explore the themes of education justice and the student ready campus at <https://fitchburgstate.libguides.com/strategiceducationaltheory>.

To access the forum at 3:30 p.m. tomorrow by video conference, go to <https://meet.google.com/jfd-pfft-gtf>. To dial in, call 1-252-404-1159 and enter PIN: 868 248 280#.

To watch and listen to the conference without participating, visit <https://stream.meet.google.com/stream/b3e7cd30-fcc1-471d-94c9-e7042e10b72d>.

Transition to remote instruction highlighted

The *Sentinel & Enterprise* interviewed a

number of faculty and students for a recent article about the transition to remote instruction this semester.

"Several professors and students said ... that continuing education online has been a struggle at times, but also a striking example of people coming together to make it work," the article began.

Read the piece online [here](#).



Freshman Christopher Sutcliffe was featured in the *Sentinel & Enterprise* look at remote instruction.

Technology making remote transition a success

(Editor's Note: In the coming weeks, the newsletter will highlight different aspects of the university's response to the challenging times. We start this week with a look at Information Technology, Academic Coaching and Tutoring, and Career Services and Advising).

The successful transition to remote instruction and teleworking this semester would not have been possible without the university's technological infrastructure.



Chief Information Officer Steve Swartz said the migration to Google's email, calendar and other functions earlier this academic year was fortuitous, given the changes to university operations.

"The Google migration has turned out to be a lifesaver," he said. "It has video conferencing and recording systems built-in, and there are no applications to install or update. It's simple to use and works with Chromebooks very well."

Since the beginning of March, the university has had more than 66,000 video conferences and "hangouts" through the various Google platforms. To help students access those functions, the university has loaned out 67 laptop computers and a number of mobile "hot spots" to boost connectivity.

The university's experience with previous emergencies contributed to the success of this semester's transition.

"We learned a lot from the ice storm in 2008," Swartz said. "We expanded laptop deployments to key areas of campus, like payroll, so that if we had another emergency that required operations to move off-campus quickly, we could more easily do so."

The Technology Department was also able to quickly add users and classes to its Blackboard system without slowing it down. "We have been designing in redundancy and the ability to scale rapidly into our projects over the past few years, and that has been a major factor in our success in providing services during this time," Swartz said.

The university has also used virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) to expand access for students and staff, mirroring the experience of being on the campus network even from a different location.

"I've been very proud of the work Information Technology has done," Swartz said. "They have spent countless hours, including late nights and weekends to support our faculty, staff and

students in this transition. They have done an amazing job."

Academic Coaching and Tutoring Center buzzing online

The transition to remote instruction has inspired creativity across campus offices. For Director of [Academic Coaching and Tutoring Center](#) **Kat McLellan**, the need to support students with new modes of instruction meant rethinking operations.

One new service created in response to the transition was "[Ask a Tutor](#)," where students can submit written questions online, in addition to being able to drop-in or instead of having to make appointments for real-time online or phone conferencing.



Kat McLellan

With this additional new service, "They can ask a question and their tutors respond with a written response, which is a little more accessible," McLellan said.

"Our goal was to make an online tutoring system that was easily accessible, could replicate the feel of drop-in appointments, and it seemed important that it didn't cost any money to the institution," McLellan explained.

As the shift to remote instruction began, the academic coaches reached out to each student with whom they'd met before, including those who'd been on probation or warning status, and recommended coaching or appropriate tutoring. "We individually called all those students to see if they were OK and ask how the university could help them," they said. "We wanted to make sure that everyone had the support they needed, because going to online learning is hard. And as an office that often hears when someone is struggling or stops coming to class, we wanted to synthesize all that information so we'd know if there was someone no one was hearing from. We just wanted to make sure no one fell through the cracks because it was such a chaotic time."

"Kat's group has done herculean work here," said Assistant to the Provost for Student Success **Sean Goodlett**. "I can't tell you how amazing the group has been with Kat's leadership in particular. We had a solution for online tutoring, coaching, and even peer mentoring in place before Spring Break was done. The amount of work to do this set-up is incredible. I can't say enough good things about how the group performed."

In the first six weeks of remote instruction, McLellan said their staff had about 650 tutoring appointments and 225 academic coaching sessions, which is only slightly below normal volume. Tutoring for writing and mathematics has kept pace with normal times, they added, even if the delivery of those services has evolved.

McLellan's office has also geared up to offer placement testing for incoming first-year and transfer students, developing a new internal system that will have all students tested in advance of summer orientation sessions. "We can do this for as long as need be, and we have the capacity to do this for everyone," they said.

Through the whole transition, McLellan said they have been struck by the empathy shown by students. "People come in for tutoring and oftentimes they're very frustrated. But they say, 'I understand my professors are doing their best,'" they said. "I would call it a real generosity of spirit that I'm seeing. What a remarkable group of young people, who are doing their best and also empathizing."

Career Counseling and Advising Center helping make connections between students and employers

The [Career Counseling and Advising Center](#) had ambitious plans for the spring semester, including a major career fair that was going to happen in April at the Recreation Center. The pandemic forced a postponement of the fair, but not the

robust array of services available.

"We were able to transition all [our services](#) virtually," said Career Counseling and Advising Center Director **Melisa Alves**. "A lot of the programs we offer around advising and mock interviews we were able to do online, and we will continue to do that. This summer there are going to be more seniors looking to find full-time job opportunities as well as students whose internships may have been canceled. We want to make sure we're providing them access to the office and to think about what they can be doing to prepare, whether they want to do an internship in the fall or later on."

Following Alves' arrival last year, she and her staff launched [Handshake](#), an online portal for students to connect with employers. With the postponement of the career fair, the office is soliciting student resumes for review and compilation in a resume book that will be shared with prospective employers and internship sites.

"Typically at career fairs students only go visit the employers they think they're interested in and may miss out on good opportunities they wouldn't have considered," Alves said. "In this case, employers will get all the resumes and they may consider opportunities for students that they wouldn't have considered for themselves."

The office will be accepting student resumes online through the end of business today via the [Handshake portal](#).

Alves said students in college during this pandemic have a great story to tell prospective employers. "This is something they should be talking about in interviews - their ability to transition and to adapt," Alves said. "They're going through experiences that will make them better candidates to employers."

Assistant to the Provost for Student Success **Sean Goodlett** said Alves and her team have done an outstanding job getting students to try Handshake-with more than 800 already registered-and are helping students succeed through proven tactics that improve retention and persistence.

The group's advising for pre-majors is helping keep students on track, Goodlett said, as are efforts to encourage students to register for full loads of 15 credits per semester. "There's really good evidence that students who take a full load actually end up more likely to persist and therefore to graduate, and they end up completing more credit hours," he said.

University again state's largest female-majority MBA program

Fitchburg State University's MBA program is the largest majority-female program in the state for the second year in a row.

The Boston Business Journal recently [published](#) its list of the largest MBA programs in the state. Fitchburg State, which offers in-person and accelerated online MBA programs, ranked 5th in the state for overall size. It's also the largest program for whom a majority of students - 54 percent - are women.

Eman Warraich-Gibson '19 works as chief clinical officer at Integrity House, the largest substance use treatment program in the state of New Jersey. She was looking for an MBA program that she could balance with a challenging career and the demands of a young family. "I knew instantly this



Melisa Alves

was the program for me: 100 percent online, a curriculum my impulsive mind could squeeze into one year, and affordable," she said. "With the support of my husband, I enrolled and started my first class in March 2019 and a year later graduated with a 4.0 GPA."

[Learn more](#)



Eman Warraich-Gibson '19

Falcons Helping Falcons

The university launched the Falcons Helping Falcons initiative in April, attempting to check in personally with every registered undergraduate student to make sure they're OK and their needs are being met. The effort is continuing, but discussions thus far have shown that students are trying their best and appreciative of the efforts that have been made to make this semester successful.

To date, more than 1,500 students have been contacted.

Business Administration Department accreditation renewed

The Board of Commissioners of the International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE) granted reaffirmation of accreditation of the university's business and management programs offered through its Business Administration Department.



"This is another great example of our faculty's commitment to a rich learning experience reinforced by the highest standards in the discipline," said Dean of Business and Technology Keith Williamson.

[Learn more](#)

Awards and scholarships delivered

The university recently recognized more than 200 students with scholarships, awards and certificates in celebration of academic accomplishment.

The Honors Convocation is typically part of a day-long celebration of student achievement on the university's campus, but this year's event could not be held as usual because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The financial awards totaled nearly \$200,000 and included recognitions bestowed by individual academic departments as well as certificates presented in the name of accomplished alumni. The awards recognize scholarship and service.

[Click here](#) to see the names of all the recipients and their accolades.

Summer session goes online

Registration is now open for Fitchburg State University's [summer session](#), which will be offered completely online for the first time. The first summer session runs Tuesday, May 26 to Friday, June 26.

Fitchburg State's Division of Graduate and Continuing Education has long offered a wide range of online courses, but offering the first summer session exclusively online is part of the university's continuing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

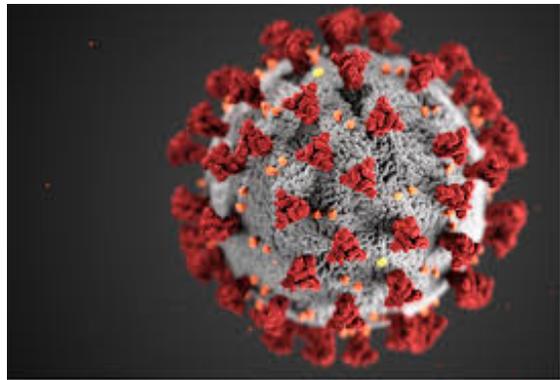
Course offerings in the summer session include undergraduate and graduate-level classes across all departments. The summer session is a great time to take one's first steps into a new program, as well as make progress on your undergraduate or graduate degree. Please visit fitchburgstate.edu/summer for more information as well as a link to see all offered courses.

[Learn more](#)

Visit coronavirus page for latest updates

The university's [coronavirus resource page](#), first created in January, is updated regularly and includes an archive of campus bulletins to students, faculty, staff and community members.

Visit fitchburgstate.edu/coronavirus to keep informed.



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