April 18, 2020

Dear Faculty & Staff,

We continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic and focus on keeping our students, employees and community safe. We are committed to supporting the continuation of our students’ education while assessing the increasing impact that this health crisis is having on our college.

We announced last week that remote learning for our faculty and students will be extended through the end of the semester. Today, I am announcing the decision to extend remote work for our staff through May 4, 2020, per the recommendations of the Governor and state health officials’ stay-at-home advisory. This will be assessed further as needed.

In addition, due to the unprecedented financial position that the college has been placed in because of the coronavirus pandemic, earlier today we began the difficult task of laying off approximately 136 part time employees, effective May 1. Our part time employees are a vital part of our college and we do not make this decision lightly. I know that this is a difficult time for our college and by no means is this a reflection of the quality work and dedication of our employees who are affected. We hope that we will be able to reinstate these positions, if possible, once the coronavirus pandemic subsides. The human resources team will be working with the employees who have already been notified as they transition to unemployment. As stated in our payroll message of March 19, we knew that after the initial COVID-19 restriction period, we would need to reassess the college’s financial position moving forward. Please note, that many of our part time employees who are currently working directly with students or are grant funded may not be part of the layoff. Also, our federal work-study students will continue to be paid through the end of the semester as approved through financial aid.

During these unprecedented times, it is a challenge to project the complete impact the coronavirus pandemic will have on enrollment for the summer and fall semesters or our overall budget and costs. At their meeting on April 16, the Board of Trustees approved our provisional operating budget for the fiscal year 2020-2021 which included several cost savings initiatives, investment strategies and an increase in student fees of $8 per credit, or about 4 percent. Through the Trustees’ efforts, the college cost remains near the bottom of all the community colleges. Bristol will remain in the bottom third of the 15 community colleges for fees and the college receives less state appropriation per student than all but one of the Massachusetts community colleges.

This was not an easy email to write, but I know that it is important that you hear directly from me that the college is in a strong financial position to move through this situation as long as we continue to make thoughtful and strategic decisions. We know that every decision we make affects the life of a student, faculty member, employee or community member. This is a great responsibility and one that my colleagues and I across the state and country have all been facing. Sadly, our college is not unique in this situation.
In the coming weeks, we will continue to focus on getting our current students through the semester. We will work through plans for the summer and find new creative ways to recruit for the fall. Amid the uncertainty, you have found ways to support our students and each other. Please join me as we support all of our employees during this transition.

Sincerely,

Laura L. Douglas
President