

To the UConn Community:

As we near the end of one of the most unusual and challenging semesters in our history, I wanted to take a moment to share a few thoughts – and to invite our graduates and our entire community to our virtual commencement on May 9.

First, it bears repeating that in the face of a globe-spanning pandemic that has affected every aspect of life, for which no training manual or rulebook could have prepared anyone, the students, faculty, and staff of the University of Connecticut have responded with care, flexibility, and swiftness that is nothing short of awe-inspiring.

While shifting all courses was not ideal for anyone, UConn made it work and not a single course was canceled.

Our faculty and staff did an extraordinary job of creating, from scratch, a course on the pandemic this spring. It became the largest and most popular course in the history of the University, with more than 5,000 students signing up. It is a sterling example of how a great research university responds to a global event.

At UConn Health, the heroic work of our caregivers goes on as the virus reaches what is expected to be its peak in this region. UConn Health has treated more than 150 COVID-19-positive patients, and our health care workers have adapted, improvised, and relied on the tremendous goodwill of the community to help them meet a challenge none of us ever expected.

From collaborations between Storrs and Farmington on the design and manufacture of critically needed personal protective equipment to students working in private sector initiatives to bring emergency ventilators to market, UConn Nation has responded to this crisis in the best traditions of a great university.

But no matter the challenges or circumstances we face, we should not give up what is the signal event in the University year: commencement. Necessity has forced us to cancel the spring commencement ceremonies for the first time since 1914, but we are not letting our graduates embark on the next chapter of their lives without a proper sendoff.

On Saturday, May 9, at 12 p.m. EDT, we'll be livestreaming the first ever "virtual" commencement ceremony from the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts on [the official UConn YouTube channel](#).

There will be taped greetings from some of the brightest stars in UConn Nation, the official conferral of degrees for undergraduate and graduate students, and the name of every person receiving a degree this year will be listed. If we can't be together in person, we can at least be together through the medium of technology, and I hope you'll join us and participate on social media, using the hashtag #UConn20.

As you know, if circumstances allow, we also plan to hold an in-person celebration of the Class of 2020 during the weekend of Oct. 9 to 11. Details to come.

While we're applauding the accomplishments of our graduates, I also want to thank everyone in the extended UConn community – alumni, parents, families, and neighbors – who have extended a helping hand during this very challenging time. Whether it's something as simple as hanging a blue paper heart in your front window, or as involved as organizing a mass donation of protective masks, you have lifted our spirits more than I can say.

And for those looking to help our students in a direct way, one of the best options is to [donate to the Students First Fund](#) through the UConn Foundation. This provides financial assistance to students experiencing hardship because of sudden misfortune, a predicament that, it should go without saying, many of our students now find themselves in. Your generosity makes a real difference in the lives of our students.

We are only at the beginning of what will be a long and, frankly, extremely hard journey. There will be tough choices and difficult decisions ahead. And while many of our most urgent questions don't have answers yet, I know without a doubt that the outcome of this journey will see UConn emerge stronger and more committed to our mission than ever. The reason I'm so confident is because I've seen how this community has already responded to the challenge of the pandemic – with inventiveness, commitment, and, above all, Husky Pride.

To our graduates, I say once again: Congratulations. And to all of us: We're going to get through this, together. Go Huskies.

Sincerely,

Thomas Katsouleas
President