

VOICES OF Roberts

ROBERTS WESLEYAN COLLEGE AND NORTHEASTERN SEMINARY | SUMMER 2020

An Anchor of Hope Message from the President

The essence of our work in higher education is to meet students where they are, challenge them to think in new ways and encourage them to find a calling that will move them into a future where they can impact their world for good. But looking back at the past few months, our work at Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary can only be described as a relentless wave of urgent and hard decisions demanding to be made.

With the immediacy of the changes incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the flurry of state and county pronouncements, we in leadership roles have navigated at a high speed from crisis mode to critical analysis, while needing to maintain overarching strategic thinking. Faculty have moved quickly from face-to-face to online education. Staff have moved from face-to-face counseling and support to virtual meetings with students and families. Students left campus abruptly and found themselves in class while caring for children and family members. It's not what anyone had planned or desired. Yet, as we reached the end of the semester, we were finally able to look up and take stock of where we were. Everyone realized there were losses greater than anticipated. But we had made it through the semester, risen to the challenge and delivered a Christ-centered education to our students. Despite tensions, questions and uncertainty, the resilience, flexibility and grace of our community was exceptional.

At some level, every part of Roberts and Northeastern has been impacted by the pandemic. The summer months that usually provide a natural and necessary respite have actually been months of making decisions about everything from health and safety to program delivery. And many, many decisions about financial planning and budgets, which naturally have added stress and pressure felt by everyone. Every institution has been in the same whirlwind, making decisions that weigh heavily on the community and leadership.

It is through this season that I have reflected often on this year's theme of Forever Faithful, anchored in 1 Samuel 7:12, "Thus far the LORD has helped us." Who knew last August that this theme would be the sustaining hope for the second half of the academic year? God did! Our history and faith provide solid footing as we have navigated toward an uncertain future. A faith anchored in a hope that comes from knowing God is present and has demonstrated His love for us from our beginning. This has been true for the community of Roberts and Northeastern, and for me personally.

Some are asking where we go from here. Like many, I believe higher education has been in need of change, and the pandemic has served as a push to get going before it's too late. As we look to the start of a new academic year this fall, we will focus on our strategic plans and lean into our vision to be a leader in Christian higher education. We will continue to do this as we meet students where they are, challenge them to think beyond the constructs of their current thinking, and encourage them to find a calling that will move them into a future that is better for their neighbors and themselves. We will continue to walk the journey with students in their development and growth, and to come alongside them in the continuous process of reaching for new ideas, examining thought processes and finding solutions that move ourselves and our communities forward. We will continue to adjust and adapt our methods in whatever ways are necessary to do this safely, responsibly and effectively. The mission of Roberts and Northeastern is to provide an education that allows the opportunity to be transformed in order to transform.

God has been in this place these past months and has never left us. He has been faithful for generations and will continue to show us a way forward as we invite him into the narrative and allow him to speak and to guide us forward with renewed energy.

With prayer and optimism,



President Deana L. Porterfield





Roberts Wesleyan College Transforms Educational Experience Amid COVID-19

Spring 2020 was a semester unlike any other. In March, conversations about COVID-19 quickly began to swirl globally, but much was still unknown about the virus and its impact in the United States. However, when those conversations began to hit closer to home, impacting the Greater Rochester region and the tight-knit Roberts Wesleyan College community, the college grappled with how to respond to the grim reality of the threatening pandemic.

Springing into Action

With the health and safety of students, staff and faculty paramount in the decision-making process, Roberts quickly transitioned operations to an emergency remote learning environment and equipped faculty with the technology and resources needed to go fully virtual in the span of one week's time.

Faculty rose to the challenge.

"Although the college has offered online courses for years, many faculty members did not have previous experience teaching in a fully virtual environment," Chief Academic Officer Dave Basinger said. "The fact that all faculty were able to change the mode of delivery to virtual within a week is a real testament to their dedication to their students."

Although the pandemic halted in-person interactions, Roberts faculty and staff still found creative ways to stay connected with students, help them finish the semester as successfully as possible and create lasting memories.

Using the technology available through Zoom, Google Meet, email and other mediums, faculty fostered continual engagement with their students, for instruction, discussion and virtual office hours.

Professor of Chemistry Amy Kovach recalls a sweet gesture her students organized in celebration of her birthday. As a surprise, they created a happy birthday video featuring each student taking turns singing one word of the happy birthday song via Google Meet.

Roberts also hosted a virtual Spring Commencement on June 13, the first in the college's 154-year history. The undergraduate and graduate ceremonies incorporated many of Roberts' historic traditions to properly honor and celebrate the accomplishments of the class of 2020. Prior to graduation, each department took time to meet with their graduating students, and hosted a forum for personal interactions and to congratulate them on their achievements and discuss their plans for the future.

"In the virtual ceremony (on social media and online), there were so many personal comments from faculty and staff to our students," Kovach said. "I think students felt appreciated, celebrated and loved even though it was different from what they expected, hoped or dreamed."

Reframing the Educational Experience

As New York State and the Finger Lakes region continued to advance into Phase 4 of reopening, the Roberts team worked diligently to prepare for the fall semester, rolling out the Roberts Restart plan in June, which offered students the option to choose between a fully virtual or in-person semester.

The task force in charge of reopening plans and academics made sure to incorporate feedback and considerations from student leaders regarding what they liked about the spring semester and areas that could be improved upon.



According to Kovach, who serves as one of the lead Restart team members overseeing academics, one piece of feedback they continually heard from students was that they missed the campus culture and community.

"What a lot of traditional undergraduate students have said to me is that being at Roberts is what makes Roberts special," Kovach said. "It's the community, and students really miss that community, so we're excited that we're able to bring them back to experience that. It will be different, but it will still be there."

While Roberts has more than 20 years of experience providing exceptional online learning offerings, the fall will bring a more robust mix of online learning coupled with in-person instruction for students returning to campus.

Students will experience a hybrid learning environment that couples the classroom with online options to accommodate those who opted to attend virtually, and that provides a seamless transition for continued learning should it be necessary for any student to not attend class in person due to health concerns.

Online instruction will contain components of asynchronous and synchronous learning — autonomous work time and opportunities for interaction or group work. There will also be a concerted effort to continue fostering social connections among students and ensure a true "teaching presence" is felt through the coursework, whether it's taught in person or online.

Capacity in classrooms will be reduced to align with health and safety guidelines and to enforce responsible physical distancing practices. Students, faculty and staff will also engage in a community-wide effort to protect one another by wearing a mask or a face covering and maintaining appropriate physical distancing at all times. Sanitation protocols within classrooms and shared spaces will also be enhanced and more frequent.

Although the learning environment may look different come fall, Roberts' commitment to providing students with education for character remains unwavering.

"When we talk about 'educating the whole person,' it's more than just the academic knowledge — it's how you internalize that knowledge, how it changes your worldview and helps you apply it in a purposeful way," Kovach said. "That can be achieved whether you're virtual or whether you're in person, because once you have that internalized knowledge, it easily translates into going out and serving our world."

One thing that's for certain is that the future of higher education will forever be changed by this experience. However, it serves as an opportunity to find moments for creativity that will shape education for the future.

Becoming Roberts Restart Ready

Looking ahead to the fall, there are several things students, faculty and staff can all be mindful of to have a successful semester.

Kovach notes that now, more than ever, it's going to be important that students understand how to manage their time effectively, as formats and schedules for instruction will look slightly different than before.

Students in need of help should also feel empowered to seek it out. "There's going to be all sorts of help available," Kovach said. "I want to encourage them to take that first step to get help, whether they need academic help or services from our counseling center." Lastly, Kovach encourages both students and faculty to actively practice self-care for overall well-being.

"If I were to make a statement to everyone — myself included — I'd say that everyone should remember the importance of self-care this fall," Kovach said. "Students are going to experience stress in new ways as they try to adapt to a new system and method of scheduling and how classes are being delivered. Students and faculty need to remember to take care of themselves spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically."

How the Roberts community interacts, worships and works together will be slightly different, but the college's core functioning as a Christian community of higher education and commitment to protecting the health, safety and well-being of others remains unchanged.

"Just because things are different doesn't mean that it's not going to be a meaningful semester," Kovach said. "So expect things to be different, but also expect to have a wonderful semester."





Commencement Recap

Spring 2020 Commencement Virtual Ceremonies were held on June 13, 2020. We recognized 720 Roberts undergraduate and graduate students who received their degrees:

- 244 traditional undergraduates
- 5 BELL students
- 471 adult bachelor's degree completion and graduate students
- For the first time, 6 doctorates

The first-ever virtual Commencement ceremonies were streamed on YouTube and Facebook and were about an hour in length. The graduating class included students from 13 countries: Australia, Burundi, Canada, Cayman Islands, China, Colombia, Congo, Ghana, Haiti, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, St. Lucia and Zimbabwe.



Challenges of athletics and extracurricular activities

What will sports look like for the fall?

The East Coast Conference Council of Presidents announced on July 17 that intercollegiate competition for the fall 2020 season will be suspended due to the continued health and safety concerns surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. We anticipate that our student-athletes will have the opportunity to train and practice during the fall in what will become the traditional "out of season" period, including skill instruction, strength and conditioning activities under social distancing protocols, and we will abide by all ECC and NCAA parameters.

As part of the long-term restructuring and reducing efforts, the college has discontinued three of its sports teams: men's tennis, women's tennis and men's golf.

How will Chapel and Spiritual Life be different?

We will minimize the number of large group gatherings and therefore not meet in Hale Auditorium for chapel. We plan to offer smaller community group-style gatherings throughout the week, as well as continue to offer the Kickstart videos throughout the year. As weather permits, we will offer outdoor worship events.

For more details and FAQs, visit: roberts.edu/restart

New this fall

The fall 2020 semester will be the launch of a new undergraduate Core Curriculum, an integrated interdisciplinary program that provides innovative and flexible options for students seeking a variety of careers. With these changes, all students will now earn a minor in critical analysis and social engagement as they complete the Core Curriculum. This minor will complement all students' major fields of study and is an enhancement to traditional general education and liberal arts models.

New majors & programs: At Roberts, two new programs will launch on August 31. A new bachelor's completion program in Christian Ministry, B.S. and an A.S. in Arts and Culture. At Northeastern Seminary, a new Master's degree in Spiritual Formation and two new certificate programs in Chaplaincy and one in Advanced Certificate in Spiritual Direction will launch.

Performance Arts events will follow NYS guidelines.

President Porterfield is leading the Rochester Area Colleges consortium for a two-year term. The RAC's 22 institutions of higher education have been working together throughout the pandemic, sharing resources, collaborating and sharing best practices.



Some of our Frontline Heroes: Alumni + Faculty

Judy Rich '74 (Nursing)
roberts.edu/news?id=3899

Paul Pettit '07 (Strategic Leadership, M.S.)
roberts.edu/news?id=3895

Erin Dibble '14 (School Psychology, M.S. with a Certificate of Advanced Study)
roberts.edu/news?id=3863

Victoria Link '15 (Childhood & Special Education)
roberts.edu/news?id=3851

Kim Kirkpatrick Strong '91, '13 (Studio Art, Nursing)
roberts.edu/news?id=3845

Dr. Kimberly Stearns Higgins '92 (Music Education)
roberts.edu/news?id=3838

Meghan Kettinger '19 (Nursing)
roberts.edu/news?id=3828

Jim VanBrederode '88 (Sociology)
roberts.edu/news?id=3825

Joshua Smith '08, '16 (Nursing)
roberts.edu/news?id=3817

Randy Barker '91 (Communication)
roberts.edu/news?id=3818

Michelle Singleton Kettinger '92, '09 (Elementary Education, Social Work)
roberts.edu/news?id=3811

Professor Laura Coles (Faculty, School of Nursing)
roberts.edu/news?id=3808