

## Education

# Here's how Mass. colleges are handling graduation ceremonies



Even as Harvard University told its students not to return after spring break due to the threat of coronavirus, campus tours continued.

GARY HIGGINS / BOSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

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By Hilary Burns – Associate Editor, Boston Business Journal

Mar 16, 2020, 4:31pm EDT **Updated** Mar 25, 2020, 5:24pm EDT

*This story will be updated as more colleges and universities in Massachusetts share their plans for commencement during the global pandemic.*

Dozens of Boston schools and thousands of Boston-area graduates must contend with ending their educational years with unconventional pomp and circumstance.

Harvard University became the latest higher education institution that has answered the question that has been top of mind for students in the past few weeks – what about graduation?

The oldest university in the nation is scheduled to hold its 369th commencement ceremony online on May 28, according to a letter Harvard President Lawrence Bacow sent to the campus community Friday. Harvard said it will hold an in-person celebration “sometime later, once we know it is safe to bring people together again.”

Bacow said that each school at Harvard will also host its own special online event after the main ceremony and afterwards they will deliver diplomas through the mail.

“No virtual gathering can possibly match the splendor of our usual festivities, but we will come together online on Thursday, May 28,” Bacow wrote.

“I love commencement. I love seeing our community come together to celebrate the academic accomplishments of our remarkable students,” he

added. "I love seeing their families brimming with pride as they participate in a ceremony that is almost as old as the University itself."

Bacow asked for the community to be patient as the school determines a new date for graduates and added that the postponed commencement would have "have all of the pomp, circumstance, and tradition that is typical of a Harvard commencement – with as many of the traditional campus festivities that typically precede commencement as possible."

The school said that it hopes to enable as many students as possible to return to campus for the rescheduled graduation with their friends and classmates.

"Everything about this year seems to be turning out unusual," Bacow said. "When we do hold commencement for the Harvard Class of 2020, I sincerely hope it will also be unusual, but only because it will be among the most joyous commencements in the history of the university."

Babson College in Wellesley also postponed its May commencement ceremony and asked its 2020 graduates "for innovative and safe ways to recognize their accomplishments, both virtually and when it is safe to gather together." MIT is taking a similar approach – with an online ceremony on May 29 and an in-person celebration in-person when it is safe to do so.

MIT President Rafael Reif said that he can relate to the Class of 2020's disappointment.

"The day before I was set to graduate from my Caracas high school, the city suffered a major earthquake," Reif wrote in a March 24 letter to the community. "Buildings collapsed. There were serious casualties. Suddenly, it was impossible, physically and emotionally, to hold the traditional graduation ceremony we had all been counting on. I still remember the pain and disappointment - so I write with special sympathy and great regret to let you know that, in a world so disrupted by Covid-19, it is clear we cannot conduct our traditional in-person celebration of Commencement, Hooding and Tech Reunions in late May."

Earlier this month, [Wentworth Institute of Technology](#) said it is postponing its April graduation, an announcement that came just an hour before President Donald Trump advised against gatherings of more than 10 people.

Wentworth's commencement ceremonies, originally planned for April 25, are now slated for August 15. The ceremonies include about 400 students. Wentworth already has a larger commencement ceremony scheduled for August 16.

Other colleges including Boston University have not publicly postponed or canceled graduations at this time.

"Given the public health concerns of public gathering the size of the April Commencement, we have had to make the difficult decision to postpone the April 25, 2020 commencement ceremonies," Wentworth President Mark Thompson said in an email to the community.

"We are providing this information to the April 2020 graduates now so that graduates and their families and friends have ample time to adjust their commencement plans," Thompson added. "We understand the importance of commencement and want to ensure we preserve this important ceremony for our graduates."

The school said more details about the postponement will come soon.

**Suffolk University** is hoping to hold its commencement celebration in August. The school said in a March 21 letter to its community that the postponed graduation could be one large event or several smaller ones. Suffolk will provide more details when they are available, according to the letter.

Northeastern University said that it will hold graduation ceremonies virtually in May.

Northeastern's virtual graduation ceremony will still include a commencement speaker and the school also plans to hold gatherings for graduates and their families in communities around the world "when we are once again able to meet face-to-face, hand-to-hand," President Joseph Aoun wrote in a letter to the school's community.

"Let us remember that Northeastern is about experience without boundaries," Aoun said. "As such, honoring the impact of our community is not bounded by time or place."

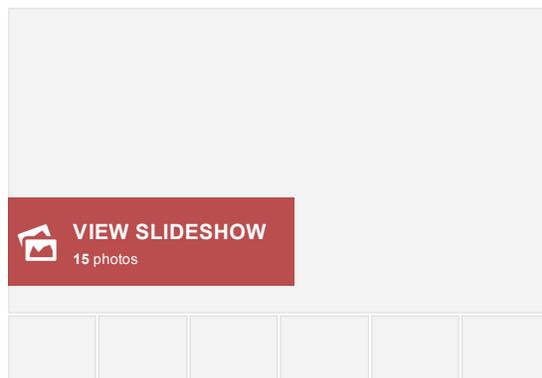
Most colleges and universities in Massachusetts have said that they will finish the semester virtually to help prevent community spread of COVID-19. Many schools are in the throes of training faculty and staff on using online tools and working out the logistics of educating students from afar.

Several schools, including Wentworth, Suffolk University and Tufts University, have said that they will refund students and families for unused room and board for the remainder of the semester.

"I firmly believe we are going to come out of this stronger as an institution as a result of our efforts and collaboration," Thompson said in an interview Monday. "We are in it for the long run. We are going to get through this."

## U.S. News's ranking of best colleges in Mass. 2020

Here are the 15 best universities in Massachusetts, according to the 2020 U.S. News & World Report report.



THE LIST

### Largest Colleges & Universities in Massachusetts

Ranked by Total full-time equivalent student enrollment for the Fall 2018 semester

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Rank	School	Total Full-Time Equivalent Student Enrollment For The Fall 2018 Semester
1	University of Massachusetts Amherst	29,051.00