

Students Adjust to the New Normal for a Successful Reopening

After months of uncertainty, preparation, and added costs related to the COVID 19 pandemic, the 14 non-profit independent institutions of higher education in New Jersey have started the Fall 2020 semester. All of our institutions, many of which are small, had great concern about whether students were going to even continue with their education, what the semester would look like, and how we could safely and productively serve our students, faculty, and staff.

As the Fall 2020 semester started, however, all of us are breathing a sigh of relief. Our independent college campuses, as a general rule, are pleasantly surprised that students continued to choose our institutions to begin or continue their college education. Though the semester has started under a “new normal” and is certainly unlike previous years, the dire predictions on enrollment due to health and economic conditions were not realized.

Most of the 14 private colleges and universities in New Jersey have reported a higher than expected enrollment rate, both among first-year and returning students. The economic and racial diversity that we are proud of is not anticipated to be impacted, and our campuses will continue to match the overall diversity of New Jersey. As we have seen throughout higher education, there have been a small number of students who have chosen to defer so they could begin in the spring or next fall in order to receive the traditional campus experience.

As with most of the colleges in New Jersey and the northeast, instruction is largely being offered remotely, though a number of New Jersey independent colleges and universities are offering hybrid and in-person instruction as well. Students are reporting that they want to be on campus if the option is offered to them and are happy to be back in school whether they’re going to in-person classes or are studying remotely. Campus life is primarily virtual, but the majority of students are very much engaged in the virtual events creatively offered by the many campus clubs and programs available to them.

Safety, of course, is and will be the first priority of our colleges, and to date, positive COVID tests among the NJ private institutions are the lowest in the state as of mid-September. We are proud of the partnership of our students, faculty and staff to ensure that everyone is safe and complying with rules and protocols. We know, however, that we must continue to be vigilant to keep our campuses as safe as possible.

All in all, we are proud that New Jersey students continue to choose non-profit independent colleges and pleased that we are seeing students back on campus, learning safely, and enjoying the new campus experience. Many of these students are glad to be close to home during the pandemic, while other students too far away to commute to campus are taking advantage of enrolling in all remote coursework so they can save money by not living on campus. Students have decided to choose NJ independent colleges because of their smaller and manageable size, student-centric focus, quality education, the overall low number of COVID-19 cases in the state at present, and as always, because of the diverse communities and educational opportunities offered.

Affinity Group Meetings

AICUNJ hosted several affinity group meetings this month, allowing individuals from our member institutions in certain departments the opportunity to virtually meet with their counterparts from the other member institutions and share lessons learned. The following four affinity groups met in September: Academic Affairs Vice Presidents, Enrollment Management Directors, Financial Affairs Chief Financial Officers, Human Resources Directors. The groups have been meeting quarterly under the direction of AICUNJ, but will now the leadership will be shared by AICUNJ and a group member. The affinity groups are scheduled to meet again in three months.

New Interim President at Felician University

James W. Crawford III has been appointed to the position of Interim University President at Felician University, effective September 29, 2020. Crawford is a retired Admiral and the 43rd Judge Advocate General (JAG) of the United States Navy. He was selected by unanimous vote of the Board of Trustees.

A native of Charlotte, North Carolina, James W. Crawford III graduated from Belmont Abbey College and earned his Juris Doctorate from the University of North Carolina. He holds a Master of Laws degree in Ocean and Coastal Law from the University of Miami, and a Master of Arts in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College. He was named an MIT Seminar XXI Fellow.

An accomplished guest lecturer and keynote speaker, Crawford will also serve as Professor of Foreign Relations in the School of Arts & Sciences. An experienced leader, Crawford has served as the head of the Naval Legal Service Command, legal counsel to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and commander of NATO Rule of Law Field Support, Afghanistan. As the Judge Advocate General of the Navy, Crawford led 2,400 judge advocates, enlisted and civilian employees of the Navy’s global legal organization. He is the recipient of numerous military awards including two Distinguished Service Medals.

Crawford has served on Boards of Directors for the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Lucy’s Hearth, the Church of the Nativity, and is on the Board of Trustees of Belmont Abbey College. He is married to the former Elizabeth Ann Goncalo and they have 12 year old twin sons.

Transitioning Sponsorship Funds

Just as our students are engaging in new learning models that sustain the quality of an independent higher education and our institutions have invested in systems that safeguard their constituents, ICFNJ is responding to the critical financial crisis that is creating a unforeseen barrier to degree completion for some of our students. Past event sponsors are asked to transition funds from a single event support to a campaign with lasting impact. Support continues to be sought for the Emergency Aid Fund. Please contact MaryAlice Breuninger, to coordinate your gift.

AICUNJ Board

The AICUNJ Board convened for their quarterly board meeting on September 25, 2020. Lou gave the President’s report, the board discussed the Trenton report highlights, the budget, the strategic plan, and the performance appraisal process.

CohnReznick Virtual Roundtable

CFNJ partnered with CohnReznick to sponsor the second in the Virtual Roundtable series. The September 30th Virtual Roundtable was entitled “Setting Yourself Apart in a Virtual World” and focused on the job search during a pandemic, where face-to-face interaction is no longer the norm. The roundtable was a Zoom session offered to accounting majors of our member institutions. A college recruiter from CohnReznick led a candid conversation offering resume guidance, networking advice, and interview preparation tips to the student attendees. The students were invited to ask any and all questions to an accounting recruiter in a safe space. The students learned a great deal and found the conversation informative and beneficial.

Student Voices

ICFNJ Scholar, Lamar–Shea Chang, received a Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems and Biology with a minor in Chemistry from Caldwell University in May, and plans to work a year or two before pursuing a career in medicine.

Lamar-Shea was selected to deliver the Class of 2020 undergraduate commencement address at Caldwell’s in-person ceremony on September 20, 2020, delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic. He told his classmates that graduating from Caldwell University has given them the “arsenal of tools and calibrated compasses” to impact the lives of “billions” of people for generations to come. “It is true,” he said. “A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions.”

Although it was difficult to have his senior year interrupted by the pandemic, he realized “the world had changed, and I had, as well. New opportunities look bright as some companies begin to reevaluate their business models.” Most of all, he is grateful that his family and friends have been okay and that, as one of the very few students who has lived on campus through the pandemic, he had “a place to stay and food to eat while I finished up my studies.” He appreciates the internships and work experiences including being mentored by an executive in global drug development at Novartis and working with the Borough of Caldwell learning about municipal government while providing his input on how to create relationships between small–business owners and consumers.

We are so proud of Lamar-Shea and wish him the very best in his future endeavors. Be sure to check out his [Caldwell feature](#).