

December 4, 2020

To: Students signed up for Dec. 2020 graduation

SUBJECT LINE: Important information regarding December commencement

December Class of 2020:

The single highest priority of Lipscomb University this fall has been to protect the health of the community so our students could complete an entire academic semester and, in many cases, complete their degree programs. After investing millions of dollars in health related resources, faculty and students working extremely hard and an entire community supporting that agenda, we are just days away from achieving that goal.

Nearing the end of the semester, however, we recognize the sobering reality of the COVID-19 crisis and its dramatic worsening across the country and in the state of Tennessee. Once again, portions of the country are closing down, travel is strongly discouraged or restricted, hospitalizations have risen to dangerous and unprecedented levels of the virus spread and deaths are increasing - some predicting that another 200,000 will die before this surge of the virus is curtailed. Overall, the statistics reflect a crisis of much larger proportions than we had to manage last spring, summer and even this fall.

Given these challenging external circumstances, Lipscomb has had to make a decision about how to best honor our December graduates. On a community basis, there is no more special moment than to see our graduates recognized for their tremendous academic achievements. On a personal basis, I have often told people that when I conclude my time as president of Lipscomb, the moment I will miss most is standing in the Allen Arena tunnel, listening to the bagpipes play, watching our graduates and faculty march before the crowd of thousands, and knowing that the academic journey we all started, is now completed. It is a profoundly special moment.

It is in that context - the desire to recognize our students but also the enormous danger of the increasing COVID-19 crisis - that the December graduation will be completely virtual with no physical attendance by students, faculty or guests. This decision will be greatly disappointing to many. Some may be angry. This is not the ending any of us envisioned when we started the academic journey together years ago. But, we have the responsibility to protect thousands of people and that almost every week I am expressing condolences to a Lipscomb connected family who has lost a loved one to this virus. It makes me angry as well that something we cannot control has such an influence on our lives.

Yet, after days of extensive consultation with local and state health officials, external medical personnel and knowing our own experience in managing the virus this fall, the conclusion is clear. If we want to protect our community - the very people who have been on the journey together - one proven way to do so is to continue our large gathering activities in a virtual

environment until the virus subsides. Thus, Lipscomb's graduation will take place as a virtual event as scheduled on December 19.

Knowing that a virtual commencement requires a different plan, we have assembled a team of creative and talented people who will create and deliver a celebratory and exciting moment for you! We will "pull out all the stops" to provide you with a celebration fitting of your accomplishments. In a few moments, you will receive an email from Provost Craig Bledsoe with more detailed information regarding the plans we have in place to honor you and celebrate this tremendous milestone in your academic journey.

I'm looking forward to honoring you in just a few days and hosting Lipscomb University's December 2020 commencement that is part of our 130th academic session!

Blessings,
Randy Lowry
Lipscomb University President