February 11, 2021

Members of the Rutgers Community:

After careful discussion with the chancellors over the past several weeks, I am writing to inform you that we have decided to hold all commencement events across Rutgers by virtual means rather than hold in-person ceremonies. This decision was a disappointing one to make in light of the difficulties our graduating students have already endured, but public health concerns related to the ongoing pandemic continue to make it unwise for us to plan for large in-person gatherings this spring. And unfortunately, it is not feasible to create appropriate, smaller ceremonies in a safe and equitable way.

Each campus is exploring the most effective ways to honor their graduates by remote means this spring, and we are earnestly hoping to host in-person celebrations later in the year to further salute our graduates from both 2020 and 2021.

Why are we making this decision now? Because, despite the optimism that the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines has brought us, our health experts have advised that even if the pace of the vaccination rollout increases, our state will not be at a point where it will be safe to gather in large crowds, even outdoors, until mid- to late summer at the earliest. With more than 18,000 graduating students across our campuses, we don’t have the capacity to ensure the health and safety of graduates and guests. Rather than book and plan for outdoor venues, only to cancel them as May draws near, we have determined that it is better to put our energies into making commencement season as well-designed, creative, and meaningful as possible in a virtual setting.

Follow-up messages regarding commencement events will come from the chancellors and/or deans later this month. I support their efforts to find ways to celebrate safely and know that they are eager to engage their communities as they consider how best to do so.

I recognize that this decision will be deeply disappointing to our graduating students and their families and friends, and I am very sorry. I know you deserve better and
wish that we could make it happen in a safe and responsible way this spring. At the point where we can resume holding large in-person gatherings, we will gladly plan for events that celebrate your accomplishments at Rutgers.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Holloway
President and University Professor