

College to pack students' remaining belongings and move to fall room or ship items home

President Hilary Link and Dean of Students April Thompson reiterate student belonging procedure despite student petition receiving nearly 2000 signatures

Bree Gray, News Editor | May 6, 2020

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UPDATE May 7 11:22 a.m.: In an email to the Allegheny community at 10:43 a.m. on Thursday, May 7, President Link indicated that the college will pay to all ship students' belongings. The college had stated earlier that only seniors' shipments would be paid for, but after receiving many concerns about shipping costs, Link said the college will now pay for each student to have their items shipped if they choose. Link also indicated that students who are close to campus and able to drive to

campus may have the option to complete a curbside pickup of their items.

Link outlined the decision as comprising of three main principles. One, the college does not want to jeopardize re-opening in the fall. Two, the college states that it wants to prioritize health and safety. Finally, Link stated that belonging retrieval is a timing issue, that it will take at least six weeks to fully prepare each room for the fall.

Link also emphasized the health of the greater Crawford County community.

“Because our relationship with and partnership with Meadville and our county is fundamental, we have an ethical and moral responsibility to take every possible step, both now and should we re-open, to ensure we are not bringing the virus into our community,” Link wrote in the email to the college community. “We simply did not feel comfortable doing so now, when we are not yet able to have clear testing, tracing and protection protocols we would have by fall to allow us to possibly reopen.”

Link also acknowledged concerns regarding student privacy.

“It goes without saying that we have a fundamental respect for property rights, and we of course want all of our students to have their belongings; nor do we have any interest in going through your personal belongings, taking or breaking your things, or mishandling your property,” Link wrote. “We want you all to have your things; but we have to go about

this, and everything, with the safety of our campus as our highest guiding principle.”

This is a developing story.

ORIGINAL STORY

The Allegheny College community received an email from Dean of Students April Thompson on Tuesday, May 5, outlining the procedure to collect and relocate student belongings that were left in dormitories, following the decision to proceed with remote instruction.

Volunteers from the college are set to pack and relocate student belongings starting on May 14. Arrangements have been made by college officials to ensure that students can monitor and direct the manner in which their belongings are packed and stored through Zoom and FaceTime sessions as well as telephone calls.

“One of the things that we had hoped in this process was that by being on FaceTime with the student and the packer, that the student can direct how they want the items packed,” Thompson said in a video conference with President Hilary Link and The Campus. “We will have bubble wrap and other accommodations so that if there are delicate objects, the student can give guidance about what is precious and what needs to be stored differently so that we can hopefully, in every possible scenario, avoid breakage, stealing and damage.”

Items in the student’s room will be inventoried and if any items are stolen or damaged, the college will implement its existing protocol to

handle the situation. This will be approached on a case-by-case basis and the student will be contacted by an administrator, regarding their insurance options.

Immediately following the release of the procedure, student Grace Bothwell, '23 began a petition to change the procedure disclosed in the email. Within hours of posting, the petition gained widespread support from a collection of more than 1500 students, parents and alumni. Students took to social media platforms to voice their concerns over the inability to personally retrieve their items.

“

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— ***Alexa Solomon, '23***

“I think that the college should have given the students the option to come and retrieve our belongings prior to this due to the financial burden associated with shipping costs,” said Alexa Solomon, '23. “I

think that they should take the current financial situation of each individual student into account, especially students from long distances, whose parents may have lost their incomes due to COVID-19.”

Returning students must absorb the costs associated with shipping their belongings back to their homes. Graduating seniors will have their belongings shipped at no cost. The option to have students’ belongings stored in their fall residences, however, was provided at no cost to the student.

“

We have asked students that, if they want items shipped, to be prepared to absorb those costs, but we also know that many families cannot do that right now, so if students need help with the financial aspect of the shipping, they should be in touch with us to apply for the Emergency Funds to help with shipping costs”

— ***Dean of Students April Thompson***

“We are able to pack and store belongings for absolutely free because we did not want to pass on unreasonable costs to students particularly at this time when we know families are suffering,” Thompson said. “We

have asked students that, if they want items shipped, to be prepared to absorb those costs, but we also know that many families cannot do that right now, so if students need help with the financial aspect of the shipping, they should be in touch with us to apply for the Emergency Funds to help with shipping costs.”

Students that would like to apply for the Emergency Response Funds should contact the Dean of Students Office.

Link indicated that the college would like to be able to re-open and proceed with in-person lectures for the fall semester. To ensure that this can occur, the college has assembled a team of senior staff, global health officials and alumni to devise any procedures that will impact the entire campus community. The email that was sent to the campus community on Tuesday was the result of a long series of deliberations that would offer the best possibility for the college to reopen next semester, according to Link.

“

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— ***President Hilary Link***

“The amount of contact and exposure that would occur by allowing everyone back to the campus is something that we deemed is not in our best interest,” Link said. “One must think about all of the doorknobs and all of the things that 1700 students plus anyone they bring with them to help pack will come into contact with, which will all become places of exposure.”

[According to the Meadville Tribune](#), Crawford County has had no recent positive COVID-19 cases and is expected to meet the Pennsylvania benchmark established by Governor Tom Wolf. The county remains in the red zone as mandated by Governor Wolf until it becomes one of the first counties in Pennsylvania to be moved into the yellow zone on May 8. Other counties in Pennsylvania will remain in the red zone as the state sees a spike in cases.

“We want to make decisions now and in the coming weeks and months that would preserve, to the best extent, the possibility of being able to reopen in the fall,” Link said. “We are prioritizing the health and physical and emotional safety of our campus community while acknowledging that there will inevitably be risks associated with any decision we make.

We want to create meaningful partnerships to protect the health and safety of and ensure the long and short term resilience of our local community as well.”

The plan to pack and relocate student belongings starting on May 14 is still in effect and will proceed as originally outlined in the email from Dean Thompson. In the event that students are unable to return to campus next semester, plans are being devised to make arrangements for shipping and delivering packed items to the students.

“These plans will depend on the Governor’s orders and where we are with the virus, if there is an opportunity to come get your belongings, then that certainly will occur but if there is not, we will talk about shipping and delivering the items because we do not want you to be without your stuff,” Thompson said. “I am going to continue to be very hopeful and optimistic that our students will be here and that when they move into their rooms, their belongings will be there waiting for them when they arrive.”

Link indicated that, later this evening, the campus community will receive clarification from the Office of the President, regarding the plan to handle student belongings.

“As people will read in the longer communication that will go out later today from my office, there is a very broad and well thought out context to how we arrived at this decision,” Link said. “While we recognize that we could have and should have framed our decision in the broader

context, we hope that once people are able to read and process the context that they will understand that we have all of their best interests at heart.”

This is a developing story.

About the Writer

Bree Gray,

2 Comments

2 Responses to “College to pack students’ remaining belongings and move to fall room or ship items home”

■ Laura Morseman on May 6th, 2020 11:15 pm



“Apply for aid” to help with the shipping cost? You mean like you “helped” get students tickets home and then after the fact told them they had to reimburse the college.

If I'm not mistaken Allegheny received money under the CARES act why not use those funds? Afterall, that's is what it is for, displaced students.

At first I was sad that my Freshman was so unhappy that she didn't want to return to Allegheny in the Fall but I am now starting to see the true colors of the college and it's not blue and gold.

Parents have offered up different ideas, including but not limited to, allowing the college to pack the room while face-timed as they said but then when items are brought down rather than loading to ship allowing the student to pick up curbside. No human contact, just a grab and go. No doorknobs touched.

■ Michelle Stephany on May 6th, 2020 11:58 pm



This is utterly ridiculous! Your county is open as of 5/8 so who are you to say these students cannot come and collect their stuff. Let alone the fact that you are letting strangers handle their belongings and we have to incur the cost to ship. We have large fans, televisions, etc. that would be astronomical to ship

but we need!!! How can these large universities, (Pitt & Penn State) accommodate their students coming on campus to collect their belongings but Allegheny College cannot.

Also, where are the students Care Act dollars???

Again other colleges are on the ball for their students but not Allegheny. Very disappointed!