



Recent High School Graduates Concerned About Fall Semester? Do *Year 1 at Home*

By Kevin Boys, President – Southern State Community College

The only thing to come on us as suddenly as the pandemic was something equally unexpected—the recession. With unemployment topping 16 percent in Ohio, the pandemic’s impact on our state’s economy will likely be significant and long. Fortunately, with Ohio’s opening back up, many businesses will begin to restart and rehire, but nothing will return to the way it was anytime soon.

The sudden changes we are all experiencing are especially difficult for those preparing to start college in the fall. Not only did graduating seniors have celebratory end-of-high school traditions pulled out from under them, but now, after saving, researching, decision-making and finally expecting to start college this fall, that seems far from certain.

Like us, the large, four-year residential colleges and universities are trying to figure out how to safely provide on-campus experiences and instruction and are beginning to announce those plans. One thing is certain, the cost of that experience is significant. And as much as we all plan, we also recognize there is uncertainty surrounding the possibility of a worsening scenario or “second wave” of COVID-19. The likelihood is great that, after all is said and done, many will be relying on online instruction for part of their course offerings.

If that is the case—or even a possibility—how can the high cost of that tuition be justified? I'd be hard pressed to answer that. After all, first-year general education courses are essentially the same at every two- and four-year institution in Ohio. Southern State is joining our state's other 22 community colleges to promote the idea that you consider Year 1 at Home.

It's an effort to remind incoming first-year students that the best option for getting their first year's general education courses under their belts at a low cost, in a safe setting, free of fears of what may or may not happen, is to enroll in their local community college for online instruction in the fall. Yes, we too, are planning to offer some classes on our campus, but even many of those classes will be offered in a hybrid fashion, with less time being spent on campus and some time via remote tools. As a result of the CARES Act, we even have limited funds available to assist students with some technology, hotspots, or WIFI access.

Ohio's community colleges are built for the ease, convenience and support of students. We know how to work around students' needs and the biggest need they have right now is certainty, and that's something we can supply.

Credits can be easily transferred later to four-year institutions once the public health situation has stabilized and, and we all agree, the sooner the better.

In addition to the certainty, convenience and low cost of *Year 1 at Home* at Southern State Community College, perhaps its most important benefit is this: students stay on track with their college careers. I've heard that more students than usual are thinking about taking a "gap year." Losing momentum in education can derail even the most qualified, motivated student. Don't let the pandemic or the uncertainty of the fall be a barrier to acquiring the skills that will be essential to being a competitive candidate in a tight job market.

There are too many things right now clouding our individual and collective futures. When we have the chance to find certainty, therefore, we should grab it. It makes the way forward that much easier on other fronts. Education is too important to leave to the unknown, but *Year 1 at Home* can provide the certainty students need to keep their college plans moving forward. Don't get me wrong. If your plan is to attend a residential college and university to earn a bachelor's degree, I hope you do just that and even more. After all, I have degrees from three of Ohio's public and private universities. This fall, it just makes sense to join us for Year 1 at Home!

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