

**Local and Global Engagement  
to Advance Racial Justice:**

*Faculty Engaging with Communities  
During the Multiple Pandemics*

An Archive of Community-Engaged  
Faculty Spotlights 2020–2021

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**OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**



# Local and Global Engagement to Advance Racial Justice: Faculty Engaging with Communities During the Multiple Pandemics

An Archive of Community-Engaged  
Faculty Spotlights 2020–2021

Office of Community Partnerships  
UMass Boston



## INTRODUCTION

The Office of Community Partnerships is guided by values of employing racial equity and social justice at the core of all our work while engaging in collaborative, inclusive, and community-centered approaches, practicing an ethic of care in our relationships and community building, and raising the strengths, knowledge, and experiences that stem from communities. Amidst the challenges of the multiple pandemics, our faculty have continued to engage and build on their partnerships with communities locally and globally. Our office collected these faculty profiles for our monthly newsletter in the 2020–2021 academic year and decided to share these with you through this special publication.

Our faculty at UMass Boston have shown extraordinary leadership in community engagement amidst the multiple ongoing pandemics. The continuity of this work has been possible through the long-term bonds that they established and nurtured with reciprocity, trust, and care over the years. In this publication, we have featured faculty who have integrated racial justice into their research, teaching, and service through partnerships spanning local and national boundaries across a diversity of fields. Their work includes centering the cultural heritage of indigenous and immigrant communities in Boston; empowering families of minoritized students with disabilities; supporting community-led educational justice movements; breaking down silos between the university and community to advocate for immigrant workers' rights and international engagement with communities for promoting community music programs, sports, and education among youth; advocating for environmental health and justice; and uplifting Black history and social movements.

In these extraordinary times, we hope these stories of ongoing commitment to our communities amidst the crises inspire and resonate with those already doing or hoping to do similar work. The multiple pandemics remind us that it is impossible to survive and thrive in these times without standing together and, as Maya Angelou asked of us, “to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.” Our faculty featured here stand testimony to this value through their exemplary work over the years. We hope these stories will reignite our hope and reactivate our collective resilience to keep moving forward courageously, standing with our communities locally and globally. It is through the leadership of faculty like those featured in this publication that UMass Boston can truly be a “Communiversity” that furthers its antiracist and health-promoting agenda, as our Chancellor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco has emphasized since the beginning of his leadership.

Cynthia K. Orellana  
Director, Office of Community Partnerships

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## Advancing Racial Justice Through Spatial Justice with Indigenous and Caribbean Immigrant Communities in Boston

[Ping-Ann Addo](#) is an associate professor of anthropology in the College of Liberal Arts at UMass Boston. For the past decade, Addo has been investigating how local politics and cultural identities articulate the artistic and community-building work of the Caribbean immigrant community in Boston. Focusing on a host of activities related to bringing out their annual Caribbean Carnival festival and parade, she uses her perspective as an immigrant person in Boston to do what she calls fieldwork and “job-work.” Addo focuses on spatial relationships by asking how reciprocity can be valued in interactions between the university, its students, and local Indigenous and immigrant communities at the place of the university.

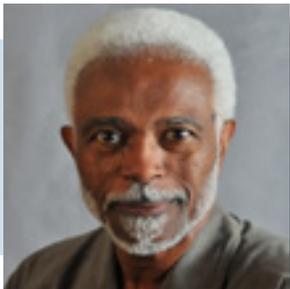
In her courses, she shares knowledge about indigenous efforts for reclaiming space in Boston and environs as First Nations people through guest lectures, having indigenous people show their films and tell their stories, and humanize and correct myths about their communities. She and her colleagues in [Native American and Indigenous studies](#) and at the Institute for [New England Native American Studies](#) hold such spaces for indigenous scholars, activists, food growers, artists, and elders to keep the university accountable in its obligation to honor the land on which it sits by making that space available to indigenous people to gather, share, and learn. “I want to remind you that this is Native Land. We are still here....and we will continue to be here,” shared Anne Foxx, a Mashpee Wampanoag elder who has been a guest lecturer in Addo’s anthropology courses. Addo reflects on her identity frames—as activist, teacher, scholar, and community member—that “require a push at the boundaries of class privilege, especially when the researcher and her university share a backyard. I cannot call myself truly community engaged unless I am willing to use my pedagogical gifts and institutional position to narrow some of the opportunity gaps between the community and the institution where I have power. I have learned that living in the shadow of a university with limited access creates a conceptual and confidence gulf much wider than a few miles of physical distance.”



Photo: Michael C. Smith, [Carnival and Steelpan at Boston Public Library](#)

Addo urges Caribbean immigrant students to support efforts toward greater visibility for Indigenous peoples, and at UMass Boston, she creates spaces in her classrooms for them to teach about topics related to her research, such as experiences with costume making; with being raced, classed, and gendered in a majority-white space in Boston; and how it felt both alienating and yet so routine for her as a Person of Color. “Such stories are wisdoms that other students gain from their classmates,” shares Addo. “I cannot offer these because I don’t live their lives. What I do carry is obligations: to look out for the community’s youth as an educational mentor. At any one time, several youth from my field site might be enrolled at UMass Boston, some of them seeking me out for academic advice and a sense of familiarity—that I was one of them.”

# 2

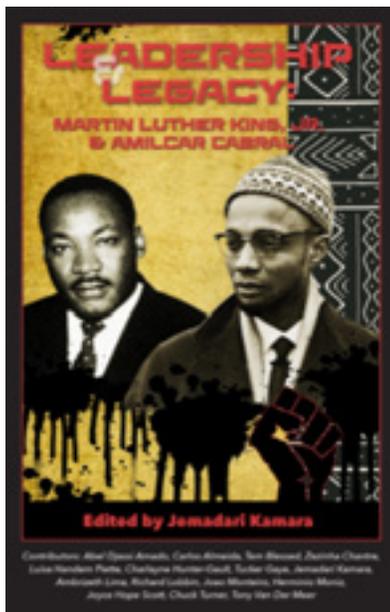


## Nurturing Lasting Community-University Partnerships with “Glocal” Communities of African Descent

**Jemadari Kamara** is an associate professor of Africana studies in the College of Liberal Arts and the director of the Center for African, Caribbean, and Community Development at UMass Boston. He believes that community-based programming and partnerships are central to the mission of the Africana Studies Department and linked to its “raison d’etre.” Further, connecting with “glocal” communities of African descent and “building lasting relationships that integrate their needs and relationships into the fabric of our institutional programming” has been part of the department’s vision,” says Kamara. “International relationships can follow after a base of trust and respect is established.”

Over two decades through a community-university partnership, Kamara and his colleagues in Africana studies have commemorated the lives and leadership of two leaders whose histories are inextricably tied, he explains, “While Dr. King is

the only leader of African American descent for whom we celebrate a national holiday, Cabral was the leader of the movement that brought independence to Cabo Verde, the largest group of African descendent immigrants in our region.” Cabral was assassinated the same week of Dr. King’s birth. Using documents from the commemorative programs, soon to be released, “Leadership and Legacy: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Amilcar Cabral,” consists of creative knowledge and academic research based on mutual respect. Further, they accredited a course through the Africana Studies Department in the Cabo Verdean language by working with the newly established Cabo Verdean Center for Applied Research (CVCAR) to enrich community partnership with local public schools.



As the director of the Center for African, Caribbean, and Community Development, Kamara worked with Charlie Titus, former Vice Chancellor of Athletics, Recreation and Special Programs, to establish an intra-institutional collaboration and a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Ecole Professionnelle Specialisee (EPS)



– La Cite Vie Nouvelle in Cotonou, Benin. Building capacity through expanding athletic, technical, educational, and entrepreneurial activities was an essential part of their mission. However, breaking the institutional barriers between academia and other units was most important in establishing the foundation for institutionalizing global partnership with the MOU. The [Youth Education and Sports \(YES\) with Africa program](#) is a result of this collaboration. As part of this ongoing work, in 2019, Kamara’s team co-hosted an international conference in Benin with EPS on “Education, Conscious Entrepreneurship, and Socially Responsible Development” with participants from Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and the USA to dialogue their stances on issues pertinent to the regional development prospects.



In 2021, the YES program in Benin, West Africa, was coordinating its fourth successful Martin Luther King, Jr. International Commemorative Basketball Tournament despite the pandemic, which has been much less severe in West Africa than in the United States. EPS, their partner in Benin, stated, “Trophies and prizes from our local and international partners were awarded to the winners.

Sport is a priority integration tool because it naturally carries with it values of respect, tolerance, and effort. Sport has no borders, and it unites communities. We anticipate hosting the fifth Martin Luther King, Jr. Tournament scheduled for January 15, 2022.”

# 3



## Engaging and Empowering Chinese Immigrant Families of Students with Disabilities

**Lusa Lo** is an associate professor of special education in the College of Education and Human Development at UMass Boston. Her research focuses on family-school-community partnerships and educational planning and practice for language minority students with disabilities. Through her work in the Greater Boston area, Lo noticed that there were many parent support groups for English-speaking families of children with disabilities, but none for Chinese immigrant families. These families needed support and connection with others who shared their cultural background and spoke the same language. One Chinese immigrant parent of two children with autism said,

“在整個社區我都不知道可以去找誰幫忙, 我的英語不好, 根本都不懂得法律又不懂得怎樣去幫我們的小孩爭取他們需要的服務。”

(Translation: “In the entire community, I don’t know who to ask for help. My English is not good. We don’t know the law and how to help our children with disabilities to get the services they need.”)

In 2012, Lo founded a parent support group that specifically serves this population that now has over 70 Chinese immigrant families. Prior to the pandemic, the group met monthly and discussed issues such as challenges they encountered in their child’s individualized education program (IEP) meetings and how to navigate the guardianship process. A parent of a child with intellectual impairment commented,

“現在參加了這個群, 認識了其他的中國家長以及上了你的課, 我現在對IEP比較了解, 也知道我應有的權利。”

(Translation: “Now that I have joined this group, met other Chinese speaking parents, and attended your training, I know more about the IEP I also know my rights.”)

Since the pandemic, the work to support the parent group has not stopped. They now meet virtually. The parents also stay connected through WeChat, and they post messages to the group and seek help whenever questions or concerns arise. They also share new resources, training, and/or workshops with each other.



When schools suddenly moved from in-person to remote learning in March 2020, many Chinese parents were lost. While the use of Google web services and applications, such as Google Classroom and Google Docs, were commonplace to educators, they were foreign to many Chinese families.

Lo views this work “as a lifetime commitment. There are still many families who are underserved and/or unserved. All of us are aware of the importance of family engagement. However, without equipping these families with the knowledge and skills they need, they would have difficulty serving as schools’ equal partners. When schools, community, and families work together, the ones who benefit are our children with disabilities.”



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## Making the University Accessible to the Community and the Community to the University

**Tim Sieber** and **Natalicia R. Tracy** have played an instrumental role in building a partnership between UMass Boston and the Brazilian Worker Center (BWC) that started in 2006 and was formally inaugurated in a MOU signed in 2012. Tim Sieber is a professor of anthropology in the College of Liberal Arts at UMass Boston and has been at the university since 1974. Natalicia R. Tracy is the executive director of the BWC since 2010 and has been a lecturer in sociology and labor studies in the College of Liberal Arts at UMass Boston since 2011. Based in Boston's Allston neighborhood and serving all of Greater Boston, the BWC was founded in 1995 to educate and support immigrant workers in their struggle to secure labor and immigration rights.

Sieber met Tracy in 2002 when she was an undergraduate student in his class. In 2008, Sieber joined the BWC's board and continued to work with Tracy, both as a community partner and a UMass Boston colleague. Tracy explains the importance



of the partnership: "[It] allows the university to become accessible to the community, and the community to the university," thus benefiting both. "For new immigrants to the United States, they mostly think of the university as a place where, if they work hard, their children and grandchildren may gain access in succeeding generations.

Partnerships like ours, however, through offering training, education, workshops, events, and opportunities for university personnel to collaborate in solving community problems, bring immigrant communities more fully into the university right now," Tracy says. Together they have raised over \$3 million in grants to support

the community work of the BWC. Meanwhile, several UMass Boston students have found placements at the BWC through internships. "The community in turn offers opportunities for applied work, for connecting the theoretical with the practical, and for seeing how knowledge can be used for human betterment," shares Tracy.



Tracy and Sieber have published and presented several community-based participatory research projects between UMass Boston and the BWC on immigrant labor issues, particularly concerning domestic workers. Jose Venancio, president of the Board of Directors of the BWC, shares, "We feel especially encouraged to be part of community-based participatory research projects that UMass Boston brings that we know will affect policy decisions that benefit our community." Additionally, the BWC through Tracy, has engaged in several large National Institutes of Health research projects at UMass Boston, including "Aqui-La: Transnationalism, Culture and Health, and Outreach to Address Cancer Disparities: Engaging Community Partners and Leveraging Evidence," as part of the [U54 Partnership](#) at UMass Boston. Sieber reflects on the importance of this work: "I believe that the natural history of knowledge reaches fruition in its application to bringing more justice and well-being to people in our communities, the nation, and the wider world. It is thus an opportunity and a privilege for the university to be able to fulfill our destiny by partnering with heroic organizations, like the BWC, who are engaged in struggling for these same ends. We have a lot to offer one another in our common strivings."

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## Partnering with the Community for Environmental Health and Justice

[Lorena Estrada-Martinez](#) is an assistant professor of environment and public health in the School for the Environment at UMass Boston. She has been working on community health and racial and ethnic health inequities for over 20 years. Prior to joining UMass Boston, she was a community organizer on affordable housing and immigrant rights for the Association for Community Organization and Reform Now! (ACORN) in New York and worked as a teacher and counselor at the alternative school Nuestra Escuela in Puerto Rico. These experiences of working with communities led her to pursue doctoral and postdoctoral studies in public health.

Estrada-Martínez’s research uses life-course and ecological frameworks to understand racial and ethnic health inequities. Her work has centered on how community and family-based dynamics impact the short- and long-term risk for behavioral and mental health outcomes among minority youth, with emphasis on Latinx populations.



Most recently, she [received an \\$800,000 three-year grant](#) from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to conduct the study titled **“Community Driven Assessment of Environmental Health Risks in Vieques, Puerto Rico”** by working with the community to study the contamination of “the soil, seas, plant, animal,

and human population of Vieques” due to the 60-plus years of U.S. military occupation and exercises that included gunfire, bombing, artillery testing, and chemical and biological weapons and materials potentially left behind like lithium, perchlorate, TNT, napalm, and depleted uranium. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, she was able to engage an advisory board, a team of student researchers, and a Community Academic Steering Committee (CASC) with 14 organizations and individuals in Vieques, Puerto Rico, and developed a website for project participants. Nilda Medina, president of Incubadora Microempresas Bieke (Bieke Microenterprise Incubator), a community organization that works toward families’ economic development on the island, emphasized (*translated from Spanish*) “the importance of supporting projects that give us back the healthy environment that we had before the bombings for 60 years on our island. Working toward that goal in conjunction with the UMass Boston team gives us hope that our community will have an environment appropriate for our families in the future.”

Estrada-Martínez shares her personal connection to this study: “In 1999—when I was in college—the U.S. Navy dropped a bomb out of its intended target and killed the private security guard David Sanes Rodriguez. This event ignited civil disobedience and an international protest movement that concluded with the Navy’s exit from Vieques in 2003. I was a member of student groups that participated in these protests, and bearing witness was a significant catalyst for my academic and career choices. In truth, the movement had started long before 1999 and had been led by a community that had lived many decades against the whim of an entity that had usurped their land, waters, livelihood, and health. It has always been these examples of courage and conviction that have inspired me to continue the work.”

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## Engaging with Diverse Black Communities Locally and Globally, Centered in Black Internationalism and Social Movements

**Quito Swan** is a professor of Africana studies in the College of Liberal Arts and the director of the William Monroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture at UMass Boston. Since he joined UMass Boston in February 2020, Swan has supported Boston-based groups such as Mass Action Against Police Brutality and Black Boston in their efforts against police brutality and is building partnerships with groups such as King Boston and Higher Ground Boston's CrossOver Community Dialogues. In conjunction with the Collaborative of Asian American, Native American, Latino and African American (CANALA) Institutes, he is working with Boston Public School (BPS) officials and schoolteachers from BTU Ethnic Studies Now to implement Africana studies into the BPS curriculum. Prior to joining UMass Boston, Swan obtained his PhD in African Diaspora history from Howard University in 2005 and taught there until 2019. Immersed in an HBCU culture, he emerged from a mission-oriented scholar-activist tradition to produce critical scholarship in support of, and informed by, the broader struggles of Black communities.

Born and raised in the British colony of Bermuda, his interest in the history of the African Diaspora stemmed from wanting to know more about the island's Black radical tradition. In 2009, in collaboration with the Pauulu Kamarakafego Grass-roots Collective (PKGK), he co-organized a conference on Black Power in Bermuda. Latoya Bridgewater from PKGC says, "Bermuda, Africa, America, and the South Pacific—Quito has traveled the world so that he can bring home the stories of our people. Much like Pauulu Kamarakafego, Quito has been the bridge that connects our 21-square-mile island to the rest of the Black world."



In March 2020, Swan was commissioned by the government of Bermuda as a historical expert for its Commission of Inquiry into Historic Land Losses in the island caused by hotel development (in the 1920s) and the construction of U.S.

military bases (in the 1940s). Eight months of research, conducted amidst the challenges of COVID-19, found that these property seizures dispossessed predominantly Black communities to accommodate White elites, segregated tourist resorts, and the U.S. military. In October 2020, he [presented his 85-page report](#) before a public tribunal, assembled to determine if these communities are due reparations.

At Howard, he advised student groups such as Cimarrones and Students Against Mass Incarceration (SAMi). Working in collaboration with the DC-based Venezuelan embassy, ROA (Afro-Venezuelan Network) and the Universidad de Barlovento, Cimarrones built a Howard-Afro Venezuelan exchange program.

SAMi emerged out of their letter-writing initiative with incarcerated Black political prisoners who were victims of the FBI's COINTELPRO program. Swan also established chess programs, including Chess Girls DC and the Sankofa Homeschool Collective in Washington, DC.



Building networks with Black scholars who are navigating the precarious and often racist road of academia, Swan supports and participates in many Black associations and is the author of Pauulu's *Diaspora: Black Internationalism and Environmental Justice*, [selected by the African American Intellectual History Society \(AAIHS\) as one of the best Black history books of 2020](#).

# 7



## Supporting Educational Justice Movements with Community Voices

**Mark R. Warren**, a professor of public policy and public affairs in the McCormack Graduate School at UMass Boston, has been studying and working with community organizing groups focused on racial equity and educational justice for over 25 years. Warren's work focuses on analyzing community organizing processes to help lift up the voices of organizers, parents, and students of color, documenting their important work and demonstrating the impact of grassroots organizing and educational justice movements to make equity-oriented policy and practice. He connects his scholarship to his teaching in the Public Policy PhD program at UMass Boston.



Warren has written four books, many academic articles, and a variety of more practical products from his community-engaged research. His latest published book is [\*Lift Us Up, Don't Push Us Out! Voices from the Front Lines of the Educational Justice Movement\*](#), in which he helped

grassroots organizers and activists tell their own stories, lift up their strategies and share the lessons of some of the most important educational justice work of the past 15 years. "It was exciting because, instead of me doing the writing, I used my skills and resources to assist others to write their own essays. These folks usually don't have a voice in the academic and literary world," says Warren. Zakiya Sankar-Jabar, co-founder of Racial Justice NOW! in Dayton and one of the authors in the book, became a community organizer when her 3-year-old African American son was repeatedly suspended and expelled from preschools. Speaking about the opportunity to be included in the book, she said, "Black parents like me need to speak up about what we know, what our needs are, what our demands are, and how we can make schools work for our children."



Warren is currently writing a book on grassroots organizing and movement building to combat the school-to-prison pipeline. Black parents and students in the Mississippi Delta were among the first to name the school-to-prison pipeline and collaborated to end harsh and racist discipline and policing practices at a time when it seemed no one was paying any attention. Recently, many of Warren's community partners were able to defund school police in several districts across the country as part of the mass protests against police violence as they had been organizing for police-free schools for many years and took advantage of the opening to finally win their demands.

Warren shares his vision, "I always rejected the hierarchy of knowledge that places academics (often white and male like me) at the top. I believe that this kind of hierarchy devalues community knowledge and forms part of the larger system of racial and class domination that keeps Black, Indigenous, and communities of color poor and lacking in power. I believe that by working together, we can create the kind of knowledge and a broad and diverse movement capable of transforming oppressive institutions and promoting liberatory education and a more democratic society."





## Building Bridges with Community Partners for Music Education in Greater Boston and Palestine

**Sommer Forrester** is an assistant professor of music in the College of Liberal Arts at UMass Boston. When she started at UMass Boston, she was new to the Boston area. Through her outreach and conversations with teachers, artists, musicians, and stakeholders in the area, she learned about what is happening in the community, got to know individual schools, programs, and began to realize the types of partnerships that would support local programs, while creating rich opportunities for UMass Boston students. In creating these partnerships, she worked alongside community partners to co-create, plan, and design a project and, once established, shifted to becoming a facilitator to create space for the students and community partners to have a shared role and voice in the project as it moves forward.



Forrester's students have been engaged in service-learning projects with Boston Public Schools and community partners such as Youth and Family Enrichment Services (YoFES). In 2016, she

designed and taught the course Sociocultural Perspectives in Music Education in an effort to provide preservice teachers with a course experience that was dedicated to exploring sociological theory, norms, order, power structure, and critical issues in music education. While the initial launch of this course was successful in that students were engaged and experienced growth, deep down she felt that something was missing. In spring 2019, the Practitioner Scholars Program (PSP) pilot presented the opportunity to enhance and augment this course by co-planning and co-teaching with YoFES Executive Director Mishella Etienne-Campbell, an accomplished singer and public speaker, and a UMass Boston alumna. Etienne-Campbell says, "Through this class, YoFES benefited from having six additional teachers for two months to work in our music program with youth."

Forrester's connection and interest in community-engaged work extends beyond the Boston area. She received a research grant from the Office of Global Partnerships and the College of Liberal Arts Research Award to support her community-engaged work. She taught at a summer intensive music enrichment workshop with students from the Edward Said Conservatory of Music in Ramallah, Palestine, that involved staging a musical production with Palestinian student musicians and working with teachers and musicians from William Patterson University and the Metropolitan Opera Guild in New York City. In addition, she worked with an all-female choir in East Jerusalem and on outreach programs that are designed for children who live in refugee camps. As a scholar of music teacher education, she strives to deepen the connections between higher education, pre- and in-service teachers, and community partners.



Forrester shares a message for faculty interested in this work: "Community-engaged work starts with looking outward to the people, organizations, and networks who contribute to the social fabric of the broader community. Building bridges with community partners requires a vulnerability and a willingness for faculty to reexamine the commonplace practices that are the bedrock of teaching within

higher education, particularly surrounding roles, hierarchy, and voice. A central and defining component of community-engagement initiatives is reciprocity and trust."

## **About OCP**

The Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) was created in 2011 to serve as a gateway and resource hub for partnerships and as a connector and strategic coordinator of the university's engagement. The goal is to better align our campus's engagement efforts, understand and recognize the impact, and support the needs of our external communities. OCP seeks to identify, strengthen, and support the creation of collaborative community partnerships that advance our mission as Boston's public research university.

### **OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

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