UMass Boston’s First-Ever Mellon Foundation Grant ($515K) for the Humanities

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and a long-time faculty member, I am pleased to share this exciting special announcement with you before its release to the media.

UMass Boston has received its first-ever grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the nation’s largest humanities funder, in the amount of $515,000 to implement an ambitious, three-year program, “High Impact Humanities: Connecting Curriculum, Community, and Careers for Student Success.” This initiative will provide undergraduates with opportunities to engage in humanities-focused research, experiential coursework, internships, and civic engagement as a path to student success and career development.

High Impact Humanities will establish a “Humanities Incubator” on campus which will produce programming that breaks down traditional barriers among curricular, extracurricular, and career-focused learning and promotes student engagement with Boston as a humanities hub. The Humanities Incubator will provide faculty with financial, administrative, and informational resources to create new courses employing best practices in student-engaged learning. In addition to expanding on successful first-year courses in CLA-First! focused on the city of Boston, the Incubator aims to develop an upper-level curriculum that helps students experience—through site visits, hands-on research, and museum and library partnerships—the dynamic creativity, analytical thinking, and cultural engagement central to the humanities. The Incubator will offer seed funding and pedagogical training for this innovative humanities teaching. It will also institute “Careers in Humanities” courses and internships, and develop a “High Impact Humanities Forum,” featuring a student-advisory group that will plan arts and humanities events on campus. There will also be mentoring support for undergraduate research and writing in the humanities.

As the humanities are essential to our undergraduate education program, this initiative will impact all undergraduates and their experiences with the humanities. It will give them active ownership of the skills fostered by the humanities that are in-demand by employers: critical thinking, creative expression, and applied skills (communication, problem solving, and teamwork).

Building on the progress we’ve made in growing our student retention and graduation rates, this initiative recognizes that academic program innovation in the humanities will play a critical role in the next phase of our work to advance student success. The program’s ultimate goal is to stimulate academic engagement that will increase our undergraduates’ persistence, degree completion, and interest in post-graduate education.

The Mellon Foundation grant is a tremendous honor for UMass Boston. In addition to investing in our undergraduates, the award recognizes our accomplished faculty and their commitment to
teaching and research. I look forward to the new forms of engaged learning we will create for our students. In transforming the teaching of the humanities to our diverse student population, we have the capacity to develop a national model for best practices in humanities programming for our country’s increasingly diverse student population.

I would like to acknowledge the colleagues who contributed to our successful proposal, beginning with Interim Chancellor Mills who championed this effort from the outset and provided a terrific endorsement. I’m grateful to my colleagues on our cross-campus High Impact Humanities proposal design team for their creative and collaborative input over many months. Our group included: Vice Provost for Academic Support Services Joan Becker, Associate Provost Cheryl Nixon, Performing Arts Department Chair and Associate Professor David Pruitt, Director of the Office of Career Services and Internships Mark Kenyon, Director of Community Partnerships Cynthia Orellana, CLA Grants Manager Barbara Matteau, and Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations Ellen Fleming.

In the coming weeks, as we put the pieces in place to launch High Impact Humanities, I’ll have further details to share about the program and opportunities for faculty and student engagement with the CLA community.

In the meantime, let’s take a moment to celebrate this exciting milestone for UMass Boston!

Sincerely,

David Terkla
Dean, College of Liberal Arts