On March 11, Commonwealth Diversity Fellows convened at an informal brown bag lunch at the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth on Beacon Hill. Policy and Program Director Maria Gonzalez invited this year’s cohort of students to share their fellowship experiences with guest speakers Ron Marlow and Sandra Borders. Marlow, recently appointed as the Undersecretary for Workforce Development at the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, inspired the new cohort of students to consider a life in public service. With over thirty years of experience working in state government and public service, he reflected on his life’s work with the new fellows. “Massachusetts is one of only a few states formed as a commonwealth—meaning we are working towards the common good.” Marlow led an open discussion about striving for leadership and his determination to push for increasing opportunities for the state’s underserved populations. When asked to share why one should consider a life in public service, he noted that we must work toward equal rights in a state that is “connected by all of us.” A desire to have relevance beyond friends and family drove him to continue working in the public sector throughout his career. Meeting with the fellows, he discussed the need to allow for a “diversity of thought.” By continuing his work in the public sector, he would like to ensure that a foundation is established and that policies will continue to reflect the needs of the population they serve.

The Commonwealth Diversity Fellows Program (CDFP) offers a select group of outstanding and highly motivated individuals the opportunity to experience firsthand the administration of state government in the Commonwealth. Established in 2011, the CDFP was created for the purpose of offering exceptional and diverse students a semester-long internship through which the students can gain work experience and critical insight into the workings of the public sector. Students enrolled in the College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) and the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) may apply to the program each fall for the following spring semester. CDFP was modeled on the White House Fellows Program, founded in 1964, by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The White House program provided an opportunity to offer exceptional young men and women first-hand experience in supporting the initiatives of the federal government cabinets. State Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity’s Director Sandra Borders reflected on how the idea for CDFP developed. In 2008, she reached out to Marlow to discuss modeling a new fellowship program for university students at the state level. Borders felt the program should be more than just an internship. As a fellowship, individuals who were young in age or work experience would gain hands-on experience at the cabinet level in Massachusetts government. A subsequent partnership emerged among the offices of Commonwealth Compact, the Office of Access and Opportunity and CPCS Professor Carroy “Cuf”
Ferguson who coordinated with them to offer the program to students at UMass Boston. Since 2011, the program has made inroads into new agencies such as the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council to respond to student interest and address the need to advance their professional development. This year a student was placed at the Soldiers’ Home in Chelsea, while other CPCS and CLA students will spend the semester at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services; the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development; the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council; the Executive Office of Health and Human Services/Department of Public Health, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and the office of Senator Michael Moore. To apply for the fellowship, students must submit a sample professional policy memo for an agency senior staffer in a desired department.

Borders, who is excited by the inroads made into new areas of the public sector, feels that this highly motivated cohort will be influential in securing future cabinet placements garnered with a fresh new outlook at working towards the common good.

For more information about the Commonwealth Diversity Fellows Program, visit http://www.commonwealthdiversityfellows.com

Commonwealth Diversity Fellows Program
offers a select group of outstanding and highly motivated individuals the opportunity to experience firsthand the administration of state government in the Commonwealth.

Established in 2011, the Commonwealth Diversity Fellows Program was created for the purposes of offering exceptional and diverse students a semester-long internship through which the students can gain work experience and critical insight into the workings of the public sector.

CDFP is open to students enrolled in the College of Public and Community Service and the College of Liberal Arts.

For more information about academic and professional development programs at CPCS

Visit our website: www.cpcs.umb.edu or call 617.287.7100