August 13, 2020

Dear Members of the UMass Boston Community,

The focus of this week’s letter from the Academic Continuity Task Force (ACTF) is inquiry. As we continue to transform the university in preparation for an equitable start of the new academic year, this letter shares more specific updates about how courses will function as well as resources that are available and being developed for students, staff, and faculty.

We gratefully appreciate the input and feedback from the campus community through emails, form submissions, and the second listening session. The third ACTF listening session is scheduled for Thursday, August 27, from 10:00-11:30 am (details to follow). In the meantime, we encourage the campus community to continue sharing concerns, questions, input, and feedback with us via emails to ACTF@umb.edu, or contributed input anonymously through the ACTF form.

Valuing Inquiry, Creativity, and Discovery in the Context of Pandemics

Maintaining our focus on commitment to action, in this week’s letter, we would like to focus on another facet of the official mission and values of our university: Inquiry. UMass Boston is dedicated to being “responsive to the call of diverse disciplines, schools of thought, and public constituencies, we expect and welcome divergent views, honoring our shared commitment to expanding, creating, and disseminating knowledge.” Our challenge now is to uphold this in the midst of two interrelated crises: the new COVID-19 health pandemic and the centuries-old pandemic of systemic racial inequities that have defined the nation since its inception and which now have been intensified by the health pandemic. The ACTF has taken our university’s commitment to inquiry and the context of these pandemics into consideration. We are working in collaboration with many offices across campus to
prepare for and engage in just and equitable education, which should be the core purpose of what animates inquiry at our university.

**On- and Off-Campus Courses, Preparing for Classes, and Support for Students**

The university will follow a hybrid format that includes some face-to-face courses and remote instruction for most courses. On-campus courses have taken into consideration requirements for licensure competencies needed to be obtained using on-campus facilities, legal requirements for some international students to have face-to-face classes, and the carrying capacity of the campus. The following 15 courses will have both face-to-face (on campus) and remote components:

1. NURS 220 – Health Assessment
2. NURS 226 – Introduction to Nursing Practice
3. NURS 310 – Adult Health Nursing
4. NURS 335 – Maternity and Women’s Health Nursing
5. NURS 615 – Advanced Health Assessment Practicum
6. NURS 435 – Nursing Care of Children
7. NURS 455 – Nursing Synthesis and Capstone
8. EHS 300 – Health Fitness Assessment
9. BIOCHM 385 – Biochemistry Lab 1
10. CHEM 313 – Analytical Chemistry Laboratory
11. CHEM 351/651 - Organic Qualitative Analysis Lab
12. ENGIN 104 - Introduction to Electrical and Computer Engineering
13. PHYSIC 607 – Experiments in Squishy Physics
14. ENVSCI 317 - Coastal and Marine Pollution Laboratory
15. ENVSCI 187S – First Year Seminar in Environmental Science 1

Most courses will be conducted in remote instructional mode. The majority of these, which are already marked REMOTE in WISER, now have Class Notes attached for students to find more specific information about modality and technology information that will be needed for different courses and class sections. Students can find required and recommended textbooks and materials at the [UMass Boston](https://t.e2ma.net/message/g2pw3g/4k4iz9f)
**Bookstore**, which has been inputting orders being submitted by faculty for courses for the fall semester.

We take seriously that, to achieve the vision of inquiry, creativity, and discovery for all students, “access without support is not opportunity” (SpeakOut Institute). The ACTF would like to remind all students, staff, and faculty of several initiatives on campus that are designed to provide direct support to many students.

- The deadline for applying in the second application window for CARES Act student emergency aid funds for students who are eligible for federal financial aid is August 14 at 5 p.m. More information can be found in an email sent to all students on July 27, or in this communication sent to faculty and staff.
- The **Beacon Student Emergency Aid** fund is available for students who have qualifying expenses and are not eligible for federal financial aid to apply for support raised through philanthropy.
- The RESPOND Initiative has been activated to provide one-on-one peer coaching to support students who are struggling in their courses. Referrals can be made by faculty and staff, and self-referrals are also accepted, through this [form](#).

Resources4U has collected many other resources specifically for students, as well as an electronic resource to help with campus questions and concerns of students.

**Support for Staff and Faculty**

The core function of educating students and animating their inquiry is carried out by UMass Boston’s magnificently dedicated staff and faculty, nearly all of whom have been working remotely to sustain our academic enterprise. Most have made do without ideal furniture and equipment. To complement the July 25 campus communication that employees are now able to retrieve from campus certain equipment, supplies, and materials that will support their remote work (the new temporary policy can be found [here](#)), the ACTF is pleased to convey that IT has developed a system that will allow faculty and staff to borrow a new computer (Dell and Apple laptops, Dell desktops, and monitors) to support their remote work. It is our understanding that supervisors will be asked to provide names of faculty and staff who may need this equipment, which will be loaned based on availability after proper paperwork has been completed.
Because “access without support is not opportunity,” the ACTF is contributing to the development and offering of a number of professional development opportunities to support faculty in planning for and enacting equitable remote instruction. The Teach Fall 2020 website is more fully populated now with ways to connect with IT support, guidelines on student engagement, assessment and academic integrity, effective practices, tools for teaching, and professional development events. Recent past events with recordings available on this website include webinars on engaging students remotely and supporting students' well-being remotely. An webinar and workshop on synchronous and asynchronous approaches for active remote learning took place on August 11 and 12. Additional events are being planned around effective use of Zoom, developing course content, and services offered by the Ross Center. In addition, the ACTF and College of Science and Mathematics have begun a STEM Educational Excellence program specifically for CSM faculty (who will find details in an email from Dean Robin Côté) that will include a series of three interactive workshops on consecutive Fridays beginning August 14. These workshops aim to provide immediate resources for faculty to implement in planning for equity, crafting learning environments in remote instruction to work for students who are under greater stresses, and designing equitable remote assessment approaches.

We are honored to be serving UMass Boston and look forward to keeping you engaged with our work as it progresses. Please be well, safe, strong, and resolute as we navigate these unprecedented times together and strive to be, both in our planning and our practice, a just, equitable, and inclusive community.

Sincerely,
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