August 25, 2020

Dear Members of the UMass Boston Community,

The focus of this week’s letter from the Academic Continuity Task Force (ACTF) is urban commitment. As Chancellor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco has said:

“In these times of great uncertainty, suffering, and economic upheaval, under my leadership the University of Massachusetts Boston will endeavor to be the university of and for the city and the university of and for the times. The times call for an education to nurture that which is true (logic), that which is good (justice/ethics), and that which is beautiful (aesthetics). Creating a more inclusive, just, and sustainable world is education’s urgent challenge.”

Our Urban Commitment

In this week’s letter, we would like to focus on another facet of the official mission and values of our university: our urban commitment. The Carnegie Foundation has designated UMass Boston under a special classification, community-engaged, and indeed community engagement is part of the institutional identity of our university. We enact this by our “particular commitment to urban places, people, culture, and issues, and by an acknowledgement of their complex local, national, and global connections.” To engage in this commitment means partnering with institutions in the urban community “to create sustainable and healthy social fabrics, economies, service organizations, and civic and cultural institutions.” Never in the history of UMass Boston has there been a more important time to strengthen this commitment than now. The intense demands of remote teaching and learning are unprecedented, but the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic is fresh trauma, exacerbating centuries of injustice toward many who are served by and who serve at our university, further centers our urban mission.
Welcoming Students

A special honor each year is welcoming students to UMass Boston. This year is unique in welcoming a large number of new students who enter our classrooms in mostly remote modality during the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of efforts to undo systemic racism. To welcome new undergraduates who join the campus community, the ACTF shares excitement in the Beacon 2020 program that has four goals:

- To explore, imagine, and promote racial justice and social equity
- To build your UMass Boston community
- To become a successful Beacon
- To have fun and get connected

As a larger community, we embrace these goals also for new graduate students, and for continuing undergraduate and graduate students. The faculty and staff of Boston’s only public university look forward to supporting the success of all UMass Boston students.

Celebrating Communication and Resources

The updated coronavirus section of the umb.edu website opened on August 23, with campus updates, as well as resources for students, staff, and instructors to answer questions about how the campus is functioning in the fall semester. The ACTF and many, many others contributed to the communication and resources in this website section. You will also find many UMass Boston virtual backgrounds available for your use. Examples of excellent remote teaching are also available under Academics & Remote Learning, where you may even see some of your favorite classes!

Students: You will find resources for academics and remote learning, self-checklists for students who visit campus, updates on the library and research, health and mental wellness services and resources, as well as FAQs and other information, such as where international students can find updates on how to meet federal visa guidance, and how to find out what textbooks and other materials are needed for your classes. Normal campus operations continue but will have new modalities remotely. Comprehensive information on where to find these resources is available on the updated site.

Staff: You will find information on IT resources, library and research functioning, updates on travel policies, and self-checklists regarding health. There are also FAQs
with information on numerous topics, such as how to check out equipment and computers necessary for remote work and where to find resources for your own and others’ wellness.

**Instructors:** You will find information on how to support students in the ongoing and new challenges they will face in academic success. This includes how-to information about instructional technology, best practices for remote instruction, how to support students and direct resources for students, methods for accessing resources needed for research, meeting and event information, updates on travel policies, and health and safety checklists for visits to campus. There are also FAQs on a wide variety of topics, such as how to set up and operate remote instruction, how to help students access information in their courses, and the many ways to connect students to the various resources the university is making available for them to flourish and succeed.

In closing…

This is the final weekly update letter from the ACTF. There will be one more communication from the ACTF in September, with a report on what the ACTF accomplished and recommendations that the ACTF delivered to Interim Provost Emily McDermott. We thank members of the campus community who have entrusted the ACTF to serve the campus this summer and who have shared concerns, questions, input, and feedback with us that informed our work. Although ACTF communication lines are closing on August 28, we encourage students, staff, and instructors to continue communicating with each other. Open and constructive communication is essential to holistic care for each other through the unprecedented situation we face as we become a leading anti-racist university.

The core purpose of a university is to educate, and every single one of us is important to that mission. We are honored to have served UMass Boston this summer in the ACTF, and as we turn our attention to the fall semester ahead, we look forward to presenting our final report to you soon. 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,

Joseph B. Berger
Lillian-Yvonne Bertram
Alice S. Carter