July 1, 2020

Dear Members of the UMass Boston Community,

As members of the Academic Continuity Task Force (ACTF) we are providing regular updates regarding our efforts to inform the planning process for the coming academic year. We are pleased that the interim provost and interim chancellor have accepted our recommendation that instruction be delivered primarily remotely during the fall 2020 semester.

**Mandate**

The ACTF works to ensure a high-quality academic experience for all students in the coming academic year by designing strategies for achieving the learning objectives of the university’s rigorous and diverse curricula through diverse modalities as conditions and circumstances permit or require. We are committed to providing an effective learning environment and academic experience to all our students, with particular concern for the most vulnerable.

As a task force, we seek to devise, introduce, and help implement intentional actions to redress and undo systemic forms of racism and discrimination internal to our own campus community and institutional practices. Additionally, we aim to identify impacts with collective bargaining implications for potential negotiation with campus unions.

**Underlying Drivers**

The ACTF’s objective is to respond meaningfully and substantively to two major 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 have been both intensified and laid more nakedly bare by COVID-19. Because these are
interrelated crises, responding to the current health pandemic requires that the entire university respond to the pandemic of structural racism as well.

As a task force, we intend to identify and coordinate restorative justice processes central to our transformation as an anti-racist public institution. We recognize that both the university system and the nation are founded on colonial and anti-Black structures that need to be eradicated. In line with this vision, the ACTF believes that UMass Boston’s approach must resemble a mosaic rather than a monolith. We aim to be dynamic and responsive in real-time to the unfolding needs of our students and our campus community. We take seriously the premise that any initiative that seeks to protect and provide for the health and well-being of our students in the midst of these crises must include sustained systemic approaches. These must address physical and mental health, job losses, poverty, housing and food insecurity, access to wifi and technology, transportation, and other inequities that render online and remote instruction further obstacles for Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, undocumented, LGBTQ, persons with diverse learning needs, linguistically diverse, individuals who have been persecuted for their spiritual and religious beliefs, and working class student populations whom it is our public mandate holistically to serve. These are necessary first steps and indicate the beginning of a more expansive process that our institution must undertake to remedy structural inequalities as opposed to merely managing, and thus reproducing and/or exacerbating, them.

**Strategic Trajectories**

To aid our work, the ACTF has formed five subcommittees:

- **Restorative Justice Initiative**: Beacons 2020 and Beyond is focused on connecting the subcommittees to the central vision and core values of a restorative justice framework. This subcommittee is recommending ongoing anti-racism and restorative justice training for all senior administrators, tenure and non-tenure track faculty, and staff, as well as first-year, transfer, international, continuing and graduate students. This committee will coordinate with other departments and groups, principally Africana Studies and the university’s centers, to develop short- and long-term plans for “Restorative Justice” programming.

- **Coordination and Planning** is focused on addressing issues of safety, equity, and community building. This subcommittee is examining mechanisms and processes to augment or replace academic supports in ways that are informed by anti-racism and restorative justice pedagogies designed to reimagine, and revise, current Eurocentric and white supremacist curriculum.
• **Technology and Online Support** is focused on rapidly clarifying and setting up systems of support for quality teaching in remote learning. This includes technology platforms, course expectations, faculty and staff training needs and formats, and student needs and supports.

• **On-Campus Instruction** is focused on courses that include an on-campus dimension. This involves advising departments on usage of space, health and safety protocols, and developing support systems for on-campus academic activity.

• **Communications** is focused on maintaining transparency and updating the community about the ACTF’s work. We will provide weekly summaries on the task force’s activities, invite community engagement, and facilitate collaboration.

**Next Steps**

Action one is to outline effective strategies for remote instruction. *Remote instruction* is different from *online classes* in that it is largely synchronous and observes class hours for various activities including designated office hours when instructors are available to students remotely. *Online classes* are typically designed from the ground up to offer asynchronous instruction and methods of communicating between students and the faculty member. We have identified three categories of courses:

- **Category 1** includes those offered remotely, which will be the majority of courses. A small subset of Category 1 courses may be offered as online classes.
- **Category 2** courses will have limited face-to-face and/or on-campus components. These include, for example, courses that require team-based exercises or instrument-based laboratories, and courses that require specialty art and design supplies available only on campus.
- **Category 3** courses (very few) will occur fully on campus and include only courses that require, for example, hands-on clinical simulations.

Action two is to finalize a consolidated inventory and categorization of all fall courses. Action three is to develop guidance on choosing platforms, formats, and resource selections that will benefit students with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged and historically vulnerable. A small set of templates will be provided to all departments and faculty and will be attached to courses in WISER, so that students will have a clearer sense of the expectations and requirements for each course.
The task force will work on addressing these objectives within the next two weeks.

**Collaboration and Commitment**

We welcome collaboration from all members of the UMass Boston community. We will be reaching out to specific community members to inform and support the ACTF subcommittees. We encourage everyone to send your ideas, suggestions, questions, and concerns to actf@umb.edu. We will hold a first listening session from 10 to 11:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 9; more information will follow on that soon.

We, the undersigned, share the commitment of every member of the UMass Boston community, the only public research university in Boston, to serve our students fully. We are committed to the work of the ACTF, which seeks to embed more broadly restorative justice in the daily practices of our campus community. We invite you to reach out to any of us individually or to our general email (actf@umb.edu) with any questions or concerns. We invite you to share, with us and with colleagues, ways that you can contribute, and are contributing, to transforming UMass Boston into an institution committed to social justice and equity for all.

Sincerely,

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