Dear Members of the UMass Boston Community,

With renewed energy from the SpeakOut Institute last week, in which over 100 faculty members, staff, and graduate student instructors from our campus participated, the Academic Continuity Task Force (ACTF) is eager to share with you some updates and more about the work we are continuing to do in preparation for the Fall semester. We greatly appreciate all the emails we have received, which are informing the ACTF’s work, and encourage you to continue sending us (ACTF@umb.edu) your concerns, questions, and hopes for our campus as we move toward the start of the academic year.

SpeakOut Institute

It speaks volumes about our university that out of the 1,000+ individuals from more than 300 colleges and universities who participated in the four days of the SpeakOut Institute during July 13-16, 10 percent of all participants were from UMass Boston.

The SpeakOut Institute focused on “building equity and social justice education to create inclusive learning environments on campus and online.” To enact change, the institute instructors taught about how radical imagination can lead to structural anti-racist institutional change. The four days of the SpeakOut Institute began with the themes of how we all are socialized into racialized identities, and how such identities are complex, historically embedded, and layered. The second day drilled down into pedagogy that centers on wholeness, justice, inclusion, and liberation. The instructors challenged participants to practice empathy by asking: How do we use this type of pedagogy to create relationships with our students that are truly transformative and empowering? The third day centered on specific pedagogical strategies to undo the ways in which white supremacy is embedded in curricula, fields of research, and in our institutions. The last day was a roundtable discussion with visionary activist-educators who urged all participants to consider how best to produce a caring, safe, equitable, and inclusive classroom and campus.
Commitment to Action
Building on this incredible experience, our next challenge is to put this into action. The place to start is with our mission and values. Our university’s mission and values are announced on the umb.edu website. In this week’s letter, we would like to focus on one of the values: Transformation.

As all of us – students, staff, and faculty – work to transform the lives, careers, and social contexts of all members of our community, we recognize that this work requires a different approach to caring for our social relations. Especially in this devastating time of COVID-19, ongoing structural racism, and massive economic disparity, every one of us on our campus must remain committed to each other by practicing empathy and seeking to unlearn the racist logics that make some lives matter more than others. The ACTF applauds the many efforts both borne of empathy and committed to structural change that are already in motion on our campus and which are aimed at holding us all accountable to our campus’s values.

As we move into the Fall semester, we can all practice empathy and commit to structural change by providing an equitable education for all students of our university. The SpeakOut Institute reminded us that “access without support is not opportunity.” The celebration this month of the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act reminds us to hold ourselves and each other accountable to meeting the needs of students, staff, and faculty with disabilities. Last Thursday, over 80 faculty came together to share advice, experience, and resources with each other in a campus Zoom session on “Engaging Students Remotely.” This session is part of a larger resource that is being co-developed by an amazing cadre of staff and faculty on campus who support instruction. These growing resources are now being housed in a single location on the umb.edu website that instructors may wish to bookmark to continue finding resources: Teach Fall 2020.

Class Notes in WISER
For students planning for the Fall semester in our mostly remote modality, an important piece of information they will need is how their classes will be happening. Starting this week, all instructors will be specifying the modalities and technologies that will be used in their classes. Modality information will include the extent to which each class will have synchronous and asynchronous components, and how attendance will work. Technology information will include what types of technology will be needed to access the class, which will answer questions like: Can I use a Chromebook or do I need a laptop computer? Will a smartphone work for accessing the class? Once this information has been gathered by the ACTF, the Registrar’s office will be posting it in the Class Notes section in WISER. Students will be able to
access this information in the listing of each course. Our goal is to have the Class Notes for the majority of classes posted in WISER by July 31. An example of the student view of a class with Class Notes (from a previous semester when classes were not remote) is shown at the end of this letter.

We are honored to be serving UMass Boston and look forward to keeping you engaged with our work as it progresses. We will be holding our next campus-wide Listening Session on Thursday, July 30 from 10 to 11:30 a.m., details to follow. We also encourage you to continue to share your concerns, questions, and recommendations rooted in empathy with us at ACTF@umb.edu. 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
Robin Côté
John Duff
Maria H. Ivanova
Rafael Jaen
Keith R. Jones
Michael P. Kearns
Suzanne G. Leveille
Mya M. Mangawang
Tomas Materdey
Apurva Mehta
Jeffrey Melnick
Anita Miller
Melissa Pearrow
Anna Louise Penner
Hannah Sevian
Eve Sorum
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Linda Thompson
Paula Thorsland
Brian White
Christopher R. Whynacht
Wei Zhang

Example of a student view of Class Notes in WISER for a course:

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