Dear members of the UMass Boston community,

I hope that you, your family, and your friends are safe and well.

I am writing to let you know that after consultation with a number of planning committees—composed of administration, faculty, and staff—and following discussion with authorities in public health, as well as city and state officials, I believe that the UMass Boston campus should plan to devote itself to remote instruction for the fall semester. On-campus activities will be limited to critical research and a modest set of courses students need to complete their degrees that depend on campus facilities (like the nursing simulation center).

We can and will monitor health indicators and consider bringing some limited student activities back on campus if the situation permits. We are hopeful that October will bring reassuring news and that we will have the opportunity to open some on-campus programs. We are even more optimistic that the spring semester 2021 will see the campus return to a “new normal” that will allow for the restoration of our full curriculum, research, residential and student life. For the moment, however, we will adapt to the conditions we face with enthusiasm and creativity even as we know it will permit neither a fall season for our athletics program nor other on-ground student activities.

In service of our goals, we are excited to note that a collaboration between our colleagues in student life and academic affairs is forming to create a first-year Beacon 2020 electronic experience, enabling our new students to join clubs, participate in student government, get to know one another through social media, and other forms of engagement—that is, to build a community that is intentional and vibrant.

As we developed our plans for faculty, staff, and students, we kept foremost in our thoughts UMass Boston’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We serve a
vibrant, multicultural city and region, and are proud to welcome students, faculty, and staff from all parts of the globe. Our plans are created with all of them—and these core values—in mind.

Below (and in the appendices in this PDF), we outline in more detail how this plan would unfold. It represents the best advice of our planning committees, but we also believe commentary from the rest of the campus community is important. Accordingly, we ask that you read this material and provide any comments you would like us to consider at Chancellor@umb.edu by June 16. We will reflect on the responses we receive and formulate final recommendations, which will be reviewed by the trustees in time for a public announcement before the end of this month.

**Preliminary Plans**

In addition to the recommendations described above—(largely) remote coursework with some resumption of research activity—we are planning for the return of a select number of other critical activities to the campus. The plan we recommend would see a small number of important activities on campus beginning this summer, such as general medicine services at University Health Services (including COVID-19 related services), which is the primary health care provider for so many of our students. It also envisions providing a set of courses remotely tailored to the needs—including time zone flexibility—for international students who are unable to return to Boston from their homes overseas.

We believe this approach is advisable because at this point in time, it is not possible to guarantee the safety and well-being of our campus community, and the neighborhoods in which our commuting population is embedded. Comprehensive testing—which ideally involves everyone coming to campus—is neither readily available and nor likely to be feasible or affordable in the near term. The asymptomatic spread of COVID-19 means that testing only those who are showing signs of infection (like temperature testing) is insufficient. Social distancing on an urban campus like ours—with its reliance on densely populated public transit, and catwalks that bring us all into close contact—would be difficult to maintain if a high proportion of us return to campus. Reliable access to medical grade Personal Protective Equipment, so important for our health center staff, is already difficult to acquire and while we hope that procurement process will improve, the hitches we have encountered give us pause. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, many members of our staff and faculty are in high risk groups and we must take their health concerns very seriously.
Beyond conditions on campus, we are also mindful that members of our community live in—and therefore commute back and forth to—homes and neighborhoods that are among the most vulnerable in the commonwealth. Communities of color have borne a disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality. Multi-generational households are common amongst us and protecting our elders must be a high priority. We have a special responsibility to bear these lives in mind even if the spread of COVID-19 slows this summer. Many epidemiologists have raised concerns about a second wave that could be even more serious in the fall. Evidence of those waves is already growing in states that have begun opening commercial operations and recreational opportunities.

**Housing**

We expect to have further details from our residence hall partners, Provident and COCM, on the options for this facility. At the moment, we project being able to provide campus housing for a significantly smaller population than normal (at best) in order to maintain social distancing. Under any scenario, we would prioritize students whose families live too far away for commuting to be feasible and those who lack housing.

**Student Engagement/Student Success**

Overall, our goal is to keep all of our students engaged in a vibrant program of study and student activities, laying the groundwork for the next phase of university life when it is truly safe to resume our work on campus to a fulsome degree. Ensuring that all students stay on track to complete their degrees in a timely manner is a major priority. Guidance from the CDC, state and local public health officials, and our own safety and wellness experts—as well as our faculty and staff—will determine when that makes sense.

**Technology and Work Spaces**

We will redouble our efforts to ensure students have access to technology needed to be successful. Our IT team, which performed extremely well in the spring of 2020, will continue to offer robust services and student activities online and using technology. We also recognize the difficulties that many face accessing optimal work and study spaces and will urge staff and students to work with their supervisors.
and faculty around those challenges.

**Phased Re-Opening**

These efforts will complement the ongoing planning process for a phased re-opening of our campus, which will accelerate when the public health conditions permit. As detailed in the accompanying appendix, for nearly every campus activity, we have identified ways to promote social distancing and effective hygiene to reduce the risk of infection for our community. In exploring how to reduce these risks, and following the governor’s re-opening recommendations, we have developed protocols for social distancing, hygiene, and cleaning.

Like other institutions, and the city and state more broadly, we will move deliberately towards this phased re-opening, working vigilantly to bring critical activities back to campus in a safe fashion and to cautiously expand those activities over time. Due to our unique campus community, the timeline of these phases will look different than other more residential or suburban campuses.

For all the reasons stated above, prudence suggests that our campus will be better off if we maintain our current practice of remote learning and focus all of our attention in the coming months on ensuring that we provide the highest quality and most engaging remote experience possible when classes begin for the fall semester. Our faculty are confident this is not only feasible, but an exciting opportunity to build on their achievements in the spring term of 2020. Training workshops, best practice exchanges, new technology training sessions, and brainstorming sessions within and between departments are ongoing. The Beacon 2020 plan, described further in Appendix D, is an exciting opportunity to provide an engaging, inclusive experience that cultivates relationships we believe will blossom when campus life returns to its new normal.

Please read more in the attached PDF on how we have approached this planning effort and on our planning for an eventual re-opening of the campus. We hope you will take the opportunity to provide comments and reactions to this blueprint.

Chancellor-Elect Marcelo Suárez-Orozco has been engaged in this deliberation and planning process on a constant basis and endorses this plan. He joins me in looking forward to the thoughts of the campus community.

Sincerely,