Dear Students,

I write in the hopes that you and your families are managing under these difficult circumstances. No doubt you have never experienced anything quite like this before. The interruption in your routines, the financial pressures so many are having to contend with, and the uncertainty about a future return to “normal,” is a lot to contend with. Since you are participating in remote learning, I know you realize how much the faculty – your teachers and mentors – care about you and how hard they are working to make sure you maintain your momentum this semester. But I would like to send them a shout out anyway.

Another important group of leaders, your Student Government Association, is also pursuing their mission with determination. I am grateful to them for working closely with Student Affairs, which is doing so much to provide services and information to all Beacons. And your student government leaders are doing a great service to me as your chancellor, articulating the concerns that are on the minds of their constituents. I wanted to take a moment to respond to some of the issues they have underlined and provide answers that I hope will be both reassuring and useful, and that largely mirror what is happening at other UMass campuses.

Refunds

- **MBTA Refunds**: Refunds of transit passes for the MBTA are being offered in full for the months of April and May by the T. Students with these passes have been notified by the Parking and Transportation Department about the specifics regarding these refunds.
- **Parking Refunds**: On-campus semester parking passes are being refunded from March 23 onward. Refunds will also be made for this time period for monthly, single-use and night/weekend passes.
- **Meal Plan Refunds**: Refunds of meal plan payments will be given on a pro-rated basis from March 23 forward.
• **Housing Refunds:** Refunds for housing are more complicated at UMass Boston. The residence halls belong to and are operated by a third party, nonprofit provider. We are actively working with them and advocating for adjustments for our students and will continue to do so.

**Other Financial Issues**

1. **Tuition:** We will be retaining the existing tuition rates for credits taken on campus this semester, even as those courses have migrated to a remote learning environment. These are not “online” courses; they offer the same academic experience in a distance modality.

2. **Financial Holds:** The threshold for a financial hold on accounts will increase immediately from $500 to $1,000. Holds will be removed with payment to below $1,000 or the establishment of a payment plan.

3. **Payment Flexibility:**
   - **Existing Payment Plans:** We will extend existing payment plans as follows with no additional fee. The April 1 payment will be delayed until May 1. Remaining installments will be increased from two to three and are due on May 1, June 1, and July 1.
   - **New Payment Plans:** Enrollment into a payment plan is being offered to students not currently enrolled in a plan through April 24. The $47 fee is being waived and balances owed the university will be due in three equal payments also due May 1, June 1, and July 1.

4. **Study Abroad:** We have allowed for reimbursement of up to $500 for unanticipated costs to return home.

5. **Student Employees:** Student employees who have work-study funds will continue to be paid as long as those funds are available, up to the end of the spring term. Students who do not have work-study funding and whose on-campus employment can be adapted to a remote work environment, will be paid as they record their hours. GEO students will continue to be paid and in most cases will continue to be working. Financial realities prohibit us from paying students who not working after April 4, with two qualifications:
   - Students may be eligible for emergency assistance that has been augmented by private donors and funds from the Chancellor’s Office.
   - Federal stimulus funds are just now being approved that may well enable us to do more. This is a quickly evolving issue but it is possible we may be able to use some of these funds to provide additional relief to these and other students.

**Academic Matters**
• **Pass/Fail Policy:** Following the vote of the Faculty Council on March 19, and in accordance with the strong recommendation of the undergraduate representative to the Faculty Council, the Pass/Fail deadline has been moved to the last day of classes in this semester, and undergraduate students can take as many as all of their classes on a Pass/Fail basis. Only one course taken Pass/Fail during the spring semester will count towards a student’s total limit of 8 Pass/Fail courses.

• **Major Requirements:** Departments are in the process of determining what major requirements they are willing to relax and which they plan to keep under a Pass/Fail scenario. We will post a list of departmental requirements this week. But there will NOT be a one-size-fits-all accommodation on this point since faculty are best able to assess what kind of mastery students need to prosper in the more advanced courses in their programs that will come later.

• **Study Abroad:** Students who are studying abroad will be encouraged to discuss with their instructors the best way to complete the work for those classes from a distance.

• **Attendance:** Faculty are being encouraged to be as flexible as they feel is wise for attendance given the upheaval that mandatory distance learning may create, especially for working students and those who are parents. But attendance requirements are a prerogative of instructors.

**Communications and Celebrations**

1. In the midst of a complex and rapidly evolving environment involving all levels of government, we are working to provide as much information as possible to students and the rest of the UMass Boston community.
   - We have a [“Coronavirus” section of the main campus website](https://t.e2ma.net/message/g2xudg/4k4iz9f) where messages, frequently asked questions for students and staff, and other important notices are posted.
   - We are also communicating relevant information to specific campus audiences through the appropriate offices and departments.
   - [The website](https://t.e2ma.net/message/g2xudg/4k4iz9f) includes a rich variety of resources and suggested activities to relieve the stresses, anxiety, and claustrophobia of the present stay-at-home advisory, including workouts from the Athletics Department.
   - We encourage and would welcome additional suggestions about communications.

2. A special announcement about plans for commencement will be forthcoming this week.
   - While we realize that the original plan for a public ceremony on campus will not be feasible, on the recommendation of the commencement
committee, we are planning an alternative digital gathering that will be joyous, inventive and participatory. Commencement 2020 should be an event that expresses the uniqueness of this time.

- Student input to the planning process will be robust and, toward that end, the commencement committee will be working with the SGA to incorporate student-driven ideas.

I close by noting what a remarkable community UMass Boston is. I am proud of all the ways in which it has pulled together, created mechanisms for mutual support, and remained steadfastly dedicated to completing the semester, ensuring that all the work students and faculty completed before Spring Break will be fully realized at the end of the academic year. To put it in a somewhat shop-worn fashion, this is the ultimate “can do” university.

Hats off to you all.

Interim Chancellor
Katherine Newman

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