

To the Finalists for the position of Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Boston:

We the undersigned faculty, staff, students, alumni and community allies wish to share with you our commitment to the long-standing urban mission, which is intrinsic to the fabric of the University of Massachusetts Boston. We believe that the future Chancellor of UMass Boston should know about and honor our proud history and distinctive mission, not just with words, but more importantly with leadership, deeds and choices. We seek a Chancellor who will be guided by the core values of equity, access, and engagement.

From its inception in 1965, UMass Boston was founded to “provide Boston with a public, municipal University of high quality, at low or no cost to the students of the metropolis.” The decision to situate it in the heart of a “great and reviving city” was expressly to establish and promote a two-way, mutually beneficial and collaborative relationship between the university and the greater Boston community. This mission has been reaffirmed time and again. In the campus’ current strategic plan a core “urban commitment” is clearly elucidated:

[Our] work is marked by a particular commitment to urban places, people, culture, and issues...Our university is located in a great city – Boston --the Commonwealth’s capital and major population center. We are proud to provide an excellent and accessible university education, as well as highly informed research and service, to residents of Boston and other cities, regions, and countries. Partnering with urban institutions and residents, we help to create sustainable and healthy social fabrics, economies, service organizations, and civic and cultural institutions.

While some might argue that the urban commitment must be put aside in the face of budgetary challenges, we regard that view as misguided. Indeed the university’s values and mission must serve as a compass to steer the campus through both calm and troubled waters; to remind us throughout what is essential, fundamental, and unshakeable – to remind us of the *true* value of what we do.

As a critical part of this mission, UMass Boston was envisioned as reaching out to students who did not have the advantages typically associated with pursuing academic achievement. UMass Boston students would “bring their lunches in brown paper bags, drink from public fountains, read the library’s magazines and newspapers, buy their books third or fourth hand, and [acquire] most of their other goods from Bradlee’s or Grant’s,” the discount stores of yesteryear.

Without a doubt, we have advanced the goal of reaching underserved and non-traditional students. 48% of our students receive Pell Grants (versus 26% at UMass Amherst). 57% are students of color (versus 25.4% at UMass Amherst), 56% are first-generation college student (versus 25% at UMass Amherst) and 51% of undergraduates speak English as a Second Language (versus 15% at UMass Amherst). 45% of our students are over 25 years old and 15% of our students are over 35. Our student body includes 533 student veterans. We are an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander - Serving Institution with over 12% low-income Asian American students. Many

of these are children of refugees from the Southeast Asian War who live in the adjacent Dorchester community. We are the only public four-year institution in MA that serves the specific needs of DACA, TPS, and vulnerable immigrant students.

While other colleges and universities struggle to become diverse, we already are. Of course, this means we must provide extra support to keep our students, many of whom work long hours outside of school, on the path toward degree completion. Yet, even though we do not have the resources of private colleges and universities, talented and determined students from our communities and beyond, speakers of more than 90 languages, are drawn to our campus. We are, quite literally, the world. Each member of our community is deeply enriched by engagement with students from these diverse backgrounds. We seek a Chancellor who shares our deep commitment to fostering this diversity and continuing to ensure access for those who are often disenfranchised

Beyond our essential role in educating students, UMass Boston, since its inception, has had a commitment to research and service in collaboration with surrounding communities. In fact, the decision to situate our campus in an urban setting was intentional: “The advantages to UM/B of a downtown location are mainly of two kinds: direct enrichment of the academic program itself, and the personal inspiration and maturity to be gained by both the students and the faculty members in daily engagement with the realities of urban life.” In its newer Boston harbor location, UMass Boston has continued to align with the city, the birthplace of an American agenda that envisions itself as fundamentally democratic.

To serve its original mission, UMass would “develop institutes, where these are needed ... as key players in advancing the essential work of the campus.” Racial and ethnic centers and institutes and those addressing the needs of women and people directly impacted by war and conflict, for example, were established through the combined efforts of campus advocates, community partners, and legislative supporters. An Office of Community Partnerships would later be created “to support the creation of collaborative community partnerships that advance our mission as Boston’s public research university.”¹

Our institutes and centers recognize that in order to meet the financial challenges of many of our students it is necessary to analyze and tackle the root causes and consequences of poverty, inequality, racism, and sexism in the communities in which they live. These centers and institutes often work directly with students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in myriad ways-providing research opportunities, leadership development and mentoring. In addition they work collaboratively and intensely with faculty to build culturally responsive research projects and engagements with the diverse communities from which many of our students come. This research also informs much of the teaching and curriculum at UMass Boston.

Unfortunately, in our history, there has been an ever-emerging disconnect between the University’s espoused commitment to the urban mission and the actual institutional and system-wide choices made in the name of fiscal expediency and/or what is valued.

¹ <https://compact.org/resource-posts/university-massachusetts-boston-civic-action-plan/>

Support for our diverse students, for the urban institutes and centers is being severely reduced, and the College of Public and Community Service which valued life learning and experience is barely standing. The campus's support for a community daycare center has ended, and critical programs like nursing struggle to find suitable facilities. Student services, such as Counseling, are significantly fewer than the average for 4 year public institutions, and significantly less than recommended by accrediting bodies. Recent cuts and upheaval have also taken a toll on our UAccess program, which serves students who are experiencing hunger, homelessness and other urgent crises.

We the undersigned seek a Chancellor who rejects the false choices presented by current leadership between supporting students and supporting the centers, institutes and services that are the core of our urban mission. We seek a Chancellor who rejects the increasing emphasis on privatization and on making educational and programmatic decisions based on profit, rather than educational quality and the campus' essential mission. We seek a Chancellor who rejects shifting priorities, in which achieving "self-sufficiency" is valued over contributing to the public good. And we seek a Chancellor who will, in collaboration with our campus community, reject the steady erosion of support for the UMass system by the state and will fight to preserve the distinctive mission and identity of the UMass Boston campus within this system.