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This newsletter was written by one of our Honors Ambassadors, Gillian Benoit. She is a third-year Psychology student who recently completed an internship at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Gillian also works in the UMass Boston’s Office of Student Leadership and Community Engagement as the Program Assistant for Community Engagement.
A Message from Dean Rajini Srikanth

We hope you and your loved ones are all doing well and keeping safe in this anxious period of pandemic disruption. The challenges that every country is facing forces each of us to probe deep within ourselves and consider what we cherish, what we value as our guiding principles for living, and how we hope to connect and sustain meaningful connections with our fellow humans, near and far. The students at UMass Boston, like yourselves, are engaged in keeping their communities functioning – being first responders, working at grocery stores, helping to provide meals, assisting at senior centers, answering calls at help desks, and creating virtual support networks where none exist. They and you do the crucial work that sustains us through the current turbulence and enables us to look ahead to a time of gradually restored normalcy.

Beloved alumni, your accomplishments animate us! On March 25, five alumni showed us how to keep our spirits high and anticipate the future eagerly. Just two weeks after the campus moved to remote instruction and remote work, these five alumni participated in a virtual (Zoom) career panel and inspired over 40 attendees. This career panel focused on the natural and biomedical sciences. The panelists included an internal medicine resident at a local hospital, an assistant scientist and instructor at a nearby university, a research associate at a company developing medicines, a clinical research coordinator in epidemiology at a local hospital, and a clinical research coordinator studying speech acquisition in children. Their graduation dates from UMass Boston ranged from 2012 to 2019.

Honors College staff member Dr. Abby Cheng expertly hosted the virtual event that began with each panelist speaking about their path to UMass Boston and their careers after graduation. Dr. Cheng then guided attendees to virtual breakout rooms where they could speak with panelists individually and gather further details about such important issues as how to identify the right people from whom to request letters of recommendation and how to study effectively for organic chemistry! The career panel was vibrant and energetic. Our panelists took time out of their busy schedules – including working on the frontlines of the pandemic response – to share their wisdom.

Stay tuned for a fall career panel on the humanities and social sciences! We will be reaching out to you for your participation.

With respect and admiration,

Rajini Srikanth
Dean, Honors College
Professor, English
Marcelo Suárez-Orozco named Chancellor of UMass Boston

UCLA Dean Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, as a teenager sent to the U.S. by parents seeking to save him from Argentina’s gathering Dirty War, today was unanimously selected to become chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Boston.

“This moment can be viewed as the completion of a journey that began when two parents, in what must have been a wrenching decision, gave their 17-year-old son an airplane ticket and sent him off to America to flee Argentina’s gathering storm-clouds of terror,” UMass President Marty Meehan said, in recommending Dr. Suárez-Orozco to the UMass Board of Trustees.

“Today, his remarkable journey arrives at the most appropriate of destinations, as Marcelo Suárez-Orozco becomes chancellor of an institution that breathes life into the American Dream every day: the University of Massachusetts Boston,” Meehan added.

“UMass Boston is a special place that needs and deserves a special leader,” Meehan said, making his formal recommendation to the Board.

Suárez-Orozco, a former Harvard and NYU professor who now serves as Dean of UCLA’s Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, won unanimous approval and enthusiastic acclaim from the trustees.

“Because of the hard work that has been done at UMass Boston over the last few years, Dr. Suárez-Orozco is going to hit the ground running with a financial foundation that is much stronger,” said UMass Board of Trustees Chairman Robert J. Manning. “We needed somebody very special to come to UMass Boston and clearly President Meehan and the search committee have found that person.”

Suárez-Orozco, an internationally-renowned educator and researcher whose work focuses on the study of mass migration, globalization, and education, said he was honored to become the ninth chancellor of UMass Boston, which was established in 1965 to make the university more accessible to the state’s urban population center.
“It is an extraordinary honor for me, an immigrant from Latin America, who came to this country and was given the extraordinary gift of higher education of the great public university system in the state of California,” said Suárez-Orozco. “I come before you with a promise that as the chancellor of University of Massachusetts Boston, I will endeavor to the best of my abilities to be faithful to the fundamental idea that in public education we find the tools for the flourishing of the youth, young men and women of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

More about Marcelo Suárez-Orozco

Dr. Suárez-Orozco, 63, is the inaugural Wasserman Dean at the University of California Los Angeles, where he leads the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, which on his watch attained US News & World Report’s top ranking.

Dean Suárez-Orozco, who arrived in the U.S. speaking only his native Spanish, is a product of the California public higher education system, having attended a community college in the state and then earning his AB, MA, and PhD (Anthropology) degrees at the University of California Berkeley.

Prior to his service at UCLA, Dean Suárez-Orozco - and his wife and academic partner, Carola Suárez-Orozco - held academic positions at Harvard and at NYU. He is an internationally-renowned educator and researcher. His award-winning books, edited volumes and scholarly papers have had a global impact, leading to international service that includes his role as Special Advisor to the Chief Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague and service on the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. During his tenure as the UCLA Wasserman Dean, Dr. Suárez-Orozco raised over $120 million toward the UCLA Campaign.

Suárez-Orozco’s full biography and CV can be found at https://www.umassp.edu/boston-chancellor-search/finalist-biography.

More about the UMass Boston chancellor search process:

The UMass Boston Chancellor Search Committee, with Trustee R. Norman Peters serving as chair and UMass Boston Professor Jean Rhodes serving as vice chair, held its first meeting on August 27, 2019, and said its goal was to help the university attract “an amazing leader” for the campus.

Over the course of the search, the committee and its recruitment firm contacted nearly 400 prospective candidates, evaluated candidacies and last month interviewed 11 candidates, ultimately unanimously recommending Suárez-Orozco for the position.

Suárez-Orozco visited UMass Boston on January 31 and campus reaction to his visit, as measured by the search committee’s web-based feedback system, was strongly positive.
For additional information on the search process, visit https://www.umassp.edu/boston-chancellor-search.

Dr. Suárez-Orozco, whose start date is not yet established, becomes the permanent successor to former UMass Boston Chancellor J. Keith Motley, who stepped down at the end of the 2016-17 academic year. Former Bowdoin College President Barry Mills served as interim chancellor in 2017-2018 and Katherine Newman has served as interim chancellor since then.

“The university owes a debt of gratitude to both Barry and Katherine,” Meehan said. “Katherine Newman had just taken on important, system-wide responsibilities at the university when I asked her to step in. She never hesitated and has performed at the highest levels.”

Mills received an honorary doctorate from UMass Boston last year, marking his service.

Interim Chancellor Newman described Suárez-Orozco as “the ideal choice” to serve as “permanent chancellor of this distinguished university.”

In addition to praising and recommending Suárez-Orozco, Meehan paid tribute to UMass Boston’s mission and goals.

“UMass Boston was established to bring one of our nation’s greatest innovations – the public university – to one of the nation’s greatest cities. UMass Boston is where you find the Boston of today—and the America of tomorrow,” Meehan said.
Course Highlight: Youth Participatory Action Research Methods in K-12 Urban Schools with Dr. Kristin Murphy

Students enrolled in Professor Murphy’s Junior Research Colloquium started the semester by exploring urban education and how to utilize the strategies of youth participatory action research (YPAR) for semester-long projects. This course was designed to provide an opportunity for Honors College students to work alongside Boston Public School students in developing research investigations most relevant to their everyday experiences. Murphy describes the method in part by saying, “YPAR re-envisions the research process and positions participants as co-researchers.” In trying to bring meaning to issues that are central to the lives of these co-researchers, the medium of photovoice methodology offers a unique way to engage beyond traditional academic approaches. The BPS students would be asked to take photographs that illuminate barriers and facilitators to their success. The photos then serve as artifacts to facilitate critical discussion about urban school experiences, and how stakeholders, spanning students to school leaders and beyond, can promote change. Murphy underscores how BPS students assume roles of the “resident experts” through this process. This shared learning, between Honors College students and BPS students, offers new ways to imagine how the transfer of knowledge and experience can be facilitated. Also, this course naturally lends itself to shaping mentor-style relationships between these groups. The process of empowerment is also an important consideration for addressing how co-researchers like BPS students can become reaffirmed in their capabilities. Murphy reiterates that this sense of empowerment is an end goal, especially since, “we don’t typically hear these voices in research… YPAR changes things dramatically.”

However, with the changes in course delivery from in-person to online university wide due to COVID-19, the Honors College students were never able to meet their BPS co-researchers. Many of Professor Murphy’s students’ research topics have shifted to address new insights regarding COVID-19 experiences. Working with family, friends and community members in their homes or virtually, students are now exploring the lived experiences of their co-researchers during a global pandemic. Photovoice will continue to offer an important frame of reference in evaluating how individuals are ascribing meaning to their challenges with COVID-19. Murphy hopes that these new inquiries provide a formalized space to reflect and understand experiences during this pandemic. Even though the course’s anticipated BPS partnership has been disrupted by the inability to meet in-person, the adaptability of all involved is ever present. In revisiting the objectives of this course, it remains clear that action and empowerment for all persists for Professor Murphy’s class.
Student Trivia Night

Taking an opportunity to carve out for fun amidst rigorous studying, on Wednesday March 4, Honors College students gathered for a Trivia Night. Sharing in an evening of food and socializing, students created teams to test one another’s knowledge on a variety of topics. Questions ranged from popular culture, to sports, and even to UMass Boston history. The winning student team received merchandise from the bookstore and noted how “dynamic” the overall atmosphere of the event was. We look forward to hosting future social events for students to partake in!

Careers in Life Sciences Alumni Panel

On Wednesday March 25th, the Honors College hosted its first digital Alumni Panel, highlighting five individuals’ careers in life sciences.Detailing their pathways through research and mentorship, the alumni shared how the Honors College facilitated many of their opportunities. Our visiting alumni included Brianna Leonardo ’19, Timothy Musoke ’17, Noreen Chioma Okwara ’12, Kamar Reda ’15, and Victoria Sanchez ’18. Attending to the wide scope of science-related work, these panelists hold positions such as clinical researchers, residents of internal medicine, and assistant...
scientists. These panelists invited current students to consider how their collegiate experiences can transform the trajectory of professional growth. Third-year student Haaris Zeb reflects on the panel and what it means to him, as an aspiring healthcare worker and scientist. He explains how, “It was amazing to see so many former UMass Boston students achieve their goals.” Even beyond this, he reiterated that, “with confidence that by giving their stories, I was given a deeper insight on the multiple possibilities available to me in the future.” The Honors College is proud to host an Alumni Panel each semester. If you are interested in speaking at a future career panel, please email Abby Cheng at abby.cheng@umb.edu.

Staying Connected within the Alumni Network

We encourage everyone to visit our newly update LinkedIn profile and “connect” with us! This platform intends to serve as a space to share professional updates and keep in touch with fellow members of the UMass Boston Honors College community. If you would like to also participate in future opportunities for engagement, such as the Alumni Panel, we invite you to fill our interest form (linked).