

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

COMMITTEE: Academic Affairs

NO.: AAC 21-12

COMMITTEE DATE: June 15, 2021

BOARD DATE: June 22, 2021

REAPPROVAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMONWEALTH HONORS PROGRAM

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education accepts the report of the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and renews the membership of the **University of Massachusetts Boston** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program** for six years, effective June 22, 2021.

VOTED: Motion adopted by AAC 6/15/2021; adopted by BHE 6/22/2021.

Authority: Commonwealth Honors Program Approval Process Guidelines as Revised by the Board of Higher Education in November 2006; G.L. c. 15A, § 9.

Contact: Patricia A. Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs and Student Success
Keith M. Connors, Program Director for Academic Affairs and Student Success

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

June 2021

University of Massachusetts Boston Reapproval of Membership in Commonwealth Honors Program

BACKGROUND

This motion concerns the continuation of the University of Massachusetts Boston's membership in the Commonwealth Honors Program. According to the Commonwealth Honors Program Guidelines, once Commonwealth Honors Program approval has been obtained by an institution, the Program will be reviewed every six years by the Commonwealth Honors Executive Committee. The report of the Committee shall be forwarded to the Board of Higher Education for approval.

REVIEW PROCESS

The University of Massachusetts Boston prepared a self-study document presenting its Honors Program structure and operation in terms of the Commonwealth Honors Program requirements. The report provided evidence documenting the fulfillment of the following criteria:

1. Alignment of the mission and goals
2. Organization and administration
3. Admissions criteria
4. Transfer criteria
5. Program curriculum
6. Graduation criteria
7. Program resources
8. Curriculum Review Process

VISITING COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On February 24, 2021, the Commonwealth Honors Program Visiting Committee (Committee) conducted a day-long assessment, via ZOOM, of the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB) Honors College. This site visit was originally scheduled for the 2019-20 academic year and was rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Visiting Committee consisted of Catherine Villanueva Gardner, Professor of Philosophy and Women Gender Studies/Director of the Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and Chair of the CHP Visiting Committee; Paul Bruno, Professor of Philosophy/Honors Program Faculty Director at Framingham State University; and Susan McPherson, Professor of English/Coordinator of the Honors Program at Quinsigamond Community College. Prior to the visit, the Committee received and studied the updated self-study by UMB.

The Committee met with the Honors College Dean – Dr. Rajini Srikanth – and the Honors College staff. The Committee was impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the Dean and her staff for their students and the value of an Honors education. The site visit team also met with the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Joseph Berger, as well as Mya Mangawang, the Associate Vice Provost and Executive Director for Online Initiatives. The review team also met with members of the Governing Council, faculty, and students. In addition, members of the review team were able to have an in-depth discussion with Chancellor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco. Given pandemic restrictions, the review team was unable to pay an in-person visit; however, they attended a course session via Zoom.

The Committee identified the following commendations for the UMB Honors College:

- The Dean, her staff, and Honors faculty clearly demonstrated extraordinary dedication to the College and particularly to their students.
- The site visit team was impressed by the College’s model of Student Ambassadors as a way of resolving a staffing issue so that it has now become a strength for the College.
- The site visit team was impressed by the College’s model of “holistic mentoring.”
- The emphasis on writing in Honors courses is both true to the goals of the CHP and the students themselves commended the College for this emphasis, as it prepared students for non-Honors classes.
- The Honors College serves the institution in many ways, including the Dean’s leading an Honors Teaching Seminar for doctoral students.
- Admissions criteria are multi-layered allowing for inclusivity and diversity in the student body.

The Visiting Committee was impressed by the Honors College at UMB and recommends, without reservation, that the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Honors College be granted re-approval.

Recommendations from the Visiting Committee, which are all focused on funding and budget, included the following:

1. Increased and more equitable financial support for students: The Visiting Committee found it important to note the “domino effect” of funding restrictions. All the students the site visit team met had jobs as well as full-time school. The Visiting Committee expressed to UMB the importance to lessen this pressure and allow students to fulfill their potential. It heard staff and faculty speak of their concerns about equitable distribution of internal scholarships, in particular, the “Chancellor’s Scholarship.”
2. Increased student support consistent with enrollments: Since 2015 there has been a 100% increase in enrollments. There were 4 staff for 250 students, but only 5.5 staff for the current enrollment of 700 students. The Visiting Committee considers that an increase for the .5 position to .75 and a new position for a total of 6.75 would seem

reasonable. Given the financial strains of the pandemic, these increases could be staggered over the next two fiscal years.

3. Increased focus on National Scholarships: The Visiting Committee recommends an increased focus on National Scholarships or similar as a way not only to benefit the students, but also to increase attention from donors and University Advancement.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

UMB offered the following responses to the recommendations made by the Visiting Committee:

1. Increased and more equitable financial support for students: UMB is dedicated to providing the necessary equitable financial support for all our students, including our Honors College students. UMB provides high levels of institutional financial aid to its students and continues to refine this support while actively engaging in fundraising and allocation of resources to finance support for students. UMB is also examining the distribution of internal scholarships, and duly notes the Visiting Committee's recommendation that it revisits the criteria and process for awarding the "Chancellor's Scholarship."
2. Increased student support consistent with enrollments: UMB has just begun the process of restructuring the campus' budgeting system as it assertively moves toward a tailored approach to activity-based budgeting. This shift from its current budget model will benefit the Honors College and other academic units that have grown and continue to grow in enrollment moving forward. UMB is also engaged in a review of its current academic organization and will launch a comprehensive and robust strategic planning process that includes academic master planning, facilities and infrastructure master planning, and a capital campaign. These are important vehicles that will provide it with the means necessary to enhance allocation of human and financial resources to the Honors College along with all its academic units at UMass Boston.
3. Increased focus on National Scholarships: UMB agreed that an increased focus on National Scholarships will benefit students, while also serving to increase attention from donors and University Advancement.

RECOMMENDATION

Department of Higher Education staff thoroughly reviewed all documentation received from the Commonwealth Honors Program Executive Committee and recommends that the Board approve the reapproval of the membership of the **University of Massachusetts Boston** in the **Commonwealth Honors Program**.