

PRESS RELEASE

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FROM: Faculty Senate Office, University of Massachusetts Amherst

SUBJECT: Massachusetts Secretary of Education to address Faculty Senate

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EDUCATION SECRETARY TO OUTLINE STATE REFORMS TO SENATE

Faculty leadership also to consider changes to undergraduate honors

State Secretary of Education Paul Reville is scheduled to talk about the role of the commonwealth's newly created Office of Education in implementing Gov. Deval Patrick's Readiness Project to the UMass Faculty Senate at its Dec. 11 meeting. The Readiness Project is a 10-year plan for education reform in Massachusetts.

"The mission of [our] office is to foster strong and seamless connections between the myriad state agencies and departments responsible for providing all Commonwealth students with a public education that will create the best possible opportunities for academic, social and civic success," he said. Reville expects to outline the work done to date and the next steps in enacting reforms that will allow for more and accelerated student success in his talk.

A question and discussion period will follow.

The campus may change the way it awards undergraduate graduation honors if a proposal to the Senate by its Rules Committee passes. Faculty leadership will consider uncoupling the awards of *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude* from participation in Commonwealth College, the campus's honors program, according to John McCarthy, chair of the Rules Committee.

The University's present system requires a grade point average (GPA) of 3.2 to graduate *cum laude* and higher GPAs, as well as designated work within the honors college, to qualify for the higher Latin honors. Under the proposed system, Latin honors would be based solely on GPA, as determined by each school or college, and separate distinctions would be given for work done within Commonwealth College.

"The current system is open to misinterpretation," McCarthy said, "because at most universities like ours, *magna cum laude* and *summa cum laude* are given for GPA [alone]. It's hard for outside constituencies to recognize that students who have *magna* and *summa cum laude* have done additional work in the Commonwealth College.

"By bringing our system of Latin honors into conformity with that of our peers, we're benefiting the students who aren't in Commonwealth College [by allowing them to achieve *magna* and *summa cum laude*.] and by giving special recognition to students who are in Commonwealth College, we're benefiting them as well. It's a win for both groups."

The Senate's agenda also includes suggestions for guidelines to supplement standards for undergraduate certificate proposals in response to a September report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Certificates. Members will vote on nominations to Faculty Senate councils and committees, as well.

In other business, senators will consider whether to approve a graduate certificate in Film Studies, as well as the Enrollment Regulations for Continuing and Professional Education courses for dismissed and suspended students. In addition, members will vote on a special report of the Academic Priorities, Graduate and Program and Budget councils concerning a Graduate Certificate in Public History.

The University's principal administrative officers will offer updates from their areas of management and will entertain questions from the audience.

The meeting is at 3:30 in Room 227 Herter Hall and is open to the public.

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