October 28, 2021

Dear Campus Community,

I am writing today to announce the formation of a Black Advisory Council (BAC) to provide the university with input and insight on how we can create a more supportive, just and equitable campus environment for our Black community.

As we are all painfully aware, this semester Black students on our campus were targeted by virulently racist, anonymous emails and other acts of racism, including when Black students were subjected to racist taunts from a passing car. Sadly, in the aftermath of these incidents, despite our efforts to reach out to the students to whom this racist hate was directed, many members of our Black community expressed disappointment that my administration and I did not respond more visibly and more forcefully to these incidents. For this, I wholeheartedly apologize.

The acts of anti-Black racism that have occurred on campus this semester and the disappointment Black students have expressed in our response to these incidents have caused my colleagues in campus leadership and myself to reflect on how we can more effectively confront racism and support our students. I am grateful to our Black students past and present for your activism, hard work and persistence. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with students to build a more inclusive community.

The Black Advisory Council, which has been in development for several months, is being launched in close coordination with Vice Chancellor & Chief Diversity Officer Nefertiti Walker. Serving as co-chairs will be Whitney Battle-Baptiste, professor and director for the W.E.B. Du Bois Center, and Wilmore Webley, associate professor and associate dean of the Graduate School’s Office of Inclusion and Engagement.

The BAC will be composed of administrators, faculty, staff and students, who have been asked to meet monthly to discuss issues related to the education, opportunity, access, well-being and success of Black people, and particularly African Americans at UMass Amherst. They will represent a broad network of more than 21 different programs, departments and resources. Full membership of the committee will be announced shortly.

The BAC will address large-scale topics related to the Black community, not to be confused with day-to-day climate-related issues, which are the responsibility of individual units in collaboration with the Office of Equity and Inclusion. Most specifically, the BAC is charged with guidance on issues that broadly impact Black students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni. This includes:
• Providing expertise, counsel and recommendations to support positive, equitable and inclusive experiences for Black students, staff and faculty

• Fostering mutual relationships with state, national and international higher education Black communities

• Developing within the UMass community fuller awareness and understanding of Black and African American issues and history, within and of our campus community

• Identifying opportunities for increased education and awareness for the campus community

• Encouraging and supporting campus initiatives and strategic planning that seek to embed specific focus for Black people and matters

• Monitoring campus performance and guiding goal setting for the ongoing recruitment, retention and success of Black students, staff and faculty

I am hopeful that with the formation of the Black Advisory Council, the UMass administration and the entire campus community can benefit from the perspectives that its members will bring in helping us foster a living-learning environment that is just, equitable diverse and inclusive.

Sincerely,

Chancellor Kumble Subbaswamy

University of Massachusetts Amherst