

Feb. 2, 2021

Dear UMass Community,

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all as we begin the Spring Semester. While this semester does not look like any other we have experienced before — with fewer students and staff on campus and as we continue to settle into new ways of living, learning and working — we are hopeful and excited to embark on a new chapter of resiliency and community.

The Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) has wholeheartedly continued to work on programs geared towards enriching UMass culture and progressing in our goals of creating a more inclusive and equitable campus. Last semester, we successfully launched several new initiatives and adapted our programs to work within our new remote learning and working environments. Some of these successes include: a webinar series, which included three separate sessions on racism, antiracism and COVID-19; the formation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Student Advisory Board; the formation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership Council; expanding our Learning Communities; and launching our Dignity and Respect in Action podcast and newsletter. This summer, we will provide a detailed public report of our work and outcomes for the 2020-21 academic year.

We hope that as you settle into this new semester, you will join us in our collective work of building a community of dignity, respect and inclusion by participating in some of our upcoming initiatives:

- On March 18, in partnership with the Isenberg School of Management, we will be presenting the [BIAS documentary and discussion](#) with filmmaker Robin Hauser. This documentary follows Hauser on a journey to uncover her hidden biases and explore how unconscious bias defines relationships, workplaces, our justice system and technology.
- On March 25, we welcome Dr. Anthony Jack, assistant professor of education at Harvard University, for a free, Five College virtual talk and Q & A on “The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges Are Failing Disadvantaged Students.” [We encourage you to learn more about Dr. Jack and the upcoming event.](#)
- [Campus Climate Grant](#) applications will open in late February. These grants, now in their fourth cycle, range from \$250 to \$2,500, and support projects proposed by UMass students, staff and faculty who help build community and create a more inclusive campus.
- Learning Communities will continue via Zoom this semester, with the option to read and discuss “How to be an Antiracist” by Ibram X Kendi; “What if I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective

People” by Verna Myers; and “Braving the Wilderness” by Brene Brown. [You can sign up for a book group here.](#)

- Season two of our [Dignity and Respect in Action podcast](#) will premier the first week of February. This podcast features interviews with student leaders, social justice and DEI-related subject matter experts, and highlights the work and accomplishments of historically underrepresented community members.
- To celebrate Black History Month, OEI will host a special podcast series throughout February called The Black Experience Series. The monthlong series will focus on Celebrating the Black Experience, the launch of the Black Presence initiative, racial justice advocacy, and more.
- In March, we will highlight the experiences and history of women and nonbinary community members. We encourage you to stay tuned through our newsletter for more details.

This is just the beginning of the work we are doing this semester, and we urge you to participate in these moments with us. We have additional speakers and events in the pipeline and will update you as they develop. There is a great deal of DEI and justice work happening across our campus community, beyond the scope of our office. To stay updated on DEI-related work and events, both within the Office of Equity and Inclusion and those of our partners across campus, we encourage you to [sign up for our newsletter](#).

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy semester,

Dr. Nefertiti A. Walker

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