February 2, 2022

Dear Campus Community,

This week, as the country begins observing Black History Month, we have an opportunity to come together and celebrate the profound role that African Americans have played in every facet of our nation. We also reflect upon the systems of oppression and acts of hate that have served as barriers to our progress, including the recent bomb threats terrorizing many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). We have proud HBCU alumni, those pursuing advanced degrees and those who teach and work here within our campus community, and we maintain domestic scholar exchanges with many of these historical institutions. We condemn these acts of hate and we stand in solidarity with HBCUs nationwide.

Last semester, we launched UMass Black Presence to chronicle the contributions of Black faculty, staff, alumni and students, who, throughout our history, have advanced our international reputation for excellence. In the weeks ahead, as part of Black History Month at UMass we continue this celebration with events and programs designed to foster celebration and dialogue among all members of our campus. I encourage you to participate as we work together to create a university community defined by the contributions of all.

Begin your exploration with the Origins of Black History Month, by Dean Barbara Krauthamer, our own eminent historian of slavery and emancipation in the 19th century American South. Continue exploring by listening to the Dignity and Respect in Action podcast episode featuring Professor Amilcar Shabazz, as he discusses his role in Juneteenth being recognized as a state holiday, and the importance of Black history and representation in education. Throughout the month, there is a wealth of additional programming to experience such as the Black Excellence Dinner, hosted by the Malcom X Cultural Center.

While I am proud of the longstanding commitment to social justice at UMass, even here, the barriers to racial equity and justice are real, whether subtle or overtly threatening. We can break down these barriers: each one of us has the power to become an agent of change. By working to see our own biases, by undoing structural barriers, by identifying our shared humanity, we strengthen our ability to challenge racism in ourselves, our university, and beyond.
As we begin Black History Month, let us use this time of celebration to reaffirm our continued commitment to creating a campus, a country, and a world defined by racial justice for all.

Sincerely,

Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy