

Engagement, Equity, and Empowerment:

*Faculty in Partnerships with
Our Local Communities*



An Archive of Community-Engaged
Faculty Spotlights 2019–2020

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS



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Office of Community Partnerships
UMass Boston



INTRODUCTION

The Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) at UMass Boston is committed to lifting up university-community partnerships that are mutually beneficial, while empowering communities and making the research, teaching, and service at UMass Boston impactful. With this publication, we bring you our second archive of faculty community engagement and partnership spotlights. The faculty highlighted have a history of engaging with communities and continue to do so in these uncertain and extraordinary times. Our office collected these profiles for our monthly e-newsletter in the 2019–2020 academic year, which we are proud to share with you through this special publication.

UMass Boston's urban mission is sustained through the work of community-engaged faculty who have been persistently committed to this work since the university's founding. Here, we celebrate the projects led by some of our esteemed community-engaged faculty who collaborate with resilient and culturally diverse communities in and beyond Greater Boston. The highlighted stories present a plethora of ongoing and inspiring community engagement work happening at UMass Boston that spans early childhood education, engagement with K–12 schools for inclusion and the empowerment of students of color, HIV prevention, community decision making, and archiving history and partnerships with Native tribal communities, among others. Their work touches on areas such as education, health, STEM, public policy, civic engagement, and immigrant and ethnic community issues.

We hope this archive stimulates and motivates us to work toward university-community partnerships that are empowering and equitable, as we deal with the challenges of our times, which wouldn't be possible without the wisdom of our communities. We hope these stories will inspire us to strive toward Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision for a "beloved community." We will continue to lift up the community-engaged work that many of our faculty colleagues on campus are doing. If you are one of them, we hope you will consider sharing your work with us.

Cynthia K. Orellana
Director, Office of Community Partnerships

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1



Partnering with the City and Local Communities for Early Childhood Education, Care, and Leadership Development

Anne Douglass is an associate professor, director of graduate certificate programs in early childhood education, and founding executive director at the Institute for Early Education Leadership and Innovation (the Leadership Institute) at UMass Boston. Douglass focuses on the design of programs, systems, and policies that cultivate leadership among early educators working with children from birth to age 5 and the skills for quality improvement and innovation. Douglass had a 20-year career in urban early care and education (ECE) as a teacher, administrator, family childcare owner and educator, and quality improvement coach and mentor to programs serving children and families with low incomes. “I learned firsthand that quality and quality improvement in ECE must be built, designed, and nurtured by those closest to the work, all in the context of supportive systems and policies,” said Douglass.

Toward that end, the Leadership Institute partnered with the City of Boston’s Small Business Innovation Center to train the owners of home- and center-based childcare programs in Boston. After completing this program, **Dorothy Williams**, the owner of Dottie’s Family Childcare in Dorchester, fully automated the administrative side of her business and learned to diversify her funding stream. “Going forward, we need to remember that the ECE system works really well with support from the state and the government. If that system succeeds, then our communities, our families, and our children succeed,” said Williams.



“The window of opportunity for us to really truly nurture our children and develop that social and emotional building to make them feel they’re worthy is from birth to 5. All our children need this, and we can’t afford to keep leaving so many children behind.”



The Leadership Institute is partnering with United Way to evaluate this training and the supply of childcare services in high-poverty neighborhoods. A recent **pilot study** suggests improving participants’ business management skills, self-efficacy, and program functioning. But demand for quality ECE far outstrips supply in Boston, Massachusetts, and across

the United States, resulting in a crisis for children and young families, starkly illuminated when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the temporary closure of ECE programs across the state, many at financial risk of permanent closure. “We’re in this situation because, over a long period of time, decisions about funding and policy have been made largely without the input of early educators. Leadership from ECE is vital to meet the challenges of the current crisis,” Douglass said.

The Leadership Institute runs applied research-practice partnerships to equip educators, while contributing new knowledge about early educator entrepreneurial leadership as a powerful lever for change. In 2019, it partnered with the state’s Department of Early Education and Care to redesign the **system of professional development and learning** for the state’s 9,000 licensed ECE programs and 70,000 early educators, and it partnered with the **Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program** to implement its entrepreneurial leadership curriculum. “What’s exciting about this work is that we do it in partnership with professional, community, government, and philanthropic entities that share our vision to transform quality in ECE,” said Douglass, and “this work can be brought to scale [to] reach tens of thousands of educators.”

2



Archiving Local Art and History in the Community's Own Voice

Pacey Foster, associate professor of management in UMass Boston's College of Management, is the faculty founder of the **Massachusetts Hip-Hop Archive** (the Archive). Located in the Healey Library at UMass Boston, the Archive started over 10 years ago with two collections of cassettes from *Lecco's Lemma*, a radio show that regularly featured demo tapes by local teenage artists alongside current rap and electro releases. With support from the UMass President's Creative Economy Initiatives Fund and the Boston Public Library, the Archive digitized 300 artist demo tapes sent to the show's founder, Magnus Johnstone, and another 200 tapes of the show recorded by Willie "Loco" Alexander, available at **Lecco's Lemma Collection**. Since the 2016 launch of the **Lecco's Lemma Collection**, Foster has facilitated partnerships between the Archive and local artists, community members, and the Boston Public Library to produce a series of public educational and archival events.



rapper Akrobatik. Two hundred community members worked with library staff and volunteers to scan 190 personal images and collect 60 short oral histories and made them publicly available. This event was followed by four public programs in 2018–2019 at which local artists worked with the Boston Public Library and the Archive to feature the four original elements of hip-hop culture (MC'ing, DJ'ing, dancing, and graffiti) at the Boston Public Library's neighborhood branches.

With funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, in May 2018, the archive hosted "Show 'em Whatcha Got" Mass Memories Road Show: Hip-Hop Edition, arranged by longtime community organizer and hip-hop activist Cindy Diggs (aka Mother Hip-Hop) and local

In fall 2019, the Archive partnered with Community Change Inc., the Boston Public Library, and a community planning team to celebrate the fortieth birthday of Massachusetts Rock Against Racism. Founded at UMass Boston in 1979, this important and little known antiracism youth program worked with a local community cable provider to teach media production and assembled a **video collection** documenting Boston's first hip-hop generation in their youth, which was made publicly available in fall 2019. In February 2020, the Archive participated in Documenting History in Your Backyard at New York University, where Foster presented the 10-year history of this project. Community engagement was a critical component in all these initiatives central to the mission of the Archive, as part of a larger community archives movement to decolonize archives and include historically underrepresented voices.



At a public research university, Foster recognizes the importance of asking how our work benefits the communities when the results of this work do not always fit into established rubrics for measuring academic accomplishments and may demand more time and administrative resources. It can be challenging to strike the right balance, Foster says, while sharing his joy from reconnecting artists and

community members with important artwork from their youth and also providing a multidimensional and multivocal record of the history of hip-hop in Massachusetts, told in the communities' own words. "This is our legacy, and we're given the opportunity to tell it in our own words. How often does that happen?" asked Rob Stull (aka NOTE) in a **2018 WBUR show**.

3



Demystifying STEM to Make It Accessible and Inclusive

Connie Chow, associate lecturer in the Honors College, is a trained biologist, science educator, and nonprofit leader. Chow spent a good part of her professional life increasing the accessibility of ideas, people, and resources related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in higher education and industry, making them accessible to groups that are traditionally marginalized and unrecognized by these fields, by gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Young women whom Chow taught in college were excited about science for the first time, and they lamented that financial constraints and the lack of requisite math and science classes in high school precluded them from revising their major, and future work. These obstacles frustrated her. Collaborating with middle school teachers in the Boston Public Schools to introduce students to six weeks of project-based, community-focused, college-level work affirmed for Chow that latent curiosity merely needed to be uncovered by providing the right context and experience. Chow believes that demystifying where and how science happens should be a feature of a functional democracy.



Centers for Youth & Families (BCYF) GIRLS (Growth, Intervention, Respect, Leadership, and Service) Leadership program to campus.

“I feel joy and connection by seeing a young person experience an “aha moment” when an idea and emotion are simultaneously sparked, a relationship to nature cemented, a vision of themselves broadened,” says Chow. Her sophomore students in the STEM Ambassador Program designed a series of hands-on science investigations with other graduate and undergraduate volunteers to welcome 12 young women from the Boston

These young women were welcomed to the Sandbox Lab at UMass Boston to measure and graph the sizes of various preserved *Anolis* lizard specimens. Serenity, a student in the GIRLS program, said, “I love dissecting the lizards. I wasn’t scared.” Further, the program participants analyzed the pH, salinity, and concentration of chlorophyll in water collected from Marina Bay, just off the Fox Point Pier, and discussed climate change. They identified different types of rocks, assessed their hardness, developed hypotheses about their formation, and discussed local geology. As middle schoolers, they were able to connect what they learned in school with their experiences. The STEM Ambassadors made a special effort to connect the science to these teenagers’ lives. Erika Butler, the BCYF GIRLS Initiative coordinator shared, “This was such an amazing opportunity for the girls, especially being in a lab. I would definitely bring them back!”



Chow’s Honors seminar, “Beyond the Bench: Scientists as Activists,” highlights scientists who advocate for environmental and algorithmic justice, in community with those most affected. It is offered as a dual enrollment course with high school juniors at Roxbury Prep, who orchestrated a multistationed event with students at the Paraclete Academy to engage them in thinking about climate change.

In closing, Chow states, “Communicating science to the public is an essential skill for STEM students and faculty alike, and outreach events offer an opportunity to hone those skills and to connect. Other than STEM, it was important that these young visitors felt comfortable on a university campus—felt like they belong. That said, be prepared to be amazed by the depth of questions you will get.”

4



Empowering Latinx and Immigrant Communities

Lorna Rivera is a sociologist; associate professor in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and Latino studies; and the director of the Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy. Rivera works on empowering Latinx and immigrant communities through research, teaching, and service relating to grassroots social justice-oriented education and community development initiatives. Rivera was the humanities scholar for the Afro-Latin Folktales project of the Hyde Square Task Force (HSTF). Funded by a Mass Humanities and Massachusetts Cultural Council grant, the program taught HSTF youth leaders the history and cultural context behind folktales from Latin America and related them to Boston's immigrant communities today. The youth explored being bi/multicultural and the sense of ownership and belonging within Afro-Latin culture. They co-wrote and produced a musical *RAICES* with amazing performances, dance, and music, which Rivera describes as "one of the greatest highlights of my community work."



Rivera attended public schools and is a first-generation college graduate. "I am dedicated to empowering Latinx and immigrant communities and advancing ethnic studies because my parents are from Puerto Rico, and although I was born and raised in Chicago, throughout my childhood I was fortunate to go back and forth from the island and

maintain close relationships with my multiracial Puerto Rican family. I maintained the ability to speak Spanish and developed great pride in Puerto Rican history and culture. Yet, I never had any Latino teachers and never learned Latino history in school," Rivera said.

Mayor Marty Walsh recently reappointed Rivera to the Boston School Committee. She also manages the Talented and Gifted (TAG) and Latino Proyecto ALERTA programs and the Latinx Student Success Initiative (LSSI)—a UMass Boston partnership with Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) funded by the Massachusetts



Department of Higher Education since 2016. "The goal of the LSSI is to increase access, retention, and graduation rates for underserved Latino students and to promote cultural wealth frameworks in curriculum and practices at both of our institutions to assist in eliminating the achievement gap for Latinx students," shared Rivera. Dean Liya Escalera from BHCC remarked that "Dr. Lorna Rivera's passion for student success and collaborative spirit embody engaged scholarship. Through our partnership, Bunker Hill has engaged in faculty development toward a more inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum, place-based field study, asset-based research and data sharing on Latinx students, and strategic planning rooted in equity-minded practices."

Her work offers strong evidence that ethnic studies curriculum and having faculty/teachers who share students' racial/ethnic/cultural background have a positive effect on student achievement, academic persistence, and success in college and beyond. Further, for first-generation students, "one of the best predictors of postsecondary aspirations is family support, especially for Latino students," said Rivera. "A College Access 'Family Night' at Chelsea High School was held in collaboration with our BHCC partners. We offered workshops in Spanish about college application procedures and financial aid. It was a huge success!"

Rivera serves on the board of the HSTF, the Center to Support Immigrant Organizing, and is the co-chair of the English Language Learners Task Force for the Boston School Committee.

5



HIV Prevention and Intervention Through Community Engagement

Rosanna DeMarco, professor and associate dean for academic affairs in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, exemplifies how reciprocal community partnerships can benefit the field and the community through advances in health science and HIV care by building relationships with Black, Latina, and Vietnamese women living with HIV infection. DeMarco employed a community-engaged, gender-sensitive, and culturally relevant secondary and tertiary prevention intervention method with a group of women and teens disproportionately affected by health disparities and HIV. Through engagement with Sistah Power Group, a group of Black and Latina women living with HIV, she helped create a social network of peers healing peers to decrease HIV incidence rates and help those living with HIV to stay well as they age. Together, they also co-produced a film titled *Women's Voices, Women's Lives* as a portable and meaningful storytelling narrative communication, an HIV prevention tool tailored to Black and Latina women. "The *Women's Voices, Women's Lives* film was a life-changing project for all of us," shared one Sistah Powah Group participant.

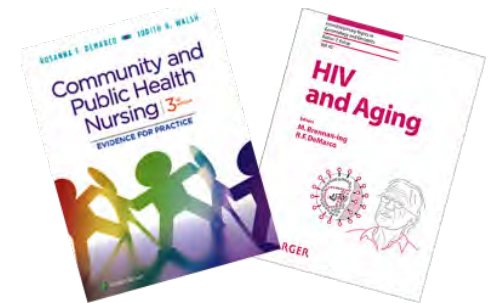


The film has been distributed nationally and internationally and offers testimonials of women aging with HIV infection and sharing what it was like to be a woman living with a life-threatening diagnosis across four stages (Being Diagnosed, Stigma, Women and Safe Sex, Survivorship). An HIV-prevention education curriculum was created to parallel the film and be used locally, nationally, and interna-

tionally as a primary prevention program. To broaden its reach, DeMarco translated the film, curriculum, and outcome measures (stigma, health care adherence, self-advocacy in safe sex negotiation) to **Vietnamese** and **Spanish**. "Coming together to find a solution to the HIV crisis among Black women has meant that I could be myself and not be afraid to use my voice to better the lives of others in Boston," one Sistah Powah Group participant commented.

With the Sistah Powah Group's direction, DeMarco's interests evolved to include studying the comorbidities of Black and Latina women living with HIV infection, specifically the intersection of HIV and smoking in relation to cancer prevention and control. DeMarco studied these comorbidities in conjunction with Drs. Sun Kim (of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences) and Mary Cooley (of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute). They teamed up to create another storytelling narrative communication, a film featuring women who have successfully stopped cigarette smoking, sustained cessation, and reduced the risk of non-AIDS-related cancers from smoking, which are more likely to cause death than AIDS at this time in history. They used the film to boost a successful video-call smoking cessation intervention.

DeMarco's interests continue to evolve in implementation science, health communications, and health equity and interventions in low-resource settings. Most recently, she has been working with Dr. Cali Fidiopiastis from the University of Central Florida on the neurological effect of viewing the film's prevention messages, combined with writing, using near-infrared spectroscopy in real time. DeMarco serves on the boards of the Multicultural AIDS Coalition and HIV Over Fifty. She continues her work and is a national leader in moving the science of HIV and aging forward, as comorbidities inform intersectionality of HIV, gender, and race.



6



Centering Decision-Making Around Community Member Needs

Michael Johnson, professor and chair of the Department of Public Policy and Public Affairs, has established a specialty in community-focused research, particularly on data analysis and decision making in housing and urban affairs. Johnson realized that decision sciences place more value on problems formulated by “experts,” without substantive consultation with community stakeholders regarding what data should be used for problem solving.

Johnson proposed that decision modeling should accommodate the needs and perspectives of communities and community members, especially from under-served or marginalized groups, whose solutions are based on quantitative analytic methods and evaluated in terms of economic efficiency. He coined the term “community-based operations research” to describe this effort and wrote two books: *Community-Based Operations Research: Decision Modeling for Local Impact and Diverse Populations* (Springer, 2012) and *Decision Science for Housing and Community Development: Localized and Evidence-Based Responses to Distressed Housing and Blighted Communities* (John Wiley & Sons, 2016). In 2018, Johnson collaborated with Gerald Midgley to produce a special issue of *European Journal of Operational Research* on **community operational research (COR)**. COR asserts that community members, not just community-based organizations, are the focus of decision modeling and that solutions may range from traditional outputs of structured decision models to a deeper understanding of problems, values, and resources.



Johnson, with colleagues across the UMass system, collaborated with community development corporations in Boston, Chelsea, Lowell, and Fitchburg on a National Science Foundation-supported project on **community-based responses to the foreclosed housing crisis**. Johnson’s team worked closely with CDC staff to

identify, formulate, and solve problems related to selecting housing units in various stages of foreclosure for acquisition and redevelopment. These collaborations addressed clarifying values and priorities that frame interventions, quantifying the notion of “strategic” action and developing multiyear strategies for local plans that accommodate uncertainty. The research team also provided technical assistance to community organizations through training in geographic information systems.

Through his work with Boston Main Streets offices in multiple Boston neighborhoods, Johnson established success measures for local economic development. Most recently, he partnered with the office of Boston City Councilor Andrea Campbell to develop a process for resource-limited city councilor offices to collect, analyze, and share data for uses beyond constituent service, such as advocacy, policy design, and evaluation. “Starting with supervising a summer intern provided by University of Massachusetts’s Civic Action Project, and continuing through the present, Professor Johnson has helped our office define its data needs, answer specific data questions, and build skills for data analytics that will enable us to use data for policy advocacy design and evaluation, as well as traditional constituent service,” shared Elizabeth Pimentel, chief of staff for Councilor Campbell.



Additionally, through UMass Boston’s Sustainable Solutions Lab, Johnson is developing a project to identify responses to the housing crisis and the climate crisis that threaten the sustainability of Boston’s neighborhoods, home to the most vulnerable populations. He shares, “I am constantly reminded that those who have firsthand experience with challenges, those with real wisdom about what data we need to make change, it is their views that count and speak to what interventions matter.”

7



Continuing a Family Legacy of Advocacy

J. Cedric Woods is a citizen of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina and the founding director of the Institute for New England Native American Studies (INENAS) at UMass Boston. Through INENAS, Woods gives care to the development of collaborative relationships, projects, and programs among Native American tribes of New England to increase tribal access to the participation and benefits derived from university research, innovation, scholarship, and education. “I see my work with the Native communities in this region as an extension of over a century of continuous advocacy that has played over time with my ancestors serving the community as teachers, religious leaders, professors, and tribal elected officials and delegates,” says Woods.

Woods has engaged in partnerships with Nipmuc, Wampanoag, Pequot, Narragansett, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Mohegan tribal members and several urban nonprofit organizations. In roles such as a convener for cross-tribal collaborations, principal investigator (for grant/program funding) for increasing access to educational programs, and an assistant for a community’s internal efforts to address issues impacting Native communities in this region, Woods works devotedly as a champion for Native education and equity. With this breadth of experience, Woods finds value in ensuring synergy between his work with communities and his academic work at UMass Boston: “My community-engaged work directly informs how and what I teach as well as which projects I see as important. It is critical for me that whatever I do addresses particular community needs and is a match for the resources available at the university.”



With each project/program having its own unique constellation of partners committed to preparing communities for addressing internal needs and providing Native youth with the skills needed for higher education, it is fair to say that Woods knows a little bit about

fostering community partnerships and feels that it is critical to take the time to build and maintain relationships with the communities with which you will be partnering. “I would say that this kind of work is both extremely rewarding as well as challenging. The biggest challenge I find is, not the lack of funding for specific projects, but rather, not enough time to do the kind of ongoing relationship maintenance you want to do with communities. No one wants to fund relationship building. However, it is essential for maintaining reciprocal relationships.”

Most recently, under the direction of Woods and in partnership with UMass Boston’s College of Nursing and Health Sciences and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, INENAS has been working to increase protective factors for the prevention of substance abuse, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase self-confidence among Native middle-school youth. “This initiative is a welcome addition to our current youth programs. It aligns with our core goals of integrating traditions and culture into our modern lives to become our best selves. Addiction lays waste to family and community structures. We see this new program as the means to prevent that destruction from occurring,” said Chief Cheryll Holley of the Nipmuc Nation.





Cross-Generational Community-Engaged Teaching and Learning, K-12 and Higher Education

Kristin Murphy, assistant professor of special education, envisioned immersive, community-based learning models to illuminate the K-12 world beyond textbooks and lectures, since she joined UMass Boston in 2013. Immersive, community-based learning is a transformative experience for teachers and students alike, centered on collaboration and critical thinking. Murphy served in special education teaching, policy, and research for the past 18 years.



Murphy received nearly \$70,000 in grant funding from sources including the OCP's Civic Engagement Scholars Initiative (CESI), UMass Medical School and the National Institutes of Health, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) to support this work. Through CESI, she created **a research colloquium course** titled "Understanding Their Experiences with

Street Trauma: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Methods," for the Honors College in collaboration with the Boston Public Schools' (BPS) Office of the Superintendent and with Community Academy of Sciences and Health (CASH) High School. Students in this course learned about conducting a qualitative YPAR photovoice study and worked with high school students enrolled in a street trauma seminar at CASH in Dorchester. Together, they explored issues of inequity around race, income, and education in urban communities. Honors College students worked alongside the high school students to provide guidance in conducting a street trauma-oriented YPAR photovoice study. In culmination, the BPS superintendent and other BPS school leaders attended an interactive exhibit of the photos, juxtaposed with student voice, and engaged with students.

"I cannot express just how much I feel I have learned/grown," a student reflected. "This class has inspired me to take a more active role in my community, and I learned how not only to listen to others, but really listen to understand..." This experience inspired a cross-generational teaching model in Murphy's classroom. She invites BPS high school students as well as teachers who are also UMass Boston alumni to join her class as teachers and learners, which reinforces their expertise and experience in the field and provides an opportunity to try their hand at university-level teaching. Participating in college coursework in high school helps the high schoolers envision themselves as successful college students. Murphy finds this to be an easy, powerful way to cultivate and maintain relationships with K-12 students and teachers and UMass Boston alumni, to keep herself informed while learning new content and teaching strategies.



Murphy also partnered with MA DESE to develop and pilot mixed reality simulations with avatars with diverse learning needs, including autism spectrum disorder and learning disabilities, allowing teacher preparation candidates to practice with avatars playing the role of K-12 students, staff, or families before or as a complement to community-based practice. She provided professional learning opportunities to teacher educators and K-12 professionals from across the state to use this technology to support active learning opportunities for preservice and in-service teachers, school leaders, and service providers.

Murphy encourages faculty "to think about ways to infuse immersive community-based learning experiences," which she believes "gets to the heart of how teaching, service, and research can truly intersect and become one transformative experience for everyone involved."

About OCP

The Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) was created in 2011 to serve as a gateway and resource hub for partnerships and as a connector and strategic coordinator of the university's engagement. The goal is to better align our campus engagement efforts, understand and recognize the impact of our engagement, and support the needs of our external communities. OCP seeks to identify, strengthen, and support the creation of collaborative community partnerships that advance our mission as Boston's public research university.

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