

BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION
REQUEST FOR COMMITTEE AND BOARD ACTION

NO.: BHE 22-38

BOARD DATE: February 1, 2022

RECEIPT OF THE NEW UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE: A VISION FOR DISMANTLING BARRIERS, RECOGNIZING STUDENTS’ CULTURAL WEALTH, AND ACHIEVING RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

MOVED: The Board of Higher Education (BHE) receives *The New Undergraduate Experience: A Vision for Dismantling Barriers, Recognizing Students’ Cultural Wealth, and Achieving Racial Equity in Public Higher Education in Massachusetts* report (the “Report”) from the New Undergraduate Experience (NUE) Committee; a group of more than 60 diverse higher education practitioners; BHE members; and business, community, and civic leaders from across Massachusetts and nationally.

The Board thanks the members of the NUE Committee and the members of the Department of Higher Education (DHE) Staff who worked tirelessly on this vision Report over the last year.

The Board endorses the Report as a vision document intended to inform the work of the Steering Committee developing the Statewide Strategic Plan for Racial Equity.

The Board further affirms NUE as a collective blueprint for policies and practices needed for students to reach their goals in the Commonwealth’s public higher education institutions. As such, the Board directs the Commissioner to work with the institutions and other stakeholders to help advance opportunities and policy levers that are appropriate for immediate implementation, as outlined in Appendix B of the Report. The Board further directs the Commissioner to identify policy priorities for Board action and to provide the Board with an implementation plan by December 2022.

VOTED: Motion adopted by the BHE on 2/1/2022.

Authority M.G.L. c. 15A, §§6 and 9 (c), (f)and (u); BHE 19-03.

Contact: Patricia A. Marshall, Ph.D., Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success
Robert J. Awkward, Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness

The New Undergraduate Experience: A Vision for Dismantling Barriers, Recognizing Students' Cultural Wealth, and Achieving Racial Equity in Public Higher Education in Massachusetts

Background

In December of 2018 the Board of Higher Education (BHE) voted to make racial equity the top statewide policy and performance priority for public higher education in the Commonwealth. As outlined in the Executive Summary of the NUE Report (Exhibit A), the moral case for educating all students is self-evident and urgent. There are powerful economic and democratic arguments for strong interventions in the way the system recruits, serves, and advocates for its racially minoritized students. The authors of the NUE Report believe that if the system transforms to successfully educate Black and Latinx students, it will better serve students from all backgrounds.

The NUE report is a declaration meant to clearly express Massachusetts education leaders' and students' collective vision for the cultural, curricular, pedagogical, and structural changes needed for a public higher education transformation. It also serves as a collective blueprint for policies and practices needed for all students to reach their goals at the Commonwealth's public higher education institutions. The NUE report provides recommendations that are meant to inform the 10-year statewide strategic plan focused on racial equity. While the NUE provides the vision, the strategic plan will detail how to move these ideas and others to action to achieve racial equity in the Commonwealth's higher education system over the next decade.

A group of more than 60 diverse higher education practitioners and leaders from across the Massachusetts and nationally informed the *NUE's* content and recommendations. Additionally, the *NUE* authors held focus groups with students to ensure student voices and perspectives are central to the report's content and recommendations. Between January and May 2021, large *NUE* committees met monthly with smaller working groups meeting weekly or biweekly. The project culminated with a June 2021 Retreat during which feedback from the Academic Affairs Committee of the BHE was integrated into the final recommendations.

The report's recommendations are organized around a newly created Student Bill of Rights and cover six broad categories:

Category

Student Bill of Rights

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|---|---|
| 1. Admissions, Enrollment, & Transfer | Students have the right to clear, accessible, and understandable financial information, as well as affordable and predictable education costs |
| 2. Curriculum | Inclusive, anti-racist, and culturally responsive curricula and pedagogies |
| 3. Equity-Minded Teaching, Learning, & Assessment | Inclusive, anti-racist, and culturally responsive curricula and pedagogies |
| 4. High-Impact Practice and Co-Curriculum | Equitable access to experiential learning opportunities, in and out of the classroom |
| 5. Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Faculty of Color | Diverse and supportive faculty and staff who are equity-minded higher education practitioners |
| 6. Holistic Student Support | Welcoming, inclusive, and safe campus environments and Timely and relevant pathways to graduation and employment |
| 7. Student Voice | A voice in the decisions that impact their undergraduate experience |

The report details opportunities for individual institutions, the Department of Higher Education (DHE), and the BHE to build upon efforts already undertaken by many public institutions to create a transformed, more equitable system. The BHE's recommendations for the FY22 budget affirm the system's commitment to this goal and signal interest in funding activities like those listed in the recommendations in this report to further racial equity.¹ Funding streams like proposed investing in outcomes-based formula funding, additional funding recommended for Early College, the Performance Management Set Aside, expansion of the MassGrant Plus program, and the newly funded SUCCESS program will provide necessary foundational support for the implementation of the recommendations in this report. However, because the *NUE's* recommendations are meant to provide a vision for racial equity in the Commonwealth's higher education system, not a mandate, this report does not detail how the recommendations, if adopted, would be funded. Specific funding streams dedicated to this work will be the topic of continued conversation between the DHE, BHE, and institutions.

The following graphic outlines the areas in which this report makes recommendations. We are aware that the implementation of this vision document will require significant resources beyond what is currently available. Further, as explained above, a detailed plan for implementation will be addressed by the 10-year strategic plan for racial equity.

Admissions, Enrollment, and Transfer

- Admissions and Enrollment
- Transfer

Curriculum

- Credit for Prior Learning/Prior Learning Assessment
- English Language Learners
- Developmental Education
- A Rejuvenated Core Curriculum
- Majors, Minors, and Certificate Programs

Equity-Minded Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

- Equitable Pedagogical Practices
- Equity-Minded Faculty and Staff Development
- Equity-Minded Assessment

High-Impact Practices and the Co-Curriculum

- Mentoring Racially Minoritized Students
- Equitable Access to Co-Curricular and High-Impact Experiences

Hiring, Supporting, and Retaining Faculty of Color

- Hiring Faculty of Color
- Supporting and Retaining Faculty of Color

Holistic Student Support

- Academic and Financial Policies
- Curricular and Co-Curricular Advising and Support
- Basic Needs Support
- Wellness, Conduct, and Safety

(See Appendix B for a list of consolidated recommendations.)

Through the recommendations, *The New Undergraduate Experience: A Vision for Dismantling Barriers, Recognizing Students' Cultural Wealth, and Achieving Racial Equity in Public Higher Education in Massachusetts* aims to serve as a 21st century foundational document for public higher education in Massachusetts and as an integral document to ensuring racial equity and justice in the Commonwealth's public higher education institutions.

Public Institution Vetting

The Commissioner sent a draft of the *New Undergraduate Experience* vision report to the presidents of all institutions of public higher education in Massachusetts on October 7, 2021. The institutions were given three weeks to review and comment on the vision report via a survey monkey feedback collection instrument. However, on October 28th, Dr. David Podell, President of Massachusetts Bay Community College on behalf of the Council for Community College Presidents, requested a one-month extension because they wished to review the report more carefully given "the value and significance of the *NUE*."

As a result, the Commissioner gave the community colleges until December 1, 2021, to provide consolidated feedback. In addition, he also communicated to the state universities that they too could have the same additional time to provide their feedback. As a result, the Commissioner received a consolidated response from the community colleges, and individual responses from five community colleges, three state universities, and two University of Massachusetts campuses as follows:

- Bunker Hill Community College
- Cape Cod Community College
- Massasoit Community College
- Mt. Wachusett Community College
- Springfield Technical Community College
- Massachusetts College of Art & Design
- Salem State University
- Worcester State University
- University of Massachusetts Amherst
- University of Massachusetts Lowell

In addition, on November 16th, Dr. Patricia A. Marshall, Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs & Student Success; Christine Williams, Assistant Commissioner for Strategic Initiatives; and Dr. Robert J. Awkward, Assistant Commissioner for Academic Effectiveness, conducted a presentation about *NUE* to the members of the Racial Equity Justice Institute at Bridgewater State University and received feedback that was also incorporated into the final report being provided to the BHE.

The collective response was very thoughtful, useful, and helpful in the development of the final report. There were 162 individual comments from all the sources cited above. Every comment was addressed by the DHE team and handled as follows: the comment/idea/suggestion/feedback was incorporated into the report, or it was determined that the comment/idea/suggestion/feedback was already addressed by the report, or that the comment/idea/suggestion/feedback was outside the scope of this vision report. In most cases, outside the scope of the vision report meant it was a matter to be handled internally within the DHE or it will be addressed as part of the strategic planning process.

However, there were several themes that emerged from stakeholder feedback that have been addressed within the vision report and can be summarized as follows:

Purpose of the Report and Implementation

A frequent commentary received from stakeholders involved the intended purpose of this report, who was responsible for its implementation, and by when. Stakeholders were confused as to whether this report was intended as a charge for them or if it was a vision report. This misunderstanding occurred because the draft version contained a table that outlined recommendations by topics with timelines for completion and assigned responsibilities (i.e., DHE, DHE and campuses, or campuses only). Yet, *NUE* had been described as a vision report. In addition, the campuses know that a strategic planning process is being rolled out, which would develop specific strategies to undertake with metrics, assigned roles, and timetables.

We agreed with the feedback and removed the table in the Executive Summary. There is a table in the Appendix that lists all recommendations by content area with recommended role assignments. In addition, we emphasized throughout the report that it is a vision document and that specific details regarding implementation will be provided in the DHE Strategic Plan.

Funding

Many responses were received from stakeholders that focused on the issue of how the proposed recommendations in *NUE* will be funded. Clearly, many of the initiatives and programs recommended within the report will require additional funding for the institutions and for the DHE as they are not yet universally adopted. That is, many of these innovations are already occurring at several of our campuses, but not at all. There has been innovation spending already enacted, e.g., proposed investing in outcomes-based formula funding, additional funding recommended for Early College, the Performance Management Set Aside, expansion of the MassGrant Plus program, and the newly funded SUCCESS program that will provide necessary foundational support for the implementation of the recommendations in this report. Yet, more funding will be required, and more funding will need to be requested in order to support the recommendation in the report.

This idea has been strengthened in the report by emphasizing the need for funding and by adding language related to a commitment to continued conversations in this area: “Specific funding streams dedicated to this work will be a continued conversation between the DHE, BHE, and institutions.”

Accountability

Accountability was another theme that emerged during the stakeholder vetting process. That is, who will be held accountable for the implementation of these proposed recommendations and how; especially if there is no additional funding. The following are some selected comments from campuses regarding what they view as elements of accountability:

- Making [NUE implementation] a mandate both at the DHE and institutional level and incorporating outcomes {should be added} to senior leadership evaluation.
- A component of the DEI [elements] of the review process for mid and annual review processes. This needs to be bargained for by colleges and universities.
- Communication and Accountability plan [must be developed] as a way of knowing what is being completed and the impact of recommendations
- Clarity [regarding] who is responsible for supporting different populations, naming people responsible
- Who is leading the efforts in each area (curriculum, assessment, transfer, etc.)? Otherwise, [the success of this effort] will fall by the wayside.

This issue of accountability will be addressed in the Strategic Plan and will include timetables, role designations, and metrics. It will detail whether an action is the responsibility of the DHE, campuses, or both (see Appendix B in the report that provides this detail by content area). In addition, accountability will be incorporated into the performance review process for presidents and the Commissioner. The DHE Strategic Plan will inform and influence institutional strategic plans developed after its completion. This will serve as another aspect of accountability. Elements of the Equity Agenda are already being incorporated into institutional strategic plans.

Intersectionality/Focus on Black and Latinx Students

Several comments addressed issues related to intersectionality and the focus on Black and Latinx students. For example, campuses asked why Black and Latinx students are the focus of the report? Will that exclude other minoritized students, e.g., Asian and Indigenous students? Does that exclude White students? Does that exclude other intersectional identities, e.g., gender, sexuality, first-generation, and socio-economic status?

This vision report is focused on Black and Latinx students because they are the students for whom the current system has institutional structures and systemic barriers that hinder the ability of our minoritized students to perform to their potential in our public higher education system. This, if you will, is the problem that must be addressed by the DHE and the public institutions of higher education. And as Dr. Shaun Harper of USC says, “you cannot address a problem until you name it” (Dr. Shaun Harper, Personal communications, December 12, 2019). The data provide ample evidence to support this idea.

A 2019 report found that Massachusetts led the country in high school graduation, college enrollment, and overall degree attainment, yet the attainment levels of White students were drastically higher given their historical advantage.ⁱⁱ The gaps persist in every success metric tracked in public higher education showing that while overall completion rates may be improving, the equity gap is widening.ⁱⁱⁱ

These trends are particularly troubling when considering the Commonwealth’s overall population trends. As the DHE data show, while the percentage of White students in Massachusetts high school graduating classes will decline from 82 percent to 56 percent by 2032, notable growth will be evident among racially minoritized students.^{iv} In particular, Black and Latinx populations – the focus of this report – will begin to claim a greater share of high school graduating students in Massachusetts. By

2032, the Latinx high school graduating population will represent nearly one-quarter of the potential college-going population, increasing from a base of six percent currently.

The reality is if we address the institutional barriers and structures that hinder Black and Latinx students from performing to their potential, the entire system will improve for all students. We also understand that many students have intersectional identities and are members of more than one of these marginalized groups. We believe that if the system transforms to successfully educate Black and Latinx students, it will also serve these other students and can point the way toward additional changes that will directly support all marginalized groups. These ideas have been incorporated more vigorously throughout the vision report.

Education Continuum

There were several comments about the challenges that the public higher education system must address, including the level of preparedness of students coming from our primary and secondary educational system. There is no doubt we will need to better coordinate our efforts and attempt to make transitions from K to 16 more seamless. However, there are two different systems with different organizational leadership. As was stated in the University of Massachusetts Amherst feedback: “This report was charged with focusing on Massachusetts public higher education, however, this needs to be a collaborative effort involving the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as well.”

As a result, in the report, it now states that we should continue to collaborate with our partners in K-12 to address our overlapping authorities in areas including pre-college and career advising, implementation and expansion of Early College, more seamless admissions processes, and alignment of college curricula with feeder high school content. This work will need to be carried out in partnership with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Segmental Differences

Several institutions noted that our public system is not one monolith. It is comprised of community colleges, comprehensive state universities, and research universities at the University of Massachusetts. Each segment is comprised of diverse populations; the community college student population being the most diverse in all ways. Thus, stakeholders highlighted the importance of looking at data at the segmental level separately because some recommendations may align better with different populations. Stakeholders also emphasized that recommendations must account for the student populations in each segment, in addition to the individual culture and mission of each institution.

For example, the University of Massachusetts Amherst noted, “It is not appropriate to compute averages over heterogeneous institutions, such as UMass and the state universities, as in the graduation rate graph on p. 15. To illustrate, on our campus, the 6-year graduation rate for Black students is 76%, which is higher than the average graduation rate for White students shown in the graph. It is more appropriate to use measures that are normalized to differences among institutions, such as the graduation gap.”

The consolidated community colleges feedback also emphasized this point: “One of the biggest causes of differential outcomes by race is that the community colleges, which serve the greatest proportion of Black and Latinx students, receive the least per [capita] funding. So, Massachusetts has inequity built into its higher education funding system, and we should not be surprised that we therefore see differential outcomes.”

As a result, all data tables are shown, analyzed, and discussed by segment. Wherever a recommendation was unique to a specific segment, that was made clear. And overall, there is an acknowledgement throughout the report that there are three different and unique segments that comprise our public higher education system. As such, recommendations and implementation have taken the unique differences between our three segments of public higher education in the Commonwealth into account.

Closing

The moral, economic, and democratic imperatives for transforming the Commonwealth’s public higher education system to focus on racial equity and justice are clear. Importantly, during the transformation process, the people most affected by the changes – students — must be consulted. The *NUE* report was created in partnership with students. Students’ voices – particularly racially minoritized student voices – must continue to be an integral part of the process as recommendations are debated and policies are formed. At the same time, public institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts must flip the mindset of students being “college-ready” to institutions being “student-ready.” Institutions must create services and activities that are intentionally designed to advance student success and educate racially minoritized students. This mindset change and the creation of supportive systems for students must be a priority as we move forward with operationalizing the recommendations in the *NUE* report through the 10-year Strategic Plan focused on racial equity.^v

The role of the BHE is vital to advancing the *NUE*’s recommendations. BHE support will help the DHE and individual institutions forge ahead, navigate resistance, and fulfill the promise of transformative change. BHE’s endorsement of the *NUE*’s recommendations to inform the statewide strategic plan underscores the focus on racial equity and justice, meets the urgency of the moment, and breathes life into the recommendations. Importantly, the BHE’s support will also ensure that resources will be dedicated to the vision set forth in this document and in the upcoming statewide strategic plan.

To see progress and success, this process must be iterative, collaborative, inclusive, and a constant focus of the BHE, DHE, and individual institutions. Collaboration between the BHE, DHE, institutions, and other stakeholders will be key to ensuring the success of the Commonwealth’s journey toward racial equity and justice. But – as the detailed recommendations in this report suggest – each body has an individual role to play to create an environment focused on racial equity and justice and urgently drive the changes necessary. The *NUE* report will inspire the next step in this process: the development of the 10-year statewide strategic plan focused on racial equity. The strategic plan will take the recommendations in this report one step further by prioritizing and operationalizing them according to timelines and providing tangible metrics for implementation and accountability.

ⁱ Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, “FY22 Budget Recommendation,” December 2020, p. 3-5.

ⁱⁱ [Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, “2019 Common Assessment Policy,” March 2019.](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Complete College America, “Massachusetts: Addressing Equity with a Sense of Urgency,” August 5, 2019.](#)

^{iv} Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, “A New Direction for Enhancing Economic Growth and Social Mobility in Massachusetts: An Equity-focused Strategic Framework for Public Higher Education,” 2018, p. 7.

^v The University of Michigan, “Defining DEI,” accessed September 8, 2021; DL Stewart. “Language of Appeasement,” Inside Higher Ed, March 30, 2020.