



University of Massachusetts

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SEARCH FOR THE ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT OF EQUITY AND ACCESS

The University of Massachusetts

Boston, MA

THE SEARCH

The University of Massachusetts System (UMass or “the System”) seeks an inspiring, collaborative, and solution-oriented leader to serve as its inaugural Assistant Vice President of Equity and Access (AVP). Reporting to the Senior Vice President & Deputy Vice President for Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Equity, the AVP will serve as the System’s primary advisor on all issues related to equity and access and aid in developing and sustaining a new equity and access unit within the System office. Working collaboratively across System campuses, they will assess and address needs that enhance the System experience for all constituents in order to continue advancing and sustaining an intellectually curious, welcoming, and diverse community for students, staff, and faculty. As UMass looks to its future growth, the AVP will provide innovative leadership in the System’s effort to cultivate a stronger and more inclusive university community by providing information, sharing resources and best practices, and facilitating conversations around issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

The University of Massachusetts is a revolutionary university that harnesses the spirit of Massachusetts to deliver a world-class education that transforms lives. Massachusetts is home to one of the world's most expansive, knowledge-intensive economies, a culture that greatly appreciates university innovation, and a spirit of academic achievement where DEI efforts are able to thrive and have impact. As the second-largest employer in the state and the largest contributor to the Massachusetts workforce, UMass continues to expand opportunities for employers to do business with us and is implementing systems to open doors of opportunity for women- veteran- and minority-owned businesses.

The UMass community recognizes the seismic changes produced by social unrest stemming from increasing political polarization, growing racial, gender, and sexual discrimination, partisan disputes, and the recovery from a global pandemic. In this galvanizing time of change, the AVP has an incredible opportunity to harness the energy of this current moment to guide the UMass community into actualizing a more just and equitable future.

The University of Massachusetts System has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this search. All confidential inquiries, referrals, and nominations should be directed to the search firm as indicated at the end of the document.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS SYSTEM

[The University of Massachusetts](#) is the public university system and the only public research system in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The System encompasses four comprehensive undergraduate and graduate campuses ([Amherst](#), [Boston](#), [Dartmouth](#), and [Lowell](#)), a world-class medical school ([Chan Medical School](#)), and the state's only public law school ([UMass Law School](#)). UMass is now ranked 43rd among all U.S. institutions and 22nd among all U.S. public universities in the 2024 Times Higher Education World University Rankings. UMass remains the top public university in New England, a position it has held in the Times Higher Education rankings since 2014.

The University of Massachusetts is governed by a 22-member Board of Trustees that represents various interests of the public at large on a non-partisan basis. Seventeen members of the board are appointed by the Governor and five members are UMass students elected by the student body on each of the five campuses. The Board of Trustees plays an important role in directing strategy and overseeing the financial and strategic direction of the UMass System. It functions as a legislative body dealing mainly with general policies governing the System. The Board is not an administrative or management board.

Leadership

[Marty Meehan](#) is the first undergraduate alumnus to lead the five-campus University of Massachusetts System. On July 1, 2015, he became the university's 27th president after serving in the U.S. House of Representatives and as chancellor of UMass Lowell. Meehan has an abiding belief in public higher education's power to transform lives. His commitment to equity and access in higher education has been demonstrated throughout his prolific career as a member of Congress and as a university leader. His service on the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) Board of Directors, supporting APLU's efforts to ensure that high-quality public higher education remains affordable and accessible for students of all backgrounds, to being named a Frederick Douglass Scholars University Leader for his commitment to making study abroad opportunities accessible to students of all backgrounds give further testimony of his commitment towards practicing equity and access.

In March 2023, President Meehan appointed outgoing UMass Amherst Chancellor [Kumble Subbaswamy](#) to the position of Interim Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs and Equity, serving the five-campus, 74,000-student system. Dr. Subbaswamy is completing more than a decade of service at UMass Amherst. He will oversee the academic program approval and faculty tenure and promotion processes, assist the president with setting and implementing academic priorities, and convene campus academic officers to identify priorities and strategies. Subbaswamy will also assist in setting a long-term strategic vision for the system office's academic and student affairs and equity area.

President Meehan also appointed [Dr. Nefertiti Walker](#) as Deputy Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs and Equity (AASAE). Walker previously served as associate dean for an inclusive organization in UMass Amherst's Isenberg School of Management. She is a tenured faculty member at

Isenberg, teaching courses in leadership and organizational behavior, sport organizational development, and foundations of DEI in business. Walker also held a dual appointment as Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion at UMass Amherst and Presidential Advisor for Equity and Inclusion. In her new role, Walker's focus will be on infusing the System's academic priorities and goals with an equity and inclusion imperative.

Office of President

The UMass President's Office provides leadership, financial management, and oversight to the System and its five campuses, spearheads joint academic, financial, and economic development initiatives, and provides shared services in the areas of information technology, treasury, procurement, legal, auditing, and others to drive maximum efficiency and effectiveness on behalf of its 75,000 students. The office works with the governor, legislature, executive branch agencies, Congress, federal agencies, and professional organizations to build support for the System. Overall planning, policy development, and initiation of university-wide programs are carried out through the office by several departments that report to the President and Vice Presidents who are located in both Boston and Westborough, MA.

President Meehan recently established an expanded [UMass President's Office Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility \(DEIA\) Team](#). This 13-member team, which has representation from several departments and will be staffed by members of the Human Resources team, will work to identify and help implement best practices across the organization with regard to DEIA issues. The mission of the President's Office DEIA Team is to promote inclusion, equity, and respect for all of those who work for and engage with the university, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, citizenship status, age, disability, genetic information, and any other characteristic or status.

Academic Affairs, Student Affairs & Equity

Academic Affairs, Student Affairs & Equity (AASAE) provides system-wide support and academic assessment for the UMass System. The team works in collaboration with the University's faculty, administration, student governance, and state education agencies to ensure UMass' status as a world-class public research university committed to advancing knowledge and transforming lives. The team also advises the Committee on Academic Affairs and Student Affairs (CASA), the Board of Trustees, the President, and campuses on the formulation, interpretation, and implementation of policies that will benefit the UMass faculty and students, research, academic programs, and outreach.

The department represents the interests of the University by serving as a point of contact for external agencies and organizations. The department is home to the Academic Advisory Council (AAC) made up of the chief academic officers of each campus. The AAC meets monthly to review academic matters common and unique to all campuses.

THE ROLE OF ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT OF EQUITY AND ACCESS

Reporting to the Senior Vice President & Deputy Vice President for AASAE, the inaugural AVP will be responsible for supporting the development of a new equity and access unit within the System office. They will work with colleagues in Institutional Research (IR), DEI, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Human Resources on the System's five campuses and in the System office to support these efforts. The AVP will also work with the Office of General Counsel. In addition, the AVP will work with government affairs professionals at the state and local levels to communicate the System's efforts, better understand opportunities for collaboration and partnerships, and assist the UMass System in all aspects of its mission, policies, and practices with the goal of serving all segments of its public equitably. The AVP will also be responsible for overseeing and growing pipeline programs, such as the [UMass Community College Advantage Scholarship](#) and the [Commonwealth Collegiate Academy](#).

The ideal leader will serve through both influence and strategy development and will possess the ability to evaluate the progress of the System toward its vision for equity and diversity. The AVP must be able to convene and work effectively with people at all different levels, including state legislatures, senior leadership, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community. The AVP will need to be nimble, with the ability to pivot and adjust strategy when new circumstances arise. The AVP also must impress on the community that the System's progress in equity and diversity will be the result of a shared endeavor. The AVP must foster an inclusive environment, creating equitable and collaborative partnerships that reach outside the University and affect change for the commonwealth. In addition, the AVP must have extensive knowledge of existing research and best practices to advance equity and access in higher education. This role also requires the demonstrated ability to apply and contribute to national best practices, and an appreciation for shared governance.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Serve as a collaborative partner that empowers and coordinates action across a complex, multifaceted university system

The AVP will bring a spirit of collaboration that drives visionary change and growth and provides resources and support to constituents across the System. The University of Massachusetts is a highly decentralized institution with campuses across the state, each with unique needs related to diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. The ideal candidate will exhibit superior interpersonal communication skills across varied constituencies, recognize the diversity within each campus, and understand the nuances of interdivisional and system-wide collaboration.

It will be essential for the AVP to facilitate the sharing of information across divisions by breaking down silos and developing a transparent process for the use of communication methods and tools across the University, providing opportunities for a clear articulation of priorities, accomplishments, and next steps. This includes recognizing individuals and units that successfully influence the System's equity and access

goals while celebrating and leveraging their contribution to further strengthen the System's climate and culture. They will have opportunities to convene the Equity Advisory Council (consisting of campus Chief Diversity Officers and other relevant representatives) to establish and exchange best practices in promoting equity and access.

Coordinate and advance a system-wide equity and inclusion strategy

The AVP will shape the strategy and coordinate system-wide efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion. This individual will help craft and execute a vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion that is unique to the UMass community and influenced by its history and context. This will include (but is not limited to) formulating policy, evaluating progress, identifying opportunities and areas of concern across the campuses, and uniting the existing efforts to align with the vision, capitalize on resources, and increase overall effectiveness.

The AVP will coordinate to ensure that a consistent and clear equity and access strategy can be implemented and assessed across the System. The AVP will coordinate, lead, and embed a cohesive equity and access strategy across the System and galvanize the ongoing commitments and talents of faculty, students, and staff engaged in existing efforts and initiatives. The AVP will have the opportunity to bring together key faculty, staff, and students in coordinating bodies to leverage resources, learn from one another, and provide consistency across the System.

Serve as a key advisor to campus leadership on equity and access issues to develop actionable solutions

As a trusted advisor and thought leader, the AVP will bring experience and subject matter expertise on emergent issues of equity and access across the System and nation. This individual will serve in an advisory capacity to leaders throughout the System. As such, the AVP must quickly work to develop new mechanisms for communicating their expertise and support from the President's Office. This will require creative and adroit communication skills, including crisis management, and the ability to work across a diverse range of constituents with varying levels of fluency around equity and access work, along with the ability to influence at all levels of the System, and with an emphasis on action and accountability.

The AVP must be able to synthesize information from multiple stakeholders and provide a range of solutions to given issues, collaborating with campuses to ensure continuous improvement of campus climate for students, faculty, and staff. To this end, the AVP will serve as a connector and facilitator, bringing alignment and awareness to the many efforts taking place across the System. This will also include establishing more strategic relationships with national organizations advancing equity and access.

Develop methods and tools to assess and evaluate community, equity, and diversity strategies over time

With a deep and contemporary understanding of equity and access concepts and issues, the AVP will employ a continuous-improvement approach to community, equity, and diversity assessment and

evaluation that is data-driven and informed by theory and current best practices. They will establish metrics for success that are current and clear, and they will ensure that equity and access performance across campuses is effectively tracked, contributing to the larger System mission, and in line with current state or federal mandates. When necessary, they will utilize data to communicate the necessity of new programs and processes across the System. Further, they will benchmark results against similar and aspirational universities and institutions to position UMass on the cutting edge of the practice.

PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS

While no single candidate will likely have all the ideal qualifications, candidates should possess many of the following qualifications and characteristics:

Required Qualifications

- Master's degree in social science, business, education, or related field 5+ years of experience within the higher education policy, equity and access, diversity, inclusion, and similar fields
- Experience navigating basic data visualization tools such as Tableau
- Experience developing equity and access policies related to or within the higher education industry.
- Excellent communication skills and experience presenting findings to decision-makers
- Ability to collaborate with internal and external audiences, work effectively and independently on multiple priorities with clear deadlines
- Experience working with government, for-profit, non-profit, and education sector professionals
- Experience executing conferences, summits, or similar events
- Knowledge of equity and access literature and frameworks as they relate to policy, process, and implementation
- Experience in diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and access in higher education, and the ability to synthesize and implement state and federal policy as it relates to higher education institutions.

Preferred Qualifications

- Terminal degree in social science, business, education, law, or related field
- Advanced research and data experience
- Prior experience working in the higher education sector
- Strong understanding of federal, state, and higher education equity and access policy, process, law, and regulation

WORK ARRANGEMENT

The Office of the President is supportive of flexible work arrangements when aligned with the ability to meet the needs of the unit and the essential duties of the position. The location of this position is flexible (Option to work in offices located in Boston, MA and Westborough, MA) and can operate in a hybrid model.

TO APPLY

The University of Massachusetts System has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist in the search for the Assistant Vice President of Equity and Access. Confidential inquiries, nominations, referrals, and curricula vitae with letters of interest should be sent electronically to the following:

Donna Cramer, Partner
Miguel Santiago, Senior Associate
Ryan Smillie, Senior Search Coordinator
Isaacson, Miller

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/university-massachusetts-system/assistant-vice-president-equity-and-access>

Electronic submission of application materials is strongly preferred.

UMass is committed to a policy of equal opportunity without regard to race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, age, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, disability, military status, or genetic information in employment, admission to and participation in academic programs, activities, and services, and the selection of vendors who provide services or products to the University. To fulfill that policy, UMass is further committed to a program of affirmative action to eliminate or mitigate artificial barriers and to increase opportunities for the recruitment and advancement of qualified minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and covered veterans. It is the policy of UMass to comply with the applicable federal and state statutes, rules, and regulations concerning equal opportunity and affirmative action.