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Community Connections Newsletter

Office of Community Partnerships

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Office of Community Partnerships, University of Massachusetts Boston

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Nantucket Program Makes Lasting Impressions

In the middle of the night, Madeline Hurtado and her peers from the Humanities and Leadership Development High School in Lawrence were combing the beach in search of horseshoe crabs. It was June 2012 in Nantucket, and with a full moon and high tide, horseshoe crabs were coming to shore to lay eggs in the sand. In response to recent concern over declining horseshoe crab populations, the students were surveying the beach to monitor and document the presence of the living fossils. The species dates back more than 350 million years, but their decline is attributed to very modern causes, including their use as fishing bait and in medical products.

The students were participating in a four-day, fully funded experiential learning trip that is part of the Grace Grossman Youth Collaborative (GGYC), a community-based program at the UMass Boston Nantucket Field Station. The



Sarah Oktay shows Worcester High School students how to do a beach profile at Sconset Beach.

program strives to trigger a lifelong interest in science and related careers by emphasizing their connection to our daily lives and future quality of life.

Through hands-on field research, students investigate topics of concern to the local community, exploring the practical uses of science in the broader context of Nantucket's environment, people, and culture. On an island steeped in history, students learn about the Wampanoag, Quakers, and African Americans who settled there; engage in discussions with local experts; and visit historic and cultural sites such as the African Meeting House and a working grist mill.

Open to middle and high schools in urban districts across Massachusetts, the program is grounded in a growing body of research demonstrating that meaningful experiences with nature during childhood and adolescence are important contributing factors to a commitment to the environment as an adult. Adults who model pro-environment attitudes are also critical. To provide the role models youth need,

GGYC incorporates instructors who are pursuing science-related careers and who reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of participating students.

Of the approximately 400 students who have gone through GGYC between 2005 and 2012, 18 percent have followed a science-based course of study, more than 10 percent have gone on to universities within the UMass system, and 7 percent (26 students) have applied for field station internships.

"I was both baffled and amazed at all of the information I was able to absorb," Lawrence student Anthony Choquette, wrote in a letter to the field school's director Sarah Oktay. "I was even more inspired to pursue a career in environmental law."

A year after her trip, Hurtado says that the experience "changed the way I cared for the environment" and modeled the crucial roles that policies, practices, and community leadership play in environmental conservation. She is headed to college this fall and is considering a bio-engineering degree.



Madeline Hurtado says her time on Nantucket changed the way she cares for the environment.

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Welcome from Chancellor Motley

As Chancellor of the University of Massachusetts Boston, I am committed to providing opportunities to engage our resources in order to improve our city and state. After I was selected as Chancellor, I called on our campus leaders and community stakeholders to develop a plan to enhance UMass Boston's ability to effectively support the needs of our community. I responded to recommendations by creating a new office at the University of Massachusetts Boston that would support and strengthen partnership activities that promote the goals of the university and our community.

In 2011 we established the Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) within the Division of Government Relations and Public Affairs. In just two short years, OCP has become a focal point where people and ideas are brought together to collaborate in community-engaged teaching, research, and service. The office has achieved notable successes, including a \$236,000 grant from the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's Vision Project, to support faculty who incorporate civic engagement into courses.

The OCP plays a behind-the-scenes role in facilitating new connections, strengthening relationships, and aligning efforts. In the past year, the office has supported more than 425 partnership planning meetings and direct requests. It also coordinates funding opportunities, and has more than \$2 million in pending proposals for commu-

nity-engaged research. I am delighted that community organizations seeking to work with the University of Massachusetts Boston, and students, faculty, and staff seeking community partners can rely on resources that the OCP provides.

In this publication, I hope you will enjoy the inspiring stories that illustrate the best practices and core principles encouraged by the Office of Community Partnerships. Built on a shared vision and reciprocity, these stories blur the boundaries between the university and community, and reinforce our commitment to and purpose for promoting deeply engaged teaching, research, and service in partnership with communities.

Sincerely,

Community Connections

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Please contact us for more information or if you wish to support partnership activities at UMass Boston.



Save the Date! April 2, 2014

3rd Annual

UMass Boston Community-Engaged Partnerships Symposium

Teaching | Research | Service

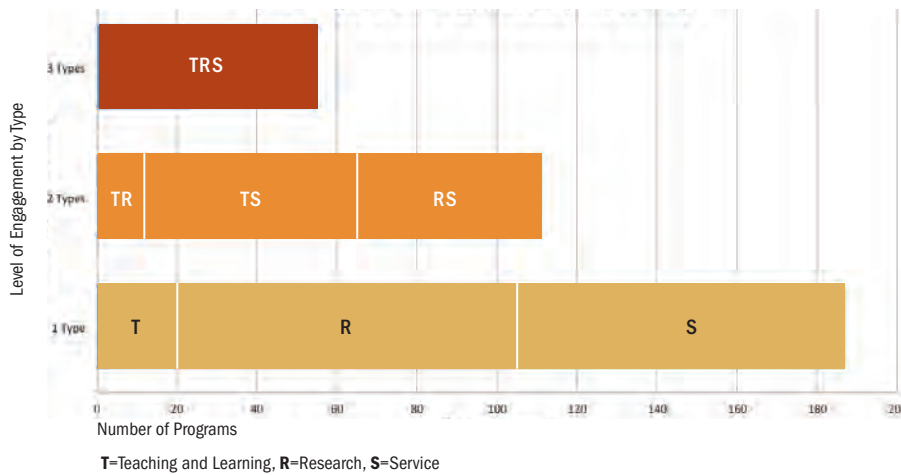


Scan the QR code to see a video about the second annual symposium and for links to further information about the 2014 event.

Partnerships by the Numbers

The Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) brings people together to work on projects with social, environmental, and economic impacts. The human story of our programs is told elsewhere in this newsletter, but numbers can tell their own story about the university's engagement with communities. Here are some revealing facts and figures about the range and scope of our commitments.

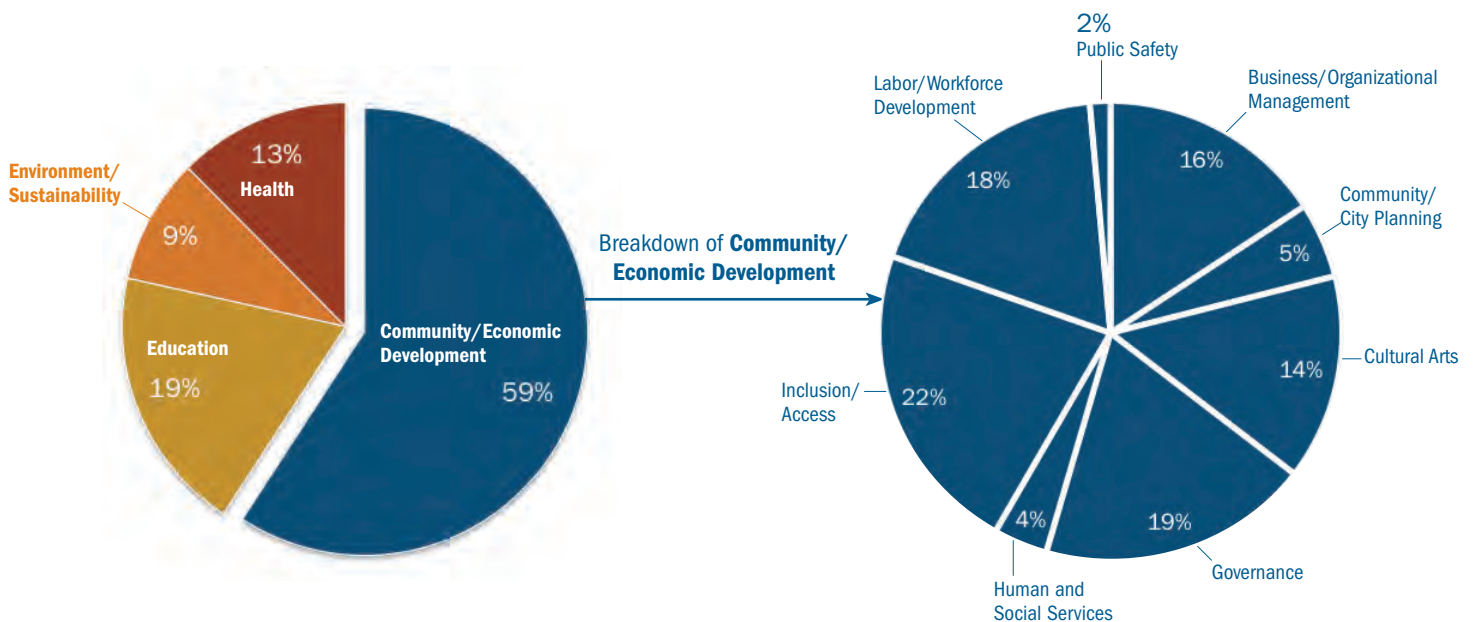
DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAMS BY TYPE (TEACHING AND LEARNING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE)



The Office of Community Partnerships strives to engage with partners in multiple ways through teaching and learning, research, and service activities. Research shows that the more modes of engagement employed in a project, the more effective it is for both the university and community participants. About half of our programs involve two or more types of engagement.

AREAS OF INTEREST

The Office of Community Partnerships organizes campus-community partnerships in four broad categories: community and economic development, education, the environment, and health. Programs that address community and economic development comprise 59 percent of the overall community-engagement efforts on campus. Of those programs, topics span a wide range from organizational management to access issues and cultural arts.



Eastern Pequot Archaeological Field School Connects People, Cultures, and History

This summer marks the tenth year of the collaborative archeological field school between the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation (EPTN) and UMass Boston. Each summer, professor of anthropology Steve Silliman leads a team of roughly a dozen students and tribal interns in five intense weeks of digging at the Eastern Pequot's mostly undeveloped 225-acre reservation in southeastern Connecticut. Established in 1683, the EPTN reservation is one of the oldest in the United States.

On any given day, tribal members—from youths to elders—join in the process of collecting and preserving artifacts that tell their cultural and historical stories of struggle, survival, and advancement. To date, close to 25,000 objects have been uncovered, along with 15,000 animal bones, shells, and pieces of charred wood. In an early nineteenth-century refuse pit filled with pottery, glass, and metal artifacts, the team found an approximately 4,000-year-old spear point and a fragment of a soapstone bowl.

Yet one must look beyond artifacts to discover what is truly at the heart of this archaeological project—relationships. During a recent visit to UMass Boston, Eastern Pequot intern Natasha Gambrell, now a college student, reminisced about her first summer at the field school at age 11. Initially, it was “just a bunch of dirt,” she recalled, yet “the more I got involved,

the more I made the connection to my culture and my people.” In 2008, 2009, 2011, and 2013 she received training in archaeological techniques, terms, and issues that helped her to effectively communicate with researchers. She—and all the other interns—can now actively guide the telling of the tribal community's story, past and present.

The field experience is also transformative for participating university students. For many, the collaborative work and the relationships that result last far beyond the dig site. Technical training is merged with eye-opening cultural experiences, field trips, guest speakers, and readings. The cultural competence gained in this way further develops students' professional capacity for interpreting archaeological research.

Two UMass Boston students, Yasmeen Abdallah and Jillian Alexander, recently reflected on how their experience ignited a passion for understanding people, culture, and history. They spent a lot of time with Eastern Pequot people, who invited them into their homes and were incredibly generous, they said. They developed a personal relationship with members of the community whose history they were helping to unearth.

Echoing that sentiment, Gambrell sees the teaching and learning as two way. “I am teaching them about my culture,” she says, “but they're teaching me about myself.”



Professor of anthropology Steve Silliman discusses an artifact from the Eastern Pequot site with members of the community.

The deep trust and respect between Professor Silliman and the Eastern Pequot leaders—a relationship nurtured by patience, compassion, and open communication—is central to the collaboration. Silliman learned early on to value the process as much as the results, adapting standard archeological practices to fit community needs and cultural preferences of the Eastern Pequot people. For example, items deemed non-cultural or irrelevant by researchers, such as unmodified rocks or sediment from cleaned artifacts, are typically thrown away. However, the Eastern Pequot believe these natural items have a deep connection to the landscape, so the material is returned to the reservation.

By adapting practices in this way, the process respects community members, who contribute to the production of knowledge, improving research and facilitating lifelong friendships. Built on this foundation, the collaborative field school has advanced Professor Silliman's scholarship on archaeological research into the impact of colonialism on indigenous communities in New England. The partnership leverages university resources by providing low-cost archeological services that truly engage and benefit this Native American community, and in doing so, has a profound and long-term impact on students' academic and civic learning and on faculty scholarship.

Reflecting on her experience, Gambrell says, “I can honestly say that working with the field school has helped me grow into the person I am today.”



Eastern Pequot interns and UMass Boston students work together on the site and learn from each other.

“Trời ơi! (Oh My Gosh) What happened over here?”



The familiar Vietnamese phrase meaning “Oh, my gosh!” (pronounced “Troy oy”) recurs throughout *Vy’s First Time at the Nail Salon*, a children’s story produced by UMass Boston Asian American Studies undergraduate Mya Nguyen and Judy Ngo. One of many innovative educational materials created by UMass Boston students, the picture book exemplifies how Asian American Studies classes can produce culturally relevant classroom materials that help children integrate their worlds of home, school, and community.

The book was written to share with children at the Mather Elementary School in Dorchester, where Vietnamese American students from immigrant households represent nearly 40 percent of the student body. The school has the largest Vietnamese Structured English Immersion (SEI) program in the Boston Public Schools. Although Asian American Studies faculty and students have worked sporadically with Mather School classrooms since 1994, recent partnership efforts gained fresh momentum following requests from Vietnamese SEI teachers to enhance their culturally responsive curriculum with additional resources and support.

Children at the Mather School can easily understand the characters, illustrations, and story of *Vy’s First Time at the Nail Salon* because it reflects daily life for many families in Dorchester’s Vietnamese community—the fifth largest in the United States. The story focuses on a Vietnamese immigrant mother who has to bring her daughter, Vy, to work at a nail salon because she has no other childcare option for the day. Vy is fascinated by the nail polish colors and special equipment, but eventually her curiosity leads to trouble, and she quickly finds out about the dangers of nail polish remover and other



In preparation for writing Vy’s First Time at the Nail Salon, co-author Mya Nguyen reads a Vietnamese American storybook to children in the kindergarten Vietnamese SEI classroom at the Mather School.

chemicals, sharp tools, and the hot sterilizer machine. The authors make clear that the nail salon is not a playground, although Vy does her best to have a fun-filled special day being close to her mom, who normally works long hours away from home.

Faculty and students continue to work closely with Mather School SEI teachers to design collaborative research and programs on critical issues identified jointly with school and community constituencies. On a visit to Ms. Songkhla Nguyen’s second-grade class in June, a student’s mother whispered to Professor Loan Dao in Vietnamese, “I love these opportunities

to come to class because it gives me a chance to learn English, too. I learn what he learns.” In fact, Ms. Nguyen revealed that she had started teaching elementary English language to parents on her own time. In response to this disclosure, Asian American Studies faculty are redesigning a course so that undergraduates with bilingual Vietnamese-English skills can work closely with parents of Mather School children.

The Mather School–UMass Boston partnership transcends boundaries between university and community. Nearly all Asian American Studies courses integrate civic engagement and community-focused content, inspiring many graduates to pursue careers at community organizations. Students connect engaged learning, research, and service with personal identities and histories, and develop a lifelong commitment to community and civic responsibility. In fact, three of the four Mather School Vietnamese SEI teachers are alumni of both the Asian American Studies program and the Mather School. This multigenerational approach grounds the partnership in a deep sense of trust and reciprocity, and leads to long-term, shared benefits for the university and the community.

“Trời ơi! What happened over here?”

Just as Vy and her mother discover together at the nail salon, quite a lot is happening over here in classrooms at both the Mather School and the Asian American Studies program.



Students from Professor Peter Kiang’s Southeast Asians in the US course visit the second grade Vietnamese SEI classroom of UMass Boston alum Songkhla Nguyen at the Mather School in March 2013.

Kostian Iftica Sees a Brighter Future Through Technology

Tech Apprentice '06, UMass Boston '11, and founder of Brilliant Geeks

As a child growing up in Albania, Kostian Iftica loved to tinker with mechanical toys; once he turned a helicopter motor into a handheld fan. After moving with his family to the United States when he was 13 years old, Iftica found that his love of technology helped him assimilate to his new country. In Albania, he had never touched a computer or been online. But after using a computer at the Boston Public Library, he found himself drawn to them.

Computers helped Iftica adapt to a new language and culture. “Computers were only in English so essentially they forced me to learn English terminology I’d never seen before,” he explains.

As a ninth grader at the John D. O’Byrant School of Mathematics and Science, he signed up for an after-school web-mastering class offered through Tech Boston. There, he learned about a new program called Tech Apprentice. Developed with input from Broadening Advanced Technological Education Connections (BATEC) at UMass Boston, Tech Apprentice connected him to a high-level, technology-related, paid apprenticeship.

Iftica was reluctant to join at first. “I wanted to do it but was afraid I didn’t have the right skills,” he says. However, Tech Boston’s staff explained that the apprenticeship was a great opportunity to develop new skills. Convinced, he took a position at the New England Baptist Hospital.

Iftica was involved in a major project to digitize hospital medical records. He learned computer and hardware requirements for the transition and helped to set up servers and the network. At first he was intimidated by the project’s complexity, but the support of his manager and mentor, Peter Lam, and the Tech Boston staff helped him excel.

The Tech Apprentice Program enhanced both his technical and interpersonal skills. As he continued to apply his skills to solving computer problems, he realized he was helping people. Iftica says that he “had the most fun interacting with the doctors and staff.” He realized that technology needed to be user-friendly and accessible to people. If the technology was easy to use, it would help people become more efficient, more organized, and eliminate many mistakes caused by human error.

“It boosted my confidence because they valued my work, and it made me realize I had something to offer,” says Iftica.

His new-found confidence helped him enormously as a UMass Boston major in management information systems (MIS) with a minor in



economics. As part of his capstone project, Iftica created a business plan for a technology consulting company; the idea of starting up a business was becoming a reality. He was connected to the university’s Venture Development Center and the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center (MSBDC), where advisors helped him

“visualize the company’s structure, income, and expenses,” Iftica says.

“It was a great pleasure working with Kostian, who embodies all of the qualities needed to become a successful entrepreneur,” says MSBDC Director Mark Allio. “He has a real passion for serving his clients and is very good at what he does. We will continue to support Kostian as Brilliant Geeks grows and prospers.”

After graduating in 2011, Iftica chose to focus solely on Brilliant Geeks, rather than accept any of several job offers he had. Two years later, Brilliant Geeks serves more than 200 clients in Boston and states across the country. The company initially focused on residential clients and is now expanding into health care and other industries. Building a strong client base has been essential to Brilliant Geeks’ growth, with word of mouth bringing in 90 percent of new business. This personal touch is perhaps what Iftica is most proud of.

“We are very honest with our clients, even if the truth hurts,” he says. “Our vision is a brighter future through technology. At the end of the day, we are all human beings, not corporations, and we strive to make the world a better place by utilizing our skills.”

Building the Next Generation of IT Leaders

Created at UMass Boston in 2003, Broadening Advanced Technological Education Connections (BATEC) envisions a seamless education-to-workforce pathway in IT that attracts, supports, and advances a diverse population of technology students. Promoting a collaborative approach, the center brings together leaders in education, industry, and the community to inform research, curriculum, professional development, and other initiatives that ensure innovative, relevant preparation of the next generation of leaders in technology fields.

BATEC has partnered with TechBoston, a department of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) that offers technology-related courses and opportunities district-wide, since 2005. The center advised TechBoston’s development of the Tech Apprentice program, which has provided more than 600 BPS students with technology-focused internships, and works with TechBoston to provide training for BPS teachers.

Growth in Enrollment in BATEC-influenced Courses			
Year	2007	2011	Percent Change
High Schools	1,215	1,837	51%
Community Colleges	3,225	5,803	80%
4-Year Colleges	47	441	838%

A United Effort to Combat Health Disparities in Latino Communities



Faith and Health workshops train parish leaders to implement cancer-screening programs at their churches.

Public health researchers estimate that cancer mortality in the United States could be reduced by up to 60 percent if available cancer prevention and screening strategies were fully implemented. CRUZA, the Alliance for Latino Health through Faith and Action, represents a new way of working together to preserve life.

Eighteen UMass Boston students, all bilingual in Spanish, played integral roles in parish recruitment, cancer-education and outreach, and program evaluation.

A research partnership among Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard Cancer Center, the Mauricio Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy at UMass Boston, the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, and Latino parish communities, CRUZA brings research-based cancer-education programs into parishes that play an essential role in Latino community life. Funded by the National Cancer Institute, CRUZA's research has two objectives: to understand and develop the resources needed by parish communities to implement cancer-screening programs and to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to implement cancer-education programs.

With the support of all four Catholic dioceses in Massachusetts, CRUZA researchers recruited 34 Latino parish communities for the

study. Each parish received a CRUZA toolkit that includes a step-by-step guide for implementing parish-based health activities. To build parish capacity to implement health programs, CRUZA invited parish leaders to Faith and Health workshops. These workshops used an innovative curriculum to demonstrate how program planning and parish-based health activities could overcome Latino health disparities while aligning with Catholic teachings related to social justice.

CRUZA also facilitated partnerships among parishes and existing community resources, such as local health centers, Neighborhood Health Plan, YWCA, Komen Foundation, and the Latino Health Insurance Program, to support group education sessions and other educational activities. The Community Advisory Committee brought together cross-sector leaders to guide the project, create culturally sensitive program materials, and influence the study's methods.

CRUZA's lasting impact in the community stems from the commitment of its Latino scholars. Eighteen UMass Boston students, all bilingual in Spanish, played integral roles in parish recruitment, cancer-education and outreach, and program evaluation. The scholars were involved in many professional development opportunities and acquired new skills in survey research, public speaking, and scientific poster presentations, among others.

Delivering Life-Saving Information

The CRUZA initiative reached deep into communities to directly deliver life-saving messages from a trusted source (the church) in a Spanish-language format. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, the St. Patrick's Parish reinforced its cancer-screening message by using multiple strategies throughout the church community. This consistent messaging boosted parishioners' comfort level with advocating for their own health-related needs. Examples of outreach and education efforts implemented by St. Patrick's Parish include:

Raising Awareness

- ▶ Brochures about common forms of cancer
- ▶ Bulletin inserts with reminders to get screened for cancer
- ▶ Tip sheets related to finding a doctor and getting insurance
- ▶ Posters promoting cancer screening
- ▶ Health-related reminders from the pulpit
- ▶ Bookmarks with reminders to get screened for cancer

Taking Action

- ▶ Breast cancer presentation with the YWCA
- ▶ Faith and Health training session at St. Patrick's Parish
- ▶ Individual and group information sessions about health insurance with Neighborhood Health Plan representatives at a spring health fair



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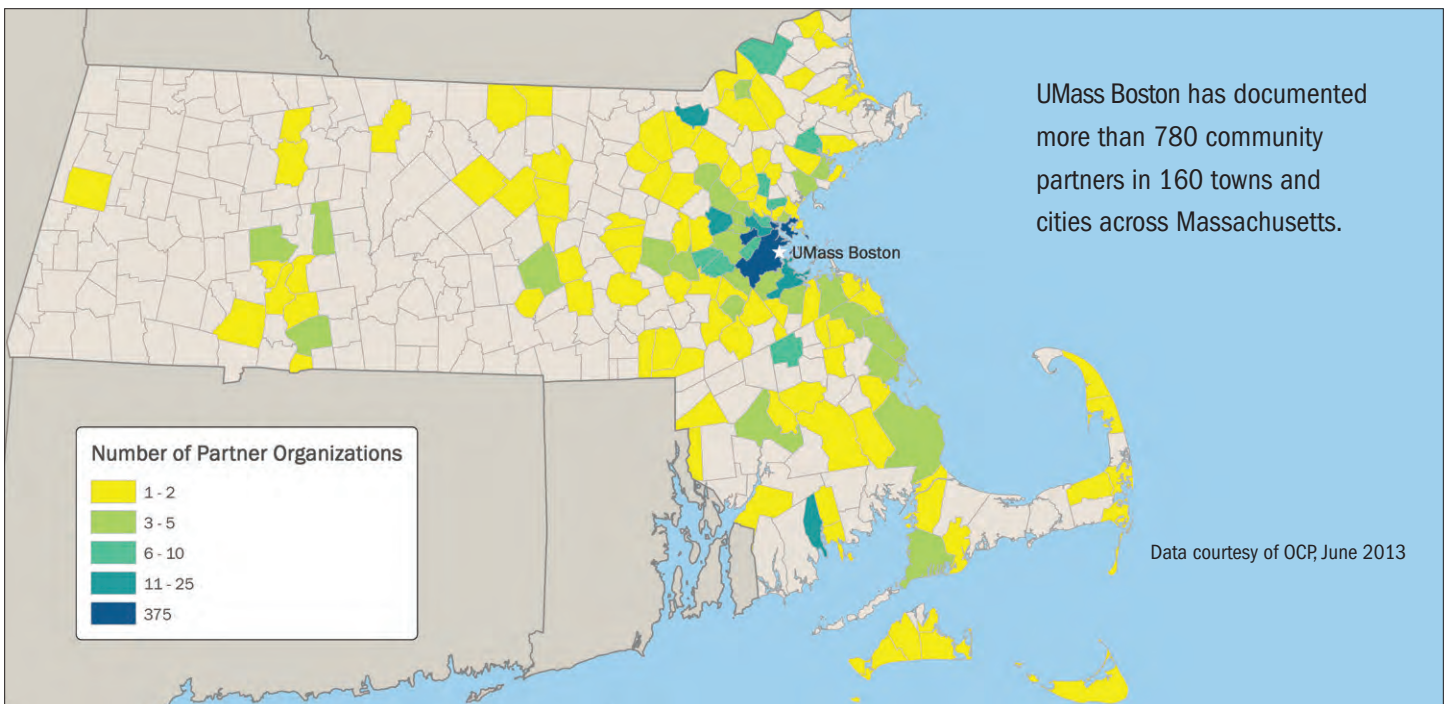
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Save the Date!

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Chances Are, We're in Your Community



To learn how you can support partnership activities at UMass Boston, please contact Luciano Ramos, director of the Office of Community Partnerships, at 617.287.5832 or luciano.ramos@umb.edu.