



## **CoP Remarks on Behalf of the State University System to the Board of Higher Education**

**January 14, 2025**

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### **Introduction**

Good Morning, Chairman Gabrieli, Secretary Tutwiler, Commissioner Ortega and members of the Board of Higher Education. On behalf of the State Universities Council of Presidents, thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the Massachusetts State University System.

As we celebrate the New Year along with the start of the new legislative session, my colleagues and I look forward to continuing to work with this board and the DHE to build upon the successes over the past year. While the challenges facing higher education are significant, our state universities continue to strive to fulfill our mission of educating our Massachusetts residents and to provide opportunities for economic mobility to all. We are all proud of our accomplishments over the past year and I would like to share updates from our campuses.

### **Bridgewater State University**

In November 2024, Bridgewater State University announced *The Bridgewater Commitment* for Fall 2025 - a groundbreaking initiative that will cover the full cost of tuition and mandatory fees for in-state undergraduate students from families earning \$125,000 or less. The *Commitment* is made possible by a combination of federal, state, institutional and private funding. It marks the next iteration in a strategy the university has been implementing for several years through initiatives, such as our merit scholarships, and has resulted in BSU reducing student loan borrowing by 9.3% since 2019. According to *The Washington Post*, the level of BSU's commitment is surpassed nationally only by MIT and the University of Pennsylvania.

### **Fitchburg State University**

Fitchburg State welcomed its 12th president, and the first woman to hold the post, with the arrival of Dr. Donna Hodge this summer. In her welcoming address in September, Dr. Hodge laid out a vision for 2024-25 as a year of service for the campus community and announced a focused effort on attaining formal recognition as a Hispanic Service Institution along with initiating new formal agreements with partner agencies in the city and region to promote its economic and educational health. Fitchburg State also saw the graduation of the 7th cohort of recruit officers from its groundbreaking police program, whose graduates complete bachelor's

and master's degrees in addition to certification as municipal police officers. Once again, all of the cohort's members graduated with job offers from police agencies. The university also launched new interdisciplinary academic programs including creative arts therapies and creative arts enterprise, designed to open career pathways in the arts and healthcare fields, providing students with skills to respond to high-needs sectors of the statewide and regional economies. Other new programs launched this academic year include an online master's degree in construction management that can be completed in as few as three semesters.

### **Framingham State University**

2024 witnessed several milestone events for Framingham State University. In September the New England Commission on Higher Education approved the ongoing accreditation of the University. In October, after the approval of a new 5-year strategic plan by the MA Board of Higher Education, FSU initiated actions on first year priorities, engaging the entire University Community in the process. Evidence of the success of these strategic efforts is already apparent including the nearly \$8 million dollar renovation of the Christa McAuliffe Center. The modernization of this facility into a 21st-century interdisciplinary operational center demonstrates several key objectives of the strategic plan - impact on community and integration of the liberal arts into the current and future world. FSU strives to meet the vision laid out by Christa McAuliffe herself who said, "I have a vision of the world as a global village, a world without boundaries."

### **MassArt**

In December, Massachusetts College of Art and Design proudly celebrated the second annual Common Good Awards. The MassArt Common Good Awards celebrate individuals and organizations that harness the transformative power of art and design to drive social progress. Honorees demonstrate the essential role of the arts in advocacy, education, and community development, making lasting contributions to civic life. This year's recipients reflected the diversity of creative practices that contribute to building stronger, more inclusive communities. This celebration recognized a distinguished group of individuals who exemplify the power of the arts to inspire advocacy, education, and social transformation.

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**May Chau**, '07 BFA Art Education, Visual Arts Supervisor for the Somerville Public Schools, was honored for her commitment to cultivating a collaborative arts education environment and for encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning in one of the state's most diverse school systems (Frances Euphemia Thompson Award for Excellence in Teaching).

**Shirley Ann Session Edgerton**, Community Activist and Founder of R.O.P.E., was honored for her work with the Rites of Passage and Empowerment Program (R.O.P.E.), which uplift young women of color by promoting self-sufficiency and global citizenship.

**Toni Elka**, '86 BFA Painting, founder of Future Chefs, was honored for her profound impact on youth development through culinary arts in Boston (Distinguished Alumni Award).

**Yinette Guzman**, '08 BFA Architecture, Senior Project Manager at the North Shore Community Development Coalition was honored for her leadership in curating the Punto Urban Art Museum in Salem and for her efforts in transforming underserved communities through public art.

**Thaddeus Miles**, Senior Director of Diversity Initiatives at MassHousing was honored as the founder of the Black Joy Initiative for his efforts to promote equity through art and culture and for his uplifting of marginalized communities by fostering joy and resilience.

**Frederick Wiseman**, an acclaimed filmmaker with 44 documentaries to his names was honored for his work capturing the human experience through the lens of social institutions. He has received four Emmys, the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Film Festival, and a 2016 Academy Honorary Award.

In addition to their recognition, honorees also received a custom-made piece by Sam Kim, a Lowell-based ceramicist and MassArt graduate (BFA Industrial Design and Ceramics '18).

## **MCLA**

MCLA proudly celebrated its rise to the No. 6 spot on U.S. News & World Report's list of Top Public Liberal Arts Schools in the nation, building on three consecutive years at No. 7. This distinction reflects the College's unwavering commitment to providing affordable, transformative education and fostering economic prosperity. Further exemplifying its dedication to equity and opportunity, MCLA earned the second highest ranking among public liberal arts colleges nationally. These accolades underscore MCLA's vital role in supporting students from diverse backgrounds to achieve academic and personal success. US News has ranked MCLA as a Top Ten Public College for the past decade, highlighting its leadership in advancing access and success for underserved students. These achievements affirm the critical importance of financial aid and the College's steadfast dedication to lifting barriers and empowering students to achieve their dreams.

## **Mass Maritime Academy**

In October, Massachusetts Maritime Academy welcomed its new training ship, the TS *Patriot State*, to Buzzards Bay. This federal asset has a dual mission: to provide a world-class training platform for the next generation of mariners and to serve as a critical support asset for

humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. Equipped with modern hospital facilities, a helicopter pad, multiple classrooms and training laboratories along with the capacity to accommodate up to 1,000 people during a humanitarian crisis, the *Patriot State* is a powerful asset for the Academy, Commonwealth, and Federal Government.

### **Salem State University**

With accessibility and servingness at the forefront of their mission, Salem State has been making great strides in becoming the first four-year public higher education institution in the Commonwealth to become a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Last semester, Salem State cleared the foundational eligibility requirements to become an HSI with the required 25% of their student body self-identified as Hispanic or Latino. Responding to the changing demographics in their region for the last several years, their work was highlighted during the Commonwealth's first New England Hispanic and Minority Serving Conference, which was funded by the DHE and hosted by Salem State this past July in partnership with Bunker Hill Community College, Holyoke Community College, and MassBay Community College. In addition to organizing this sell-out conference, Salem State University declared 2025 the Year of Advising and is tackling student advising in new ways through establishing a peer-to-peer advising program; conducting additional trainings for faculty, staff and students; and providing in-person and virtual advising sessions to students. Their advising sessions go beyond the registration process, and advisors connect students to financial aid opportunities, wellness programs, academic supports, and student engagement opportunities.

### **Westfield State University**

Westfield State University has recently announced its new Law Enforcement and Mental Health Co-Response Graduate Program. The program is designed to address the growing need for collaboration between law enforcement and mental health professionals. This degree-granting program, the first of its kind in the nation, is a concentration within the University's Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling program or available as a standalone post-baccalaureate certificate. The program was designed to reduce strain on emergency services, connect individuals to appropriate care and resources, and foster trust between community members and public safety professionals. The program equips graduates to address critical public safety challenges while supporting the mental health needs of communities.

### **Worcester State University**

Worcester State University is welcoming the new year at a momentous time in our history as we celebrate our 150th anniversary. Our sesquicentennial theme, "Our Place. Our Purpose," underscores the university's longstanding commitment to making outstanding higher education

accessible to all students in Worcester, the heart of the Commonwealth. We kicked off the festivities with a Homecoming carnival in September that brought together more than 3,000 alumni, faculty, students, and families. We have much to celebrate. In the past year, we earned the Silver Military Friendly School and Military Friendly Spouse designations for our success in supporting military students, as well as renewal of our Community Engagement Classification from the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. More recently, we have secured grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Barr Foundation, and we are a collaborator on a new National Science Foundation grant. In September, we strengthened our commitment to improving educational outcomes for Latine students with a renewal of the MOU that established the Worcester State University Latino Education Institute (LEI). Alongside LEI's 25-year history of advancing educational outcomes for Latino students and their families, Worcester State has been designated an Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, and we have set a path to achieving HSI designation.

## **Conclusion**

As always, we encourage you to visit any of our campuses so we have the opportunity to show you the great work that we do. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to share this update and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.