

UMass Dartmouth receives grant to create innovative curriculum for a Transformative Justice Certification Program

The University and partners Massasoit Community College and UMass School of Law were awarded \$150,000 to bolster Southeastern Massachusetts workforce readiness in justice-related occupations.

UMass Dartmouth, along with partners Massasoit Community College and UMass School of Law, were awarded a \$150,000 Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) grant from the Office of the Governor to research and gather evidence-based data toward the creation of a multi-campus curriculum for a Transformative Justice Certification Program. This initiative will help institutions of higher education implement training, certification, and workforce readiness for Transformative Justice Practitioners.

The Massachusetts Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) seeds and supports innovations and proven practices in public higher education specifically aimed at advancing the Commonwealth's overarching goal to significantly raise success outcomes among under-represented student populations. This most recent grant focused on funding projects that support initiatives and activities that adopt an equity lens designed to increase college-going and completion rates for minoritized students, specifically students of color and/or students from low-income and/or first-generation backgrounds.

"The goal is to create a data-driven Transformative Justice

Practitioners Certificate that responds to the collective needs of our three campuses, and the communities our students represent. The program would allow Massasoit Community College, UMass Dartmouth, and UMass Law students to engage in a collaborative Transformative Justice principles and skills training certificate that will equip them to practice and create Transformative Justice Centers and Services in communities and campuses that seek these services and supports,” said Professor Viviane Saleh-Hanna, Principal Investigator on the grant, and Chairperson of Crime and Justice Studies Department at UMass Dartmouth. “We are amid the largest social movement in the history of the United States. Needs and demands for true justice are not going away. Transformative Justice Practitioner’s Certificate would offer an innovative response that Higher Education in this region can contribute towards meeting those needs.”

The Transformative Justice Certification Program aims to alter methodologies historically utilized by the existing criminal justice system which are ineffective and inequitably punitive against this constituency group. The collaboration between UMass Dartmouth, Massasoit Community College, and UMass School of Law presents a unique opportunity to produce training and education opportunities that bring together new ideas within criminology, criminal justice, and justice studies research and researched based methodologies informed by transformative justice and harm-reduction studies.

“It’s a privilege to be part of this innovative movement of Transformative Justice within the Massasoit and Brockton communities, as well as Massachusetts higher education,” said Yolanda Dennis, chief diversity officer at Massasoit. “This initiative aligns with the Massachusetts Equity Agenda and our commitment to social justice. It will create a new academic pathway and opportunities for our students while strengthening our partnership with UMass Dartmouth.”

“UMass Law is honored to take part in this important

initiative that will offer students practical skills and further our mission of advancing justice within and beyond the Commonwealth,' said Eric Mitnick, Dean at UMass Law. "As the only public Law school in Massachusetts, our students and faculty seek opportunities to better their communities through the power of their legal education."

The Grant's Program Coordinators are nationally recognized Transformative Justice Practitioners, Fatima Arain and Lisa Marie Alatorre. They are working closely with Dr. Saleh-Hanna and Crime and Justice Studies faculty to coordinate training, data-gathering, and curriculum building in partnership with faculty, students, and staff on all three campuses.

The outcome of the project is to build a program and curriculum that integrates skills-based, data-driven, and theoretically rigorous training and certification for Transformative Justice Practitioners. This will allow graduates to introduce Transformative Justice within already existing services, or to found Transformative Justice centers in many settings. This includes but is not limited to educational settings and communities seeking a survivor-centered, harm-reduction, needs-based justice.