

PHENOMenal News

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Fall 2014

UMASS Dartmouth Chapter Has Staying Power

By Colleen Avedikian, PHENOM Vice President

UMass Dartmouth's PHENOM chapter has hosted weekly meetings and campus events since 2009. Its formula for success is close contact with student groups, support from the UMD Faculty Federation, and academic department recognition.

UMD PHENOM has been able to organize important events on campus, including teach-ins, Legislative Call-In Days, Student Debt Weeks, and movie nights. The group has also participated in community political events, such as the annual Legislative Breakfast sponsored by the Arnold M. Dubin Labor Education Center. PHENOM at UMD proudly sends a large contingent to Boston for Public Higher Education Advocacy Day each year.

The members of UMD PHENOM have established strong relationships with campus student groups including the Student Government Association, Greek Life, The Black Student Union, Frederick Douglass Unity House, the Multicultural Support Council, MassPIRG, and the Center for Women, Gender and Sexuality. Students from these organizations attend and participate in UMD PHENOM events



and PHENOM members reciprocate in kind.

UMD PHENOM uses weekly meetings during Fall and Spring semesters to pursue its mission. The meetings are predominantly student-centered and always democratic—the agenda can be changed to reflect specific interests and concerns of the participants.

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PHENOM Talks Higher Ed with Congressman McGovern



Rep. McGovern with PHENOM Board member Manny Pintado

During a wide-ranging conversation on April 14, 2014 at UMass Amherst, it was clear that Representative Jim McGovern was passionate and well-informed about the current state of affairs in higher education.

Initiated by PHENOM, a group of about a dozen students, staff and faculty met with Congressman

McGovern. He shared

Monica Rochon, a Residence Director, attended the gathering. She said, "in my position at the university I interact with students on a professional and personal level. They open up about their lives, social identities, and particularly their financial struggles and ability to afford paying for college. Some of our students are working multiple jobs while also maintaining full time student status. They are under immense amounts of stress." She wanted to know, "when a student comes to your office explaining that they have to drop out because they cannot afford to finish, what do you say to that student?"

The highlight of the meeting was his suggestion that his office and PHENOM work

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a letter he wrote to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Signed by the 9 Massachusetts House members, it was very critical of President Obama's proposal that colleges be rated according to the earnings of their graduates.

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PHENOM Names Executive Director

By Kim Selwitz, PHENOM President

We have exciting news to share: after a rigorous, extensive search process we have hired our first ever Executive Director, Natalie Higgins. Natalie graduated in May from the Northeastern University School of Law with her Juris Doctor. She received her B.A. in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She is pursuing her M.S. in Public Policy part time through the UMass Dartmouth online program. Through her senior capstone project at UMass Amherst, she successfully organized the campus community to lobby the State Legislature to pass 258E, the Harassment Prevention Order bill.



Natalie Higgins, JD.
PHENOM's new Executive Director

Later, as the full time Teen Counselor at Pathways for Change, Natalie provided sexual assault prevention education and outreach throughout central Massachusetts. She also organized a successful benefit concert for Pathways for Change at the Palladium in Worcester.

During law school, she received the Rappaport Fellowship in Law and Public Policy to work in the Office of Governor Deval Patrick in Cabinet Affairs, and she received the PHRGE Fellowship to work with the Human Rights Law Network in New Delhi, India.

Natalie started working with PHENOM in August, and is particularly excited to

unite students, faculty, staff, alumni and other stakeholders from the state's public campuses to advocate for the higher education system that Massachusetts deserves. She believes that in order to do this, we need a strong PHENOM Chapter on each of the 29 campuses. Additionally, she is excited to explore new fundraising and outreach opportunities, as well as partnerships throughout the Commonwealth. Organizing an Access Conference, and creating systems to make this an annual event, is a short-term goal.

Thirteen PHENOM members participated in the hiring process. There were 31 applicants, 15 interviews and a strong field of 11 candidates with potential to lead the organization.

Please join the board as we welcome Natalie to the PHENOM team, and into the next chapter of our exciting future!

We are extremely grateful to the **Massachusetts Teachers Association** for printing this issue of *PHENOMenal News*. *PHENOMenal News* is published twice a year. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

PHENOM July 2014

See phenomonline.org for new Board elected in August

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PHENOM

PO Box 2281

Amherst, MA 01004-2281

phenom@phenomonline.org

<http://www.phenomonline.org>

Massachusetts Public Higher Education: Separate and Unequal?

By Ira Rubenzahl, President, Springfield Technical Community College

When we look back on terrible wrongs—slavery, unjust wars, periods of deep and pervasive inequality—we may wonder how individuals tolerated and ignored these realities. Yet this is, unfortunately, a human tendency that Margaret Heffernan details in *Willful Blindness: Why we ignore the obvious at our peril*. “We know, intellectually, that confronting an issue is the only way to resolve it. But any resolution will disrupt the status quo. Given the choice between conflict and change on the one hand, and inertia on the other, the ostrich position can seem very attractive.”

Within public higher education we have a number of issues that have been avoided and ignored, yet cry out for discussion and action. One such is the distribution of individuals of color within public higher education. Like other states, Massachusetts public higher education continues to be, to a large extent, separate and unequal, with the preponderance (68%) of African-American and Latino students at the community colleges and the minority (32%) split between the University of Massachusetts campuses and the nine state universities.

The good news is that the number of black and Latino students has increased markedly between the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2013, the latest semester for which figures are available. Over these four years, black student enrollment in our public colleges and universities increased by 19%, Hispanic enrollment grew by a whopping 46%, and white enrollment declined by 3%. These numbers reflect the changing demographics of Massachusetts and the United States as a whole. By 2050 the minority population (including Asian-Americans) is expected to exceed whites.

The bad news is that these students of color are flocking into community colleges, not the selective four-year pub-

lics. This is significant because a bachelor's degree is more and more the best entry to the middle class. The US Census Bureau consistently shows the higher the degree, the greater the annual salary. For example, in 2009 the average salary for someone with a bachelor's degree was \$55,700, compared with \$42,000 for an associate degree and \$33,800 for someone with only a high school diploma.



Students at Springfield Technical Community College
Photo by Kerry Ferrero

If, as Heffernan states, we are willing to deal with conflict and change, there are a number of opportunities to increase black and Hispanic public university enrollment and ultimately bachelor's degree attainment:

- 1) The Commonwealth should increase funding to community colleges to ensure that more students of color complete their associate's degree and are thus prepared to transfer to universities as juniors. There is a great disparity between the Commonwealth's funding of public

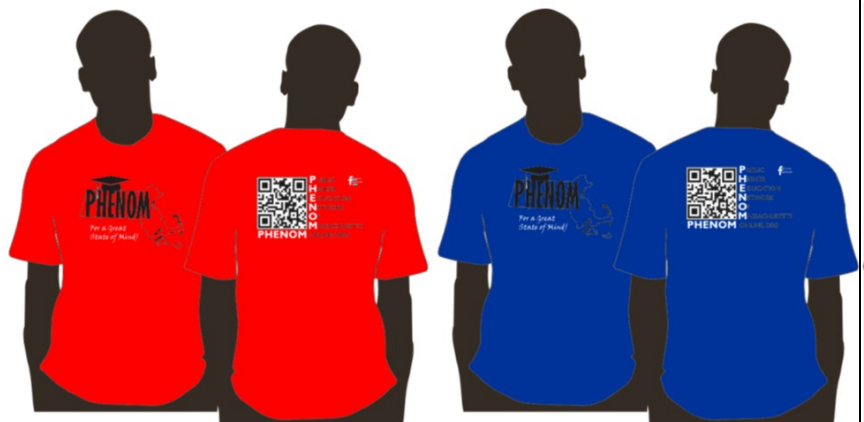
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PHENOM has a snazzy T-shirt designed by Brittany Haughton.



By Ken Haar (Westfield State), PHENOM Legislative Director

The fiscal 2015 budget process is over, and while there were many successes for public higher education, there was a good deal of disappointment as well. Following the grand success of the fiscal 2014 budget, with progress made toward splitting the cost of public higher education 50/50 between the state and students, there was hope that the bargain would hold. All segments of the system and our legislative and administrative allies seemed prepared to honor the system-wide fee freezes and provide agreed-upon funding for 2015.

The deal struck last year to increase funding for the State Universities by \$15 million and to fund the Community Colleges with an increase of \$20 million, fell short in the fiscal 2015 budget process. The State Universities received \$8 million in new revenue and the Community Colleges received \$13 million. Both numbers fell short of the amount necessary to secure a fee freeze at these campuses, and while a few schools will be able to freeze their fees in fiscal 2015, most students will return to school in September with a larger bill than this past year. The UMass funding level was sufficient to again secure a fee freeze for UMass students for the 2014-15 school year.

So while the budget marks a second year of significantly increased funding for the public higher education system, nearly three-fourths of the students in that system will see their access to public higher education eroded by higher fees as the affordability of the system continues to decline.

Mitigating some of the pain is a \$3 million funding increase in the Mass Grant program, and a continuation of the matching grant for the paid internship program (\$1 million) at the State Universities.

All in all, PHENOM activists can be proud of the gains we've made in securing increased funding for the public higher education system, but our fight is far from over. Too many of our schools rely too heavily on contingent faculty, too many of our students are driven into increasing levels of debt, and too many of our potential students forsake even trying to go to college because of the increasing costs.

Photo by Ferd Wulkan



In Montreal, Students Discuss Organizing

The success of the massive 2012 student strike in Quebec, which lasted more than 6 months, involved over 200,000 students, and brought down the provincial government, demonstrated that students were more than capable of a powerful mobilization to oppose attacks on education. But is Quebec an exception?

Over 200 students from across North America tried to answer this at the Montreal Student Movement Convention in June 2014. A number of students from Massachusetts attended, and *PHENOMenal News* recently caught up with two undergrads at UMass Amherst.

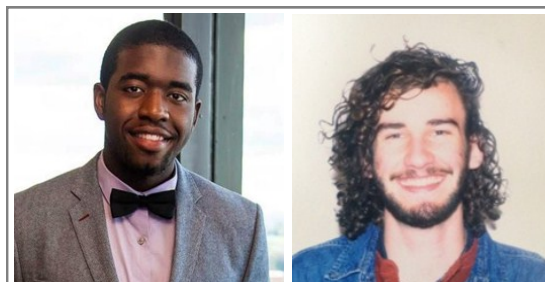
Josh Odam found it refreshing to be with so many students active around so many issues, not just higher education.

He was especially impressed with the rapid growth and great organizing done recently by New Jersey United Students. It is structured so that both elected student government leaders and unaffiliated student activists play leader-

ship roles. Assessing past efforts to build a statewide student association in Massachusetts, Josh said "we have been too heavily dependent on one or the other, and we need to understand we need both." Josh himself led a successful workshop on Racial Justice and Anti-Colonialism, discussing the re-segregation of United States public schools sixty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Dean Cote said too many workshops were like lectures, noting "it's collective reflection that leads to the strongest collective actions." Dean said he learned about other struggles and about himself, things like "specific ways that I as a white man can support my women of color peers when they face oppression."

"We don't have to recreate Quebec in order to have a successful student movement in the U.S.," Josh said, "This is a good moment for me to realize that while there is a time and place for theory, the key is the work—the work in and with the communities whose conditions we are trying to improve."



Chatting with MTA's New President

On July 15, Barbara Madeloni took office as President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the 113,000-member union of educators in public schools in Massachusetts. This follows a year-long campaign during which Madeloni articulated a progressive platform for public education—pre-K through college and university. As a professor at the University of Massachusetts, and Secretary of the Massachusetts Society of Professors (the faculty and librarian union at UMass Amherst), Madeloni is familiar with the huge funding cuts on our public campuses, the massive increase in fees (and therefore student debt), and the rise in the numbers of underpaid part-time faculty and staff. Barbara shared some of her ideas with PHENOM Board member Max Page recently.



I said throughout my campaign that I believe we as a Commonwealth and as a nation have to reinvest in public higher education. Frankly, I believe that at least some public higher education should be free, as the natural evolution from our commitment as a nation, first to K through 6, and then K through high school.

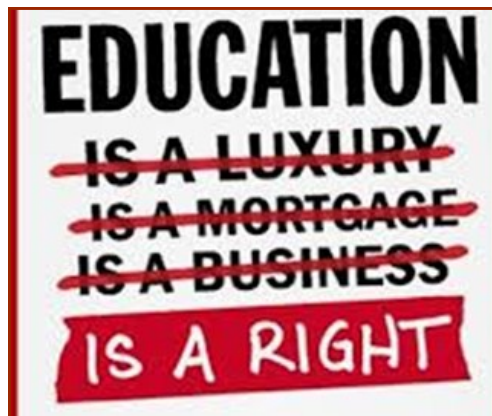
But we can't just make public higher education accessible. We also have to hire more faculty and staff, with fair pay and benefits, so that our students get the highest quality education, which they deserve.

PHENOM has been an important force driving the call for greater investment in public higher education in Massachusetts. By focusing on organizing on the campus level, especially with students, PHENOM will be a key partner as we build a campaign for a dramatic reinvestment in public higher education in the state. MTA has had a long and mutually supportive relationship with PHENOM and I look forward to working with PHENOM on building a collaborative, grassroots campaign for our public colleges and universities.

Free HE—Cont'd from page 8

Two people who have recently addressed the complications are Sara Goldrick-Rab and Nancy Kendall, who call themselves The Education Optimists. They published a very detailed plan which they call F2CO—free two years of college. Key aspects of the F2CO plan include:

- All eligible students can attend any public college or university (2-year or 4-year) for free for the first two years
- Through a redirection of current federal financial aid funding, the federal government pays tuition for all students, and provides additional performance-based top-up funding for institutions that serve low-income students.
- Participating institutions cannot charge tuition or additional fees to students
- State funding for higher education will be redirected to cover books and supplies for all students
- Student living expenses will be covered through a combination of state and local stipend, federal work-



study funding, and/ or access to federal loans.

Even *Forbes Magazine* ran an article this year on "The Promise of Free Public Higher Education." In it, Josh Freedman argues that free higher education would address many of the problems we face today by pooling risk, emphasizing that higher education has societal and not just individual value. It would remove schools' incentives to admit mostly well-off students, putting limits on cost inflation.

And it would structure funding through progressive taxation.

The financial arguments are critical, but ultimately it comes down to moral and social considerations. In "Free higher education is a human right" from *The Campaign for America's Future*, the author argues that social mobility in the United States is at or near its lowest point in modern history, that more student aid goes to wealthier students, and that higher education is in danger of becoming an inherited privilege.

Wikipedia lists 43 countries with free post-secondary education. If Cuba, France, India and Iran can do it, shouldn't the U.S. be able to as well?

"Performance Funding" is all the rage in public higher education these days. A cornerstone of the Department of Higher Education's Vision Project, it is playing a bigger role in how state allocations are distributed to our campuses. Basically, externally-imposed, one-size-fits-all criteria are used to assess how well a school is doing, and the better it does, the more funding it receives. Some strong supporters of public higher education advocate for this approach as one that demonstrates "accountability" and could convince legislators to increase funding.

PHENOM is very concerned about broad implementation of "performance funding" as the vehicle for advancing our public higher education system. We agree that demonstrating the value and effectiveness of what we do on our campuses is crucial, but we think this could be done with campus-centric implementations of outcomes assessment. Unfortunately, we see deeply-flawed notions of "performance funding" inserted in recent budgets having pernicious implications for our students and campuses.

First, performance funding tends to emphasize those things which are easily countable and comparable to other states. These are not necessarily the truly important contributions made by a college or university. That has led to using proxy data to evaluate the highly

complicated and subtle idea of "an educated graduate." For example, to summarize our effectiveness in teaching only by counting how many students pass licensure examinations belittles the subtle work of developing intelligent, reflective workers and citizens.

Second, when performance measures have high stakes attached to them, like the campus budget, there is always a tendency to game the system. For example, higher graduation rates can be attained through more selective admissions, easier grading, awarding more credits for the same course, or lowering graduation requirements. These are the opposite of what is intended. We have seen this problem proliferate around the country as high stakes testing has taken hold in K-12. People and systems cheat or cut corners when there is much at stake and tests or arbitrary numbers are the only tools for evaluation.

Finally, the very logic of improving quality through this kind of system is flawed. If we want to get graduation rates for minority students up at a smaller school like Berkshire Community College, depriving the campus of funds for failing to reach certain benchmarks will not enhance the college's ability to achieve its goals. This funding model leads away from the desired outcome.

How would you reframe the issues of funding and performance? We believe our state could benefit from a broad and open discussion.

UMD PHENOM—Cont'd from page 1

The Faculty Federation, or "Fac Fed," represents faculty, librarians and professional staff at the university. This union has provided material resources for PHENOM in the form of buses (for Advocacy Day), free paper and printing materials, and email access for campus wide announcements. This has been particularly helpful in advertising PHENOM events.

The Fac Fed devotes space in its monthly newsletter to PHENOM activities, and invites members to make announcements at General Membership meetings. In 2012, the Executive Board of the Fac Fed voted to give a yearly stipend to the PHENOM Faculty Organizer, insuring continuity. The Faculty Senate of UMass Dartmouth has allowed UMD PHENOM members (including students) to make announcements to its monthly assembly as well.

Three academic departments, Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology, and Crime and Justice Studies, have also been supportive of PHENOM. They accept working with PHENOM as an appropriate placement for students in the major, who are required to fulfill an internship of 120 hours.

While the actual requirements can be negotiated, they include activities that develop community service and

advocacy capabilities:

- increase membership in PHENOM
- organize and facilitate weekly meetings of the UMD PHENOM Campus Council
- act as liaison to other campus groups/student groups/centers
- contribute to PHENOM's blog
- maintain the "UMD is PHENOMenial" Facebook page (or other social media)
- write a weekly column for the UMD Torch newspaper
- write letters to the editor (Standard Times, Fall River Herald, Boston Globe, Providence Journal) on issues related to public higher education in Massachusetts
- coordinate a major campus event during the semester
- establish connections to other SE Mass campuses
- attend meetings of the PHENOM board.

The persistence of PHENOM at UMD has been achieved thanks so a number of dedicated people, working collaboratively, in support of PHENOM's mission.

Author's note: As a faculty member in the Sociology and Anthropology department at UMD, I have had the pleasure of serving as direct supervisor for 16 interns since 2009.

McGovern—Cont'd from page 1 together on a “marker bill.” This is a type of federal legislation that does not try to be “realistic” but rather aims for the ultimate objective. It is designed to generate broad support and change the terms of the discussion in Congress and among the public.

McGovern offered to have his staff work on this, to ask the Congressional Research Service to cost it out, and to file the bill.



Unequal—cont'd from page 3 universities and that of community colleges. One could argue that community colleges with their open admissions policy require more funding per student rather than less.

2) Public universities should recruit community college students of color and support them with scholarships. Community college graduates come with two important strengths: first, they have already completed half of their

The Congressman encouraged PHENOM to create the initial outline, and urged that we model it on our comments to the state's Funding Commission. PHENOM argued for 2 free years of college, calling this a necessary step with tremendous benefits for individuals as well as the economy.

Congressman McGovern said that “Republicans are successful at making us think small,” and he noted that the Single Payer health care movement helped pass the Affordable Care Act. In other words, PHENOM's task is to think big and assure that these ideas will resonate with a large segment of the public. Another task is to organize around any such legislation. He suggested starting with a major conference to bring together members of Congress, students, the Department of Education, the campus unions, and college presidents.

Monica concluded, “I felt heard and listened to by Congressman McGovern and it's great that he was quick to move to action steps about proposing a marker bill. Higher Education should be a right for all, not just a privilege for some.”

Contact PHENOM to help plan this conference, develop this initiative, or pass this legislation.

undergraduate courses and, second, they have already proven themselves in college. A robust and dedicated focus on community college transfers will increase the number of university graduates, while placing renewed attention to community colleges as a path to the bachelor's degree. In general, universities who are seeking to increase enrollment of students of color should go where the students are—at community colleges.

LIKE WHAT YOU READ? WANT PHENOM TO DO MORE OF THIS GOOD WORK?

Your support allows PHENOM to advocate effectively for an affordable, accessible, high quality and well-funded public higher education system in Massachusetts. Please give as generously as you can by mailing your check to the address below or making an online contribution at www.phenomonline.org. On the website you can also learn how you can support PHENOM as you purchase books, supplies and gifts!

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Free Higher Ed: No Longer a Pipe Dream

PHENOM fights for better state funding, lower student costs, and improved access to public higher education. Even when we make important gains like the fee freeze, we are making small dents in an irrational system. That is why PHENOM simultaneously argues for much more dramatic changes, key among them being Free Higher Education. There are many signs that this is an idea whose time has come.

The rationale is simple. Where success in the job market and civic society used to depend on completing 12 grades of school, that is no longer enough. Experts across a wide range of political opinion agree that most new jobs require at least 2 years of college. Four years leads to between half a million and a million dollars more in lifetime earnings. But many people are excluded from higher education because of cost or other barriers to access.

Free public higher education would dramatically change the equation. Here are some recent developments.

"Tennessee Promise" is a new program that will effectively waive the tuition and fees for two years of community college in Tennessee by paying the costs not already covered by other scholarships and grants. Indiana is considering a similar program. These are similar to a proposal Deval Patrick made early in his first term as Governor. But ultimately, free higher education depends on action at the federal level.

A March 2013 article in *The Atlantic* entitled "How Washington Could Make College Tuition Free (Without Spending a Penny More on Education)" explains how the federal government already spends enough on student aid to cover tuition for every public college student in America. Students and their families paid just under \$60 billion in tuition in 2012, while the federal government spent \$77 billion in grants and tax breaks (this doesn't include loans). The author writes, "Instead of handing money to students and parents, the federal government could instead send the cash down to the states, on the condition that local legislatures kept per student funding at a certain level, and colleges lowered their tuition rates." It's clearly more complicated than this, but certainly makes the idea seem realistic.

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