

Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC) – 2009 Annual Meeting

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**Dr. J. Keith Motley
Chancellor, University of Massachusetts Boston**

Keynote Address

Connecting with Communities and Creating Opportunities



Good evening and thank you for the privilege of addressing the annual meeting of an organization with such a long history of commitment to the Asian American community in Boston and to the revitalization of the Chinatown neighborhood. I would like to acknowledge the presence of ACDC operations manager Jason Chou, a 2006 UMass Boston alum who I know has worked hard on this evening's event, and who remains deeply connected with our Asian American Studies Program.

I am so happy to join today with you, knowing that we share a passion for transforming communities. Whether through housing or education or economic entrepreneurship or cultural and civic engagement, ultimately the Asian Community Development Corporation and the University of Massachusetts Boston are each working to ensure that underserved communities are empowered and repositioned to not just survive, but to thrive. ACDC has been a powerful force in Boston's Asian American community from

your founding in the 80's to develop affordable housing in Chinatown to your multi-faceted work to advance home ownership, enrich Chinatown as a cultural center, build economic and political capacity and support a seamless transition for immigrants into the complexities of life in our city. Now entering your 22nd year of operations, I want to take this moment to thank you for your inspiring, sustained innovation in advancing your mission. You and the community you serve should be very proud.

Similarly, I am proud to have this opportunity to speak with you about the University of Massachusetts Boston where our research, curriculum, and civic engagement enable a process of transformative education for the many diverse students, families, and communities we have the mission to serve. We are the community's university, an "urban public research university with a teaching soul." And we are on the move...

- We've seen a 26% growth in our enrollment since 2005, and now enroll roughly 15,000 students. We have more than doubled our commitment to financial aid in the past five years, and awarded \$10.93 million just to Boston residents during the past decade.
- Our students hail from 140 countries and speak 90 different languages; 41% of undergraduates and 17% of graduate students are people of color. Many are the first in their families to achieve higher education in the U.S. Our campus community looks more like Boston — and more like the world — than any other university in New England.

We are currently engaged in the implementation of a 25-year campus master plan to make our beautiful setting along the Columbia Point peninsula a top destination point for students as well as for residents and visitors in the city of Boston. We are working closely with our architect on the programming for a new Integrated Sciences Complex that will provide lab, research, and classroom space for the university. This will be the first new academic building since the campus opened in 1974. Plans for a second new academic building are also underway along with the design and development of the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate which the Senator and his family wished to be sited on the campus of the university as well.

Last spring we opened an \$8 million state-of-the-art Venture Development Center, an incubator for new ventures that provides the infrastructure for faculty, students, and collaborating partners to be a part of the entrepreneurial process literally from the ground up. Given that so much of our innovation economy hinges on the success of start-ups, we felt that our students should be part of the process. The VDC heralds the extension of interdisciplinary, university-driven development all along the MBTA Red Line from Harvard to MIT to UMass Boston and back. This enhances the competitive advantage of our city, state and region.

Of course, the Red Line also runs through Chinatown, as do the Orange, Green, and Silver Lines. Historically, this central role of Chinatown as a hub of connections — for culture, business, politics, and services as well for transportation — has enabled the spread of Asian American communities to Allston, Mission Hill, Malden, Fields Corner, and Quincy. It is no coincidence that these are also the locations where many Asian American students at UMass Boston come from and go back home to each day.

As the region's only urban public research university, we appreciate the role and responsibility we have as one of the important resources in the overall web of support and opportunity for Boston's Asian American communities. Not only do we provide Asian American students with access to a wide range of outstanding and affordable undergraduate and graduate academic programs, we are also deeply engaged, much like ACDC, in building long-term capacity for Asian American community development.

In September, we were proud to be selected by the national organization, Asian Pacific Americans for Progress (APAP), as one of the “*Top Ten Best Campuses for Asian American and Pacific Islanders*” in the country. And in 2008, we were designated as an “*Asian American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution*” by the US Department of Education. This makes us eligible to compete for a small but growing pool of federal funds allocated by Congress with the support of the President. We are currently the only research university in New England with this designation based on satisfying specific guidelines for serving low-income students and having an Asian American or Pacific Islander student enrollment of more than 10%. Ours is roughly 14%. Having the AAPISI designation is a major breakthrough nationally, and very important to us at UMass Boston. But these federal numbers-based criteria do not convey what it *means* to be an Asian American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. So, let me say a few words about this meaning for us.

First, many of you already know that we offer the most Asian American Studies courses, faculty, and community linkages of any university in New England, by far. The faculty members affiliated with the Asian American Studies Program come from a wide array of scholarly interests that provide an invaluable interdisciplinary academic experience found nowhere else in this region. Here are a just a few of the classes being offered just this current semester: Andrew Leong is teaching “Asian Americans and the Law”; Karen Suyemoto is teaching “Asian American Psychology”; Shirley Tang is teaching “Applied Research in Asian American Studies” with a focus on local Cambodian community history in Revere; Peter Kiang is teaching “Boston’s Asian American Communities”; and Paul Watanabe is teaching an honors course on the “World War II Japanese American Internment”. Paul just returned two weeks ago from leading an amazing four-day field-study trip with fifteen UMass Boston students to the Manzanar internment camp in California. And your own former ACDC staff member Giles Li is teaching an invited course on “Asian American Storytelling and Performance”. In fact, several students from Giles’ class are presenting their original work at the Chinatown Storefront Library on December 7th. Those are just some of the courses that we are offering this semester. In the spring, others will be offered on Asian American health, Asian American media literacy, multiracial experiences, critical race theory, Asian American women, Asian American literature, and more.

Complementing our interdisciplinary Asian American Studies academic program directed by Peter Kiang, we also have the Institute for Asian American Studies, which has been led by Paul Watanabe since its founding in 1994. The Institute is unique in its capacity to conduct applied research and policy analysis on issues that relate to and affect the lives of Asian Americans across the state and around the nation. This kind of applied and collaborative research expertise is critical for policy-makers and the media as well as for funders and service providers. All of you who do community-based advocacy and development work with ACDC know how important it is to have relevant, reliable data at the community level. Too often, we have what Asian American Studies-affiliated Professor Hae-ok Lee from our College of Nursing and Health Sciences refers to as “data disparities” along with disparities in health and other issues facing immigrant communities and communities of color. As we look ahead, for example, to the impending 2010 US Census, we will count on the Institute to provide us with clear analyses of emerging trends and changing profiles for Asian. Americans.

So, transformative teaching and relevant research are essential in our definition of an Asian American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. But, what else? Here, I want to highlight the leadership roles played by some of our former students whom you might recognize.

I already mentioned ACDC’s own Jason Chou. Other UMass Boston alumni connected to Asian American Studies include Elaine Ng, executive director of the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC); Frances Ma, Coordinator of Social Services at South Cove Community Health Center; Cydney Dang, Education Coordinator at South Cove Manor; Chheub Bun Heng, Immigrant Program Manager for

Massachusetts Asian & Pacific Islanders for Health; Chealyn Tim, Youth Program Coordinator, and Chris Albrizio, Employment Specialist, both with the Asian American Civic Association, Lola Tom, Community Development Manager at Quincy Medical Center... and I could go on for another hour...

This network of alumni in the community includes former graduate students as well, like Giles Li and Sophia Kim, both of whom currently direct major programs at BCNC and received their master's degrees from UMass Boston. Michael Liu of the Asian American Resource Workshop wrote his Public Policy Ph.D. dissertation about the history of organizing here in Boston Chinatown. And this past summer, Phuong Nguyen, with the support of Professor Karen Suyemoto, became our first Vietnamese American Ph.D. He is now one of a handful of bilingual bicultural Vietnamese American clinical psychologists in the country. Again, I could go on and on.

Having this kind of longer-term impact through building capacity and social-cultural capital for the community also helps to define what it means for UMass Boston to be an Asian American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. We educate students from the neighborhoods that you serve; our research directly engages with the communities where you live, work, and organize; and our alumni are well-respected for the contributions they make individually and collectively as new generation leaders for the community.

This work is not easy, however, and should never be taken for granted. Given today's difficult announcement by the President, for example, I am mindful of the reality that additional U.S. personnel will soon be deployed to Afghanistan. UMass Boston already enrolls more than 500 veterans in our student body, far more than other local colleges and universities. Roughly 70% of our veterans are men and women from the Iraq/Afghanistan generation, including a number of Asian American student veterans. Their needs and interests are both similar to and different from other Asian Americans on campus, such as our recent immigrant students from Bangalore and Fujian, students born in Korea and the Philippines with adoptive families in the U.S., and U.S.-born Vietnamese and Cambodian American students with refugee family backgrounds. We are working hard to serve them all and more.

And I want to be clear that our internal institutional identity as a *real* Asian American and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution is good for everyone, not just for Asian Americans themselves. Whenever I visit Asian American Studies classes, as I did last semester in courses taught by Karen Suyemoto and Shirley Tang, I am always reminded that these are also profound transformative educational opportunities for our Latino, Black, and White students who gain immensely from having strong Asian American faculty mentors, meaningful interactions with Asian American student peers, and a serious knowledge base regarding Asian American history, issues, and perspectives. Their educational experience contributes not only to the vitality of our campus environment, but also to the multicultural competence and cross-racial solidarity that is so critical to the peace and prosperity of our city.

Imagine your communities with steadily increasing concentrations of individuals and families who are not marginalized or victimized, but empowered to dream, as so many of you did 22 years ago, to harness those dreams to new and broader perspectives, new competencies, new capacities and new connections established and nurtured in their educational experience and available to them for the rest of their lives. That is a community with assets that can sustain inclusion, upward mobility, justice, and hope for current and future generations. That is a vision of a truly transformed community that I believe we share.

I look forward to exploring such visions with you, ranging from collaborative community-based GIS research, joint proposals for federal funding, and the seeding of new ventures to more modest reciprocal efforts such as supporting student interns, hiring our alumni, and presenting your *Chinatown Banquet* video in our Asian American Studies courses. Thank you so much for this wonderful invitation to share my thoughts with you. Once again, best wishes and congratulations to you all.