

New Dean of Faculty Article – Rajini Srikanth

This year is newly appointed Dean of Faculty, Professor Rajini Srikanth's 23rd year at UMass Boston. She started at the university in 1998 as an assistant professor in the English department and was tenured in 2004. It was around that time that she took over as the Director of the Honors Program at UMass Boston until 2013. The Honors Program became the Honors College, making her the founding dean. From 2009 to 2013, she served as Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs and in that role helped establish the Office of Faculty Development. Professor Srikanth teaches in the English department, the Human Rights minor, and the Critical Ethnic and Community Studies program, all in the College of Liberal Arts. She has also taught in the Asian American Studies program, and several of her publications are in this area.

One of Professor Srikanth's new responsibilities as the Dean of Faculty is to help senior colleagues, deans, and the provost recruit the best faculty for the campus who will appreciate and uphold the university's mission and goals. She also wants to be able to help the newly recruited faculty find their sense of belonging and support within the university. "Everything comes into play in the work that you do and the Dean of Faculty needs to understand how to holistically support faculty so they can be the best teachers for their students, be productive and fulfilled researchers and scholars, and creative artists", said Professor Srikanth.

When asked about her new priorities and perspectives as the new Dean of Faculty, Professor Srikanth mentioned that she wants to address the concerns and hopes of the faculty and identify what the urgent issues are right now, especially while recognizing the stressors that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought. She wants to do what she can to support the faculty as they support their students during this difficult time.

Among this, Professor Srikanth said, "I want to continue building the support structures at the university that address every faculty member's needs at the various stages of their careers". Making sure to help the faculty grow as individuals and realize and pursue their ambitions is what will make the faculty successful as well as their students.

Another priority of hers is to diversify the faculty to represent UMass Boston's student population. "Our student body is 62% students of color but our faculty is not representative of this", she said. Not only is hiring a more diverse faculty of importance to her, but also retaining and supporting diverse faculty so that they can feel UMass Boston to be their home.

In her new position, Professor Srikanth hopes that faculty will reach out to her with any concerns that they may have. She wants faculty to see her as an advocate, and as someone who genuinely tries to listen to others and understand what aspects of the university can be restructured or mobilized to address any particular concerns. Working with other leaders on campus, she wants to make change possible and have faculty trust that she's working in their best interest.