MEMO

DATE: 6/28/24
TO: *Nir Eisikovits, Applied Ethics Center Director, UMass Boston*
FROM: *Daniel Bryan, Mayor's Youth Council Coordinator, City of Boston Office of Youth Engagement and Advancement (OYEA)*
SUBJECT: *Review of the Tech Talk Pilot Technology Literacy Program for Boston Mayor's Youth Council Members in Partnership with The University of Massachusetts Boston*

I'm writing to recap the successful pilot of the *Tech Talk* program during the 2023-2024 Mayor's Youth Council (MYC) year. This technological literacy initiative brought youth civic leaders from across Boston together with faculty from the University of Massachusetts Boston for four engaging workshops focused on new and emerging technologies, and their ethical implications.

MYC is a body of high school aged Boston residents who represent the broader youth community, plan and implement original initiatives, and receive training and professional development to grow as civic leaders. The *Tech Talk* program was imagined in order to address a perceived gap between rapid advances in technology and coverage of these issues in secondary school curricula.

At the beginning of 2024, the opportunity to participate in the *Tech Talk* series was offered to the sixty members of MYC with seats for 10 in the pilot. Members were promised an official certification from Umass Boston for their successful completion of the program. Between March and May, interested MYC members gathered with UMB faculty and MYC staff in the UMass club on the 32nd floor of One Beacon in downtown Boston. Use of this space was a privilege, as the venue was a novelty for many of the participants, and contributed to the feel and ultimate success of the program.

During the first Tech Talk entitled *Privacy and For-Profit Surveillance*, Professor Maria Brincker discussed privacy as an intrinsic and extrinsic good, the "you have nothing to fear if you have nothing to hide" argument, and how the third party doctrine of big tech negates 4th amendment and other privacy protections.

At the next meeting, Professor Matt Davis spoke about his research on the relationship between AI and writing, particularly in education. As current high schoolers, this subject was of particular interest to the group. The prevalence and proliferation of generative AI among youth made this conversation especially illuminating.

The session led by Nir Eisikovits, Director of the Applied Ethics Center at UMass Boston, led to a lively discussion among the participants, who philosophized eloquently on whether it was possible to befriend, or even love, a chat bot. Once again, the Council members drew on personal experience to consider the future of a technology which for many is just beginning to be present in daily life.

The fourth and final session, facilitated by Professor Alec Stubbs, explored the future of robotics and its potential impact on employment. The participants were encouraged to contemplate on the various pathways presented by robotics and automation, each leading to starkly different future outcomes. As Professor Stubbs aptly questioned, "Will the robots replace us, and should we want them to?"

Overall, this pilot was a clear success. The Office of Youth Engagement and Advancement was able to offer a unique and enriching opportunity to Mayor's Youth Council members, and participating instructors had the chance to glean insights about the perception and use of various technologies among youth. *Tech Talk* is the only program of its kind of which I am aware, and the value of getting high schoolers engaged on issues of technology and ethics seems clearer than ever.

We hope to see the program continue and expand in the coming school year to include all interested Mayor's Youth Council members. Just as recent years have seen a rise in financial literacy programs to address gaps in youth awareness, Tech Talk represents a similar opportunity to address critical gaps in technological literacy.

In recent years, a lack of youth awareness around financial rights, systems, fraud, and more led to the creation of a spate of financial literacy programs. It seems that technological literacy programs present a similar kind of opportunity to solve a damaging public knowledge problem.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and to continuing to work together in the future.