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Success Boston College Completion Initiative (SBI)

Each September, over 150 Boston Public School (BPS) graduates step foot on the UMass Boston campus as new students, filled with the many promises that a college education brings. They are motivated by their families' aspirations, encouragement from high school teachers, and their own hopes and dreams. Yet the majority of these students face significant barriers to completing college. They tend to come from underrepresented backgrounds, such as minority, immigrant, first-generation, and low-income. Despite the best intentions, their families often lack the knowledge and experience to support them with planning for college and navigating through it.

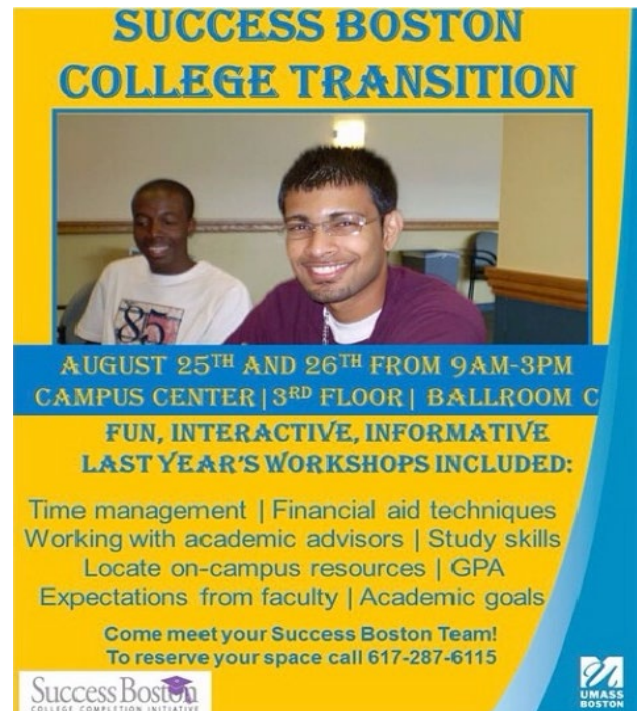
When a 2008 study confirmed that only 35.5% of BPS graduates who enrolled in all colleges earned an associate's or bachelor's degree within seven years, the former Boston mayor, the Boston Foundation's president, and UMass Boston's chancellor came together to launch the [Success Boston College Completion Initiative \(SBI\)](#), which aims to double the college graduation rate of BPS graduates. As his first action as co-chair, Chancellor Motley recruited thirty-seven Massachusetts colleges and universities to join the unprecedented partnership with BPS, city government, local foundations, and nonprofits.

As a lead partner, UMass Boston developed and implemented a data-driven cohort model for all partner colleges and universities to utilize. Our campus SBI program helps students transition into the university environment, build campus connections, and be an active partner in their education. University and nonprofit coaches provide intensive support, participate in monthly case-management meetings, and co-plan and implement activities aimed at increasing academic success and building community and engagement. Through wraparound services, students become deeply connected to the university and its many opportunities, resulting in higher rates of student success.

To better illustrate the vital role that the SBI plays in BPS graduates' college experiences, meet Yen, Manny, and Ravie.

YEN

Yen's family immigrated to Boston from Vietnam when she was five years old. Growing up, she was shy, self-conscious, and struggled academically. After enrolling in UMass Boston's Transitions Program, invitations to participate in Success Boston created a buzz in Yen's inbox and despite her nerves, she decided to check it out. When you meet Yen today, you find an ambitious, confident young woman and a star student.



A flier promotes Success Boston workshops to kick off the new academic year. Ravie (front right) and another Success Boston student and pictured.

Yen shared that through SBI she always felt informed about scholarships, job and co-curricular opportunities, and financial aid deadlines. Success Boston connected her to various university opportunities. Yen earned a spot in a two-year cancer research program called [CURE](#) (part of UMass Boston’s partnership with the Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center), participated in a “life-changing” [service-learning trip](#) to Puerto Rico, is a member of student government, and is utilizing her fluency in Vietnamese to lead health disparities research in her own community. “UMass Boston has given [me] a lot of different skill sets...No matter what it is...I can go out in the world and be good at what I do.”

MANNY

Manny attributes Success Boston as the key factor in preventing him from dropping out—not once, but twice. As a first-generation Cape Verdean student, he struggled to balance his full course load with full-time employment. Success Boston connected him to an on-campus job, a seemingly small yet significant factor in his success. By spending more time on campus, he managed to forge new friendships, devote more time to studying, and gain career-oriented experience compared to his job in the fast food industry.

When a family tragedy struck, Manny felt so distressed that he skipped class and wandered the campus harborwalk. “As I was thinking about dropping out of school, one of my coaches called me. I just needed to be reassured by someone else who cared about me and I got that,” Manny recalled.

This unwavering support deeply motivated him to give back. He founded [Ambitious Men Engaged in Necessary Dialogue](#) (AMEND), which proved to be an effective strategy for bringing young men together in a safe place to discuss issues of identity, relationships, success, violence, and a host of other topics. Manny extended the reach of AMEND by leading the dialogues for one of UMass Boston’s pre-collegiate programs.

RAVIE

When Ravie sought a safe space to work through the “internal struggles” he faced, AMEND was there for him. As a young child, Ravie moved to Boston from Guyana and faced an unstable home life marred by domestic violence. Through AMEND, he connected with peers and realized he wasn’t alone in his experiences.

Once connected to SBI, other components of Ravie’s experience started to click. “They provided opportunities that I couldn’t find (on my own),” Ravie explained. This past summer, his coach referred him to Career Services, which supported him in applying to the new [CVP Career Academy](#). Through this UMass Boston partnership with CV Properties, Ravie landed a 10-week paid internship with Haley & Aldrich, an environmental consulting firm. There he applied theories and concepts from his environmental science major and gained hands-on skills like data organization and quality assurance checking.

IMPACTS

The initiative’s impact extends beyond Yen, Manny, and Ravie’s unique accounts—through its referral and relationship-building functions, the SBI demonstrates consistent progress as measured by persistence and performance. Since 2008, the percentage of students on track at the beginning of year two, defined by minimum 2.5 GPA/24 credits/six-year graduation, has increased significantly with each cohort. For instance, 65% of the 2012 cohort was on track compared to 2008’s 31%. Institutional Research also found that BPS graduates who entered in the fall 2012 cohort have remained enrolled at a higher rate than non-BPS students—85% compared to 77%.

At a systems level, intensive planning continues and engages hundreds of stakeholders across the network to address key barriers, including contextual issues that affect the academic success of BPS graduates. UMass Boston’s leadership of this transformational initiative is grounded in the words of its chancellor, “There is no better way to invest in the future of our city than to invest in our students.”

Progress, Persistence and Performance Measures of SBI Students

	Class 2008	Class 2009	Class 2010	Class 2011	Class 2012	Class 2013
Number of students	150	113	144	195	165	207
Complete initial FAFSA	95%	92%	94%	97%	99%	98%
% of students who enroll semester 1	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
% of students who enroll semester 3	79%	79%	88%	87%	85%	TBD fall 2014
Maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 +	56%	61%	81%	80%	84%	84%
On track for 6-year graduation—24 credits per year and 2.5+ GPA at the end of year 1**	31%	39%	46%	44%	65%	TBD fall 2014