

Activists call on UMass leadership to end austerity measures

Labor and student activists are scheduled to address the UMass Board of Trustees at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, April 14, and hold an event on the UMass Amherst campus later in the day aimed at supporting demands for greater investment in programs that support the academic, social, emotional and health needs of students.

The trustees' meeting will be [held remotely](#). Members of the UMass Unions United coalition are on the public speaker portion of the agenda, and they will address the impacts of deep cuts over the past year in staffing and programs across UMass campuses. Coalition members addressing the trustees include Andrew Gorry of the Professional Staff Union at UMass Amherst; Leslie Marsland of the University Staff Association at UMass Amherst; Razvan Stanescu of the Graduate Employee Organization at UMass Lowell; and Massachusetts Teachers Association Vice President Max Page.

At 3 p.m., students, staff and faculty at UMass Amherst will bring back the “asteroid” they have been using to respond to the assertion made by UMass Trustee Michael O’Brien that the university’s vast reserve funds should not be used to preserve jobs and programs during the pandemic. [O’Brien maintained at one board meeting](#) that reserves could only be tapped for a disaster on the magnitude of a giant asteroid crashing into Earth — but not for a global health crisis.

To persuade trustees and campus executives to invest in their campus, activists will have an “asteroid hit” outside of the UMass Amherst Integrative Learning Center, at 650 North Pleasant St.

Social distancing is required for those attending in person to have their picture taken with the asteroid and to hear from student, staff and faculty speakers. The speaking program will also [be streamed](#) live on Facebook.

UMass Unions United, which represents thousands of employees on campuses in Dartmouth, Lowell, Boston and Amherst, issued the following statement:

“The federal government has made more than one hundred million dollars available to the UMass system to provide fast and direct economic aid to the students and workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Trustees and

campus executives have been disappointing in their actions over the past year, exploiting the pandemic to cut staff and programs at a time when our universities and communities need bold solutions. These cuts have directly hurt students and workers alike and have proven to be unnecessary given the federal aid, state funding and stable enrollment. It is time for the UMass Board of Trustees to stand up and defend UMass rather than defund it.”