UMassOnline has been awarded a $650,000 grant by The Sloan Foundation, a national association that promotes online learning standards. The funds will help expand access to the UMass system through blended programs, a model that combines classroom and online learning.

“The grant will help UMassOnline to develop, deliver and market a new suite of online, blended programs and services,” says Jacqueline Moloney, dean of Continuing Studies, Corporate and Distance Education and principal investigator for the grant.

UMassOnline, which has 22,000 enrolments and offers 69 online degree and certificate programs, has grown dramatically since it was launched five years ago. These programs come from the five campuses in the system—Amherst, Dartmouth, Boston, Lowell and the Medical School in Worcester. Each of the five UMass campuses will develop or expand two programs as part of the grant. Programs in healthcare will be the primary focus of the first series of blended courses. UMass Lowell will implement the grant with UMass Online, working with the other campuses in the system. The blended format makes programs and classes more convenient to students, particularly those who are also working professionals.

“We look forward to providing our students the ‘best of both worlds,’” says Moloney. “Students will have the flexibility of the internet combined with face-to-face meetings with their colleagues and faculty members.”

The program will launch during the summer of 2007 with a graduate course in healthcare management taught by Prof. James Lee of the College of Health and Environment. The class will be conducted onsite at a regional hospital with a blended format that will alternate between on-campus sessions and online sessions.

“The program will also allow us to develop unique partnerships with local healthcare organizations and provide for much needed workforce training in this high demand area,” says Catherine Kendrick, director of Corporate and Distance Market Development. —JH

Making the Invisible Understandable

Nano Program Expands Education, Outreach

Proactive” could be the motto and mantra of the nanotechnology education and outreach program at UMass Lowell.

Directed by Prof. Carol Barry of the Plastics Engineering Department, the program reaches undergraduate and graduate students, schoolchildren and teachers, researchers and industrialists.

“We’re trying to reach all audiences,” says Barry. “NSF puts great emphasis on education and outreach. It’s a real challenge to fulfill the mission.”

Undergraduate offerings include the Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) summer program, which draws students from UML and campuses across the country for 10 weeks of intensive study and research, concluding in a joint conference with CHIN partners Northeastern and UNH.

Barry and others have also developed more than a dozen nanotechnology modules that incorporate information into existing undergraduate courses. Several are engineering courses, but other disciplines are represented, including economics, English and philosophy. Barry estimates that the modular instruction has reached more than 600 students. In addition, three students have completed senior capstone projects, conducting supervised research and working in the lab.

Philosophy Prof. Eugene Melican, who incorporates nanotechnology into his Engineering and Ethics course, says, “I enjoy engaging students in a technical area they know little about—it holds intrinsic interest for them.”

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UMassOnline Awarded $650K National Grant

Expands Access to UMass Through Blended Programs

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UML-Middle School Collaboration Gets Boost

BHE Grant Helps 15 School Districts

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Aramark introduces frying oil with no trans fats.
UML Team Wins $1.3 Million NSF Grant

Fred Martin, assistant professor in the Computer Science Department, and Doug Prime, director of K-12 outreach for the College of Engineering, are the crazy duo of creativity.

For their latest endeavor, they teamed up with Michelle Scribner-MacLean, visiting assistant professor of science and math education at the Graduate School of Education, and won a $1.3 million grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

Prime and Martin joke about what to call Scribner-MacLean within the team—"She’s our conscience." She takes it in stride, saying, "They’re so great at brainstorming—it’s never boring to work with them."

In their work together, Martin and Prime like to emphasize the messy and chaotic nature of scientific investigation: curiosity leading to questions and investigations, without knowing the answers in advance. This is very different from what Martin refers to as the "confirmation experiments" that are so common in science classes, where the experiment simply verifies a known scientific principle:

"Science is rigorous, but not orderly," says Martin; Scribner-MacLean agrees. Besides teaching courses on elementary math and science education, she serves on the fifth grade MCAS committee for the state.

"About 25 percent of the MCAS test is composed of questions in science, technology, and engineering," she says. "Many teachers are afraid of this area, concerned about their knowledge base. Really, science is mostly about asking questions and exploring for answers, so we need to get people comfortable with the messing around aspects of science."

Grant funders at the NSF agree. After an initial proposal that the team now describes as "overly ambitious," the three developed a more modest one that was successful. With Martin as principal investigator, they obtained the three-year, $1.3 million grant for "ICODE, Building an Internet Community of Design Engineers."

The project expands after school science and technology education, working with school systems and community groups such as Girls Inc. and the Boys and Girls Club. The on-line system will support engineering design programs for students in grades 7 through 12, reaching more than 175 students from Boston, Lowell and Lawrence over three years.

UMass Lowell is partnered with Machine Science Inc., a non-profit educational company in Boston that has developed high school-level programs using an array of project kits and on-line resources. The students use hardware and software to create modern electronic equipment, controlled by microprocessors.

The activities will combine online content with classroom kits of materials. The project modules will begin with rather detailed directions for hands-on learning, leading gradually to more open-ended projects as students and teachers develop their skills and knowledge. Through the website, students can share project ideas, upload designs and stories, critique the work of others, look for feedback and ask for help in solving problems—becoming, in effect, a community of design engineers.

"We want to teach kids what engineering is," says Scribner-MacLean. "It’s fluid, ever-changing and creative."

Spring Decision Expected on Nano-Bio Building Site

A revised master plan and a site decision for the nano- and biomanufacturing building should blossom along with the flowers this spring, according to Vice Chancellor for Facilities Diana P prideaux-Brune.

HDR Architects is currently reviewing each of four potential sites for the advanced manufacturing and research building. Under review are: the Riverside parking lot on UML North; UML’s old West Campus on Princeton Street; the corner of Perkins and Aiken Street in the Lawrence Mills site; and an area near the National Park Visitors Center in Lowell’s Hamilton Canal District. “I’m hoping that by April or May, at the latest, we’ll have the site selected,” says Prideaux-Brune.

Public comment was solicited on the first draft of the campus’s $260 million dollar overall master plan last spring. Several “critical issues sessions” were held on both UML North and South. The Facilities office reached out to ensure cross-campus representation at the sessions. Students, alumni and Lowell residents also were asked for their feedback at public sessions.

Prideaux-Brune expects that those comments will be reviewed and incorporated into a revised plan that should be released this fall.

Meanwhile, work has begun on other needs identified in the draft master plan. The new parking garage on UML East is complete. “The students really seem to like it,” says Prideaux-Brune. She noted that the facility, which opened just before the start of classes this semester, has operated at “pretty much full capacity” since.

UML Faculty, Staff and Students Join in Lawrence Health Summit

Group Rethinks Public Health Policies in Lawrence

University of Massachusetts Lowell faculty, staff and students were among the 200 participants at the Lawrence Mayor’s Health Task Force Summit in January.

The Task Force is a broad-based collaborative of health care and social service providers, environmental groups, academic and research institutions, local businesses, community leaders and city planners. The mission is to develop public health policies and activities that accommodate the changing conditions of the community and to promote improvement in the quality of life of Lawrence citizens.

Featured speakers at the summit included U.S. Rep. Marty Meehan; Dr. Howard Koh, Harvard School of Public Health; Nancy Turnbull, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation; and Linda Silka of UML’s Community Outreach Partnership Center. UML Asst. Prof. Lisa Abdallah, Nursing, facilitated a group addressing teen issues.

The School of Health and Environment exhibit table was supported by Asst. Prof. Deirdra Murphy, Physical Therapy Department; Deana Sousa and Christine Hannus, Senior Exercise Physiology Students; Dr. Cora Roelofs of Work Environment; and Craig Thomas, Vista Volunteer with the UML Center for Family, Work and Community.
Programmed for Savings

UML’s Hardware/Software Committee Streamlines Computer Purchases

Keeping up with the high tech demands of a university is daunting; here at UMass Lowell, nearly 12,000 students, staff and faculty members clamor for the latest and greatest systems and software. To manage the process effectively, the Provost and Vice Chancellor of Information Technology brought together representatives from all areas of the university to form the Hardware/Software Committee.

“Our committee’s mission is threefold,” explains chair Nancy Fowler, technical analyst in Information Technology. “First and foremost, we consider the technical needs of the entire campus; second, we provide quotes, place orders, and design system configurations for all departmental equipment purchases; and lastly, we advise members of the campus who are purchasing home systems.

“Thanks to input from all areas of the University, the products we buy—and when we buy them—have become more strategic and cost-effective.” The committee’s ideal plan runs on a four-year cycle, with upgrades and maintenance agreements timed accordingly. To keep the process fair, standards have been developed for staff and faculty interested in the committee’s help. For software purchases, committee members have taken inventory of their areas to understand what applications are being used. The committee reviews the list of software applications to determine if they are being used in other areas. If they are used campus-wide, and the committee has sufficient funds, separate licenses are combined into a single purchase, saving considerable money on the price.

Recently, the committee was able to help seven departments interested in buying a license for Mathematica, a specialized software program. While the application didn’t meet the funding requirement for campus-wide use, the committee was able to coordinate the purchase of one license for the group—dividing the lower price seven ways.

The committee’s success rate to date is impressive: FY 07’s budget funded 430 systems for student computer labs and more than 150 desktop and laptop systems for staff and faculty. Through the volume purchasing program, students, faculty and staff are up to date with technology, a fact borne out by outside evaluations.

“Accreditors who inspect and evaluate the university’s IT commitment have been impressed with our student labs,” says committee member John White from the College of Engineering.

Faculty and staff interested in learning more about the services of the committee should contact their representative (see list) or e-mail Nancy at Nancy_Fowler@uml.edu

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Sliding to Victory

Team Recreation Center Wins First Challenge Cup

They showed their skill at running on ice, not falling out of a speeding sled and shooting pucks into an unguarded net. And for their efforts, the team from the Recreation Center came from behind to win the inaugural UML Challenge Cup, a crazy contest held between periods of the UML River Hawks hockey game during the faculty/staff appreciation night, sponsored by University Advancement.

Six teams of four eagerly toed the mark, as participants showed their competitive nature even in their choice of uniform. Team Management looked almost businesslike in their matching white shirts, while Team Instructional Networks displayed a flair for irreverence with Hawaiian shirts and dreadlocks. Team Engineering included a dean, John Ting, while Team Police was led by Chief Brian Pray himself. But the team from the Recreation Center put fear into contestants early with their snazzy matching red shirts and their intimidating game faces.

The contest itself was surprising fast, as one team member raced down the ice pulling a second member, who snagged hockey pucks along the way. A third member then shot three pucks into the net at the far end of the rink before the last member pulled the sled to victory. Team Advancement seemed to be headed for a convincing win before Team Recreation Center came from behind to win by a nose.

Organizer Deme Gys of University Advancement says the Challenge Cup will again be up for grabs at next year’s faculty/staff hockey night, so interested departments should start considering teams now. Winners will have their names engraved on the cup, which will reside in a place of honor in University Advancement.

Participants were: Team Recreation Center—Christine St. Laurent, Ben Bettez, Justin Lawler, Pete Murray; Team Police—Katrina Thompson ’05, Dennis Shemchuk, John McCune; Chief Brian Pray; Team Alumni Affairs—Brian Andriolo, Steven Rogers, Debbie Marino, Lois Nangle; Team Engineering—Bob Malloy, Julie Chen, Gil Brown, John Ting; Team Management—Sherre Strickland, Dave Lewis, Steve Tello; Team Instructional Networks—Mike Lucas, Andy Alfano, Dave Timnyson, Bill Suppa. For more pictures, visit http://www.uml.edu/advancement/alumni/Faculty_Staff_Hockey_2007.html

The winners of the inaugural UML Challenge Cup were (from left) Christine St. Laurent, Ben Bettez, Justin Lawler and Pete Murray, team Recreation Center.