



# LIRA NEWSLETTER

LEARNING IN RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION  
Office of Community and Cultural Affairs – UMass Lowell  
Member of Road Scholar Institute Network  
Tel.: (978) 934-3135 Web: [uml.edu/community/LIRA](http://uml.edu/community/LIRA)



March 2026

Vol. 33 No 1



PLEASE JOIN US

## LIRA TOWN MEETING

**DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4**

**TIME: 10:00 - NOON**

COBURN HALL ROOM 255 OR VIA ZOOM  
UMASS LOWELL SOUTH CAMPUS

### AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

- Update UML "Healthy Aging & Neighborhood Study" (HANS)
- Spring Schedule Overview
- Sign up for Spring Classes & Trips
- Meet with LIRA Committee Members
- Purchase 2026 *Great Decisions* Books (\$25.00)
- Refreshments
- Enjoy Camaraderie of Friends



## From the President

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter for the March 2026 *LIRA Newsletter*, the snow is piled up outside the window above my desk and the temperature remains below freezing. Even though Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow and predicted six more weeks of winter, the announcement of the upcoming annual **Town Meeting on Wednesday, March 4**, and the plans for LIRA's Spring Semester should bring cheer and warmth to everyone.

Despite the cold and stormy weather, the Winter 2026 Intersession is in full swing, and the range of diverse topics, books, and films continues to attract strong participation from LIRA members. In the span of eight weeks, we have learned about Artificial Intelligence, the reconstruction of the dialect of a Revolutionary soldier, Victorian Era fashion, trade and finance, Homer's *Iliad*, and the history of the Conga Dance. In addition, LIRA members have engaged in book and film discussions, learned about LIRA members' travel experiences along the Danube River and above the Arctic Circle in Norway to see the Northern Lights, and practiced beginning Yoga!

Many thanks go to the Curriculum Committee for organizing a fabulous Winter Intersession and to LIRA members Neal Berenson, Steve Cerand, Chris Geggis, Lisa Hertel, Jim Pope and Alan Friedman for presenting engaging sessions. I would also like to thank the many LIRA members who served as class coordinators and Zoom hosts or provided delicious snacks during the breaks. Every contribution helps make our sessions an enormous success. Thank you!

The **2026 LIRA Town Meeting will be held in Coburn Hall (Room 255) on Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. to noon and on Zoom**. Please see the agenda and parking information included in the newsletter.

The opening program will feature an update from Professor Wenjun Li and Research Project Director Qun (Rachel) Le on the **Healthy Aging and Neighborhood Study (HANS)** at UMass Lowell. Funded by the National Institute on Aging, the primary purpose of this multi-year study is to better understand the relationships among aging, risk of falling, physical activity, and indoor and outdoor environments. Many LIRA members have been active participants in this study.

Following the HANS presentation, we will learn about the **Spring 2026** class schedule, LIRA's annual budget, and the work of LIRA's many committees and support teams. During the extended break, LIRA members will be able to meet with representatives from the various committees, enjoy some refreshments, sign up for classes, purchase (\$25.00) the *2026 Great Decisions* book, and catch up with LIRA friends.

I look forward to seeing you at the Town Meeting on March 4. To borrow travel-writer Rick Steves' advice of "Keep on Traveling," I say "Keep on Learning" with LIRA.

Best regards,  
David Troughton

# LIRA Town Meeting

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

10:00 AM – Noon

Coburn Hall (Rm 255), UMass Lowell South Campus

Parking at Wilder Street Staff Parking Lot &

Wilder St. Metered Lot



## Scholarship Fund

Here we are in a new year for the Scholarship Fund! The students we enjoyed meeting in December have their well-deserved awards, and we have started saving for this year's awards.

Last year we met students making new hands from 3D printing, helping new immigrants to Lowell, and in many ways combining their academic skills with compassion. Who will we meet this year? Please support this wonderful aspect of LIRA by contributing to the LIRA Scholarship Fund.

You can make your gift online through the UMass Lowell website where you can specify the donation go to the LIRA Scholarship Fund, or send a check to me, made out to UMass Lowell with LIRA Scholarship Fund in the memo line. My address is in the LIRA directory, which you can access through the link Peter sent out on January 27.

Thank you,  
*Debby Friedman*  
Co-Chair, LIRA Scholarship Fund



## YOGA!

Despite the cold weather, on February 4th, eleven LIRA members gathered at the UML Recreation Center for a tour of the facility and an introductory level yoga class! Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the exercise and appreciated the skilled and friendly instructor. We all learned some new yoga movements to help keep us limber and relaxed. As you can see from the photographs, everyone finished the class with a smile! Perhaps “LIRA” should stand for “Limber in Retirement Association”!

Hope you can join us next time!

*Jim Rutter*





The next newsletter will be out on **May 1, 2026**; the deadline for news items is **April 5, 2025**.

Please submit all **member news** to Laura Boerman.

All other LIRA news items should be emailed to Becky Bronson.

Please note that emails for all members can be found in the LIRA directory, which you can access from the email sent by Peter Sebelius on January 27.

*Becky Bronson*

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## Newsletter Committee

[Becky Bronson, Editor](#)

Marge Nardini, Layout and Production

Charlotte Evans, Calendar

Laura Boerman, Member News

Peter Sebelius, Web site coordinator

## **LIRA 2026 Spring Course Descriptions March 9 - May 4**

**Most programs will be available via Zoom, other than those listed as In Person Only. For programs listed as Hybrid, the presenter will be in person in room 106 of the University Suites building at UMass Lowell and the program will also be available via Zoom. The presenter will be remote for all programs labeled Zoom only. Please check your email for the weekly program announcement, and for any last-minute changes or additions.**

**\* denotes LIRA member.**

### **Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art**

**Mondays March 9, 16, 23, 30, and April 6: 10 a.m. - noon  
(Hybrid)**

Great Courses Topic

Our Great Courses video is titled "Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art". Our instructor is Ricky Allman, an artist and educator from the midwest. We will start by finding out about Paul Cezanne, named the founder of the Post Impressionists. Many turn of the century artists were using experimental styles that expressed the technical and scientific advances of the day. Please join us for 5 weeks from March 9 - April 6.

Facilitator: Bev Rudeen\*

## **Exploration of Homer's *Iliad***

**Mondays April 13 and 27: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

Presenters: Alan Friedman\* & Samuel Curry

The *Iliad* is one of the oldest complete surviving literary works in the western canon. Surprisingly for such a work, it is still extensively read and studied today, still accorded the status of masterpiece. Alan Friedman presented a very brief introduction to this work during the LIRA winter semester, only a single session.

Alan Friedman and Samuel Curry will provide additional insight into the *Iliad* in two additional sessions in the spring semester. Having attended the introductory lecture is recommended but not required. Alan will be the teacher of the April 13 class and Samuel of the April 27 class.

The course will explore the *Iliad* as both a historical artifact and a living work of literature. We will examine the world from which the poem emerged—its Bronze Age (almost post-Apocalyptic) setting, archaic Greek context, and the likely processes by which it was composed, performed, and eventually written down. We will trace how The Iliad was preserved and transmitted through antiquity, survived the upheavals of the so-called Dark Ages, and was rediscovered and reinterpreted in the modern world. We'll also look at how Greek heroes are flawed and why, including the previous and subsequent generations of heroes.

Alongside these historical and mythic journeys, the course will explore the poem's form, how it was experienced, major themes, and cultural values: honor, rage, fate, heroism, mortality, and the costs of war. Finally, we will consider The Iliad as a foundational template for later classical literature—and for much of Western storytelling that follows—shaping how epic, heroism, war, meaning and tragedy are still imagined today.

Coordinator: Marie Voltaire\*

## **Improving the Ability of Robot Learning from Human Demonstrations**

**Monday March 30: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**

Presenter: Brendan Hertel

Robots are becoming increasingly common in the world. Currently, robots are often employed in highly-controlled environments under expert supervision, as in warehouses or assembly lines. To be generally useful, robots need to be in the hands of non-experts and lay-users. Lay-users do not have the time or experience to program in specific skills. A professional chef is unlikely to be able to program a robot to cut vegetables, much less a home cook. Therefore, there should be an easy and intuitive way to teach robots new skills. One of the easiest and most common approaches for this is Learning from Demonstration (LfD). In Learning from Demonstration, a demonstrator shows the robot an example of the task, which the robot then learns. This allows for anyone able to perform the task to teach the robot a new skill. Brendan Hertel will talk about the challenges involved in LfD and how to overcome them.

Coordinator: Lisa Hertel\*

## **Immigration In The Merrimack Valley**

**Mondays April 6 and 13: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**

Presenter: Bob Farrant

Immigrants and immigration are clearly in the news these days. In this two-part LIRA presentation, UMass Lowell History Professor Emeritus Robert Farrant will discuss the Merrimack Valley's immigration history from the 1820s to the 2020s, with a particular focus on the greater-Lowell story. Before the Civil War, the Irish arrived, and they continued to arrive afterward. The next wave of French Canadian and German migrants swelled the population between 1870 and 1900. Between 1890 and the First World War, immigrants arrived from numerous southern and eastern European countries, including Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Poland, Armenia, and Lithuania. In the 1920s, after decades of trying, those in favor of dramatically curtailing new arrivals carried the day, and a quota system was put in place. During the 1960s and again in the 1980s, reforms to the system opened its gates, leading to the most diverse migration to the U.S. in

the nation's history. Today, people continue to arrive from all over the world despite the obstacles and barriers they face.

Coordinator: Susan Lemire\*

**Understanding the Mysteries of Human Behavior**  
**Tuesdays March 10, 17, 24, 31, and April 7: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**  
Great Courses Topic

Have you ever wondered what makes people behave the way they do? If so, then join award-winning Professor Mark Leary of Duke University in the continuation of this fascinating video course.

**You will learn about this and more:**

- Why is self-control so hard?
- Why do we forget?
- Why don't adolescents behave like adults?
- How much do men and women really differ?
- Why do people fall in and out of love?
- What makes Relationships succeed or fail?

To understand human behavior is to better understand ourselves and the people around us.

Each lecture is independent. It is not necessary to have viewed any of the previous material presented last fall.

Facilitator: Bob Hanlon\*

## **“Sing, Unburied, Sing” – Fiction by American Women of Color**

**Tuesdays April 14 and 21: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

Presenters: Rebecca Kelley-Morgan\* and Steve Buccieri\*

A discussion and survey of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century fiction written by African-American, Latina-American, Indigenous and Asian-American women. Each will explore the work and importance of a few authors, and discussion is encouraged.

Two 2-hour classes, no advance reading necessary, but please bring your own experiences with these writers.

Coordinator: Nancy Pitkin\*

## **Diversity Class on Ancestors**

### **Let’s Investigate Related Ancestors (LIRA)**

**Tuesday March 10: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**

Presenters: Diversity Committee\*

Diversity can be examined in many ways. In this session, we are going to explore the diversity of LIRA’s members by identifying where and when the group’s ancestors arrived in America.

This is a class where you will be encouraged to contribute. Participation is completely voluntary, but the more members that are willing to provide information, the better we can understand the backgrounds of the group. In a brief period of time (10 minute time limit) we ask you to share some information on your ancestors.

Some possible topics to consider

- When did they arrive
- Where did they first settle
- What was their first occupation
- Did all ancestors come from the same area of the world
- How often did they move
- What was their most interesting occupation
- Were they at or did they participate in any significant event
- What language was spoken in the home? What foreign words do you remember?
- Did your parents/grandparents share their ancestral roots and stories with you when growing up?

We expect that no one can or will answer all of the above topics. We also hope that some of you will come up with additional topics to delight the group.

As an additional question - when did they/you arrive in the Massachusetts area

Besides providing entertainment and our increased knowledge of LIRA's members' diversity, we plan to generate a Google map showing the location(s) of your ancestor's origins and date(s) of their arrival in America.

Together, let's have fun learning about our diversity

Coordinator: David Troughton\*

## **Critical Thinking**

**Tuesdays April 7, 14, 21, and 28: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**

Presenter: Evan Shapiro\*

Most everyone agrees that critical thinking is an important skill, yet it is seldom taught as a separate subject. And especially in our current polarized world, those who consider themselves critical thinkers often reach very different conclusions. This four session course is designed to shed some light on why that is, how we can become better critical thinkers, and how we can better understand how others may reach different conclusions from the same information. The course is designed so that each session is somewhat independent.

Coordinator: Nancy Pitkin\*



## **Griffin Museum of Photography**

### ***Manifest Destiny***

**Wednesday March 11**

**Docent-led tour 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. (Trip)**

*Manifest Destiny* refers to the 19th-century belief that the United States was destined to expand westward across North America. Artists of that era often responded by romanticizing expansion and conquest, depicting the West as a vast and “empty” landscape filled with promise. Such images concealed the realities of dispossession and erased the enduring presence of the peoples and cultures who had long inhabited these lands.

The Griffin Museum’s exhibition *Manifest Destiny* revisits this legacy through a contemporary lens, bringing together photographers who investigate the layered histories held within the American landscape. The artists in this exhibition create images that bear witness to transformation, revealing human stories embedded in the land’s somber monumentality. Here, the emptiness of the landscape becomes a site of tension—between absence and presence, memory and erasure.

Featuring the work of American and international artists **Scott Conarroe, Craig Easton, Lisa Elmaleh, Rich Frishman, Drew Leventhal, and Victoria Sambunaris**, *Manifest Destiny* invites viewers to reconsider the narratives that have shaped our national identity.

*Manifest Destiny* is part of a broader, year-long series of exhibitions titled **State of Our Union**. The four exhibitions presented in 2026 examine the United States as it celebrates its 250th anniversary—through its landscape, its culture, and its people.

LIRA will have a docent-led tour of *Manifest Destiny*. The cost will be \$12 per person.

Because of the distance between Winchester and Lowell and the uncertainty of traffic, we will have to leave the parking lot at Hannaford in Chelmsford, MA, **no later than 12:00** to arrive at the museum at **the desired time of 1:15**. We have intentionally scheduled the tour a little late to leave time beforehand to have lunch together in Winchester, for those who wish to do so. We will work out the details after I get a head count. If interested in museum and/or lunch, please notify [alan-friedman@comcast.net](mailto:alan-friedman@comcast.net) by Feb. 23.

Coordinator: Alan Friedman\*

## **Travel Experiences**

**Wednesday March 18: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

Presenters: Stan Powers\* and Bob Slezak\*

### **Travel in the Southwest US**

Are you a dinosaur fanatic (or have grandchildren who are)? Interested in John Wesley Powell's voyage of adventure down the Green and Colorado Rivers? Is a white water rafting trip in your future? During a recent trip to Utah and Colorado, Stan and Jan Powers explored these and other lesser known but very worthwhile state parks, national monuments as well as an

“Indian” era fort. Stan will share maps, and photos and trip details as well as other interesting potential places to visit in the “near” area.

### **Travel in Russia**

Bob will show photos of different cities he has visited in Russian, and will share comments he has heard from various Russian people. He will also discuss his itineraries and any difficulties he encountered during his travels.

Coordinator: Jim Rutter\*

## **Lowell Dining Experience - Brazilian Restaurant**

**Wednesday March 25: 1 p.m. (Trip)**

Join us for our latest Lowell Dining Trail adventure at the "Trem Caipira" restaurant, which serves delicious Brazilian cuisine. We will gather on Wednesday, March 25th at 1 p.m. for dishes of meat, seafood and varied tastes. There is a parking lot across the street from their downtown location at 62 Gorham Street, and their menu may be viewed at [www.tremcaipira.com](http://www.tremcaipira.com)." - The LIRA Diversity Committee

Coordinator: Steve Buccieri\*

## **Lowell’s Historic Spaulding House/Museum**

**Wednesday April 8: 10 a.m. - noon (Trip)**

Expand your knowledge of Lowell history by visiting the c. 1760 Spaulding House; a charming landmark that offers a glimpse into the past and the rich heritage of the region. The Spaulding House has been a witness to the city’s evolution since its colonial period. Acquired by the Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust in 1996, the Spaulding House is now, also, a museum. This two-story building is located at 383 Pawtucket St, Lowell.

This tour will start downstairs. Then, the group will take the stairs to the second floor (no elevator available), sit for an interactive presentation/conversation (bring your questions), and continue the tour of the upstairs portion of the museum. As you wander through the rooms, you will see exhibits and artifacts that tell the stories of the people who lived there.

Parking is limited. Carpooling is suggested. Please park along the fence line and behind the house.

Coordinator: Marie Voltaire\*



Note: The room capacity is 20 - 25 people (prefer limit of 22) and the final head count needs to be in by Monday, 3/30

## **Political Polling and Elections**

**Wednesday April 8: 1:30 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**

Presenter: UML Political Science Professor Rodrigo Castro Cornejo

Political polling is a central feature of elections and is widely used to understand and explain public opinion. In a democracy, the views of citizens are expected to guide government activity and public policy, making public opinion a central concern in the study of democratic politics.

This class examines public opinion in contemporary politics. We will explore how to conceptualize and measure public opinion, where opinions "come from," the nature of opinions on several salient issues, and their impact on elections. We will also address the various challenges facing survey research, including rising non-response rates, the use of new survey modes (e.g., online vs. telephone surveys), and respondents' behavior when taking surveys (for example, do people lie to survey researchers?)

Coordinator: Susan Lemire\*

## **Western Avenue Studio**

**Wednesday April 15: 10 a.m. - noon (Trip)**

Western Avenue is an exceptional example of urban reuse – turning an industrial textile mill complex into a campus of over 350 creatives. WA rents work-only artist studios and live/work artist residential lofts. We host year round First Saturday events ranging from Art Markets to Open Studios where the artists open their studios to the public, as well as other events. The Studios are open for wandering the hallways seven days a week. Individual artists are available in person by appointment. The campus is home to the Loading Dock Gallery, Navigation Brewing, Refuge Art School, Nibbāna Cafe, and Taffeta Music Hall. Each have different hours of operation. Western Avenue : celebrating art and the art of the handmade.

Coordinator: TBD

## **Merrimack Repertory Theatre**

### **Angkor Dance Troupe**

#### ***A Khmer Swan Lake***

**Wednesday April 15**

**Theater and dance 2 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. (Trip)**

Join LIRA for a collaboration between the internationally recognized Angkor Dance Troupe (ADT) and the award-winning Merrimack Repertory Theatre (MRT) in a groundbreaking adaptation of the classic ballet *Swan Lake*. This production blends Western ballet with Cambodia's Robam Kenore traditional dance style, bringing the timeless themes of love, betrayal, and sacrifice to life through Cambodian dancers and musicians. A partnership between ADT and MRT, this unique performance bridges cultures and celebrates Lowell's vibrant performing arts community.

We have reserved a block of tickets for the Wednesday matinee of this show on April 15. The cost (for seniors) is \$20 per ticket. Please sign up at the LIRA Convocation on Mar. 4 (bring your checkbook) or send your check made out to LIRA, Inc. to Alan Friedman, 21 Jonathan Ln., Chelmsford, MA 01824. Tickets will be available first come, first served.

Both free and paid parking are available near the museum. [Directions and parking](#) information are provided on the museum website. Carpooling can be arranged.

In the interest of punctuality, please arrive at the theater no later than **1:45 p.m.**

Coordinator: Alan Friedman\*

## **Concord Museum**

### ***Revolutionary Legacies***

**Wednesday April 29**

**Docent-led tour 1:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. (Trip)**

**Museum open until 4 p.m.**

*Revolutionary Legacies* is a special, temporary exhibition, the last of three mounted by the Concord Museum to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the start of the American Revolution. LIRA took a tour of the first of the three exhibitions in spring of 2025.

The exhibition explores the public memory of April 19th and the Revolution over the centuries and until today through the stories we tell about the founding of our nation, Concord's role in that history, the unfulfilled promises of the Revolution, and the meanings of liberty.

We will have a docent-led tour of *Revolutionary Legacies* as well as selections in the permanent galleries that focus on the American Revolution. After the tour ends, we will be free to explore the rest of the museum, which is **open until 4:00 p.m.** The cost will be **\$13 per person.**

The museum, which has its roots in the nineteenth century, completed a \$16 million renovation project in 2021 that has resulted in an innovative and up-to-date experience.

Because of the distance between Concord and Lowell and the uncertainty of traffic, we will have to leave the parking lot at Hannaford in Chelmsford, MA, **no later than 12:30** to arrive at the museum at **the desired time of 1:15.** We have intentionally scheduled the tour a little late to leave time beforehand to have lunch together in Concord Center, for those who wish to do so. We will work out the details in April.

Coordinators: Alan Friedman\*(sign up) and David Troughton\*(trip)

## Great Decisions Spring 2026 Topics

**Thursdays March 12 and 19: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

### **America and the World: Trump 2.0 Foreign Policy**

Trump's return has marked a break from 80 years of U.S. foreign policy leadership, embracing an "America First" approach. This chapter explores the risks of isolation and diminished influence in relation to Trump 2.0 foreign policy.

By G. John Ikenberry (Currently Professor at Princeton University School of Public and International Affairs)

Presenter: Neal Berenson\*

**Thursdays March 26 and April 9: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

### **Trump Tariffs and the Future of the World Economy**

Trump's aggressive trade and tariff policies have shaken global economic norms. What's the rationale behind this radical shift in economic policy, and what are the implications for multilateral trade and geopolitics?

By Michael Mastanduno (Professor of Arts & Sciences at Dartmouth College)

Presenter: Peter Sebelius\*

**Thursday April 16 and Wednesday April 22: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

### **U.S.–China Relations**

Relations with China remain tense, with tariffs, military modernization, and pressure on Taiwan. Does Trump have a coherent China policy, and will his tariffs on rare earth minerals be effective? What are America's strategic options?

By Oriana Mastro (Asst Professor of Political Science at Stanford University)

Presenter: David Troughton\*

**Thursday April 30 and Monday May 4: 10 a.m. - noon (Hybrid)**

### **Ruptured Alliances and the Risk of Nuclear Proliferation**

U.S. alliance skepticism may drive countries like Japan and South Korea to reconsider nuclear options. What are the implications of the Trump administration's rethinking of the U.S. alliance system for regional and global security? Will this new uncertainty alter the way allies and rivals in various regions make decisions about security and nuclear weapons?

By Gideon Rose (Adjunct Sr Fellow of Political Science at Columbia University)

Presenter: Neal Berenson\*

Coordinators: Steve Cerand\* and Neal Berenson\*

**BSO Rehearsal**  
**Thursday April 23 10:30 a.m. (Trip)**  
**Open Rehearsal: An Evening of Piano Concertos with Evgeny Kissin**  
**and Andrey Boreyko**

**Symphony Hall, Boston, MA**

Boston Symphony Orchestra Andrey Boreyko, conductor Evgeny Kissin, piano RIMSKY-KORSAKOV *Russian Easter Festival Overture* SCRIABIN Piano Concerto LIADOV *Baba Yaga*/LIADOV *The Enchanted Lake* LIADOV *Kikimora* PROKOFIEV Piano Concerto No. 1

This exciting and unusual two-concerto program features acclaimed soloist Evgeny Kissin, known for his charismatic virtuosity. These sparkling but rarely heard concertos span the late Romantic/early modern periods. The BSO has only played Scriabin's concerto on two prior occasions, most recently in 2001. Andrey Boreyko leads this all-Russian program, opening with Rimsky-Korsakov's brilliantly colorful Russian Easter Overture.

Tickets are \$36.99 plus your share of parking expenses (about \$8.00 per person). Contact Peter Sebelius (978-758-5680) if you are interested in attending. We will be carpooling to this event, if you can drive or need a ride please let Peter know. We will meet at Hannaford's, Drum Hill side lot at 9:00 a.m. for the trip.

Coordinator: Peter Sebelius\*

**Back Central Project**  
**Thursday March 12: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**  
Presenter: UML Professor Marie Frank

This class will center on the "Back Central Project," a recently complete website that focuses on one of Lowell's signature neighborhoods, known familiarly as Back Central and located along the Concord River, just south of the city's commercial downtown. The website can be found here (<https://www.uml.edu/research/back-central/>). The class will use the building biographies to draw out the history of the neighborhood—who lived there, where they worked, and how the architecture, memorials, and parks

create a sense of place for the community. For most of the 20th century, Back Central has been considered the city's premier Portuguese neighborhood. However, it originally began in the late 1820s as a leafy suburb for Lowell's elite. Early residents included judges, lawmakers, politicians, and successful businessmen, and they built substantial homes in the current popular styles of the Federal and Greek Revival. 23 Ames Street is a good example and will be described in detail in class. The house was occupied by the wealthy Richmond family who invited Edgar Allen Poe to stay between 1848-49. Poe dedicated the poem "Annie" to Mrs. Richmond. By the Civil War, the demographics began to change as did the density of construction. Irish immigrants first settled in the neighborhood and by 1910 there was a markedly diverse array of nationalities including Russians, Swedes, Poles, Lithuanians, Armenians, Syrians, French Canadians, African Americans, and the Portuguese. The class will not only discuss various examples of the neighborhood's history but also the methods of research used for the project that might be helpful for others interested in building histories from the ground up.

Coordinator: Susan Lemire\*

## **An Introduction to Geospatial: Location, Life, & Decision-Making**

**Thursday March 19: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. (Hybrid)**

Presenter: Red Curry  
Chief Marketing Officer, T-Kartor

Geospatial is the study and application of where things exist in the world and how location shapes relationships, behavior, and outcomes. At its core, geospatial connects people to the places and systems they depend on, where we live, work, learn, travel, and play. It helps us understand how distance, proximity, movement, and environment influence everyday life, from commuting to school and accessing healthcare, to where food comes from and how communities grow or struggle.

This session introduces geospatial as both a practical tool and a way of thinking. We'll explore how spatial data supports human needs like food, water, shelter, education, and safety, while also shaping culture, art, science, business, and public policy. Geospatial thinking is used to design cities, protect the environment, respond to disasters, improve public health, enable business success, and support national defense and intelligence. It reveals

patterns we cannot see otherwise and turns complex systems into something we can understand and act on.

Finally, the talk will explore how geospatial sits at the intersection of the physical and digital worlds. From satellites and sensors to smartphones and maps, location connects land, sea, air, and space into a shared picture of life on Earth. Geospatial is not just about maps, it's about understanding how humans interact with the world around them, and how better spatial awareness leads to better decisions, resilience, and opportunity.

Coordinator: Simon Curry\*

## **Early Christianity**

**Thursday March 26 and April 9, 16, and 30: 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.  
(Hybrid)**

Presenter: UML Professor Jane Sancinito

Today, 2.3 billion people, globally, identify as Christian. Billions more, of other (or no) faiths, are familiar with its story, and especially its origins in the baby in Bethlehem and the man on the cross. Yet the story of the rise of the faith is complicated. For the historian, the story of Christianity simultaneously looks commonplace and utterly exceptional. It is unsurprising that the province of Judaea produced an apocalyptic cult focused on a savior figure, and completely unbelievable that a monotheistic religion took root among the variety and flexibility of ancient Mediterranean religions. This course looks at early Christianity, its first 350 years, in its historical context, focusing on the roots of the religion in Judaism, the historical figure of Jesus, the relationship between early Christians and the Romans, and the development of the Biblical canon.

Coordinator: Susan Lemire\*

**LIRA/Chelmsford Library Series**  
**Registration Required (on Library website)**

**Friday March 13: 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.** Witchcraft, Curses, and Demons:  
An Introduction To Ancient Magic

Presenter: Jane Sancinito

**Friday April 17: 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.** Johnny Cash: A Life in Song

Presenter: Jonathan Silverman

## **Book Discussion**

**10 a.m. - Noon Zoom Only**

**Friday March 20** - Some People Need Killing: A Memoir of Murder in my Country by Patricia Evangelista, 2023, 428 pages.

Discussion leader: Karen Naka\*.

**Friday April 17** - The Lioness of Boston: a novel, by Emily Franklin, 2023, 376 pages.

Discussion leader: Bob Hanlon\*.

**Friday May 15** - The Sun Does Shine: How I found life, freedom, and justice, by Anthony Ray Hinton, 2019, 255 pages. (forward by Bryan Stevenson).

Discussion leader: Becky Bronson\*

Coordinator: Sheila Pariseau\*

## **Film Discussion**

**10 a.m. - Noon Zoom Only**

**Friday March 27** - Idiocracy (2006) directed by Mike Judge.  
Discussion lead: Nancy Pitkin\*

**Friday April 24** - The Great Debaters (2007) directed by Denzel Washington. Discussion lead: Marie Tada\*

**Friday May 22** - Manon of the Spring (1986) directed by Claude Berri.  
Discussion lead: Carolyn Walsh\*

# LIRA 2026 Spring Semester Calendar

Zoom Only in Red

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
March 2	March 3	March 4 10 am to Noon Town Meeting	March 5	March 6
March 9 10 am to Noon Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art	March 10 10 am to Noon Understanding the Mysteries of Human Behavior 1 to 3 pm Diversity Class of Ancestors	March 11 1: 30 to 2:30 pm Griffin Museum of Photography: Manifest Destiny (trip)	March 12 10 am to Noon Great Decisions 1 to 3 pm Back Central Project	March 13 1 to 2:30 pm LIRA/Chelmsford Library Series
March 16 10 am to Noon Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art	March 17 10 am to Noon Understanding the Mysteries of Human Behavior	March 18 10 am to Noon Travel Experiences	March 19 10 am to Noon Great Decisions 1 to 3 pm Introduction to Geospatial	March 20 10 am to Noon <b>Book Discussion</b> <i>Some People Need Killing: A Memoir of Murder</i> Patricia Evangelista
March 23 10 am to Noon Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art	March 24 10 am to Noon Understanding the Mysteries of Human Behavior	March 25 2 pm (Tentative) Lowell Dining Experience— Brazilian Restaurant (trip)	March 26 10 am to Noon Great Decisions 1 to 3 pm Early Christianity	March 27 10 am to Noon <b>Film Discussion</b> <i>Idiocracy</i>
March 30 10 am to Noon Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art 1 to 3 pm Improving Robotic Learning	March 31 10 am to Noon Understanding the Mysteries of Human Behavior	April 1 Passover No Classes	April 2 Passover No Classes	April 3

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>April 6 10 am to Noon Post Impressionism Beginnings of Modern Art 1 to 3 pm Immigration in the Merrimack Valley</p>	<p>April 7 10 am to Noon Understanding the Mysteries of Human Behavior 1 to 3 pm Critical Thinking</p>	<p>April 8 10 am to Noon Lowell's Historic Spaulding House/Museum (trip) 1:30 to 3 pm Political Polling and Elections</p>	<p>April 9 10 am to Noon Great Decisions 1 to 3 pm Early Christianity</p>	<p>April 10</p>
<p>April 13 10 am to Noon Homer's <i>Iliad</i> 1 to 3 pm Immigration in the Merrimack Valley</p>	<p>April 14 10 am to Noon Fiction of American Women of Color 1 to 3 pm Critical Thinking</p>	<p>April 15 10 am to Noon Western Avenue Studio (trip) 2 to 3:30 pm Merrimack Repertory Theatre Angkor Dance Troupe (trip)</p>	<p>April 16 10 am to Noon Great Discussions 1 to 3 pm Early Christianity</p>	<p>April 17 10 am to Noon Book Discussion <i>The Lioness of Boston</i> Emily Franklin 1 to 2:30 LIRA/Chelmsford Library Series</p>
<p>April 20</p>	<p>April 21 10 am to Noon Fiction of American Women of Color 1 to 3 pm Critical Thinking</p>	<p>April 22 10 am to Noon Great Decisions</p>	<p>April 23 10:30 am BSO Rehearsal Symphony Hall, Boston (trip)</p>	<p>April 24 10 am to Noon Film Discussion <i>The Great Debaters</i></p>
<p>April 27 10 am to Noon Homer's <i>Iliad</i></p>	<p>April 28 1 to 3 pm Critical Thinking</p>	<p>April 29 1:30 to 2 pm Concord Museum <i>Revolutionary Legacies</i> (trip)</p>	<p>April 30 10 am to Noon Great Decisions 1 to 3 pm Early Christianity</p>	<p>May 1</p>
<p>May 4 10 am to Noon Great Decisions</p>	<p>May 5</p>	<p>May 6</p>	<p>May 7</p>	<p>May 8</p>
<p>May 11</p>	<p>May 12</p>	<p>May 13</p>	<p>May 14</p>	<p>May 15</p>

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
				<p>10 am to Noon  <b>Book Discussion</b>  <i>The Sun Does Rise</i>  <b>Anthony Ray Hinton</b></p>
<p>May 18</p>	<p>May 19</p>	<p>May 20</p>	<p>May 21</p>	<p>May 22  10 am to Noon  <b>Film Discussion</b>  <i>Manon of the Spring</i></p>