UMass Lowell Reaches New Heights on National Ranking

University Is Second-Fastest Riser on U.S. News & World Report List since 2010


UMass Lowell has climbed 31 spots since it was first ranked among the best universities in the nation by U.S. News & World Report in 2010, rising from No. 183 to No. 152. Its ascent in the rankings is the second-fastest in the nation over the last six years and UMass Lowell is the only institution, public or private, in the eastern United States to move up more than 30 spots over the same timeframe. Among the public institutions that made the national universities ranking, UMass Lowell is No. 78, up from No. 84 last year.

To determine the annual top colleges and universities in the nation, U.S. News & World Report assesses more than 1,600 four-year institutions based on up to 15 factors, including, student-success rates, faculty resources, student selectivity and alumni giving.

The rankings are the latest to cite UMass Lowell for academic quality. Earlier this year, the publication ranked the university’s online bachelor’s degrees No. 39 overall in the nation. Online graduate programs and on-campus graduate programs are also among the best in the U.S.

The university was also recently recognized by the Chronicle of Higher Education, which, for the second year in a row, named UMass Lowell to its Fastest-Growing Colleges list, ranking it ninth in the nation among public doctoral institutions for its 54.9 percent enrollment increase from 11,000 in fall 2004 to 17,000 in fall 2014.

UMass Lowell also gets high marks for graduates’ success. PayScale.com’s College Salary Report found that, with an average of $94,700, UMass Lowell ranks No. 28 in the nation and No. 1 among New England public research universities for mid-career salaries earned by graduates with bachelor’s degrees. UMass Lowell also ranks No. 1 among New England public research universities for graduates’ return on their educational investment.

“All of these rankings illustrate the quality and value that UMass Lowell is delivering to students and the academic success they are achieving,” says Chancellor Jacqueline Moloney. “As a university community, we have set high goals for our institution and developed a strategic plan to guide us on our path to becoming a world-class institution. Our rise in the rankings is evidence that we are well on our way.”

UMass Lowell’s dramatic transformation over the last nine years includes the opening of 12 new buildings since 2009, including a state-of-the-art research facility, an academic building for health and social sciences, two new student centers, the region’s premier sports and entertainment venue, a downtown location combining university housing and lodging and function space for the public and the campus, along with three residence halls and two parking garages.
Learning with Purpose

Provost Role a ‘Perfect Fit’ for Vayda

From Antarctica to Arkansas, New Chief Academic Officer Brings World of Experience

Mike Vayda began his role as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at UMass Lowell in June after spending the past six years as dean of the University of Arkansas Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences.

Vayda was born and raised in northern New Jersey, but considers his move to UMass Lowell a homecoming of sorts. He’s spent most of his academic career in New England—as an undergrad at the University of New Hampshire—where he double-majored in biochemistry and zoology—a professor at the University of Maine and associate dean at the University of Vermont. And New England is where he and his wife, Jeanne Marie, raised their family.

“UMass Lowell just felt like home,” he says. “It was the perfect fit.”

“Mike is a consensus-builder, he’s incredibly enthusiastic and dynamic and he is eager to make a difference at this university,” says Chancellor Jacquie Moloney. “His goals for us are quite aspirational, quite ambitious and we’re so thrilled he’s here.”

“The people are the gem of this institution. They’re the heart and soul,” Vayda says. “This is the dream job for me. It’s the perfect alignment of the things I’ve been aspiring to implement in higher education—meeting the needs of students and communities. It’s exactly where I want to be.”

Workspace Will Enable Students to Bring Their Engineering Concepts to Life

“I owe this school a lot,” Lawrence C.H. Lin ’90 said in 2015, when he received the University Alumni Award.

A native of Taiwan who earned his Ph.D. in polymer science and plastics engineering, Lin says UMass Lowell gave him the technical knowledge he needed to help grow a small family-owned firm into an internationally recognized injection-molding company. Today, Grand Dynasty Industrial Co.’s clients include Specialized, Snap-On and Bosch.

Lin has found numerous ways to support the university, including endowing a scholarship for plastics engineering students. This fall, he announced a new $1 million gift that will provide equipment and operational support for the Francis College of Engineering’s MakerSpace, an 8,500-square-foot, open-concept workspace where students bring their engineering concepts to life, using CNC machines, 3-D printers, laser cutters and electronics workstations.

“We are deeply indebted to Lawrence for giving our students and faculty the gift of innovation,” says Joseph Hartman, dean of the Francis College of Engineering.

Lin and other supporters have already contributed more than $88 million to Our Legacy, Our Place: The Campaign for UMass Lowell. For more information on how you can leave your own legacy, contact the Office of University Advancement at 978-934-2223.

Lawrence Lin ’90 Gives $1 Million to Support MakerSpace

Funding for Offshore Wind Energy Research

$200K Grants Will Support Technology Innovation and Workforce Development

Mechanical engineering Prof. Christopher Niezrecki and Asst. Prof. Murat Inalpolat are among the researchers from eight academic and research institutions across the state who have received grants from the Commonwealth to advance offshore wind energy research and development. The funding was awarded through the Renewable Energy Trust of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center.

Six of these institutions—UMass Lowell, UMass Amherst, UMass Dartmouth, Northeastern University, Tufts University and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution—were awarded a total of $300,000 to develop a multi-disciplinary collaboration, called the Massachusetts Research Partnership in Offshore Wind. The partnership aims to increase innovation within projects and drive down costs by examining risks, finances and regulations associated with the industry. UMass Lowell’s share of the project is $50,000.

Additionally, Inalpolat will receive $150,000 to develop a new technique for monitoring the structural health of offshore wind-turbine blades. He will use low-cost wireless microphones to detect sound changes caused by defects or damage to a blade during the operation of the turbine. The project will be field-tested at the MassCEC’s Wind Technology Testing Center in Charlestown. Also supporting the project are the National Science Foundation WindSTAR industry/university cooperative and the University of Texas at Dallas.

Inalpolat’s project will provide training and professional development for graduate, undergraduate and high school students.

The Francis College of Engineering MakerSpace will be named in honor of Lawrence C.H. Lin ’90, president of Grand Dynasty Industrial Co.
Rays the Roof: New Panels Nearly Double Solar Production

University Reduces Electric Bill and Carbon Footprint, with Installation of South Campus Array

The university is nearly doubling the amount of power it generates from the sun with the installation of a new solar panel array on the top floor of the South Campus parking garage, just one of several energy-saving projects completed over the summer as part of the state’s Accelerated Energy Program.

The 600-panel photovoltaic array sits atop a raised steel structure that is approximately 60 feet wide and 100 feet long. As a bonus, the new array provides cover for approximately 50 rooftop parking spaces that were previously exposed to the elements.

The latest system is expected to generate 232,000 kilowatt hours of electricity each year for buildings on South Campus, says Paul Piraino, energy and sustainability manager in the Office of Facilities Management and Planning.

This will not only reduce the university’s electric bill by $31,000 annually, but it will also reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 119 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent—which is about how much 18 homes would generate each year through electricity produced by New England Grid power plants that run on coal, oil and other natural resources.

“The less power we rely on from the grid, the cleaner our carbon footprint,” says Piraino, who adds that the university is receiving $60,000 in annual solar renewable energy credits for at least the next 10 years, which will help pay for half of the new $1.2 million system.

Thanks to the addition of a 600-panel solar array on the South Campus parking garage roof, the university will reduce its annual electric bill by $31,000.

Research Center Secures $6.4 Million Worker Health Grant

Initiative Aims to Improve Safety, Well-Being

Mounting scientific evidence shows a link between negative working conditions and health issues such as obesity, cardiovascular disease and depression.

To reverse this trend, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health awarded the Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace a grant worth nearly $6.4 million.

CPH-NEW, a joint initiative of UMass Lowell and the University of Connecticut, is one of six federal Research Centers of Excellence for Total Worker Health in the country dedicated to advancing, protecting and promoting the health of the nation’s workforce. This third round of CPH-NEW funding brings the total to more than $15 million since 2006.

Introduced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the total worker health approach offers a holistic way of looking at employee health, safety and well-being.

“Risk factors that cause stress at work can contribute to hypertension, obesity and depression, which were previously considered unrelated to work,” says Prof. Laura Punnett of public health, co-director of CPH-NEW. “Our research and education programs promote employee engagement to develop solutions rather than a purely top-down approach.”

Part of the funding will be used to build upon research and programs that improve the health of correctional officers, a stressful occupation. A study conducted by CPH-NEW showed that correctional officers in the Connecticut Department of Corrections have a life expectancy of 12 years below the state average.

Health-care workers experience a high risk for injury and illness on the job. CPH-NEW will study the impacts of strengthening labor and management safety committees in six New England public hospitals.

Diversity Programs and Growth Lead to National Awards

Office of Multicultural Affairs Hosts Student Clubs, Workshops and Events

UMass Lowell’s efforts to create a diverse and inclusive campus were recently honored with a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine—for the second year in a row. The HEED Awards recognize schools with an outstanding commitment to diversity of race, nationality and religion and inclusion of veterans, people with disabilities and the LGBTQ community, among others.

Chancellor Jacquie Moloney also received a Giving Back Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine earlier this year, recognizing her leadership in creating a more diverse campus.

This fall, the campus welcomed its most racially and ethnically diverse class of new students ever. More than one-third of undergraduates are U.S. students of color or international students. Among graduate students, more than 40 percent are domestic students of color or international students. The university has also made gains toward its goals for diversifying faculty and staff.

The Office of Multicultural Affairs spearheads the university’s efforts to help all students feel at home on campus and succeed in their studies, from hosting educational events to sponsoring more than 30 student clubs and associations, including the UMass Lowell Gospel Choir, the LGBTQ Resources Program and the Indian Scholars Office.

In addition, the International Students and Scholars Office provides support and events specifically geared to international students, including the Pair-up Program that matches new international students with a domestic buddy to help them acclimate.

UMass Lowell welcomed its most diverse class of new students ever this fall.
$3.5 Million NSF Grant Will Fund Program to Close Gender Gap for STEM faculty

Women earn nearly half of all college degrees in science, technology, engineering and math. But only about a quarter of the professors teaching them are women.

A team of women faculty at UMass Lowell led by Chancellor Jacquie Moloney, Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation Julie Chen and Center for Women and Work Director Meg Bond is out to change that, thanks to a new $3.5 million award from the National Science Foundation.

The grant will fund a major effort by UMass Lowell to remove barriers that women faculty experience in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields. The new initiative, called “Making WAVES (Women Academics Valued and Engaged in STEM),” is designed to help all higher-education institutions establish environments that support faculty who are women, as well as those from other underrepresented populations, in achieving their highest potential.

Specifically, the project will target microaggressions that communicate derogatory or negative messages toward such faculty. Those actions are brief verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities that can be difficult to detect by those they are not directed at and may even be unknowingly committed by the person initiating them, according to the researchers. However, they are a significant factor in deterring women from pursuing or staying in STEM faculty roles and there are few models available to provide practical steps to address the problem.

UMass Lowell’s team of faculty researchers plans to develop a variety of new approaches to prevent such microaggressions and the subtle biases that are discouraging women from succeeding by undercutting their productivity and well-being.

“UMass Lowell is known for its innovation in science and technology in the lab and in the classroom. But this NSF grant recognizes that we also are leaders in innovation in changing the culture of higher education in those fields,” says Moloney.

The grant was awarded to the Center for Women and Work because of its previous research on gender bias, including the development of the Subtle Gender Bias Index, a questionnaire that measures faculty experiences and perceptions about bias. The index, which has already led to fruitful discussions among faculty and administrators, was developed under an earlier, $750,000 ADVANCE grant in partnership with the UMass Medical Center.

UMass Lowell is also partnering with the White House, Boston University and the American Association for the Advancement of Science to develop a STEM Equality Achievement rating system for use at colleges and universities across the country.

Making WAVES aims to create a program that promotes alternative patterns for interaction and addresses areas of organizations that can breed bias through a variety of interventions including survey-feedback cycles, information campaigns and training on confronting microaggressions at the interpersonal and institutional levels. The model will also include new opportunities for networking, and accountability initiatives for areas such as decision-making on faculty workload and committees to reduce the likelihood of bias.