Tickets Going Fast for “A Conversation with Oprah Winfrey” at Tsongas Center

Oprah Winfrey, the global media leader, philanthropist, producer and actress, is coming to UMass Lowell next month to raise money for student scholarships—and inspire thousands of attendees—as the next guest in the Chancellor’s Speaker Series.

“A Conversation with Oprah Winfrey” will take place on Thursday, Nov. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell. Chancellor Jacquie Moloney will serve as moderator of the event, whose title sponsors include Liberty Mutual Insurance, Suffolk Construction and the Marty Meehan Educational Foundation.

“It’s an incredible opportunity for the UMass Lowell community and the public to hear from one of the most renowned and admired public figures of our time,” Moloney says.

The Chancellor’s Speaker Series brings individuals at the top of their respective fields to campus to talk to students and the community while raising funds for scholarships.

Excitement is building across campus and beyond for Winfrey’s visit. Ticket sales have been strong. To check availability, go to www.tsongascenter.com, call 866-722-8780 or visit the Tsongas Center.

In addition to the program for the public and campus, Winfrey will attend a reception for event sponsors. Proceeds from sponsorships will also go to student scholarships. For more information on sponsorships, visit uml.edu/oprah-sponsorship.

Winfrey is one of the most influential—and successful—media personalities and businesswomen in the world. For 25 years, she was host and producer of the award-winning talk show “The Oprah Winfrey Show.” In her role as chairman and CEO of OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network, she’s guiding her cable network to success. Winfrey is the founder of O, The Oprah Magazine and oversees Harpo Films. In 2017, “Oprah’s SuperSoul Conversations” podcast launched as No. 1 on Apple Podcasts; it has been downloaded more than 70 million times by listeners in over 155 countries worldwide.

As an actress, Winfrey was nominated for an Academy Award for her role in “The Color Purple,” earned critical acclaim in “Lee Daniels’ The Butler” and produced and acted in the Academy Award-winning film “Selma.” She starred in the Emmy-nominated “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks” from HBO Films and most recently portrayed “Mrs. Which” in Disney’s “A Wrinkle in Time” film adaptation from director Ava DuVernay in 2018.
Merrimack Repertory Theatre Adapting Kerouac Novella for Stage

Beat Writer’s Long-lost Early Novel Sees New Life

A once-forgotten novella written by Lowell native and Beat generation icon Jack Kerouac is coming to life on the stage of the Merrimack Repertory Theatre.

MRT Artistic Director Sean Daniels is adapting the novella “The Haunted Life” with input from Assoc. Prof. of English Todd Tietchen, a prominent Kerouac scholar and co-director of the university’s American Studies program.

The novella, which Kerouac lost shortly after completing it, re-emerged in 2002 when the handwritten manuscript appeared at a Sotheby’s auction. With support from Kerouac’s literary estate, Tietchen edited a scholarly book that includes “The Haunted Life” alongside outlines, notes and partial scenes for two sequels Kerouac had planned to write. Tietchen’s book was published in 2014.

The story is set during the summer of 1941 in Galloway, the fictional name for Lowell in several other books. The central character is the young Peter Martin, and the story concerns his relationships with his French-Canadian parents and two friends, based on Kerouac’s childhood friends Sebastian Sampas and Billy Chandler.

In his stage adaptation, Daniels is using Kerouac’s outlines and unfinished scenes along with unpublished letters from the literary estate, which is supporting the production.

The novella and Daniels’ script are being used as teaching tools in UML’s Theatre Arts and English Literature programs throughout the academic year. English Department faculty are also planning a discussion series on the work for spring semester in advance of the play’s March premiere.

Antiterrorism Nonprofit Founded by Students Gets Boost from Federal Grant

Department of Justice Funding Will Help Expand Op250

Op250, a nonprofit started by students that aims to prevent young people from joining terrorist and hate groups through education in online safety, recently got a boost: it is the subject of a $1 million U.S. Department of Justice grant.

Asst. Prof. of Criminology Neil Shortland, who helped students establish Op250, is the principal investigator on the grant. He will collaborate with researchers from Harvard University and Georgia State University to further develop Op250’s program and evaluate its effectiveness.

Op250 was started by 10 student interns in the university’s Center for Terrorism and Security Studies in fall 2016. They came up with the idea for an educational website to counter extremism. Since then, they have refined the idea, racked up awards and garnered funding. They incorporated as a nonprofit, and the organization now has one full-time employee, Tyler Cote ‘17. Last fall, Op250 began piloting its program in elementary and middle schools in North Adams.

Under the Department of Justice grant, the Harvard researchers will help build up the program. Next year, Op250 and Georgia State University evaluation experts will test the program on hundreds of high school students in North Adams. They will then follow up and compare the online behavior of those who go through the training to a matched group of their peers who don’t get the intervention.

Researchers Get Mileage from Sawdust

Department of Energy’s $1M Grant Funds Project

The U.S. Department of Energy has awarded a three-year, $1 million grant to a team of researchers from UMass Lowell, the University of Maine and Florida-based Mainstream Engineering Corp. to develop renewable fuel additives made from sawdust.

The additives will help offset the use of traditional fossil fuels in internal combustion engines in cars and trucks, as well as in steam turbines for power generation, and will help reduce their carbon footprint, says Hunter Mack, an assistant professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering and the project’s principal investigator. The biofuel-blend formulation will offer comparable engine performance while being more environmentally friendly to produce than fossil fuels, Mack says.

“Our lab’s goal is to increase energy efficiency, reduce emissions and identify other potential sustainable fuels and chemicals of the future,” Mack adds.

The research team at UMass Lowell includes chemical engineering Asst. Prof. Hsi-Wu Wong, who is also a co-principal investigator for the grant, and graduate students Martia Shahsavan and Mohammad Morovatyan.

The project could benefit Maine’s paper industry, which produces the sawdust or “woody biomass” in its papermaking mills, by providing a new revenue source for its waste. The sawdust could also be used in making biopolymers and other bio-derived products.

The UMass Lowell-led project is one of 42 that the Department of Energy recently selected as part of its $80 million investment to support early-stage research of advanced vehicle technologies.
First-generation College Students Get a Helping Hand

River Hawk Scholars Academy Welcomes 250 First-year Students

It takes a special kind of courage to be the first in your family to pursue a college education.

It takes even more nerve to attend school far from home—like first-year student Jaya Sims of Milwaukee, Wis., who turned down offers from Midwest universities to pursue a sociology degree at UMass Lowell.

A major factor in her choice? The River Hawk Scholars Academy, which provides extra help and a supportive community for first-generation college students.

Sims is among hundreds of first-generation college students in this fall’s first-year class. All earned their places here through a combination of strong grades, test scores and extracurricular activities. But, while they are well-prepared academically, first-generation college students often struggle with financial aid, course selection and time management because they can’t turn to family members who know the ropes.

That’s where the River Hawk Scholars Academy comes in, providing an academic advisor who helps with course selection, peer mentors, special workshops to learn strategies for success, invitations to social events, volunteer opportunities, talks and other support to help the students adjust to the expectations and challenges of college.

The program debuted as a pilot project with nearly 100 students last year ago under the leadership of Provost Michael Vayda and Vice Provost for Student Success Julie Nash. This year, 250 students are participating.

River Hawks Ride Commuter Rail for Free

Pilot Program Offers Free Lowell-to-Boston Service

Students, faculty and staff have a new way to commute to campus for free—and another great reason to leave their cars at home—thanks to a new collaboration between the university and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA).

Under a pilot program launched in September, members of the UML community can ride the MBTA’s Lowell commuter rail line free of charge. The line services the towns of Billerica, Wilmington, Woburn, Winchester and West Medford en route to Boston’s North Station.

The pilot program is the first of its kind for the MBTA commuter rail.

In addition to making it easier for commuter students and university employees to reach campus, the program gives students living on campus a free and convenient way to travel to Boston for co-op jobs and internships or to attend a sporting event or museum. The program also supports a key goal of the university: the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the reliance on cars commuting to and from campus.

To take advantage of the program, UML students and employees must download the MBTA’s mTicket app from the Apple App Store or Google Play, and then create an account with their university email address.

The university will collect ridership data during the program’s pilot phase, which will help guide program development, with the expectation that the service will continue.

Vice Chancellor John Feudo Offers Guidance to UML Donors

As Our Legacy, Our Place. UMass Lowell’s first-ever comprehensive fundraising campaign, fast approaches its $125 million goal, donors are looking at how the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will impact their charitable giving plans.

“Members of the UML community are excited to support scholarships and other campus priorities, but they want to know the best way to plan their gifts,” says John Feudo, vice chancellor for university advancement.

Together with Carolyn Flynn, general counsel and director of gift planning for the UMass Foundation, Feudo offers the following guidance:

• Because the standard deduction is higher ($24,000 for married filing jointly; $12,000 for single filers), fewer taxpayers will be itemizing this year.
• Donors may group donations in one year to achieve the greatest impact from a tax perspective. For example, paying a multi-year pledge in one year may be more beneficial to the donor.
• Donors can consider contributing appreciated assets, which retain a tax advantage (no capital gains tax), regardless of whether deductions are itemized.
• For donors of ages 70½ or older, the IRA charitable rollover enables them to have their required minimum distribution sent directly to UML as a charitable contribution, avoiding the need to report it as income.
• Because the standard deduction is higher ($24,000 for married filing jointly; $12,000 for single filers), fewer taxpayers will be itemizing this year.

“We are happy to talk with donors at any time to discuss these and other options, and to help them find ways to support the UML programs they care about,” says Feudo. To reach him or another member of University Advancement, contact 978-934-4814 or john_feudo@uml.edu.
Project Aims to Improve Quality of Life for City’s Residents

University researchers are collaborating with officials in Lawrence to turn the city into an “Age-Friendly Community”—a place where housing, transportation, green spaces, health care and social services help residents of all ages lead healthier lives.

The city recently received a $199,813 grant from Tufts Health Plan Foundation to support health and high-quality aging among residents. It will help Lawrence plan for improving infrastructure, services and other amenities to make the community a great place to grow up and grow old.

Asst. Prof. Sabrina Noel of the Department of Biomedical and Nutritional Sciences will collect and analyze data for the project. This builds on a relationship that was forged five years ago when Noel started working with the city of Lawrence on dietary quality and bone health among aging residents.

On the age-friendly initiative, Noel is collaborating with Groundwork Lawrence, the Mayor’s Health Task Force and the Council on Aging. The project team will assess the city’s strengths and identify gaps within policies, programs and infrastructure.

They will gather feedback from the community by conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys and forums.

The initiative is part of the World Health Organization’s Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities, which launched in 2010. Areas of focus are based on the organization’s eight livability domains, which include transportation, outdoor spaces, housing, health services, safety and more. The domains have been adapted to meet the unique needs and culture of the city of Lawrence. After gathering data, the project team will develop an action plan to achieve their goals for each domain.

The university began working with the city of Lawrence on public health issues in 2013, when Noel began investigating the high rates of osteoporosis among the city’s Puerto Rican adult residents. On a second project, Noel is working with Asst. Prof. Kelsey Mangano of the Department of Biomedical and Nutritional Sciences to examine residents’ food intake patterns, inflammation and the bacteria that live in the gastrointestinal tract, known as the gut microbiome.