Neil Shortland Wins $531,000 Grant for Study

Fight, flight or freeze—those are the most common responses to high-stakes decisions made under stress.

Most of the time, soldiers quickly choose fight or flight, says Neil Shortland, a visiting lecturer and program manager for UMass Lowell’s Center for Terrorism and Security Studies. But when faced with two equally bad or uncertain choices, soldiers, police and other emergency responders may freeze, Shortland says.

“You can be so focused on not making the wrong choice that you don’t make any choice,” he says.

Shortland has won a three-year, $531,000 grant from the U.S. Army Research Institute to study military decision-making, working with the HEROES center on campus, the Army Natick Soldier Research and Development Center and colleagues from the University of Liverpool and Tufts University.

The study will compare military to nonmilitary decision-making in situations that call for a quick choice between two equally bad or uncertain alternatives, known as “least-worst” decision-making. A typical example: Armed insurgents set off a bomb in a tunnel where soldiers are trapped. Do you send in more soldiers to treat and evacuate the wounded? Or do you hold off, knowing that the insurgents could set off a second bomb to kill the rescuers?

The researchers will focus in particular on indecision, known in psychological terms as “decisional inertia,” as well as what leads to it and how training might help reduce it.

Shortland already has some ideas. A forensic psychologist, he started research in this area several years ago. First, he interviewed about 30 soldiers and veterans, asking each one to describe in detail a least-worst decision he or she had to make during wartime.

He used their examples to create immersive scenarios—brief podcasts with sound effects, followed by questions—that he could use with research subjects. Then he did a pilot study comparing 35 active-duty soldiers and veterans with 35 police officers (none of them military veterans) and 35 UMass Lowell students.

“Both soldiers and police officers make phenomenally hard choices under terrible circumstances and terrible stress,” he says. “But overall, the soldiers were faster and more confident than the police or the students.”

Shortland’s research suggests that soldiers may find it easier to make least-worst decisions because they have a very clear and strong hierarchy of values: namely, that protecting their fellow soldiers takes priority over everything else. Police operate within a more complex set of values. When confronted with a situation that requires them to choose between equally strong values, such as the imperative to protect civilians versus the need to protect fellow officers, they may hesitate.

That has implications for training, says Shortland.

In the new study, Shortland and his colleagues will broaden the investigation to study more soldiers and civilians, measuring their psychological, neurological and physical processes at critical decision points.
Ladder to Success

Lowell Firefighter Builds Leadership and Management Skills with New Master of Public Administration Program

So three veterans from Lowell—a soldier, a Marine and an airman—walk into a classroom.

Really.

David Provencer, his cousin Aaron Patterson and Patterson’s friend John Buckley are all earning their master of public administration degrees at UMass Lowell because they want to rise through the ranks of Lowell firefighters.

Provencher is already a firefighter on Ladder 3 at the JFK Civic Center downtown. Buckley ‘16 and Patterson are full-time students while they wait to get into the department.

All three are using their military benefits to study public administration so they can learn the skills they will need to advance in their careers as fire captains, lieutenants and deputy chiefs. An M.P.A. degree also would qualify them to apply for the chief’s job one day.

Provencher says he’s learning about the big picture at the Lowell Fire Department, including how it works with other city agencies and nonprofits—and the constraints administrators face.

The program is not just for firefighters: Faculty are working closely with regional health and human services, government and arts organizations to meet their needs for trained administrators, as well as to find great placements for students. It offers three tracks: public humanities and the arts, human services management and justice administration.

Learning with Purpose

Be Bold, Learn from Failure, Say Top Women Execs

BroadwayHD.com and Coca-Cola Executives Headline Women’s Leadership Conference

Be bold, fail fast and always have a Plan B, Bonnie Comley told a sellout crowd at the 2017 Women’s Leadership Conference in June at the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center.

Comley ’81, an award-winning Broadway producer, the founder of BroadwayHD.com and a first-generation college graduate with deep roots in Lowell, gave the opening keynote in a conversation with Chancellor Jacquie Moloney.

Moloney cited Comley’s career as a Broadway producer, her three Tony Awards, her generous contributions—the Comley-Lane Theater is named for Comley and her husband and business partner, Stewart Lane—and her innovation in starting BroadwayHD.com, the only live-streaming service to bring Broadway shows into people’s homes.

Comley joked that people always talk about successes and never about failures.

“We always love to do those highlights,” she said.

But failure is built into every success story, she said. Comley attributed her success to being flexible, planning for some failures, trying not to take those failures personally—even though terrible reviews can be devastating—and hiring people who are good team players.

Comley’s message was amplified by Therese Gearhart, the president of Coca-Cola Co.’s Latin American business unit. In the closing keynote, a conversation with Asst. Prof. of Business Elizabeth Altman, Gearhart told students to communicate clearly—and stop apologizing for everything.

“Be fearless in your own journey, and be fearless in bringing another woman along,” said Gearhart, who overseas Coca-Cola’s operations in 31 countries.

Nursing Students Break Down Language Barriers in Spain

New Study Abroad Program in Cádiz Focuses on ‘Medical Spanish’

As the Hispanic population in the United States continues to grow, so too does the need for medical professionals who can communicate with their patients in Spanish.

To prepare for this growing need, 13 students from the Solomont School of Nursing traveled to Cádiz, Spain, this summer with Asst. Prof. Valerie King for an intensive two-week language course, “Medical Spanish for Nurses.”

Students learned medical terminology each morning in classes taught by faculty at the University of Cádiz, an international partner institution with UMass Lowell. In the afternoons, students visited local hospitals, nursing homes, pharmacies and herb shops, where they were able to compare and contrast the U.S. and Spanish health care systems.

“The knowledge I gained and the new vocabulary I learned will be very helpful when discussing health issues with Spanish-speaking patients,” says nursing major Sabrina Andrews.

“There’s a huge Spanish-speaking population here in the Merrimack Valley, so there’s a great need for this professionally,” says King, who opened the trip to students of all levels of Spanish proficiency.

Nursing major Chris Manganello took three years of high school Spanish but says nothing compares to being immersed in the language.

“Understanding the Spanish language is one thing, but hearing how they speak and understanding the mannerisms was really helpful,” says Manganello.
College of Health Sciences, School of Nursing Dedicated

Support from Prominent Alumni a ‘Game Changer’ for Health Education at UML

In an era when health care is one of the biggest issues facing the country, UMass Lowell is redoubling its efforts to educate a new generation of health professionals, thanks to support from four prominent alumni.

This spring, the university officially renamed its College of Health Sciences in honor of Roy Zuckerberg ‘58, ’99 (H) and its School of Nursing in honor of Alan Solomont ‘77, ’94 (H) and his wife, Susan. Both Zuckerberg and the Solomonts recently made major gifts in support of student scholarships and health education.

And Robert Manning ‘84, ’11 (H), chair of the UMass Board of Trustees and co-CEO of MFS Investment Management, endowed a chair of nursing in honor of his wife, Donna ’85, ’91, ’11 (H), a longtime oncology nurse at Boston Medical Center—the first-ever endowed professorship in the nearly 50-year history of the nursing program.

“These are game-changing achievements,” says Chancellor Jacquie Moloney ’75, ’92, who praised Zuckerberg, the Solomonts and the Mannings for their decades of support for UMass Lowell. “They are committed to making a difference in people’s lives, a value that we feel very strongly about at UMass Lowell.”

Zuckerberg, who studied textile sales at Lowell Tech, went on to a successful career on Wall Street, retiring as the longest-serving partner in Goldman Sachs’ history. Solomont is a former U.S. ambassador to Spain who earned a degree in nursing at UMass Lowell before embarking on a career in health care and politics.

“What you are studying here is absolutely critical for our society,” Zuckerberg told an overflow audience of students and faculty at the May 18 dedication ceremony. “You’re really helping people. And there’s nothing better in life than helping people.”

Global Entrepreneurship Program Expands its Reach to China

Sessions Have Drawn More than 600 Students from Eight Countries

Senior economics major Mike Maguire traveled to India last winter with the Global Entrepreneurship and Innovation program along with Nitin Kulkarni from KLE Technological University in Hubli, India.

“We had a planned to collaborate with 20 KLE students as well as students from Nanjing. Mehta runs the International Department, took three UMass Lowell students to Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunication, an international partner institution of the university. Once there, they planned to collaborate with 20 KLE students as well as students from Nanjing. Mehta runs the program along with Nitin Kulkarni from KLE Technological University in Hubli, India.

Maguire was one of 18 undergraduate and graduate students to participate in the three-credit summer session, which offered an opportunity to collaborate on entrepreneurial projects in small groups with 43 students visiting from India, China and Japan. A second summer session drew 55 M.B.A. students from Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.

Since launching in 2014, the Global Entrepreneurship and Innovation program has attracted more than 600 students from eight countries.

The program alternates between winter sessions in Hubli, India and summer sessions in Lowell—and this summer, a new session was added in China. In July, Manning School senior lecturer Ashwin Mehta and Assoc. Prof. Yi Yang, chair of the Marketing, Entrepreneurship and Innovation Department, took three UMass Lowell students to Nanjing University of Posts and Telecommunication, an international partner institution of the university. Once there, they planned to collaborate with 20 KLE students as well as students from Nanjing. Mehta runs the program along with Nitin Kulkarni from KLE Technological University in Hubli, India.

Global Conference Focuses on Carework Inequalities

From Babies to the Elderly, Most Carework Is Done by Women

We all need care at some point—and most of that care is provided by women working for low or no wages as family members, nannies, day care providers and health aides.

It’s time to change that, says Shah rashoub Razavi, chief of research and data for U.N. Women, who gave the opening keynote speech at UMass Lowell’s Global Carework Summit in early June at the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center. U.N. Women was established in 2010 by the United Nation as its entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

“Care is mired in such intense inequalities, both in who receives care and who provides care,” Razavi said.

“It’s contrary to notions of equality and social justice.”

The Global Carework Summit, a three-day conference, was organized by Assoc. Prof. Mignon Duffy, chairwoman of the Sociology Department, and the Carework Network, an international group of scholars and activists. It was hosted by UMass Lowell’s Center for Women and Work.

The summit attracted labor activists, policy analysts and scholars from diverse academic disciplines and countries. They discussed issues ranging from effective labor organizing strategies to the migration of nurses and other care workers from developing countries to wealthy nations.

Razavi argued for policies that give men and women equal opportunities to care for family members—and said that part of democratizing care is making sure that quality options are available for paid care as well.

“Low-income families fare worse in access and quality of care, and single women spend more for day care than married couples,” she said.

Students gather for the May 18 dedication of the Zuckerberg College of Health Sciences, named in honor of longtime benefactor Roy Zuckerberg ’58, ’99 (H).

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Senior economics major Mike Maguire, center, catches up with students he met in Hubli, India, during a recent Global Entrepreneurship and Innovation program reception at University Crossing.

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Who’s Reading What This Summer?

No matter how you’re spending your summer, chances are you have a book within reach. We asked people around campus what’s on their summer reading lists, and we got volumes of answers. Looking for ideas? Read on.


Assoc. Prof. of English Maureen Stanton, an award-winning nonfiction author herself, is doing background reading on juvenile delinquency and crime for an upcoming memoir. On her list are “The Girls” by Emma Cline and “The Brain Defense” by Kevin Davis.

Hunter Mack, an assistant professor in mechanical engineering, is reading the recently published “Jason Molina: Riding with the Ghost” by Erin Osmon, a biography of one of his favorite recording artists. A Rust Belt singer-songwriter, Molina was a talented yet complicated musician who died in 2013 at age 39.

Maureen Martin, office manager in the Zuckerberg College of Health Sciences, is reading “No One Cares about Crazy People” by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Powers.

Ha Pho, entrepreneurial initiatives project manager with the DifferenceMaker program, is reading the novel “The Nightingale” by Kristin Hannah. The bestseller is set in World War II France and tells the story of war through the experience of two sisters.

The bestselling memoir “Hillbilly Elegy” by J.D. Vance is on tap for Assoc. Prof. of Public Health Lee Ackerman: “I am reading it because it portrays a community in America that faces many difficulties and is often ignored in terms of public policymaking.”

Kennedy College of Sciences Dean Nouredine Melkechi is reading “Algorithms to Live By: The Computer Science of Human Decisions” by Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths, which looks at how computer algorithms can be used to solve life’s big questions—from finding a parking spot to picking a spouse.

Computer Science Prof. Holly Yanco has a varied list: “Cumulus,” a high-tech dystopian thriller by Eliot Peper; “Unflattening” by Nick Sousanis, an exploration in comic book format of how humans construct knowledge; and “Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography” by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

Alec Golas, a rising junior studying nuclear science and engineering, is finding enlightenment in the pages of “Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief” by Jordan B. Peterson. “His interpretation of religious and political ideologies and the conflicts between them is enlightening and also helpful in understanding the conflicts between people I know of different belief systems,” says Golas.

Noy Thrupakaew, journalist and UMass Lowell’s 2017 Greeley Peace Scholar, is reading “Ghettoside: A True Story of Murder in America” by Jill Leovy. The bestseller studies the plague of homicide in a Los Angeles neighborhood and the relationships between police and victims’ relatives, witnesses and suspects.