UMass Lowell Provides Millions of Dollars of Economic Gain to Lowell and its Residents, says Report

The growth of public universities can power economic revival in their host cities, according to a new report released by UMass Lowell.

The case study—released this fall at an annual breakfast for The Lowell Plan, a non-profit economic development organization—analyzes the investment made by UMass Lowell in the City of Lowell in recent years.

The report highlights direct economic benefits to the city resulting from the University’s construction, acquisition and renovation of commercial buildings, public-private partnerships, property leases, purchasing, tax-generating activity, employment and transfer of once-tax-exempt properties.

It identifies approximately $450,000 in new revenue for the city tied to the recent growth of the University, which has realized an enrollment increase exceeding 40 percent since 2007. Ongoing direct economic benefits include $24.5 million in annual salaries to Lowell residents employed by the University, $3.5 million in financial aid to residents who attend the University, $2.7 million in annual goods and services purchased from Lowell businesses and $1.6 million annually in leased property in Lowell.

Bond-rating agencies Moody's and Standard & Poor's recently referenced economic activity at UMass Lowell when upgrading Lowell's financial outlook.

“This report shows how the transformation and growth of the University translate into real economic benefits for the city,” said Chancellor Marty Meehan. “UMass Lowell is a vital partner to the city and vice versa, and our relationship could serve as a model for other urban public universities.”

Since Meehan became chancellor in 2007, UMass Lowell has invested more than $600 million in capital projects, including the construction of six new buildings. The report—titled “The Economic Effect: How UMass Lowell Benefits the City of Lowell”—also focuses on three once-failing properties acquired, renovated and repurposed by UMass Lowell: the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center, formerly a commercial hotel; the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell, an arena once owned by the city; and University Crossing, a construction and renovation project on the site of a largely vacant former hospital property. Divestments by the University in the form of two apartment buildings and a mill property have also returned once-tax-exempt properties to the city's tax rolls that will generate more than $600,000 in property taxes annually.
ScienceToGo.org Climate Change Campaign Targets Commuters

Ostriches Get Heads Out of Sand to Lead Public-Education Effort

Ostriches are the star of the show in ScienceToGo.org, a multimedia, informal learning campaign designed to engage the 500,000 commuters who ride the MBTA Red and Orange lines daily.

Funded by a $2.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation, ScienceToGo brings environmental awareness and science education into everyday life. Project partners include the Museum of Science, Hofstra University, UMass Boston, Goodman Research Group and the MBTA.

Through subway posters and placards, the project educates the public on the science of climate change while researching the efficacy of the approach. The campaign features a flock of ostriches, who, instead of keeping their heads in the sand on the important issue, share insights about climate change and how the public can get involved.

“Only 17 percent of the average American’s life is spent inside a formal school setting and most adults learn informally,” said Prof. David Lustick of the Graduate School of Education, who is leading the project. “If successful, the cost-effective model could be used on mass-transit systems across the country to address any socially relevant science topic.”

TURI awarded grants to five communities to educate the public about safer alternatives in land care, art studios, cosmetics and more.

Toward a Greener Massachusetts

TURI Funds Community Projects to Promote Safer Products

The Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) awarded $75,000 to five Massachusetts organizations to educate the public about safer products for land care, art studios, cosmetic products and more.

“Each year, the community projects get more interesting and innovative,” says Joy Onasch, TURI community and small business manager.

TURI awarded grants to the following organizations:

• La Chic Mentoring Plus, Inc.: Healthy Girls Model Healthy Products to develop a curriculum for middle and high school girls about safer beauty products.

• Full Circle Earth Greenhouse and Farm: Healthy Communities Initiative: Pesticide Use Reduction through Promotion and Practice of Organic Land Care Principles project.

• Franklin Regional Council of Governments: Green Cleaning for Food Service to compile green cleaning product information, practices and benefits for public health inspectors of commercial and institutional kitchens to distribute during routine inspections.

• Barnstable County Cape Cod Cooperative Extension: Hidden Hazards in the Art Studio Educational Outreach Program to share information about toxic chemicals in art supplies and about safer alternatives with municipal and state organizations responsible for the oversight of hazardous materials.

• Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition: Cancer-Free New Economy: Integrating Toxics Reduction Approaches with Sustainable Community Development to develop methods, materials and workshops to encourage a community conversation about reducing the use of carcinogens.

Unsafe Drinking and Bathing Water in Haiti Tackled by Commonwealth Honors Scholars

In Partnership with Haitian Counterparts, Students Confront Real-World Challenges

The water for drinking, cooking and bathing offered to Haitian residents from community wells is not always safe, says Prof. Robert Giles, whose testing found bacteria in the water there.

Giles, who chairs the Physics and Applied Physics Department, has worked with the poor of Haiti for over a decade. He established the UMass Lowell Haiti Development Studies Center (HDSC) in Les Cayes, about 200 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince, to engage faculty and students from Haiti and UMass Lowell to solve life-threatening conditions faced by citizens in the world’s poorest nations.

Two students in the University’s Commonwealth Honors program—Rachel Paquette and Jillian Giles—are collaborating with Giles and the HDSC staff to provide clean, safe water for Haitian residents.

Paquette, a senior majoring in biology, is investigating established water-purification techniques with an eye to implementing them not only in the HDSC’s facility but also in the surrounding regions.

Jillian Giles, daughter of Prof. Giles, graduated with a bachelor’s degree in physics in July and started in the physics Ph.D. program this fall. She is developing a pilot study in Haiti to diagnose leptospirosis, a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals.

“The Haiti Center’s research projects not only challenge the critical thinking skills of our students, but also raise their awareness of socio-economic and regional factors that hinder positive world change,” says Prof. Giles.

Staff members in the Haiti Development Studies Center in Les Cayes construct a bio-sand water-filter system.

Learning with Purpose
Menino Covers 20 Years Over Lunch

Lunchtime Lecture Series Brings Long-Serving Mayor to Lowell

Mayor Thomas Menino spoke on campus 77 days before his 20-year career leading Boston will come to an end. His candid look back on his service highlighted the often forgotten human element of politics.

“I just believe you should stand and say what’s right, and that’s how you get along in this business,” Menino said.

The mayor spoke with moderator Brian Mooney, special assistant for strategic communications at UMass Lowell, about politicians’ responsibility to their constituents, his career highlights and his future plans.

While Menino didn’t endorse a mayoral candidate, he said that the public’s attention should be more on the new administration’s staff than its leader. He worries about who will be in charge of the public school system in which he takes pride.

Menino was clear that the election should not be about one issue. Instead, voters, himself included, should choose the candidate with a strong vision for the future of Boston. He said the next mayor must have the ideas and determination to build upon the city’s strengths during his time at the helm, whether it’s a few years or a few decades.

As for Menino’s future, he’s said he’ll gladly offer advice—if asked, and only in private—on keeping Boston moving forward. He has had several job offers from organizations and universities, but wants his next career to involve helping young people.

Historic Cemetery Statues Meet Advanced Technology

Engineering Students Bring Back the Lowell Sphinxes

After protecting the receiving tomb at the Lowell Cemetery for a century, two 120-pound bronze sphinxes went missing in the 1970s. One was recovered and has been kept in safekeeping ever since. With the help of engineering students, there’s hope the sphinxes will take their rightful places again.

The tomb was first used for the young son of Freeman Ballard Shedd, a cologne magnate, in 1890. It kept him and others who died in the winter safe until interments could resume in the spring. Mechanical engineering Asst. Prof. Christopher Hansen heard that the cemetery wanted to replace the missing statues with replicas that are easier to maintain and protect. He found five students eager to tackle the challenge as their senior capstone project.

The students digitally rebuilt the sphinx and milled a new one from foam. They also tested different composites to build a mold from the foam sculpture. While the sphinxes haven’t made their return to the Lowell Cemetery yet, Hansen is confident that the project will be completed.

“The opportunity to work with cutting-edge products and materials such as 3D scanning and composites drew me to the project, but the rich history of Lowell and the opportunity to help restore a piece of city history was also appealing,” says student Kyle Tweed.

Center for Terrorism and Security Studies Lauded at Inaugural Event

Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis—a leader in local law enforcement’s role in battling terrorism—said recently that the work of the University’s new Center for Terrorism and Security Studies will “save lives.”

In his keynote remarks at the Center’s opening event—“New Security Challenges”—Davis added, “Sharing experiences and lessons learned with our law enforcement partners helps all of our organizations become better prepared.”

Over 200 representatives from the counterterrorism, law enforcement and academic communities—many of them nationally renowned—participated in the program.

The Center will study those behind domestic terrorism and develop solutions. The Center has already been awarded more than $1 million in research grants by the National Institute of Justice.

“Our research provides the evidence to help law enforcement, analysts and policymakers better understand the changing threat environment and help them make informed decisions,” said Prof. John Horgan, director of the new Center and a member of the FBI National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime’s research working group.

The other two core faculty at the Center are Prof. Mia Bloom, a former member of the Council on Foreign Relations, and Prof. James Forest, who has been called “one of America’s most esteemed terrorism and national security experts.”
It’s a Building Time as River Hawks Adjust to Upgraded Conference

Excitement and determination are fueling the River Hawks as they navigate a bumpy first season as Division I student athletes. While they’re enjoying updated facilities, traveling to new cities for games and the prestige of competing at the highest level of college athletics, they are also facing tough opponents in the demanding America East conference.

“When I first heard about the move, I didn’t know what to expect, but we couldn’t wait to make the jump,” says Alex Sindoni, senior business administration major and captain of the men’s soccer team. “I’m glad to finally get the chance to prove that I can play at the Division I level. We knew it was going to be hard; we just didn’t know how hard. But with a couple of wins, we’ve proven we can compete.”

Sindoni’s team, which left Division II highly ranked after years of team-building and success, were the first River Hawks to win a game this year.

Elisabeth Monty, a track and field athlete, achieved All-American status in four events last year and would likely have added more accolades in her senior year if she remained in Division II. With the jump, Monty and her fellow River Hawks are not eligible for post-season competition this year. She was disappointed at first, but has seen a shift as the season progresses.

“We’re beginning to see the benefits of going up to Division I, with the most prominent change being the increase in competition,” says Monty, a nursing student. “It’s forced me to re-evaluate my goals as a student athlete and adjust to the new competition and schedule.”

Coach Gary Gardner’s cross country and track and field teams have experience at the Division I level, which has made the elevation less of a shock, but it still requires work for the team and coaches.

“We’ve discussed being patient with the move. But since our women’s team was second at the New England Championships last year and our men’s Cross Country has won the title three times in the last seven years, we want to continue to be competitive with Division I schools,” says Gardner.

“When I first heard we were moving to Division I, I leapt with joy,” says Carolyn Eddy, captain of the volleyball team and an exercise physiology major.

“I tell the freshmen that they’re very lucky they’ll get to play on a Division I team for four years. The program is developing and I see great things ahead as we’re all learning so much.”

The women’s basketball team came in fourth in the Northeast-10 conference last year, but graduated seven players in the spring. The new players, including nine freshmen, will rebuild the team focused on Division I play.

Even after a tough match, the optimism and determination for a bright Division I future is a focus for River Hawks like Monty.

“My team is ready to step up to the plate and show our conference—and the rest of Division I—that UMass Lowell has been ready to compete at this level for quite some time,” she says.