UMass Lowell Athletic Teams to Join America East in July

In another historic milestone for UMass Lowell, the University announced in February that its athletic teams will move to Division I, joining the America East conference on July 1, 2013.

“This is about the academics of this institution,” Chancellor Marty Meehan said. “This is about where we’ve been and where we’re going as an institution. We belong in America East.”

The step follows five years of record enrollments, research funding and fundraising, in addition to greater student success and a surge of new building construction and other facility improvements.

America East has the division’s third-highest academic progress rate and features schools similar to the University in size, range of teams and academic focus. The America East Board of Presidents, the University Faculty Senate Executive Committee and Student Government Association all approved the shift unanimously.

The University will elevate 14 of its teams to Division I and add men’s and women’s lacrosse in the next few years. Men’s ice hockey will remain in Division I Hockey East.

Excitement and support for the transition has been felt across campus.

“This move will add value to a UMass Lowell degree because being Division I will strengthen the reputation of the University not just in this area but around the country,” says Student Government Association President Brian Dano.

“UMass Lowell has been preparing for this move forward for more than 100 years,” says Athletic Director Dana Skinner. “The decades of alumni, the generations of accomplishment on the fields of knowledge and on the fields of play have propelled UMass Lowell to this place on this day in the top tier of college athletics.”

America East Commissioner Amy Huchthausen noted that the conference looks for members with “strong academics, competitive athletics programs and outstanding facilities,” adding that “UMass Lowell has those assets and will strengthen America East in all facets.”

Other campuses in America East include the University at Albany, Binghamton University, University of Hartford, University of Maine, University of Maryland Baltimore County, University of New Hampshire, Stony Brook University and University of Vermont.
‘I Love Being Here,’ She Tells Crowd

U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren met with an overflow crowd of students and faculty on campus in February, updating them on issues ranging from gun control to “leveling the playing field” for workers and consumers.

Arriving at Fox Hall with Chancellor Marty Meehan, the state’s senior U.S. senator spoke of favoring federal support for education and university research and said a budget sequester could be disastrous for the state. She cast education as its own form of infrastructure, and challenged students to become grassroots foot-soldiers for change.

“That is how we’re going to build a future,” said Warren, adding that action is not something the government handles. “The lesson is we have to invest and manage our own infrastructure.”

Earlier, Warren toured the Massachusetts Medical Device Development Center and the Mark and Elisia Saab Emerging Technologies and Innovation Center. It was her first return to the campus since October, when she debated Scott Brown before a Tsongas Center crowd of 5,000.

State-of-the-art Robotics Testing Center Opens

New Facility Will Spur Robotics R&D

A new testing center on campus will serve as a “proving ground” for robots—testing their strength, durability, design and functionality—and will help advance robotics research and development across the region.

The New England Robotics Validation and Experimentation (NERVE) Center is located at 1001 Pawtucket Blvd.

“The NERVE Center will be the most advanced robotics testing facility in the United States and the most easily accessible to robotics companies and researchers in the Northeast,” said Chancellor Marty Meehan.

Faculty researchers and experts will help firms significantly speed up the process of taking robotics technology from the laboratory to real-world applications. The center will also support the education and hands-on training of undergraduate and graduate students.

Developed in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Institute of Standards and Technology and the U.S. Army, the 9,000-square-foot NERVE Center features a dozen dedicated courses that challenge the robots’ ability to negotiate obstacles and traverse rough, uneven terrains and various surface materials. They will also test the robots’ maneuvering underwater and withstanding rainstorms as well as check the visual acuity of the robots’ sensors.

Joining Meehan for the center’s inauguration on Feb. 12 were Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Greg Bialecki, Rep. Kevin Murphy, Massachusetts Technology Leadership Council President and CEO Tom Hopcroft, iRobot Chairman, CEO and Co-founder Colin Angle and computer science Prof. Holly Yanco, the center’s director.

“As one of the most advanced facilities of its kind, the NERVE Center is a new opportunity for our growing robotics industry to continue to expand its frontiers and for Massachusetts to maintain its position as one of the world leaders in innovation,” Bialecki told the audience.

Students Study International Business in Spain

Global Supply Chain, Product Development Examined

Claudia Vargas-Fregoso learned firsthand about the challenges of international management during a two-week study abroad trip to Barcelona: the complexities of global supply chains, the demands of product development and strategies for staying competitive during a recession. She also developed a deep appreciation for the city’s culture.

Vargas-Fregoso was one of nine students who traveled to Spain in January with Prof. Silvia Salas to study global business at the Universitat Autonom a de Barcelona (UAB), a UMass Lowell partner institution. The course, called Comparative Management, included visits to Barcelona-based businesses and collaboration with international MBA students studying at UAB.

“The trip enriched all of us. I don’t think there’s anyone in the group who didn’t come home with a different perspective,” says Vargas-Fregoso, a senior in the Manning School of Business. “It’s amazing how two weeks will change you.”

The students visited headquarters of Freixenet, the sparkling wine maker; Mercadona, a leading grocery distributor and retailer; L’Illa Diagonal, a prominent upscale shopping mall; and Roca, a maker of bathroom fixtures. Executives from each business met with the students and talked to them about the challenges of expanding into new markets, fostering innovation and managing global supply chains.

Students participating in a two-week international management study abroad program in Barcelona experienced the local passion for football.

Among U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren’s stops while on campus was a visit to Fox Common, where students, faculty and staff heard an update from the now senior senator.

More than a dozen robots were on display during the NERVE Center’s grand opening on Feb. 12.
Role of Physics in Diagnosis, Treatment of Diseases Highlighted

The Department of Physics and Applied Physics is now offering master’s degree and Ph.D. programs in radiological sciences with a medical physics option.

“A Ph.D. in biomedical engineering and biotechnology with medical physics specialization is also available,” says Prof. Erno Sajo, director and graduate coordinator for medical physics.

“These programs are the only ones of their kind in New England and are among the most rapidly growing academic programs on campus.”

The programs are accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Physics Educational Programs (CAMPEP), an internationally recognized and sole accrediting agency of the medical physics profession. To date, UMass Lowell is one of only 40 universities worldwide that have met the high quality standards established by CAMPEP.

Students will receive the education and training they need to work in the fields of therapeutic, diagnostic and nuclear medical physics as well as medical radiation protection.

The demand for medical physicists is expected to grow as the population ages, and the focus on health issues will increase the demand for improved medical diagnostic and therapeutic tools.

Nationally Accredited Grad Programs in Med Physics Now Offered

Students Discover Independence, Diversity in Aging

Lowell Seniors Count, a recently completed survey study of elders in the city, finds that Lowell seniors, as a whole, are doing well.

Over the three-year grant period, more than 200 trained volunteers visited seniors (age 60 and above) in every neighborhood in Lowell, knocking on 13,000 doors, delivering 6,500 resource bags and administering 1,900 surveys.

Among the seniors who participated in the study, 69 percent reported being in excellent, very good or good health. A majority of respondents reported no health limitations in their daily activities, while 41 percent have difficulty climbing stairs and 30 percent experience difficulties with housekeeping.

The seniors interviewed also report generally high levels of psychological well-being: about 88 percent rate themselves happy, while 90 percent are satisfied with their lives overall. Most of the seniors also feel physically and economically secure.

“The great majority of Lowell-area seniors are doing quite well, but that leaves 10 to 15 percent who struggle with economic difficulties, loneliness and other problems,” says project director Andrew Hostetler, associate professor of psychology, who worked closely with the Lowell Senior Center.

“Our study sample had fewer respondents among immigrant groups and people of color than there are in the Lowell population,” says Hostetler. “It’s possible that our findings may provide an overly optimistic picture of senior life in Lowell.”

The study was funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Massachusetts Partnership for Healthy Communities.

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Engineering Students Deliver a Smile

Tricycle Project to Help Youngster With Cerebral Palsy

Electrical engineering students Anthony Capone and Derek Dempsey used assistive design technology to create a “hybrid power tricycle” for 4-year-old Pierce, who is afflicted with cerebral palsy.

“Knowing you improved the quality of someone’s life is very powerful,” says Capone. “When Pierce first saw the tricycle, he was so excited that he couldn’t stop smiling.”

The project was part of the students’ senior capstone project in the College of Engineering’s Assistive Technology Program.

The Assistive Technology Program pits students against problems that hinder the functional capabilities of people with physical or mental challenges. Parts for the projects are funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, as well as by corporate and private donors and by alumni endowment. The students supply the labor and the finished products are delivered to clients free of charge.

“Basically, Pierce can ride the trike and the motor will assist him while he pedals,” says Dempsey. “Pierce’s cerebral palsy has left him with poor core and leg muscle strength. Riding the tricycle provides important exercise to improve his physical condition.”

Anthony Capone, left, and Derek Dempsey, right, deliver their hybrid power tricycle to Pierce at his Pittsburgh home in December.
University, Army Join Forces to Improve Troops’ Safety

Collaboration Will result in Better Body Armor, Equipment

UMass Lowell and the U.S. Army have teamed up to find new ways to enhance the safety and effectiveness of soldiers in the field.

HEROES—Harnessing Emerging Research Opportunities to Empower Soldiers—is a joint research effort that aims to improve military members’ survivability, mobility and combat effectiveness.

UMass Lowell researchers and their counterparts from the U.S. Army’s Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, known locally as Natick Labs, will work on projects such as designing better parachutes by understanding how air flows through fabrics; developing flame- and heat-resistant clothing made from renewable, environmentally friendly raw materials; providing portable, lightweight power sources in the field; and making meal rations last longer.

“HEROES will bring the vast expertise and resources of the U.S. Army and UMass Lowell to bear on life-or-death issues faced by our military personnel every day around the world,” said Chancellor Marty Meehan at the opening of the campus center on Feb. 7. “The initiative will also allow our students to apply what they are learning to real-world situations of great importance.”

The joint research will be conducted both at Olney Hall on North Campus and at Natick Labs.

At the grand opening of HEROES—Harnessing Emerging Research Opportunities to Empower Soldiers—guests previewed the type of research projects that will lead to better protection of soldiers in the field.

UMass Lowell Students are Work Ready, Life Ready, World Ready

Spearheading the initiative are Natick Labs Chief Scientist Lynne Samuelson ’90, who earned her Ph.D. at UMass Lowell and is an adjunct faculty member; Julie Chen, UMass Lowell’s vice provost for research; and Plastics Engineering Assoc. Prof. Ramaswamy Nagarajan. Through HEROES, the partners will work together to secure research funding.

“The research and development that will happen in these labs will result in benefits not just to our troops in the field but also to companies in the region, as they commercialize the resulting new products and technologies,” said Chen.