Change Will Bring More Resources and Opportunities for High-Achieving Students

A newly approved Honors College at UMass Lowell will bring expanded resources, new courses, more co-ops in business and expanded service-learning projects around the world.

While UMass Lowell has offered an honors program for nearly two decades, the approval by the UMass Board of Trustees recently to establish an Honors College ramps up the opportunities for high-achieving students.

The Honors College will provide dedicated space in UMass Lowell’s new $95 million student center at University Crossing, which will open for the fall 2014 semester, and a “Personal Librarian Project” that will assign a librarian to every junior and senior in the College to amplify the one-on-one attention students receive as they research and write their honors theses.

UMass Lowell has already taken several steps to prepare for the establishment of the Honors College, including specialized housing and living-learning communities for honors students; new research and service-learning co-ops for top first-year students; and expanded academic requirements and offerings such as interdisciplinary courses designed to teach students to use knowledge of more than one subject area to tackle important issues.

Aspects of the existing honors program that have been a hallmark of its success—such as small, seminar-style classes tailored to foster academic excellence and personalized advising to meet students’ individual needs and interests—will continue as part of the Honors College. More opportunities to engage in creative projects with one or more faculty members within or beyond a student’s major will also be added.

“By raising our program to Honors College status, we are investing in the educational opportunities of academically talented students who are already on our campus as well as those who will study here in the years to come,” says Chancellor Marty Meehan. “As enrollment at UMass Lowell has grown over the last six years, we have seen the academic qualifications of our students become even more impressive. By offering an honors college, we expect more of the best and brightest to choose our campus.”

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For more information, go to: www.uml.edu/news.
Student-Veterans Receive Training, Internship Opportunities

Campus is First in State to Host Program to Help Vets Break into Life-sciences Industry

Twenty-five veterans earning degrees at UMass Lowell are participating in a program designed to help them to translate their military strengths into success in one of Massachusetts’ fastest-growing industries.

UMass Lowell is the first university in Massachusetts to work with Edge4Vets to provide specialized training as well as connections with prominent companies in life sciences as a way to offer the student-veterans entry into the field. Among the benefits of the program are guaranteed interviews for internships with major employers.

Edge4Vets—which began three years ago at Fordham University—is earning a national reputation for success in helping veterans translate their military strengths, including strong core values and skills, into success in acquiring civilian jobs.

Executives from sponsoring companies participate as mentors during workshops where student-veterans are instructed in how to gain clarity on their strengths, develop confidence expressing them and make connections to build a network of contacts that can land them a job and career.

More than 1,400 student-veterans attend UMass Lowell, which is ranked among the most military-friendly schools in the nation by G.I. Jobs magazine. Home to award-winning ROTC units and an active student-veterans’ organization, the University in 2011 established an Office of Veterans’ Services and dedicated space on campus to serve this population’s specific needs.

Engineering Students Assist Homeless Shelter

Project Will Help Lowell Center Save Money on Bed Repair

Each winter as many as 30 cot frames break during normal use at the Lowell Transitional Living Center (LTLC), which has been providing emergency shelter, hot meals and showers to homeless adults since 1986.

Repair expenses were adding up and LTLC reached out to UMass Lowell for help. Students enrolled in Asst. Prof. Christopher Hansen’s “Strength of Materials” course tested various insert materials to reinforce the frames and retrofitted two cots, which they recently delivered to the Center.

“The total cost to test the materials and retrofit the two cots was $200,” says Hansen. “The material cost for future retrofits is currently $15 per cot, and with donations of wooden dowel material, we envision the cost to drop to $1 per cot. This will offer the Center savings of up to $600 per season and many hours typically spent on cot repair.”

Students performed design analysis and calculations, produced group reports and visited the Center, allowing them to witness first-hand the face of homelessness in the community.

Professors Build Connections in Online Classes

Student Engagement Fosters Success

Can online learning be as interactive and engaging as classroom learning? Yes, say experts in the field, as long as care is taken when building and implementing online curricula and activities.

Case in point: After teaching engineering for more than 40 years, Prof. Sammy Shina made his foray into online education last year. Shina wondered about interacting with students whom he might never meet face-to-face and creating an engaging classroom environment for students scattered around the globe.

“IT’s been an excellent experience,” Shina says. “I’ve been pleased with how completely engaged and motivated the students are.”

The subject of student engagement is of such high interest it was the theme for last semester’s faculty convocation hosted by the Division of Online and Continuing Education.

“Communication is absolutely essential in fostering student engagement,” says Mary Duell, a lecturer in the Department of Psychology, who teaches both on campus and online. Sharing some details of her personal background to build rapport, using online chats to foster interaction and having students post responses to different topics on class discussion boards are some of ways to encourage communication and cultivate student engagement, says Duell.

Since the University launched its first online course in 1996, enrollments have steadily climbed, with total enrollments in online undergraduate and graduate programs for the 2013 academic year topping 32,600.
Greher Named Donahue Professor

Funds will Support String Project and Visiting Artists

Music Prof. Gena Greher has been named the Nancy Donahue Endowed Professor of the Arts, a position funded through a $500,000 gift from patrons Richard and Nancy Donahue to support arts education.

Greher will use the award to support the Lowell Youth Orchestra and the Lowell String Project, which provide high-quality stringed-instrument instruction and creative music classes to Lowell Public School students. The String Project offers University students hands-on experience teaching children.

Greher studied music performance as an undergraduate and earned a master’s in broadcasting and film from Boston University. She worked in advertising in New York City, then returned to school earning a doctorate in music education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Since then, she has taught in UMass Lowell’s music education program.

Her work at the University has been largely collaborative. Sound Thinking, a class co-taught with Jesse Heines of the Computer Science Department, brings the seemingly opposite worlds of music and computers together. Greher and Heines recently published a book called “Computational Thinking in Sound: Teaching the Art and Science of Music and Technology.”

Greher has also teamed up with psychology Assoc. Prof. Ashleigh Hillier to offer SoundScapes, a program that uses music and technology to help teens with autism spectrum disorders feel less stressed and more comfortable socially.

Professor Offers Guidance for Bringing Ideas to Market

Whether it’s a child’s summertime lemonade stand or a market-altering software application, business success comes down to a well-executed strategy.

With the failure rate for startups as high as 80 percent by some estimates, businesses can’t afford to give short shrift to a well-planned strategy. They have to take into account everything from decoding the competitive landscape to smart positioning, says Manning School of Business Prof. Scott Latham.

Successful entrepreneurs share a number of common traits, says Latham, who teaches strategic management and strategy formation and implementation. One key factor, he says, is having the discipline to say “no” to ideas or proposals that can drain resources and divert focus.

Latham recently co-authored “Mastering Strategy” with Michael Braun, a professor at the University of Montana. The book explores the development of successful business strategies and examines some of the common mistakes that derail entrepreneurs and experienced business people alike.

The authors offer guidelines for assessing the business environment, charting growth, planning diversification and offer suggestions for measuring success. They use examples of actual strategy decisions by companies including Apple, Southwest Airlines and Netflix along with stories about every-day products like Crocs and Neutrogena soap.

No Strategy, No Success

Program Assists Startup Companies, Creates Jobs

UMass Lowell has been awarded $4 million by the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center to create the Big Company/Little Company Innovation Hub. Announced recently by Gov. Deval Patrick, the grant will support the University’s Massachusetts Medical Device Development Center (M2D2) in its efforts to help medical-device and bio-tech startup companies succeed.

M2D2 is a joint initiative of UMass Lowell and UMass Worcester and provides medical-device entrepreneurs with easy, affordable and coordinated access to world-class researchers and resources.

The success of companies participating in M2D2 has attracted the attention of investors and larger medical-device companies. However, M2D2’s incubator is now operating at physical capacity and cannot accommodate additional startup clients.

The new grant will allow M2D2 to dedicate 11,000 square feet of additional incubator space for startup companies.

“This funding will allow M2D2 to expand the much-in-demand services it provides to startups in an industry that is not only important to the Commonwealth’s economy, but also to the health and well-being of its citizens,” says UMass Lowell Chancellor Marty Meehan. “We are grateful to Gov. Patrick and the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center for recognizing how M2D2 helps entrepreneurs turn innovative ideas into real products.”

The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center is an investment agency that supports life sciences innovation, research, development and commercialization and is charged with implementing a 10-year, $1 billion, state-funded investment initiative to create jobs and support advances that improve health and well-being.

Chancellor Marty Meehan thanks the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center for a $4 million grant that will fund the University’s support of medical-device and bio-tech startup companies.

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Acclaimed Actress Raises $230,000 for Scholarships

She answered questions, reflected on her storied career and offered advice for breaking into films before a crowd of 3,600 and raised more than $230,000 for scholarships. That's all in a day's visit to UMass Lowell for actress Meryl Streep.

The three-time Academy Award-winner held court before a capacity crowd at the Tsongas Center in an event billed as “A Conversation with Meryl Streep” that was moderated by Assoc. Prof. Andre Dubus III. Earlier in the day, she held an hour-long question-and-answer session with 100 English and theater arts students at the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center, touching on subjects from how she prepares for roles to how she got her start as an actress.

By turns witty, thoughtful and quick, she held her audience rapt as she discussed her career. Dubus, a New York Times bestselling author, wanted to know how she is able to disappear into her roles.

“Acting is a very mysterious craft,” Streep said. “The (actors) I admire, I have no idea how they achieve what they do. When you are working with them there's a seamless exchange of thought, emotion and physicality. You can't parse it when you are in the moment.”

Streep's visit was the latest installment of the Chancellor's Speaker Series, which was established in 2012 with author Stephen King as the initial guest. Her appearance was co-sponsored by the UMass Lowell English Department's Theatre Arts Program and the College of Fine Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The presenting sponsor was the D'Agostino family, who used the opportunity to encourage organ and tissue donor registration.

All proceeds from the Tsongas Center event are being used to establish the Meryl Streep Endowed Scholarship, which will assist outstanding UMass Lowell English majors, and the Joan Hertzberg Endowed Scholarship, which will support students who excel in math as did the fund’s namesake, a former classmate of Streep's.

Looking back on her career, Streep said the “quiet, held-in” characters she portrayed earlier in her career in films like the “Deer Hunter” and “Kramer vs. Kramer” were products of their time when most movies were written, produced and directed by men.

“It would be hard to create those characters in today's world. Girls are way more out there,” she said, adding that her approach to work has evolved.

“I feel like I ingest characters in a different way. I feel like I know more about the bumps of life.”

When asked why she gravitated toward movies over theater roles, Streep said it was simply a matter of film schedules being more accommodating to her family life.

“Film work is a very kind profession for a mother,” said Streep, who has four grown children with her husband, sculptor Don Gummer.