New Buildings, Division I Athletics, More Parking: Booming Campus Greets Over 16,000 Students

Two new residence halls, a new academic building, a new parking garage, Division 1-ready athletic fields and refreshed classroom, labs and meeting spaces greeted new and returning students when they began moving back to campus at the end of August.

“Our commitment to building a world-class campus is yielding top-notch facilities for learning, research, athletics and student living,” says Chancellor Marty Meehan.

The transformation of the campus is attracting more students, many from around the globe and with higher academic qualifications. This year, 2,750 new first-year and transfer students—representing more than 50 nations—will attend UMass Lowell, up from 2,614 last year. The freshman class boasts an increased average SAT score (up 63 points since 2007 to 1137) and average high school GPA (3.36, up from 3.29 just a year ago), as well as 270 new members of UMass Lowell’s Commonwealth Honors Program.

Nearly 1,000 students will live in University Suites and Riverview Suites, UMass Lowell’s fifth and sixth new buildings to open in the past year. On East Campus, the 148,000-square-foot University Suites includes 88 four- and six-bed suites, study areas, an outdoor courtyard and a café open to the public. Just off South Campus, the 172,200-square-foot Riverview Suites features 110 two- and three-bedroom apartment-suites that include full kitchens, living rooms and bathrooms, and a state-of-the-art fitness center.

UMass Lowell kicked off a new era of athletic excellence as a member of the Division I America East Conference with the 2013 field hockey home-opener against the Northwestern Wildcats on Sept. 2. The playing surface is the centerpiece of the renovated Cushing Field Complex, which has been updated for Division I standards, including new blue turf for the soccer/lacrosse field, LED scoreboards and drainage and irrigation systems.

Tucked between Mahoney Hall and the Riverview parking lot on South Campus, a new garage provides parking for 762 cars. On East Campus, the Perkins Street Parking Lot has been overhauled, with new paving and landscaping. Last year, the campus opened a parking garage on North Campus.
Scientists to Study Mercury Contamination in the Arctic

National Science Foundation Funds Research

A team of researchers from UMass Lowell, Rutgers University and the U.S. Geological Survey recently received a three-year grant worth nearly $830,000 from the National Science Foundation to study how wetlands influence mercury contamination in the Arctic regions.

“Mercury has become one of the most insidious pollutants on Earth,” says biology Prof. Mark Hines, one of the principal investigators for the project. A significant amount of mercury is released into the air from burning of coal and can travel thousands of miles.

“Mercury that falls back to Earth can be readily converted by bacteria into methylmercury, which is the most toxic form and tends to bio-accumulate in the food web,” he explains. “Methylmercury is most harmful to developing brains and can affect growing fetuses and young children.”

Hines and his co-investigators will test the hypothesis that this methylmercury production occurs through the symbiotic relationship between bacteria that are only able to metabolize by sharing food.

“Our team discovered that duos of bacteria working together were able to produce more methylmercury than individual ones, and in some instances methylmercury was produced only when two species worked together,” says Hines, who is also acting dean of the College of Sciences.

Women Underestimate Work Contributions

Research Shows Effects of Feedback on Self-value in the Workplace

When working in mixed-sex groups with unclear roles, women are likely to give more credit to their male co-workers than themselves, according to a recent study coauthored by psychology Asst. Prof. Michelle Haynes. The study has been picked up by academic and popular news outlets, striking a chord with many readers.

“This study dovetailed with the national radar in the wake of ‘Lean In,’” Haynes says, referring to Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg’s recent best-selling book on women in leadership roles and the lack thereof.

The paper, co-authored with Prof. Madeline Heilman of New York University, says that women who received group feedback rated themselves less favorably than their male team mates compared to those who received individual praise. Haynes and Heilman say this indicated that women deferred to their partner unless told specifically that they had performed the task well. The ambiguity of group feedback appears to be the sticking point for many.

“If you get an A on a paper, you understand that you did the work and accept the high grade as yours,” says Haynes. “But if it’s a group with colleagues, how do you interpret that? It’s that ambiguity that leads to the underestimation of contribution.”

“This research is just a piece of a more complicated puzzle,” says Haynes. “Simply taking appropriate credit won’t solve gender inequality in the workplace. It’s a single feather in the pillow.”

Laura Punnett Awarded University Professorship

Honor Reflects Exemplary Teaching, Research and Service

Prof. Laura Punnett, an internationally respected leader in public health and ergonomics, has been awarded the prestigious title of University Professor. The three-year appointment is the highest distinction bestowed on a UMass Lowell faculty member, recognizing exemplary contributions to teaching, research and service.

“I am honored to receive this distinction,” says Punnett. “It is an institutional endorsement and recognition of the strong team that we have built in the Department of Work Environment over the past 25 years.”

Punnett arrived at the University in 1987 and is a founding member of the Department of Work Environment. For the past seven years, she has also led the Center for the Promotion of Health in the New England Workplace, a research center of excellence funded by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health with more than $9 million to date.

Punnett was lauded for her strong mentorship to pre-tenure faculty, helping them advance their research initiatives.
New Software Gives Students 24/7 Lab Access

Students Log in From Phones, Tablets

Students will have access to biology, business, health sciences and other software applications wherever they are this fall, thanks to new technology that allows them to use smart phones, tablets or personal computers to log on.

Under an initiative led by the Information Technology staff, biology, business and health majors will have around-the-clock access to software used for everything from molecular modeling to crunching statistics to DNA sequencing—applications that had previously been available only in department computer labs. Some computers in the Centers for Learning and the O'Leary Library will also offer access to the software.

The project, known as vLabs, relies on virtualization technology, which optimizes computing resources by allowing different operating systems and applications to run on a single host computer. Umass Lowell is piloting the software for the entire Umass system.

Students can log onto biology, health sciences and business applications remotely using laptops or smart phones, thanks to new virtualization software.

Projects Designed to Purify Water, Assist People With Disabilities

For many people living in Africa and Asia, having safe, clean drinking water can be the difference between life and death.

With this in mind, electrical engineering senior Matthew Berardi teamed up with classmates Julie Chau and J. Cory Miniter and recent graduate Magnim Lequessim to create a portable, low-cost water purifier designed to remove inorganic contaminants from untreated water and kill bacteria and any other pathogens present. The students' water purifier can process up to two gallons of raw water every day and can be powered using the solar panels.

The student-designed and built device is part of the University's unique Assistive Technology Program, which challenges seniors to come up with engineering solutions to solve real-world problems.

From left, electrical engineering seniors Matthew Berardi, Julie Chau and J. Cory Miniter have designed a water-purification system for use by people living in poor, rural areas of the world.

Center for Terrorism Studies Launched

Renowned Expert Will Lead Program

Umass Lowell this fall is launching the Center for Terrorism and Security Studies to house a variety of collaborative research projects addressing the complexities of topics like terrorism, cyber-security, transnational crime and weapons of mass destruction. The Center will be directed by John Horgan—author of more than 70 publications on terrorism and political violence—who is a member of the Research Working Group of the FBI's National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime.

Horgan, who was previously director of the International Center for the Study of Terrorism at Penn State University, is being joined by his former Penn State colleague Mia Bloom. Once a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations, she is now a professor of security studies at Umass Lowell. Bloom, who speaks nine languages, is the author of several books and regularly appears on CNN, Fox News, CSPAN and NBC Nightly News.


John Horgan
Forbes: UMass Lowell Is a Best Buy in Education

Magazine Ranking the Latest in a Surge of Accolades

UMass Lowell offers one of the best buys in higher education in the nation, according to a new ranking by Forbes.

UMass Lowell is No. 10 in the magazine's 25 Best Value Colleges 2013 ranking and one of only two institutions in New England to make the list. Compiled as part of its annual "America's Top Colleges" survey, Forbes considered factors including post-graduation success, low student-loan debt, academic performance and student satisfaction.

The median return on investment (ROI) for UMass Lowell graduates over 30 years, minus the cost of their education, is $1.1 million, representing an 8.8 percent annual return, according to PayScale. UMass Lowell is in the top 1 percent of colleges and universities in the United States when it comes to ROI, Affordable Colleges Online said in its ranking.

Both PayScale and Affordable Colleges Online placed UMass Lowell as No. 10 in the nation among hundreds of public colleges and universities surveyed. PayScale, which also ranked private institutions, placed UMass Lowell 50th nationally among all schools for 2013.

In addition, UMass Lowell is ranked as a top-tier national university by U.S. News & World Report—climbing 13 points in the last two years to No. 170—and among the top 100 public universities in the country.

UMass Lowell has seen enrollment grow by 40 percent over the last five years. Average SAT scores for first-year students have climbed more than 50 points over six years, and 82 percent of UMass Lowell freshmen continue on to their sophomore year.