UMass Lowell Boosts City’s Downtown

First-of-its-kind Study Measures Economic and Social Impacts

UMass Lowell students, faculty and staff provide a significant stimulus to the city’s downtown economy, representing a potential $10 million in annual spending in Lowell, according to research released recently by the Lowell Plan Inc. and UMass Lowell.

The Downtown Initiative Report underscores the University’s role in creating a vibrant, thriving downtown that not only enhances student and faculty recruitment and retention, but also attracts private investment, expands the economy and creates jobs in the city of Lowell.

“This study quantifies for the first time what we have long known about UMass Lowell: that the University has a significant positive impact on downtown Lowell,” says Chancellor Marty Meehan.

“The data reveal a high level of interaction between University students, faculty and staff, and downtown businesses and organizations, which is very encouraging,” says Jim Cook, executive director of the Lowell Plan.

The comprehensive study was the first-ever effort to analyze UMass Lowell’s impact on the downtown Lowell economy as well as the social fabric of the city. It was launched after the University acquired the former DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Lowell in 2009 and transformed it into the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center, which now houses 500 students, has 31 year-round guest rooms and an additional 252 available during the summer tourism season, and offers space for community and University events.

The report’s key findings include:

- Student, faculty and staff spending represents a potential $10 million impact in Lowell, according to survey data on frequency of downtown visits and spending estimates volunteered by participants in surveys and interviews.
- 91 percent of faculty and staff reported visiting downtown approximately eight times each academic year and spending an estimated $30 on each visit; 82 percent of students reported visiting downtown in the past year and 30 percent said they go downtown once a week or more.
- 85 percent of business owners surveyed expressed interest in UMass Lowell expanding its presence downtown.
- 78 percent of downtown businesses characterized their relationship with the University as good or excellent.
- 58 percent of downtown businesses offer student discounts.
- Faculty, staff and students engage not only with businesses but also with community organizations—some 34 percent of students and 30 percent of faculty and staff have volunteered in Lowell.

To read the full report, visit www.uml.edu/downtown-report.
Robert Caret Named New UMass President

The Board of Trustees of the University of Massachusetts unanimously elected Robert L. Caret president of the five-campus university system in January. Caret, the president of Towson University in Maryland, will succeed retiring UMass President Jack M. Wilson, who will step down on June 30.

Caret, 63, has been the president of Towson University since 2003. He had served as a faculty member, dean, executive vice president and provost of Towson for 21 years before leaving to assume the presidency of San Jose State University in 1995. Caret, who is credited with helping to reinvigorate the San Jose State University campus, also championed a joint city/university effort to build the Martin Luther King, Jr., Library there.

Caret, who is a native of Maine who received a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from the University of New Hampshire in 1974 and a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry and mathematics from Suffolk University in 1969. Caret has authored many articles on chemistry, chemical education and higher education for business and professional publications. He is the co-author of four textbooks in the fields of organic chemistry and allied health chemistry. The Maryland Chapter of the American Chemical Society recognized Caret’s achievements by honoring him with the George L. Braude Award in 2005.

Current UMass President Wilson is retiring from the presidency after eight years to return to teaching. He will become the Distinguished Professor of Higher Education, Emerging Technologies and Innovation at UMass Lowell.

Nursing Alum Recruited for Federal Post

Bonner Will Improve Nursing Homes Across America

As the country’s nursing homes brace for the rising tide of aging baby boomers, the federal government has turned to a UMass Lowell graduate to figure out how to offer better services.

Alice Bonner ’89 was a nurse practitioner for 20 years and spent more than a year with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health when she was tapped, recently, by the Center for Medicare and Medicare Services, the federal agency that ensures that the country’s 16,000 nursing homes meet strict standards.

A graduate of UMass Lowell’s Gerontological Nursing Master’s program, Bonner will use her combined expertise in nursing and policymaking to try to expand and improve care in nursing homes across America.

“One of her first responsibilities will be to examine policies on workforce training required in nursing homes.

“Nursing homes have improved a lot in the last 30 years, but with our aging population, we need these facilities to diversify to become part of the continuum of care,” says Bonner. “Within communities, this could eventually include services such as outpatient visits, adult day health programs and home and community-based outreach.”

Bonner got her first glimpse of the power of policymaking when she worked on a community project as part of the curriculum in the nursing gerontology program. She assessed community services for the elderly in her hometown of Leominster and worked with the city council and mayor to make changes.

“UMass Lowell is on the forefront of geriatric initiatives that are improving, and will continue to improve, health care across the nation,” says Bonner.

Traffic Information Anytime, Anywhere, Any Way

New Technology Will Help Motorists Navigate Changing Road Conditions

Wouldn’t it be great to get real-time alerts about traffic flare-ups on the road? UMass researchers are helping make that technology possible.

Called Anytime-Anywhere-Anyway (AAA) Transportation Information, the system will alert drivers through their mobile devices of any traffic congestion due to accidents, road construction or weather. The project recently received a $100,000 seed grant from the UMass Science and Technology Office.

Researchers from the Lowell, Dartmouth, Amherst and Boston campuses are collaborating on the project.

“People spend enormous amounts of time and money on daily commutes and holiday travel,” says civil engineering Asst. Prof. Tzu-Yang Yu, co-principal investigator for UMass Lowell. “The AAA system can provide traffic information 24 hours a day, seven days a week that can save them thousands of dollars in fuel and, most importantly, time.”

The team plans to integrate hardware (a wireless network of underground/surface road sensors) with software (an intelligent transportation system) to seamlessly deliver traffic data through secure multi-media communications, including the Internet.

“If someone is on his way from Boston to New York to visit his parents for Christmas and there is construction activity or a vehicular emergency on the road, AAA transportation will provide detour options so he won’t miss the Christmas gathering with his family,” says Yu.
Professional Degrees Go Online

Sloan Grant Expands Program

Upgrading career skills just got easier.

UMass is a national leader in the small, but growing, specialty of Professional Science Master’s (PSM) degree programs, with 15 system-wide programs offered, 11 of them originating on the Lowell campus. PSM degrees combine science and technology studies with cross-training in business and communications.

Designed in collaboration with industry leaders, the programs emphasize real-world experience, teamwork and leadership skills that are directly applicable to the workplace. The programs require an internship instead of a thesis—providing connections that can quickly advance career opportunities or jumpstart a career search.

UMass Lowell has been awarded $124,200 by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to expand the PSM degree programs over the next 18 months.

“We plan to increase student enrollments and business partnerships significantly,” says Donald Pierson, vice provost for graduate education. “We will develop model curricula, particularly online and multimedia, that can be shared with other programs around the country.”

Professionals in science and engineering need management and communications skills to advance, but often find such courses poorly designed for their needs.

The UMass system offers courses that are tailored to those with science and technology backgrounds. These “plus” courses (separate from core science courses) include topics such as entrepreneurship, tech transfer, project management and ethics.

For more information, go to www.uml.edu/grad/PSM.

The World Becomes the Classroom During Winter Break

Students and Educators Volunteer, Learn, Share Perspectives on Four Continents

In January, UMass Lowell students could be spotted all over the world, forgoing winter break for a global learning experience. They participated in community service missions, intersession courses and teaching projects across four continents.

Members of the Nursing Students Without Borders program worked long hours in impoverished conditions delivering care, supplies and compassion to the residents of Ghana, West Africa. The 10 senior nursing students, led by Asst. Prof. Valerie King, know that their 17-day mission will not only have a positive impact but will provide an unforgettable learning experience—helping them become confident world-ready nurses.

“It takes a village to educate a student,” said King, adding that after the trip she expects the nursing students will be “prepared to meet the health-care challenges of the USA and beyond.”

Nursing Students Without Borders conducted wellness checks, taught workshops on disease prevention and delivered much-needed supplies to clinics, orphanages and villages throughout the Volta region. King and her students blogged while there to share their experiences with friends and family back home and on campus.

Steven Tello, assistant professor of management and entrepreneurship, became a blogger over the break, following five UMass Lowell students as they took a Technology Innovation and Entrepreneurship course at Bilkent University in Turkey. The students gained a real international perspective on business management, observing differences in how Turkish culture addresses certain aspects of entrepreneurship.

Elsewhere, members of UMass Lowell’s Village Empowerment Partnership were back in Peru, upholding the University’s commitment to providing sustainable energy to one of the most isolated regions on Earth, where previously there had been no electricity, telephone service or clean drinking water. The group, made up of volunteers and solar-energy engineering students and led by Prof. John Duffy, has made a profound impact on the villages they visit, developing their own professional and personal skills in the process.

Meanwhile, Computer Science Prof. Jesse Heines and students Zori Babroudi, Elad Shahar and Sreeja Kaimal visited India to share their web programming knowledge as part of the Indo-US Collaboration for Engineering Education. The students are assisting Heines in teaching Programming for the World Wide Web to 280 second-year students at K.L. University in Vidhayawada.

Nursing Student Liz Long examines a child in Ghana during intersession as part of the Nurses Without Borders program.

Management students Chris Foster, right, and Steve Johnian spent the winter intersession in Turkey studying and teaching entrepreneurship.

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First Year Owned by UMass Lowell a Success

Drake, Bob Dylan, Jeff Dunham, Godsmack, Snoop Dogg.

Those are just some of the big names that took to the stage at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell in recent months, with more lined up in 2011.

More than 80,000 people have passed through the Tsongas Center’s turnstiles since October, when UMass Lowell unveiled its latest and most extensive renovations to the building, both inside and out.

“The response we saw from the community in 2010 shows that they are happy with the many changes we have made at the Tsongas Center and we expect 2011 will be an even bigger year,” says Peter Casey, UMass Lowell’s director for athletics business enterprises.

Driving the center’s growing popularity are the increased offerings as well as the physical improvements made to the $24 million venue since it was acquired debt-free by the University last February. Those include:

• A video scoreboard and LED “ribbon” boards;
• Spectacular club and premium seating in the Lowell Cooperative Bank Pavilion;
• The new Talon Club and University Suite rooms;
• A sixty-speaker sound system;
• All-new concessions that include local favorites like Sal’s Pizza and Lowell Beer Works;
• Logos, signs and other visual enhancements inside and outside the building;

In addition, a new management company, Global Spectrum, has been hired to run the building and has made its own changes, including hiring a new cleaning company to keep the building spotless and initiating a customer service program for employees.

Not Just for Hockey Fans

The tradition of River Hawk ice hockey continues at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell—the University is ranked No. 17 nationally in hockey attendance.

The venue has become home to more in the last year, from concerts by national acts like the KISS 108 Jingle Ball, Disney Live! and Riverdance on ice, as well as job fairs, community programs and functions of all sizes. The recent “Wicked Irish Thunder” event held in tribute to the release of The Fighter even drew the film’s stars, including Christian Bale, to the Tsongas.

The Tsongas Center offers organizers of community events the opportunity to grow and modernize. The George Rossi Lowell Holiday Wrestling Tournament was held at the Tsongas the first time in the contest’s 43 years and the Colonial Classic synchronized figure skating competition, which has long called the Tsongas home, was able to enhance fans’ experience this year by using the video scoreboard and other technology UMass Lowell brought to the building.

The Center will host the Lowell Spinners’ annual Hot Stove Dinner for the first time, allowing the team to expand the number of seats and provide more flexibility to offer autographs with former Spinners, as well as a silent auction.

Upcoming Events at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell

While many more events are in the works, highlights of the 2011 schedule already include:

• Atlantic 10 Women’s Basketball Tournament, March 4-7
• Dropkick Murphys concert, March 19
• Monster Truck Nationals, April 22 and 23
• Massachusetts State Democratic Convention, June 3 and 4

For tickets and more information on upcoming events at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell, check out www.uml.edu/tsongascenter.