Smart Professors, Smart Students — Now Smart Classrooms

University Installing High-Tech Classrooms Thanks to Stimulus Funding

A recent study revealed that eight out of 10 students want universities to overhaul traditional learning environments to include more technology and collaboration.

UMass Lowell is on the leading edge of making that happen. Thanks to $750,000 in federal stimulus funds appropriated last year, the University is installing 80 “smart classrooms” to help faculty explain complex topics to students by using all available media—the Internet, collaboration tools, video and audio.

About 90 percent, or 150, classrooms on campus are now “smart,” or “technology-enhanced.”

The new technology includes computers, digital document cameras, DVD/VCR players, laptop connections, network connections, integrated sound and a system that controls all audio and video from the lectern.

Another innovation is the Smart Technologies Symposium, an interactive LCD touch screen that acts like an electronic writing tablet with the ability to save, share and print class notes.

For instance, a professor could open a series of PowerPoint slides on the Symposium, which would also be shown on a large projector. As he lectures from the slides, he could make notes on the slides using the touch screen and pen; those notes would appear immediately on the projector screen. He could then save the updated slides and send them to a website, e-mail them to students or print them.

“The systems increase the reliability of the room equipment and allow faculty to use a ‘turn-key’ system,” says Mike Lucas, director of instructional technology support. “They can just walk in and within a minute or so, are able to present their materials. It also allows faculty to bring their own laptop into the classroom environment and easily connect to the projection system.”

Studies show that with adequate teacher preparation, technology greatly facilitates teaching of abstract concepts and problem-solving, as well as basic skills. Students benefit by having access to online material, rich media learning and streaming media technologies encompassed in an easy-to-use setup.

“Taking class with technology definitely makes learning more interesting—a professor is finally able to show you the clip she’s talking about, or show a picture he’s talking about, or play a song,” says Jessica Provan, a senior English major.
States with More Personal Freedom Have Higher Death Rates

Study: Less Restrictive Safety Laws Endanger Public Health

In a new study exploring the link between personal freedom and mortality, researchers have found that states with less restrictive laws also have higher rates of death due to injury.

“Freedom is deeply ingrained as a fundamental belief in the American character,” says Asst. Prof. Leland Ackerson of the UMass Lowell Community Health and Sustainability Department and lead author of the study. “However, our study shows that protecting public health by regulating some health-related behaviors can be instrumental in creating a healthier society.”

The results of the study, conducted by researchers at UMass Lowell and the Harvard School of Public Health, were published online in February in the American Journal of Public Health article “Negative freedom and death in the United States.”

The study measured personal freedom across states according to the strictness of laws governing behaviors such as the use of fireworks, seat belts, motorcycle helmets and cell phones while driving, as well as smoking, access to alcohol and use of controlled substances.

The researchers reported a wide variation in state rates of unintended injury mortality; in 2006, New York had the lowest death rate in the country at 25.9 per 100,000 with the third-most strict laws, while New Mexico had the highest death rate at 67.1 per 100,000 with the third-most lax laws. Alaska had the most-lax laws in the country with a death rate of 51.9 per 100,000, while Maryland had the most-strict laws with a death rate of 26.1. Massachusetts was the state with the seventh-most-strict laws with a death rate of 32.0.

Check out the study results by state at www.uml.edu/mortality.

UMass Lowell Receives Presidential Community Service Award

Students Provide More Than 44,000 Service Hours Annually

UMass Lowell was recently named to the 2009 President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement.

Together with the 2008 recognition as a community-engaged university from the Carnegie Foundation for Excellence in Teaching, this award underscores UMass Lowell’s commitment to applying knowledge for the public good and supporting the development of community through teaching, research, scholarship and engagement.

“We are grateful for this national recognition of UMass Lowell’s excellent service efforts that affect the lives of people locally, nationally and globally,” said Chancellor Marty Meehan. “UMass Lowell is deeply committed to community engagement that serves the public good, enhances student learning and advances faculty research and scholarship.”

Honorees are chosen based on factors such as the scope and innovation of service projects, percentage of student participation in service activities, incentives for service and the extent to which the school offers academic service-learning courses.

The three service projects highlighted in UMass Lowell’s application were Village Empowerment in Peru, Media Literacy and Engaged Education and Project IMPACT (Increasing Math Proficiency in Algebra with College Tutors).

Three special focus area projects were also featured: Assistive Technology, Bringing Diversity to Nursing and Serving Urban Youth and Families through Athletics.

“Service learning is a key component of our experiential learning model,” said Provost Ahmed Abdelal. “UMass Lowell’s students provide more than 44,000 hours of service each year.”

Candlelight Vigil, Concert Held to Benefit Haiti

Eunice Delice, president of the UMass Lowell Haitian Student Association, participates in a vigil for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti. A night of remembrance and reflection was organized to benefit the Haiti Relief Fund, and included a candlelight walk and vigil from Middlesex Community College to the UMass Lowell Inn & Conference Center, where student musicians and the University dance team performed. Upcoming plans include a panel discussion called “Understanding the Challenges in Haiti” and collaborations with other colleges and universities and their Haitian associations.
University Begins Community Health Needs Assessment for Hospitals

Survey Asks Area Residents for Opinions on Health Care

A team of UMass Lowell researchers and students is working with Lowell General Hospital, Saints Medical Center and the Greater Lowell Health Alliance to talk to local residents about their health needs.

The community health needs assessment will look at unmet health care and public health needs in the Greater Lowell area. The findings will provide a foundation for the hospitals, health alliance and others to build a consensus on the community’s health needs and what should be done to meet them.

Greater Lowell residents are encouraged to contribute to the study by participating in a brief web-based survey. All responses to the survey are anonymous and confidential.

Anyone 18 years of age or older who lives in Lowell, Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Dunstable, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro or Westford.

The UMass Lowell researchers will also conduct focus group and personal interviews with various individuals and community groups.

Community representatives interested in participating in the study should contact Prof. Jim Lee at (978) 934-4522 or AJames_Lee@uml.edu.

The results will be made available to the public, the media and health-related interest groups.

Roger Goodell to Speak at Commencement

National Football League Commissioner Roger S. Goodell will address graduates at UMass Lowell’s commencement on Saturday, May 29 at the Tsongas Center.

Goodell also will accept a posthumous honorary degree for his father, the late U.S. Sen. Charles E. Goodell, who was elected to Congress in 1959 and appointed to the Senate following the assassination of U.S. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in 1968.

Other honorary degree recipients include Doris Kearns Goodwin, presidential historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning author; Richard N. Goodwin, presidential speechwriter and adviser to John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert Kennedy; Gloria Ladson-Billings, pedagogical philosopher, scholar and educational author and Alan P. Lightman, physicist, novelist and author of international bestseller “Einstein’s Dreams.”

In addition to appearing at commencement, Goodell, the honorary degree recipients and Distinguished Alumna Bonnie Comley, ’81, award-winning Broadway producer, will speak at a Commencement Eve Celebration. The celebration will be preceded by a 4 p.m. special event with the Goodwins—"A Conversation with Dick & Doris."

For more about Commencement 2010, go to www.uml.edu/commencement.

River Hawks Take NE-10 Championship Title

Men’s Basketball Team Earns Eighth Trip in School History to NCAA Tournament

Costello Gym was packed March 6 when the seventh-seeded UMass Lowell River Hawks defeated the ninth-seeded Adelphi Panthers for the Northeast-10 Basketball Championship.

“Our students came out in full force wearing school colors, a large number of faculty and staff were in attendance and the pep band helped to create a championship environment,” says Athletic Director Dana Skinner. “Most importantly, the team gave everyone a chance to cheer and feel proud of their University.”

In a rematch of the 2010 NE-10 Tournament Semifinal, the sixth-seeded UMass Lowell River Hawks (20-11) were, at press time, scheduled to take on the third-seeded Merrimack (20-8) in the first round of the 2010 Division II Men’s Basketball NCAA Tournament.

UMass Lowell finished the season with a 20-11 record, marking the fourth time the River Hawks have won the NE-10 title and their eighth trip in school history to the NCAA Tournament.

“The men’s basketball team competed extremely well in an unbelievably competitive Northeast-10 conference,” says Senior Associate Athletic Director Joan Lehoullier. “They played especially well through this last stretch and generated a great deal of excitement for the campus community. The atmosphere and spirit on display during the championship game in Costello Gym was tremendous and surely propelled the team to a much deserved Northeast-10 Tournament title.”

With the victory, UMass Lowell earned an automatic bid to the 2010 NCAA Tournament.

For updates, go to www.GoRiverHawks.com.
They Are Tough and Resilient, but Also Difficult to Help, Says Report

Hidden in plain sight, they are part of every urban landscape. They are teenagers who panhandle, sleep in doorways and stand on shadowy corners, trading sex for cash, food and the “protection” of pimps. Perhaps they are runaways, perhaps throwaways.

Trying to rescue these youth, police and social workers quickly find that intervention is complicated and often unsuccessful. The kids are tough to deal with and conflicts with authority figures lead to punishment or prosecution instead of help—a negative feedback loop that does nothing to get teens out of that life.

Researchers at UMass Lowell took the unusual and revealing approach of asking teens themselves about the pathways that led them to prostitution, how they survived under these circumstances and how they took steps toward recovery.

The report, “Pathways into and out of commercial sexual victimization of children: Understanding and responding to sexually exploited teens,” is based on intensive interviews with teens at shelters and drop-in centers, or living on the streets, in metro Boston and Washington, D.C.

Prof. Linda Williams of the Criminal Justice and Criminology Department directed the study with Andrea Powell, executive director of Fair Fund Inc. in Washington. The U.S. Justice Department’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funded the research.

The youth in the study were 14 to 19 years old and, as children, were forced to engage in sexual acts in exchange for money, food, drugs, shelter, clothing or protection. They were mostly runaways, homeless and transient or unemployed youth who trade sex as a means of survival. Some left home situations that were destructive, drug-involved or violent, and are vulnerable to adults who manipulate them for profit.

“The resiliency of these teens surprised me,” says Williams. “Intertwined with their vulnerabilities, the damage and harms they had suffered, they showed strengths and intelligence. They provided astute observations about systemic problems. They want better schooling and better services. And they want their voices to be heard, to help others.”

Their tough façade, transience and “don’t mess with me” attitude can get in the way of the outreach efforts of police, social workers and educators, although many youth do maintain access to health services.

The report calls for policy changes in the treatment of sexually exploited teens: expanded training, coordination of agencies across jurisdictional boundaries, better facilities and services for homeless youth.

As for law enforcement, a sense of justice would call for more arrests and serious charges lodged against the purveyors (pimps) and customers of sex with children.

Above all, social responses to homeless, runaway and sexually exploited teens should be empowering and build on survival strengths.

“Coping and survival is a key theme for high-risk teens,” says Williams. “Based on their own reports, they have ‘survived’ the extreme difficulties of violence in their original homes and on the streets. They have negotiated life at a very young age to deal with hunger and poverty. They see this as survival.”

The full report is available at www.uml.edu/pathways.