More students graduated from UMass Lowell last June than ever in the University’s history. More new ones than ever have taken their place this fall, and more of those who were here already are staying on to graduate. And none of these trends shows any signs of abating.

“The numbers are very exciting, very hopeful,” says Director of Undergraduate Admissions Kerri Johnston. “Academically, there’s more opportunity in the classroom, and more internships being offered. And student life—with nearly 120 student clubs now, and the [residence hall] living and learning communities—has probably never been richer. All in all, I think we’re just making ourselves more attractive, and more visible. And it’s showing some results.”

Undergraduate enrollment has increased by 20 percent over the past two years. It has increased this year by 10 percent—highlighted by a 2009 freshman class of just under 2,500, the largest ever. On the graduate level, the combined total of master’s degree and doctoral enrollments has also shown a 10 percent year-to-year increase.

The goal for 2010, says Johnston – modest enough to permit the University’s teaching and living space to keep pace with the fast-burgeoning numbers—is to maintain this year’s freshman enrollment levels, while increasing the number of transfers by 5 percent or more. There were 936 transfer students this fall, a 14 percent increase over last year.

The spike in transfer enrollments, says Gerry Durkin, director of transfer admissions, has a lot to do with what’s happening on campus these days.

“The changes these last couple of years have really made a difference. We’ve got the new academic buildings coming in, a growing athletic focus. There’s just a lot happening right now,” he says.

What about the retention (the percentage of freshmen who return for their sophomore years) of those students already here? In 2008, the national freshman retention rate for all U.S. colleges, according to ACT, the independent educational assessment organization, was just under 66 percent. At UMass Lowell it was 76 percent for the same academic year. For this year, it was 81 percent, or more than 20 percent higher than the national average.

For more information, go to http://umasslowell.edu/EnrollmentUp
Profs. Manohar, Lawton Help Frito-Lay Become More Green

Researchers to Develop Biodegradable Plastic Packaging

Each year, Frito-Lay products generate tens of thousands of tons of cardboard waste that are difficult to store and recycle, and many of them end up in landfills. But that is about to change.

Frito-Lay North America Inc., maker of some of America’s favorite potato and corn chip snacks—Lay’s, Doritos, Tostitos, Cheetos, Fritos, Ruffles and SunChips—has enlisted the expertise of two UMass Lowell Chemical Engineering researchers. Assoc. Prof. Sanjeev Manohar, director of UMass Lowell’s Green Technology Laboratory, and Assoc. Prof. Carl Lawton, director of the Massachusetts BioManufacturing Center, recently received a two-year, $180,000 grant from Frito-Lay to develop new methods for converting the cardboard used to ship its products into biodegradable plastic.

“The company wants to convert that packaging waste into bio-friendly and biodegradable plastic that can be used as chip bags,” explains Manohar.

Manohar says one way to achieve this is through biosynthesis—using bacteria or fungi to first convert the waste cardboard to glucose. The glucose is then fed to special organisms that will directly convert it to a plastic that the organisms will store inside their cell walls.

For more information, go to http://umasslowell.edu/FritoLay

Toxics Use Reduction Institute Saved
Stimulus Funds Ensure Continued Reduction of Toxins in Massachusetts

Thanks to an infusion of $1.3 million in federal economic stimulus funds, the Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) will survive the current budget year that ends June 30, 2010.

The state’s Executive Office of Education designated the one-time federal stimulus-backed Education Stabilization funds to cover TURI staff and programs that help make Massachusetts a safer place to live and work.

“Governor Patrick and the legislature stepped up to the plate to ensure that TURI can continue to help reduce the use of toxins in the Commonwealth,” says Chancellor Marty Meehan. “The one-time federal funding will allow UMass Lowell to cover the costs of the institute this year, without disinvesting in our core mission of providing high-quality, affordable higher education.”

Although TURI is part of the UMass Lowell campus, it has been funded separately by the state since its inception in 1990. Under the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Act, businesses that use toxic substances pay fees to the Commonwealth, in essence covering the costs of the program. In 2008, $3.2 million in fees were collected from 550 facilities.

After TURI’s budget was eliminated in June, 39 representatives and 13 senators signed letters to their leadership requesting separate state funds be restored for TURI. Ultimately, UMass President Jack Wilson helped work out an agreement with the Executive Office of Education for the federal funds.

Among the legislators championing separate state funding for TURI were Sen. Jamie Eldridge, D-Acton; Rep. Jay Kaufman, House Chairman of the Joint Committee on Revenue and Rep. Frank Smizik, chairman of the House Committee on Global Warming and Climate Change.

By providing research, training, technical support, laboratory testing services and grant programs, TURI has helped Massachusetts companies reduce the amount of toxic chemicals used in manufacturing processes by 41 percent.

For more information, go to http://umasslowell.edu/TURI_saved

“The Rivalry” at Inn & Conference Center

What: UMass Lowell is proud to present The Rivalry, a critically acclaimed play by Norman Corwin based on the 1858 debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas.

When: Thursday, Oct. 29, at 7 p.m.


Cost: Free!

How: To reserve seats, contact Barbara Nolan at (978) 934-4450 or Barbara_Nolan@uml.edu.

Background: This performance revives not just historical details of 1858, but also the national dialogue about the American character and system, which still rings true today. This production coincides with the bicentennial of the birth of President Lincoln and recollects his 1848 visit to Lowell, who, then a congressman was in the city to campaign for Zachary Taylor.
UMass Lowell Goes Global

University Brings International Education to the Next Level

It’s not your parents’ “study abroad” program. For decades, many college students have been spending a semester studying in distant lands for cultural enrichment, improved foreign language skills, personal development and, of course, fun.

Now, at UMass Lowell, study abroad is only one part of an effort to integrate the University with the world in a wide range of substantive ways.

Some examples:

- A new partnership between UMass Lowell and Queens University in Northern Ireland will see Lowell and Queens students surveying, excavating and cataloging sites in Ireland and Lowell to uncover clues about life during the Irish Famine.
- A leading research center in India, the Central Institute of Plastics Engineering Technology, has formed an alliance with UMass Lowell to conduct joint education and research.
- As part of formal agreement with Haifa University in Israel, Lowell and Haifa students can study for a new degree in peace studies and conflict management, managed by both universities.

And that’s just the beginning. Six virtual international centers have recently been formed by Provost Ahmed Abdelal, who has made it his mission to intensify the University’s commitment to international education and research.

“Today, it is critically important for our students to be informed, aware, experienced world citizens,” he says. “One in five jobs is linked to international trade and that percentage will likely rise. Also, for the economic strength and security of this nation as well as the future harmony of the world, we must educate students who understand different countries and cultures and who are able to collaborate in research, education and issues that affect us all.”

For more information, go to http://umasslowell.edu/agreement
Chancellor Hosts Annual Breakfast Forum

Chancellor Marty Meehan welcomed school district leaders from 25 communities this month to the third annual Chancellor’s Breakfast for Superintendents.

“I started this annual breakfast tradition when I became Chancellor to make it clear that partnerships with you and your teachers are central to our work here at UMass Lowell,” he told attendees.

In the past year, the Office of School Partnerships (OSP) was established to coordinate and support programs between all the colleges and public schools in the region.

Collaborative proposals between UMass Lowell and school systems this year won $4 million in grants from federal and state agencies and foundations—grants that support education in science, technology, engineering and math, dual enrollment courses and a new Teaching American History project.

Three panelists, who were introduced by David Troughton, superintendent of North Reading Public Schools, spoke about OSP accomplishments.

Chris Scott, superintendent of Lowell Public Schools, reviewed the model for comprehensive education in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Representing the eight school systems of the Teaching American History grant consortium was Susan Nicholson, assistant superintendent of Andover Public Schools. She described the close working relationship that develops between classroom teachers and academic researchers as they work side by side to develop the program.

Interim Dean Anita Greenwood of the Graduate School of Education told attendees, “Because you expressed concern about not having enough special education teachers, we developed a graduate certificate program so that teachers could develop the required competencies without having to immediately commit to a degree program. Similarly, our certificate program in teaching English language learners meets a need that you identified. … We listen and learn from each other, in order to bring quality education to school professionals.”

For more information, go to http://umasslowell.edu/superintendents