Meet the First Gens

Ilyssa DeLeon
the emerging humanitarian

Dandan (Lilly) Zheng
the resilient future financier

Nancy Vega
the fearless bibliophile

KEEPING THE PROMISE OF ACCESS

A Report on the Impact of Philanthropy

Spring 2017
Welcome to the first edition of Aspire, a new biannual report dedicated to the impact of philanthropy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This first issue illustrates how the generosity of alumni and friends carries forward the promise of access and opportunity to the next generation. We hope you are as inspired as we are by the fearless and resilient first-generation college students who shared their stories with us within these pages.

UMASS AMHERST MISSION
To provide an affordable and accessible education of high quality and to conduct programs of research and public service that advance knowledge and improve the lives of the people of the commonwealth, the nation, and the world.
The Center for International Education in the College of Education has fostered educational reforms worldwide with $97 million in grants for projects focused on research, policy making, and leadership. The center has successfully worked in 39 different countries, from sub-Saharan Africa to islands in the Caribbean, and provided opportunities for graduate degrees to nearly 500 students from 70 different nations. With generous donations from anonymous donors and campus contributions, the center moved last summer from an aging building across campus into the newly renovated Montague House. The retrofitted farmhouse has the charm of an 1840s home and 21st-century accoutrements and better serves students with its close proximity to the headquarters of the education college. The house, where one of the country’s oldest international education programs had its beginnings, has new offices for staff, faculty, and graduate students, as well as new conference and smaller meeting rooms.

Bridging International Differences
by Judith Cameron ’16G

Eighteen-year-old Dandan (Lilly) Zheng, a first-year student from China studying finance at the Isenberg School of Management, already knows the transformative power of education. Living in an orphanage in Beijing, she won a scholarship to an international high school where she earned top grades and learned about American, European, and different Asian cultures from her classmates. Her high school experience helped Zheng earn the Paul J. Carney Scholarship, created by Carney ’82 as a way to forge mutual understandings and respect between different nations, as well as other scholarships.

“Education is very important because it gives you a broad understanding of the world,” says Zheng. It is also a vehicle for upward social and economic mobility and creates opportunities to contribute to the common good. “Sometimes poverty robs away a lot of valuable things like confidence and positiveness. Education really helps you gain an understanding of your own values and helps you gain self-confidence,” she says.

Zheng has rounded out her grueling academic schedule with extracurricular activities—memberships in a number of Registered Student Organizations, such as the investment club at Isenberg, workouts at the campus recreation center, and trips to Boston. “I feel very lucky to be here on the Carney scholarship,” she says, “but at the same time, I feel a responsibility to try to study harder than anyone else.”
Holyoke, Massachusetts, is a city facing significant challenges, with high poverty and teen pregnancy rates and struggling public schools. But Holyoke is also a city of optimism and promise, with a young, passionate mayor, drops in crime and unemployment rates, and the expansion of jobs and services in high tech, the arts, entertainment, and higher education. Through these programs, alumni and friends are part of the city’s revitalization.

**Youth Writing Adventure**
The Western Massachusetts Writing Project (WMWP) wants youth to call themselves writers. With the support of gifts, WMWP brings 200 students, including those from Holyoke, to UMass Amherst for a Youth Writing Adventure. In this daylong program, students write short stories, collaborative scripts, poetry inspired by injustice, description-focused fiction, narratives for awareness and activism, and songs. Back at school, they polish the writing, and WMWP publishes it in an anthology. Through the program, WMWP hopes the students develop a passion for writing as they imagine themselves attending college.

Research shows that while the formulaic approach to writing that students practice in school helps students pass standardized tests, it doesn’t lead to proficient or advanced-level achievements. When students make choices about their work, write for an audience, and publish the results, they begin to see themselves as writers, which can make a significant difference in their academic success. Equally important: youth love the adventure.

umass.edu/wmwp/

**STEM Coach**
In the fall of 2016, graduate students at UMass Amherst launched a program—not only to encourage girls in Holyoke to dream of college and careers—but to dream specifically of careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. With financial support from Women for UMass Amherst, STEM Coach, in partnership with Girls, Inc. of Holyoke, was launched by the UMass student chapter of Boston Women in Transportation. Girls, Inc. is a well-established national organization that aids girls in reaching their full potential, through academic support, college readiness, and leadership training.

Graduate students travel each week to Girls, Inc. to tutor middle and high school girls and establish mentoring relationships. With STEM Coach, graduate students help the girls develop the knowledge, confidence, and skills they need to embark on higher education, connect their classroom learning to careers, and learn to advocate for themselves as they make their career dreams a reality.

umass.edu/wfum/

**Hear Our Stories**
As the screen scrolls through photos and drawings, the young mother speaks in a voice-over: “If you ask me, ‘Where are you now?’ I will say, ‘I’m getting my GED at The Care Center. . . I’m so excited for what’s to come in my life. My future is still being written.’” The storyteller is Dashira (pictured above), who participated in “Hear Our Stories: Diasporic Youth for Sexual Rights and Justice.” Led by UMass Health Promotion and Policy Professor Aline Gubrium and Anthropology Professor Elizabeth Krause, “Hear Our Stories” examines the social inequality experienced by young mothers in Holyoke through digital storytelling in order to reframe public conversations about teen parenting and to work with women on becoming advocate leaders. The Ford Foundation provided generous support for the program. “Hear Our Stories” shows young parents who are resilient, proud, capable caregivers, and it gives these often silenced women a voice.

umass.edu/hearourstories/

City of Promise

by Megan Rubiner Zinn
For Nancy Vega ’18, books provided a refuge and sparked an extraordinary academic career. After attending Bunker Hill Community College, the Boston native found in the MassTransfer and Honors-to-Honors programs the most advantageous path to achieving her dreams while obtaining economic stability. The heroine of her own adventure story, the 23-year-old English major is undaunted by a full course load, an internship, two jobs, and, oh yeah, that honors thesis.
The Power of Community

Cameron Kilcoyne and Ilyssa DeLeon strike up a conversation about all they have in common. Both from Springfield, Massachusetts, they are first-generation college students with siblings who are alumni. They also are recipients of Community Scholarships, a program begun in 2014 for students with financial need, including first-generation students and those from underrepresented groups. Sixty percent of students qualify for need-based aid, and one in four students are eligible for Pell grants, the federal program for students from low-income families.

Ilyssa DeLeon ’19
School of Public Health and Health Sciences
Age 20
Major Public Health
Most Challenging Course Introduction to Linguistic Theory with Alice Harris
Favorite Diversions Volunteering, in particular Alternative Spring Break for flood relief in Louisiana, and Zumba class
Aspiration Merging interests in volunteering and the well-being of others into a career
“My family is from Puerto Rico. At that time, they went straight out of high school to jobs. They’re encouraging me because they want for me what they couldn’t have.”

Cameron Kilcoyne ’17
College of Natural Sciences
Age 22
Major Biochemistry and Molecular Biology
Most Challenging Course Contemporary Native Americans of the Northeast with Jean Forward
Favorite Diversions Club Swim Team, hikes with the Outing Club, and lectures about diversity
Aspiration PhD in chemistry
“My dad lost two jobs. He is an OR nurse now and just got his RN degree. He always pushed for us to get an education so we would not have to worry as much about jobs.”

COMMUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS
204 donors
$879,792 raised

MATTHEW CAVANAUGH
The Year in Generosity

With our donors, we improved public safety during dangerous storms, provided cancer survivors greater control over their health, and overcame a major barrier for students struggling to pay for their textbooks. That’s just the beginning. Here’s a look at how donors had a hand in advancements across campus:

C.A.M.P. Opportunity
We fostered a more inclusive and diverse workforce through a free, weeklong experience for high school students underrepresented in higher education, which included lectures, hands-on activities, and visits to businesses. The Isenberg School of Management’s Careers in Accounting and Management Program is funded in part by generous leadership gifts from Richard B. and Susan J. Gulman, Margery J. and Mark Piercey, and Scott B. and Melissa Kaplowitch.

Outstanding Performers
Acclaimed actors Rob Corddry ’93 (left), Bill Pullman ’80G, ’08Hon, his wife, Tamara Hurwitz Pullman ’81 (center), and Jeffrey Donovan ’91 created the first endowed scholarship that supports promising careers in acting, named in honor of their mentor, Professor Emeritus Ed Golden (right).

Health Equity
We advanced health equity in the four counties. The School of Public Health and Health Sciences’s 2016 Western Massachusetts Health Equity Summit brought more than 250 leaders together to address food insecurity, institutional racism, health literacy, public policies, and community research.

Lifesaving Tool Kit
We designed a lifesaving tool kit for breast cancer survivors. The tool kits are under development by an interdisciplinary team led by College of Nursing Professor Rachel Walker with a grant from the Susan G. Komen foundation for breast cancer research.

COURTESY OF BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE LIBRARY
BILYANA DIMITROVA
JOHN SOLEM

Migration Mystery
We analyzed more than 150,000 historical radar images to create maps of spring bird migration over the Gulf Coast during a period of eight years. A gift to the College of Information and Computer Sciences supports Daniel Sheldon’s research, which applies novel machine techniques to large-scale environmental data.

Jump-Starting Safety
We improved human safety during severe weather. We jump-started the commercialization of advanced weather sensing networks that provide the public with critical early detection with a successful $1 million challenge fund gift from Jerome Paros ’60 to the Engineering Research Center for Collaborative Adaptive Sensing of the Atmosphere, which resulted in $2 million in new resources.

Provoking Minds
A research trip to Quebec, Canada, brought course material to life for students taking a senior seminar on health and health inequality in the United States, offered by Commonwealth Honors College. Political Science Professor Dean Robinson, who led the Quebec trip, is developing and expanding innovative courses with faculty funds made possible by FleetBoston Financial (now Bank of America).

Open Resources
We traded in traditional textbooks for free, open resources in 100 courses by helping faculty reimagine teaching materials. Gifts encouraged this UMass Amherst Libraries initiative that removes an obstacle for low- and middle-income students struggling to pay for books.

Like Father Like Son
From a humble background, the late Wilmer D. Barrett ’34 (above) became an entrepreneur and philanthropist, establishing the Department of Polymer Science and Engineering’s first faculty endowment. Twenty-four years later, in 2016, son Robert K. Barrett expanded this remarkable philanthropic legacy by creating the department’s second professorship.

The Year in Generosity

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The University of Massachusetts Amherst Foundation, an independent 501(c)3 corporation, leads and supports private fund-raising on behalf of faculty, staff, students, and friends of the Amherst campus.

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**Offices**

- 12 aspirant spring 2017
- Commitment totals include new pledges, cash, in-kind gifts, and estate giving.
During “I Love UMass Day,” held on February 15, 2017, students, including senior Deidre Jocus ’17, penned more than 700 thank-you notes to generous university donors.