The purpose of Aspire is to convey the impact of philanthropy on the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This publication by the University of Massachusetts Amherst Foundation reflects our commitment to transparency as well as our sincere appreciation for those who give generously to the university through their service and philanthropy.

For a PDF version of this publication, see umass.edu/aspire.

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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.

ON THE COVER
Shiri Dori-Hacohen ’15G, ’17PhD sheds light on the nature of controversy on the web and opens the door to more rigorous, fact-based handling of conflict. Read the story on page 4. Photo by Matthew Cavanaugh.

267,268
Living alumni

2,888
51%
of alumni live in Massachusetts

54,241
3,585
28%
of the Class of 2017 made a gift
Alumni who made a gift for 5 years or more
Alumni who made their first gift

11,808,944
Total amount donated by alumni

Fiscal 2017 numbers
All the Difference in the World

In response to the question, “What difference does my gift make?” we turned to these four professors and one student for answers. Armed with gutsy idealism and bold imagination, these researchers and those who support their efforts are tackling big global challenges. Last year, close to $20 million in gifts supported research and programs at UMass Amherst (see chart on page 12). From the $25 gift dedicated to saving sea turtles to the $1.4 million gift designed to give every girl and woman around the globe control of her own destiny, philanthropy is at work in brilliant ways. Spoiler alert: get ready to be amused, empowered, and perhaps even brought to tears.

Due to their lack of water, the villagers work together and share the water they have. Never before in my life had I seen a group of people so grateful for something seemingly so simple: drinkable water.”

—Akhileshwar Borra

The United Nations estimates 40% of sub-Saharan Africa lacks access to clean and reliable water. The shortage contributes to high rates of disease and poverty.

STUDENTS IMPROVE LIVES, A VILLAGE AT A TIME

IN THREE AFRICAN VILLAGES, children now regularly attend school, disease is reduced, and economic growth has increased—improvements that came after University of Massachusetts Amherst engineering students provided access to clean water. For the last 10 years, the engineering students and faculty have worked to bring potable and yearlong water supplies to two villages in Kenya and one in Ghana. Their work, part of the UMass Amherst chapter of Engineers Without Borders, may be a metaphorical drop in the bucket for the water-scarce continent, but to the villagers, clean and sustainable water has dramatically improved their lives. Children are no longer burdened with daily treks of more than a mile for water. Health clinics shuttered due to inadequate water supplies now operate year-round. With reliable access to water, farmers can now cultivate a mango hybrid that brings more profit than other types of the fruit. “The biggest motivator for us is helping people,” says Akhileshwar Borra ’18, president of the chapter. Over the decade, the students have overseen the drilling of wells, the installation of water pumps and a rain catchment system, and have educated villagers on how to avoid contaminating the water. “We have provided water where there was none,” notes John Tobiason, an engineering faculty member and founding member of the chapter. The students receive no academic credit and must raise funds for travel expenses and equipment. They make two trips per year, with an estimated cost of $50,000, funded by corporate sponsors and crowdfunding campaigns. The university’s chapter of EWB has a loyal following of alumni and friends who have generously supported it for years.

“The hope is that if we can understand conflict better, then we can take steps toward resolution.”
—Shiri Dori-Hacohen

Dori-Hacohen worked with CICS Professor James Allan, an expert in intelligent information retrieval, and Myungha Jang '18, a PhD student in information and computer sciences, on the research used to identify and better understand contentious and trending topics. Some of those topics are the 2016 U.S. elections, gun control, climate change, and disputed medical treatments. They found that other subjects, such as the dress debate, are highly contentious but of low importance to people (see graphic).

Dori-Hacohen is now developing and testing the computational method through the company she founded, AuCoDe, and adapting it to the financial sector, where online events might potentially be used to predict stock movement. The commercial value of Dori-Hacohen’s work earned her a first-place award in last year’s UMass Amherst Innovation Challenge and $35,000 in start-up funding. This annual event is one of the programs of the Berthiaume Center for Entrepreneurship, established in 2014 by a gift to the Isenberg School of Management from Douglas ‘71 and Diana Berthiaume. Funds awarded as prizes to start-up entrepreneurs via the Innovation Challenge are provided through philanthropic gifts from alumni and business professionals.

UNDERSTANDING CONTROVERSY
SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BECOME AN IMPORTANT NEW tool of grassroots democracy, but at the same time, has hardened political and cultural divides. With all of the controversy playing out in the Twitterverse each day, it is hard to imagine social media disputes turning more rigorous, fact-driven, or civil. But, it’s that very possibility of finding resolutions for contentious issues that drove college of Information and Computer Sciences (CICS) doctoral student Shiri Dori-Hacohen ‘15G, ‘17PhD to develop an algorithm that detects, and potentially predicts, controversy on the web. The research could also be used to offer visitors opposing viewpoints.

It took the analysis of 100 million tweets to define the nature of controversy.

ART AND SCIENCE FOR SAVING SEA TURTLES
MEET THE BEASTCAM: AN ingenious device that produces stunning 3-D photographs for use in sea turtle education and conservation and to digitally preserve the charismatic sea creatures. The octopus-like device, loaded with 30 cameras set off by a wireless trigger, is the brainchild of Duncan Irschick, a University of Massachusetts Amherst biology professor, and his undergraduate students in the College of Natural Sciences.

Motivated by the imminent threat of the turtles’ demise, Irschick plans to use the Beastcam’s photogrammetry technology to create art to inspire save-the-sea-turtles campaigns and give scientists a new tool to study the manners that swam the oceans when dinosaurs roamed the earth. His quest to add the sea turtles to his digital Noah’s ark started in June in Florida and will take him to Australia, the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Greece, and Texas.

Through crowdfunding, alumni and friends have contributed $4,200 for the sea turtle project. “Essentially, we are saying we are so worried about these animals that we are taking the trouble to go around the world and preserve them digitally so future generations can know them,” says Irschick. Researchers will be looking at unlocking secrets of the enigmatic sea turtles, the best navigators in the animal kingdom, by studying their anatomy and migratory patterns.
The statistics are themselves shocking, saddening, and alarming—and then you learn about the heartbreaking human experience and what mass incarceration does to families and communities.

—Marla Miller

The U.S. in the Age of Mass Incarceration: A Spotlight on our Carceral Crisis

Through a series of public and community events, UMass Amherst historians led a comprehensive examination of mass incarceration, in particular the rising imprisonment of women and the deep and far-reaching ways the carceral state affects communities. “The U.S. in the Age of Mass Incarceration,” the 2016–17 topic of the Feinberg Family Distinguished Lecture Series, reached more than 3,000 people in western Massachusetts through two dozen lectures, panel discussions, bilingual museum and art gallery exhibits, workshops, university courses, and performances.

For students, staff, faculty, and community members, the seventh Feinberg series raised awareness about many subjects, including the history of women’s incarceration in Massachusetts—home to one of the oldest, and among the newest, women’s prisons and jails in the country. Other issues reviewed were migrant detention and the imprisoned laborers who produce American flags, institutional furniture, and other products. “One of the things participants learned is how we are all complicit in the system. It’s a real eye-opener,” says Marla Miller, professor of history and director of the Public History Program. Miller, Jessica Johnson, outreach and community engagement director, and Jennifer Nye, lecturer in law and social justice, steered the year-long series.

These interdisciplinary programs—their impact extended by an associated initiative for K–12 teachers and free transportation between campus and nearby cities—were made possible by Kenneth Feinberg ‘67, who endowed the biennial series. The series also stood out for its collaboration with national and community-based organizations and activists. “Without the generosity of Ken Feinberg, we would not be able to dig as deeply or have as sustained conversations around these urgent topics,” notes Miller.

This serving spoon inscribed with “Jail” was used at the Union Street Jail (1851–1985) in Northampton, Massachusetts, and is from the collection of Historic Northampton, one of four Massachusetts museums, galleries, and libraries that joined with the UMass Amherst Public History Program to present exhibitions that explored the history of incarceration.

120 Million More

The goal of the Global Partnership Family Planning 2020 or “FP2020” is ambitious and lifesaving: provide 120 million more women and girls around the world with access to contraceptives by 2020. Sexual and reproductive rights and health services for girls and women improve quality of life, prevent maternal and newborn deaths, and alleviate poverty.

UMass Amherst received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop new statistical methods and tools for monitoring family planning indicators including contraceptives, which are critical to meeting the goal of FP2020. The grant will be used to explore and analyze family planning and contraceptive use in 69 of the world’s poorest countries. A focus of the research by biostatistician and School of Public Health and Health Sciences faculty member Leontine Alkema is to develop a statistical model for subnational analysis to detect disparities in access to family planning services within a particular area. Alkema’s involvement in the estimation of the family planning indicators started with the creation of a statistical model to produce national-level estimates for all countries in the world in collaboration with the United Nations Population Division.

“This work will help move toward the goal of providing every woman with access to the contraceptive method of her choice.”

—Leontine Alkema

Last year, an estimated 204 million women worldwide had an unmet need for modern contraceptive methods. For comparison, the entire population of women in the U.S. is 162 million.
“I received an ‘adjusted financial statement’ from UMass Amherst. I read it and discovered that no loans were necessary because of the Higher Hopes Fund. I cried for a bit because I finally got a chance to leave Chelsea (Massachusetts). I cried because someone gave me a chance. And I cried at the irony of receiving a full scholarship I never applied for.”

—Ugjesa Cvjetan ‘16

Students don’t apply for the Higher Hopes scholarship. The scholarship targets first-generation college students and those from Massachusetts high schools where fewer than 45 percent of graduates attend four-year colleges.
WITH ORANGE-YELLOW FLAMES AND violet embers, Caitlin Cherry paints her first encounter with the colonial architecture characteristic of western Massachusetts and New England. The up-and-coming artist created a series of eight works in residency this past spring at the University Museum of Contemporary Art (UMCA), based on her first experiments with the art of printmaking.

Not yet 30, the Brooklyn-based artist has already made a name for herself and is best known for her hybrid of painting and sculptural installation. To understand Cherry’s work is to peel away the layers of her creative process. During her residency, Cherry began by creating small architectural maquettes, or 3-D representations, made of paper and metal. Working in collaboration with the Department of Art’s Printmaking Studio, Cherry altered digital photos of the maquettes creating inkjet prints.

Cherry’s visit was made possible through a gift by the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation and from the Class of 1961 Artists Residency Program fund. The mission of the Artists Residency Program is to enliven the cultural life of campus, enhance educational opportunities, and to bring artists together with a wide spectrum of people: students, faculty, and the public. Considered a teaching museum of UMass Amherst, UMCA has a permanent collection valued at approximately $5 million that consists almost entirely of donated works. The five prints Cherry donated from the series she created at UMass Amherst are valued at $11,000.

Caitlin Cherry
Inferno Pipeline Punch, 2017.

A Teaching Museum

I volunteered over the summer with after-school sports programs in Costa Rica with US-based aid foundation La Casa de los Niños because of the College of Humanities and Fine Arts’ Study Abroad Scholarship.

Stephanie Wasser ’75 created the scholarship.

The Kenneth O’Brien Scholarship is special to me. It’s named after “Coach OB” and I know him personally.

Peter ’76 and Denise ’79 Bloom established the scholarship for honors students participating in non-revenue generating sports.

“Pizza and Prof” nights highlight two of my favorite things about Commonwealth Honors College: the sense of community and the amazingly talented professors.

Commonwealth Honors College’s living and learning residential facilities, including programs such as “Pizza and Prof” nights, were supported by philanthropy.

The peer writing coaches in the Writing Center are awesome. I go to the Writing Center three or more times throughout the process of writing one paper.

The most visited spot on campus, the library’s 30,000-square-foot Learning Commons, which includes the Writing Center, serves as a model for innovative and collaborative design and is supported by gifts.

I love the library’s Digital Media Lab. I created a public-service video ad for my Social Diversity in Education course.

Gifts from Friends of the Library sustain the Digital Media Lab, a state-of-art production space for students working on multimedia and 3-D printing.

T-Mobile CEO John Legere ’80 and his fellow track and field teammates funded the scoreboard.

Peter ’78 and Denise ’79 Bloom established the scholarship for honors students participating in non-revenue generating sports.

Stephanie Wasser ’75 created the scholarship.

I was excited to go to UMass because of the support and involvement of its alumni. I watched one of the track meets when a new digital scoreboard was dedicated.

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T-Mobile CEO John Legere ’80 and his fellow track and field teammates funded the scoreboard.

There’s no better way to illustrate how gifts fuel a high-quality education than through the eyes of Atlantic-10 athlete Brook Hansel ’19, whose passion and hard work earned her a spot as the captain of the cross country and track and field teams. Here’s a look at how gifts help this scholar-athlete with a near 4.0 GPA to run her own race.
Thank You

54,241

alumni and friends made a gift for 5 years or more