UMASS

The Magazine of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Spring 2023

HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

> FROM DEATH TO LIFE
> FIXING COFFEE

CONTENTS

VOLUME 27 NO. 2 SPRING 2023

Did you know there is a right way to climb trees? Well, if you're an arborist, there is. As part of the Stockbridge School of Agriculture's two-year arboriculture and community forest management program, students learn how to use the tools pictured here to safely climb and prune trees—just one of many skills they learn for keeping trees healthy and the community safe. No kit is complete without a harness, helmet, and protective eyewear.

Established in 1893, the program is the oldest of its kind in the United States and continues to be an industry leader in arboriculture research and training to this day.

— Alexis Ali

Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson

LONG READS >

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On the cover:
Varshini Prakash '15, co-founder and executive director of the Sunrise Movement, summons collective will to combat climate change. Story on page 26.
Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson

ONLINE

Campus like you've never seen it before—and more stories on Extra Credit: umass.edu/magazine/extra

FRI 11:24AM> MEADOW, KINNEY CENTER FOR RENAISSANCE STUDIES

UMass Grounds Services hosted several new—and woolly—faces when a flock of sheep from the Hadley Farm sustainably "mowed" the meadow behind the Renaissance Center in September. This event, along with one held in April 2022 near the Business Innovation Hub, was organized by Sustainable EweMass, a group of professors and students across departments working to provoke questions about sustainability and land use. "The way we manage our lands is a reflection of our values," says professor Britt Crow-Miller of the group. She hopes these green grazers are just the start of nurturing a more sustainable campus ecosystem, for "the health of our campus community—both our ecological community and our human community."

—Ari Jewell

Photo: John Solem

ONLINE

More about this flock of fluffy lawn mowers: umass.edu/magazine/ewemass

Photo: Lori Shine '04MFA

SUBTLE SUPERPOWERS

What's most remarkable about the front door of Sunrise Movement co-founder Varshini Prakash's apartment building is just how *unremarkable* it seems. Standing on the sidewalk in a middle-class Boston neighborhood (dry cleaner, gelato shop, overpass), we rang the bell and Prakash opened the scuffed white door at the top of the stairs with a warm smile, welcoming our photography crew into her apartment and introducing us to her enthusiastic dog. Though she's just turning 30, Prakash has been one of the most vocal—and successful—advocates for policies to combat climate change. In less than a decade, Sunrise has pushed the climate emergency into the public conversation and won the largest legislative victory yet for the cause: the Inflation Reduction Act, passed in 2022, allocating $369 billion for the fight.

How amorphous and intimidating change can seem, but our visit with Prakash reminds us that it's in human hands to make. The huge existential threat of climate change isn't going to solve itself; the work is being tackled by real people, including this 5-foot-tall daughter of immigrants who wouldn't accept that there was nothing she could do about it and came to UMass determined to learn and build the foundation of a movement.

We're proud that so many of our alumni, like Prakash, are dedicating their educations—and entire lives—to service for the greater good. Solutions to some of the scariest problems of our moment can be found in unlikely places, including our own kitchen tables, classrooms, and town squares. Read on for more stories of UMass ingenuity and progress, as well as some practical tools we can all use to make a difference.

Happy reading,
Candice Pinault Novak, Editor
Lori Shine '04MFA,
Managing Editor

HAVE A STORY IDEA?

Scan this QR code with your smartphone to drop us a note:

Rachel Bukoski '12
@garlic_lust UMass Homecoming 2022 & Sophie's first UMass football game! (Unless you count homecoming last year when she decided it was time to enter the world and my water broke two hours after we got home 🥴) So glad baby number 2 decided today was not his day 😅

Jackie Brousseau-Pereira '00MPA
@dean_jackie_sbs_umass
Sid Ferreira and I are the current co-chairs of the UMass Amherst Community Campaign. That means we are encouraging everyone who works at UMass to give to their favorite community organizations and nonprofits through this easy to use process.
Apparently, as co-chairs, we are also required to wear matching outfits at all times!

UMass Student Farm
@umass_student_farm
thanks for all the love this season! crew of '22 signing off 🍂🌱

Suzette Marie Martin
@szttmrtn Apocalypse. Myth. Science. The Expulsion from Eden, version 2. [. . .] I will be continuing this series for a solo show at the Kinney center for Interdisciplinary Renaissance Studies, UMass Amherst.

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FIXING COFFEE

THE PATH TO SUSTAINABLE BEANS, LANDS, AND LIVES

BY ALEXIS ALI PHOTOS BY LISA BETH ANDERSON

Armed with my second cup of coffee for the day, I feel ready to dig into the story of these magic beans—but also a little hesitant. Is it the caffeine making me feel anxious, or does this feeling come from just how problematic the global supply chain can be for the beloved beverage enjoyed daily by roughly two-thirds of Americans?

Coffee beans are among the most traded commodities in the world, so the impact this market has on the planet—and the people living on it—is significant. And in the next 30 years, demand for coffee is expected to *double*.

Fortunately, researchers and coffee lovers saw this particular blend of issues brewing years ago and have come together to let their ideas percolate. UMass professors Timothy Randhir and David King, along with their graduate students, are in phase one of their five-year project to create a new system for the sustainable production of coffee, with funding from a $1 million National Science Foundation grant and several collaborating universities.

"Coffee production has impacts on poverty, migration, and youth and female empowerment—all those things are embedded in the supply chain, which we don't see when we look at a cup of coffee," Randhir explains. Because the issues stemming from the conventional coffee supply chain are complex and systemic, Randhir and King have set out to augment the Multiscale Ecosystem Framework developed by Randhir to approach these issues on many fronts. In collaboration with experts from multiple disciplines, this project will converge and integrate innovative systems in biology, economics, and geology (just to name a few), to rebalance the needs of ecosystems, farmers, and coffee drinkers.

David Murillo Bustillo '26PhD, a graduate student on the research team, has documented wildlife on Honduran coffee farms for Randhir and King's project

David Murillo Bustillo '26PhD, faculty members David King and Timothy Randhir, Department of Environmental Conservation

ECO UNFRIENDLY

To keep coffee lovers well stocked, coffee production has wiped out huge swaths of forested areas. A natural reaction may be to intentionally buy from small farms. They have to be better, right? Well, you probably already do; about 70% of the world's coffee is grown on small-scale farms. But depending on the growers' *method* of farming, the impact can be pretty similar to larger plantations. For the sun-grown coffee method, large tracts of land are completely cleared of native plant life, which are then replaced by coffee shrubs. This method provides the highest amount of sellable beans because the crops can be planted more densely. However, the method requires a large amount of pesticides, completely disrupting the local ecosystem and further damaging the land.

While the shade-grown method preserves some of the forests around the plantation, important features of more mature habitats are often removed, including vines, flowering plants, and larger trees, forcing many animal species to go elsewhere for survival.

Both methods are used in Central America, where most countries depend on coffee exports. Over the past two decades, Honduras in particular has become an ever-increasing supplier of the world coffee market and is now the fifth-largest producer globally. King regularly conducts research in the Yoro region of the country and explains, "The pressure on the forests of Honduras is readily apparent to anyone who has spent any time in the country. A forest patch we pass by one year is converted to coffee the next. The trees at a bird survey point established in prior years are reduced to muddy stumps. Entire mountainsides that were cloud forests are now orderly rows of coffee."

In addition to wildlife habitat loss, the removal of native plants both in sun-grown and shade-grown methods has led to a dramatic reduction in the carbon sequestration that the rainforest can provide, allowing greater carbon emissions into the Earth's atmosphere.

While the project is continuing to gather data, the researchers have already identified a potential land-use solution to test: the integrated open canopy (IOC) model. In IOCs, farmers take a plot of forested area, clear the middle of it, and plant their coffee, leaving a border of untouched tropical forest around it. The forest acts as a protective barrier against leaf rust—an airborne fungus whose spores are spread by wind over long distances, destroying crops—while also encouraging more natural pollination and maintaining the natural habitat for local wildlife.

FAIR-TRADE FOLLY

Unfortunately, farmers face daunting economic sustainability issues, too. Most small coffee farms are in impoverished areas and the supply chain is designed to keep it that way. Market volatility for coffee is high, making farmers' income incredibly variable from year to year. You may be thinking to yourself, "Hey, my Starbucks drink was $5 this morning! Now you're telling me that's not enough?" Yes, and here's why: As with most food and drink products, these markups in price come along later in the supply chain and the profits do not trickle back down to the producers themselves. Often, farmers make only cents on the dollar, which, in some cases, is just barely enough to cover their production costs, leaving nothing for them to live on.

Because there is so little profit going back to the farmers, they often have to depend on cheap labor to make ends meet—and there is no cheaper labor force than underage workers. Kids in Honduras and from many coffee-producing countries across the area are regularly taken out of school to work, limiting their opportunities for academic pursuits and stagnating the education that locals receive generation after generation. In the direst situations, families will pack it in and migrate to the cities to find other employment, fragmenting social networks.

Rather than operating on assumptions or anecdotes, researchers are carefully collecting data to develop and test workable solutions for these complex issues, exploring how local and global conditions impact environmental, social, and economic sustainability on individual farms and in nearby communities. To do this, doctoral candidate Ana Quinonez Camarillo and a team of local researchers started by traveling from farm to farm throughout the Yoro Biological Corridor in Honduras to talk to growers about their systems, income, and ability to invest in sustainability.

MANIFESTING A BETTER FUTURE—ONE CUP AT A TIME

Lisbeth Alicia Pacheco-Palencia '14MBA has been drinking café con leche since she was a child growing up in Guatemala. Decades later, her love of coffee has only grown—now combined inseparably with her passion to give back to those who grow the beans. Along with partner Jolian Rios, Pacheco-Palencia founded Ethos Roasters in 2016, a company that works with small farmer cooperatives, providing them with economic opportunities and helping them grow their business with sustainability in mind.

"We started Ethos in 2016, with the mission to champion life-changing prices for small farmers," Pacheco-Palencia says. "We source the absolute best coffees from our small farmers, at prices that allow them to send all their kids to school (instead of having them work at the farms), invest in their quality and green coffee-processing capabilities, and commit to them long-term so there's a powerful, reliable source of income that incentivizes them to raise their own bar on quality and sustainability every year."

Camarillo was encouraged by their initial survey of 600 farmers. "I am very excited about the openness we encountered with most coffee farmers," she says. "Throughout the process, we trained nine locals to help us." Once all the baseline data points are collected, this interdisciplinary team will move on to phase two—working to design, test, and implement new systems for local farmers that will make their plantations more environmentally, socially, and economically friendly.

The team also plans to make a social impact by generating training and employment opportunities and focusing on gender equality. Education programs for training in specialized practices, micro-loans for female-owned farms, and the targeted hiring of women are just a few of the initiatives under development. However, Randhir and King are already taking every opportunity to incorporate these goals even in the early stages of this project. He explains, "We are training young emerging researchers, so that they can take on this legacy of the sustainability practices we are developing and bring it back to their home country in some sort of leadership role either as academics, working with companies, or even creating nonprofits."

CLEANER DIRT

The data being gathered now will help write a recipe for sustainable success for farmers to improve not only the quality of their products but also the quality of their lives.

This research project's success is predicated on the idea that the changes in one area of sustainability will support the others. By rehabilitating local biodiversity, providing clean water, using coffee pulps to create nutrient-rich fertilizer, sequestering carbon emissions, and implementing sustainable methods for coffee processing, farmers can protect their crops and land while cashing in on renewable energy credits from the government. With a higher income that is less dependent on market volatility, farmers can pay higher wages and become less dependent on cheap untrained labor, and at the same time afford to invest in more sustainable equipment.

Over the next four years, this team has its work cut out for it in the Yoro Biological Corridor—identifying issues within the researchers' individual specialties and then using that knowledge to develop integrated systems that provide realistic and impactful solutions. King says, "It is good to be working with people who share in a vision of a more balanced paradigm."

By filling this huge knowledge gap in sustainable food systems on a micro scale, King and Randhir hope to formulate a scalable model applicable to any size farm that is usable for all products. If they pull this off, it would be a global game changer.

Learn more about making sustainable coffee choices: umass.edu/magazine/coffee

Photo: John Solem

FLOCKING TOGETHER

A casual observer walking past on a sunny Saturday might be stunned by the sight: dozens of performers wearing bright flamingo-shaped pool floats zigzagging across the Metawampe lawn. *What's going on with this witty pink flash mob?!*

Provoking that question is just what *Flamingo Murmuration* is all about. Assistant Professor of Scenic Design Anya Klepikov and graduate student Rudy Ramirez '25MFA collaborated on the performance inspired by starling murmurations—when huge groups of the small birds move together as one large mass. Klepikov says, "There's whimsy and delight to be found ... but there's a thoughtful inquiry for audiences to ponder as they watch: *Are we humans capable of acting in concert for our evolutionary benefit?*" As we flock together, we might just find our common ground.

—Lori Shine '04MFA

Video of the murmuration and more of the team's collaborations: umass.edu/magazine/flamingo

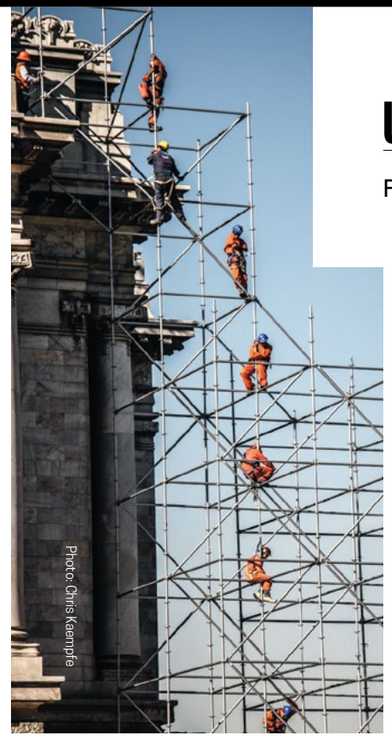


Photo: Chris Kaempfe

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Fighting wage theft and tax fraud

A recent study by the UMass Amherst Labor Center provides evidence that wage theft and tax fraud are business as usual for much of the residential construction industry in Massachusetts. Each year, the center discovered, as many as 1.2 million workers are "off the books" and another 300,000 are illegally classified as independent contractors. In this model, workers—many in precarious financial situations—lack health care and benefits, work overtime for no pay, and receive no workers' compensation or paid leave. And the costs to state and federal taxpayers add up to an estimated $2.6 billion a year.

The findings are part of an ongoing effort by the center as well as UMass unions and alumni leaders to help cities and towns in Massachusetts put teeth into existing wage theft protections. "The goal is to build on existing local laws to create statewide legislation," says Eve Weinbaum, associate professor of labor studies and a former director of the center.

Weinbaum says this study, and the center itself—known nationally for placing an emphasis on racial, social, and economic justice—seeks to expose information with the aim of promoting "what every worker deserves—fair and equitable treatment."

—Sally Parker

SACRED SMOKE

On many college campuses, burning candles, incense, or other items is restricted due to fire safety regulations. But what if those activities are part of a spiritual practice? A new policy at UMass seeks to balance safety concerns with religious respect—and offers a blueprint for how other places of learning can be more inclusive.

The Policy for the Burning of Material Offerings for Ceremonial, Cultural, Traditional, or Religious Observance is more colloquially known as the Smudging Policy—a reference to the practice common among Native and Indigenous communities that links smoke with spirituality through the burning of botanicals, or medicines. The UMass Native Advisory Council worked with the university's Office of Environmental Health & Safety to create the new guidance, which Assistant Vice Chancellor for Shared Services and Native Advisory Council Co-Chair Sara Littlecrow-Russell says is likely to be "the most inclusive" in the country. The policy supports not only Native and Indigenous students, faculty, and staff but also Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, and other campus community members who burn incense or other materials as part of a spiritual practice.

"A lot of institutions talk about inclusion but have policies that create barriers for people to engage in practices of cultural tradition and well-being," says Littlecrow-Russell. "This policy is an explicit statement that UMass Amherst is different."

—Heather Kamins

> Hear more about this policy from the people who helped shape it: umass.edu/magazine/smudging

SHORT READ >

A MAN WITH MOMENTUM

Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy's legacy was defined by growth, excellence—and community

After more than a decade at the helm of UMass's flagship university, it is difficult to imagine the Amherst campus without Kumble R. Subbaswamy's near-ubiquitous presence—and we've got the Swamy selfies to prove it. This summer, the beloved chancellor bids a fond farewell. He leaves behind a staggering legacy of institutional accomplishments and growth, and a trove of fond personal memories. Saying goodbye seems too hard, Swamy, so we'll simply say: We couldn't have done it without you.

> Chancellor Subbaswamy's impact was so sweeping there aren't enough pages to portray the full scope, but for highlights from his rich tenure we offer this: umass.edu/magazine/legacy

CLAIMING A MARK OF ACHIEVEMENT AND PRIDE

BY SLOANE VANDA '12 PHOTOS BY LISA BETH ANDERSON

LISA MODENOS '02MA, '10PHD
SENIOR LECTURER, UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS

"T-SHIRTS ARE JUST FOR STUDENTS, sorry," a staffer at the national conference said, surveying a group of University Without Walls students alongside senior lecturer Lisa Modenos '02MA, '10PhD. Even at a conference for first-generation students, her students were facing stigma at the registration table. "I had to explain that the participants were indeed students—nontraditional in age, obviously," Modenos recalls. Indeed, nearly 25% of today's UMass Amherst undergraduates are first-generation college students, defined by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators as students whose parents have not yet earned a bachelor's degree.

Modenos herself was the first in her family to get a degree—in her case, three. "Going from GED to PhD was not easy, but I didn't lose who I was prior to earning that PhD," she says. A native of Queens, New York, Modenos has published about the *grit* of first-generation (or first-gen) students being overrated. Rather than undermining the reality that first-gen students have to work harder—and oftentimes longer—than their peers, she intends to highlight the systemic nature of their experience. "The idea is not to say, 'First-gen students, just be a little *grittier*,'" she explains, noting that while increased programming and resources around first-gen status is a positive, "it just goes to show that academia was not built for us." Modenos really does emphasize the *us*, often sharing her personal story to help attend to what she describes as students' long-held shame. In sharing her own experience working retail and food service jobs for almost a decade before returning to school, she has seen students realize that their prior unsuccessful college days were more about a lack of resources than some internal deficit. "So many carry the baggage of failure that they internalized for years, but when they learn more about first-generation experiences, see that they weren't—and aren't—alone, and recognize their own knowledge and strengths, it can be transformative."

UMass has mainstreamed support for this resilient demographic. Over the years, the university has acted as a springboard for so many, and the faces of first-gen students are varied, resilient, and more empowered than ever.

SHANAZI JACKSON '23

NUTRITION MAJOR

AT COMMENCEMENT 2023, Shanazi Jackson is slated to be the first of 13 grandchildren in her family to graduate from college. Her grandparents came to the United States from the Caribbean. The nutrition major has transferred schools twice in her collegiate career, with UMass being her third campus experience. Along that journey to Amherst, Jackson was motivated by her younger siblings looking up to her. "I don't know if it's pride or ambition, but I just felt like I needed to get this done. I knew failure was not an option for me." Jackson adds that professor Claire Norton of the nutrition department has been a key force in her development, pointing out that Norton just seemed to put in more effort than advisors past. Jackson says, "When I took classes with Claire, that's when I fell in love with the major." Along with Norton and the nutrition faculty, Jackson credits her success to passion for community work and holistic health and wellness shared among the major's students. After graduation, she plans to pursue a career as a dietitian.

"I NEEDED TO GET THIS DONE"

CAM BOYLAN '24

LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING MAJOR

CAM BOYLAN '24 has adapted to the culture shock of being a first-year student in the Stockbridge School of Agriculture by getting right to work. "Honestly, I just kind of put my head down and went right into it," Boylan says of his fall semester, when working as a bus driver helped him get familiar with the layout of campus before classes began. As a transfer and commuter student, Boylan has leaned on the example of his late grandmother, Mary-Jean Fontaine, who was an integral part of his upbringing. "She had probably the most level head I've ever seen," he said, recalling being tempted to join a fight during a high school football game before thinking, "If she were still here, I would never hear the end of it." Ultimately, Boylan would like to own a landscape contracting business as well as work in the sustainable food and farming industry. He credits what he calls a tight-knit Stockbridge faculty and staff for their friendliness and support during this time of transition.

SAFFRON TURNER '24

SOCIOLOGY MAJOR

SAFFRON TURNER '24 had already fallen in love with the Amherst area when they moved to Massachusetts from Florida with "a U-Haul and two cats." In 2018, Turner had visited local friends for a commencement. "It made me so happy to be here, and it made me feel like this is where I belonged," they said. After leaving their first college in 2016, Turner spent time discovering that they are autistic and creating new frameworks for self-care. That period was a turning point. "I just simply didn't care what other people thought of me anymore. I was like: *I'm here to get my degree, I'm here to get as much out of my classes as I can, I'm here to pick my professors' brains, I'm here to pick any students' brains who would like to talk!* And that is something that I've carried with me."

Entering the university well into their 20s has not slowed Turner either. At a New Student Orientation & Transitions event in fall 2022, they were surprised at how staff reframed first-generation status as a strength. "I feel like first-gen students are the kinds of students who go to professors' office hours," they reflect. Turner now researches disability studies, with a particular emphasis on autistic self-advocacy, and finding ways to incorporate the voices of autistic people who are not well-represented in current research, such as nonverbal people. Turner pointed out how in moments of doubt, first-gen students can look to many faculty and staff at UMass who are also first-gen graduates themselves and have been in their shoes before. "It's one thing to know in the abstract that you aren't the only person who has had similar experiences," they said, adding, "It's something completely different to actually meet people and ask them how they've dealt with a specific situation."

"IT MADE ME SO HAPPY"

SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

UMass has proactively created many avenues of support for first-gen students, including:

First-Generation Low-Income Partnership (FLIP): A student organization whose mission is to build a community that allows first-gen and/or low-income students to encourage each other and support each other's overall academic success. FLIP also educates the campus community on the first-generation low-income student experience and advocates for targeted supports.

The Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success (CMASS): CMASS supports the academic success and sense of belonging of first-generation students, students of color, multiracial students, and low-income students.

Student Success: This team gathers and alerts first-gen students to resources available across campus to help them approach personal finance, logistical challenges, and how to celebrate as part of the larger first-gen community.

Bio-Pioneers: Founded by Linda Ziegenbein '13PhD and the late Tracie Gibson, this Residential Academic Program brings together first-year students who identify as first generation and are pursuing life sciences majors. Bio-Pioneers community members live together in Southwest's Emerson Hall, take select coursework as a group, and receive mentorship opportunities.

Connect UMass First-Generation Students and Alumni Group: In this virtual community, first-gen students can connect with each other and with UMass alumni who are open to sharing their own first-gen experiences. Students and alumni can join the community at **connectumassalumni.com.**

JESSIE CARREDANO, ESQ. '13, '16MA

TRIAL ATTORNEY, COMMITTEE FOR PUBLIC COUNSEL SERVICES

ATTORNEY JESSIE CARREDANO built an attitude of fearlessness as a student at UMass. A Guatemalan American who is among only 2% of lawyers nationwide who identify as Latina, she encourages students fighting long odds to take chances. "Not everyone succeeds," the Lynn, Massachusetts, native points out. "You could be third generation. Your dad and your grandpa could've all gone to college and had successful careers, but that doesn't mean that you're also going to succeed. So you just have to have this fearlessness."

Carredano is a first-gen student, but is also a first-generation American. English was Carredano's second language as a child. She recalls professors pointing out that she was writing in passive voice, while her mind was actually translating from Spanish, a passively structured language. Today, her bilingual ability helps create trust with clients in her work as a trial attorney with the Committee for Public Counsel Services. She has also used her experience to mentor UMass students. "Take advantage of what is there," she tells them, "These resources don't always exist in the outside world."

More stories of first-gen alumni and students: umass.edu/magazine/firstgen

TELLING A DIFFERENT STORY

> ARTRESS BETHANY WHITE '86

Over the past decade, I have faced the challenges of raising a transracial family in the South, reckoning with being descended from one of the largest slaveholding families in America, and discovering a 19th-century ancestor's lynching. As I worked to absorb these realities, I marveled at how my experiences were echoed in the trauma of a nation under siege from domestic terrorism, gun violence, and racism.

I wrote *Survivor's Guilt: Essays on Race and American Identity* searching for answers to America's complex racial dilemmas. And while my motivation may sound like a set of insurmountable reckonings, I believe it is possible for true racial understanding to be just a shared story away.

It is vital to share and hear each other's stories about racial and cultural bias in America, especially in the face of book bans and the weaponized deployment of the term "critical race theory" from school boards to the ballot box. A basic answer to this crisis of empathy is developing relationships with people outside of our own cultural and racial identity.

Storytelling is a way to build community and overcome learned biases. Community building can take place through diverse stories shared across classroom desks. If this does not happen, students often negotiate their biases on the playground, where open discourse can be replaced by bullying.

The current increasing trend of book bans presents dismaying challenges for educators working to teach history accurately and share diverse life stories with students. I have, however, seen the great rewards of advocating for all communities in the classroom. In my classroom, students are awed to read full-length narratives—not excerpts—penned by one-time enslaved persons. They read poetry and cultural criticism by Native American authors and essays by LGBTQ+ authors.

Photo: Lisa Beth Anderson

"A BASIC ANSWER TO THIS CRISIS OF EMPATHY IS DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF OUR OWN CULTURAL AND RACIAL IDENTITY."

An array of stories and narratives from outside the mainstream are a key tool in fostering a climate where bias is diffused and civil rights respected in the name of justice.

Of course, one need not be in a classroom to have their world enlarged by diverse stories. We can look critically at our own media and reading habits and work to break our own patterns of reading narratives only from within our own cultural spheres. Actively seeking out books from independent publishers, university presses, and book festivals can create opportunities to discover new authors and new perspectives. Many libraries are also actively working against book bans. In my own community, the local library is sponsoring a reading/discussion group for young adults based on banned books. Librarians can be a great resource for recommending books one step outside of the comfort zone.

> Mapping contemporary book bans, state by state: umass.edu/magazine/diversebooks

FRESH ENCOUNTERS

My students have responded strongly to these stories, which feature points of view they may not have read before:

The Many Names for Mother by Julia Kolchinsky Dasbach

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave by Frederick Douglass

The Souls of Black Folk by W. E. B. Du Bois

Red-Inked Retablos by Rigoberto González

The Age of Phillis by Honorée Fanonne Jeffers

Whereas by Layli Long Soldier

For Younger Readers (Middle Grades and Young Adults):

Blended by Sharon M. Draper

Melissa by Alex Gino

I Am Alfonso Jones by Tony Medina

Amal Unbound by Aisha Saeed

Artress Bethany White '86 is associate professor of English at East Stroudsburg University and a poet, essayist, and literary critic. She is the recipient of the Trio Award for her collection *My Afmerica: poems* (Trio House Press, 2019). Her essay collection, *Survivor's Guilt: Essays on Race and American Identity*, was a 2022 Next Generation Indie Book Award finalist. White is active on Instagram: @artresswhite

THE RIGHT SPOT

Sam Breen '21, '22MEd learns to love the game again

> SETH LANDMAN '04, '08MFA

Sam Breen has, as her head coach Tory Verdi puts it, "an uncanny ability to find the ball." In December of 2020, during Breen's first full season at UMass Amherst, that ability was on display in the Mullins Center against St. John's.

With the game tied and only seconds remaining, Breen tipped a missed free throw to her teammate Sydney Taylor '23. Taylor missed the shot, but Breen grabbed the rebound and scored at the buzzer for the win. It was a miraculous play, emblematic of what makes Breen's game so special.

"That's where I find myself a lot," Breen marvels, "being at the right spot at the right time." After a successful career at North Catholic High School in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, during which she scored 2,488 points, Breen barely played in her college seasons at the Pennsylvania State University. Her confidence and love for the game of basketball had faded.

Breen decided to add her name to the NCAA's transfer portal. Immediately, Verdi knew she was exactly what UMass needed. Breen didn't want to move far from home, but reluctantly agreed to visit UMass. "I know a lot of coaches say they're family oriented, and some of them definitely mean it," says Breen, "but when I got here all the coaches and the staff just really cared about who you were as a person and a player, and that really stood out to me because I didn't necessarily have that before."

For Verdi, that caring is part of his values. "Transparency, overcommunication, and love and respect. Those are the cornerstones of our program. I think Sam felt that right away when she stepped on campus. I just listened to Sam and asked her what she needed from me as a head coach. She needed somebody who really believed in her."

With that support, Breen found her love for the game again at UMass. "When I first got here, I was more quiet. I would be happy, but you wouldn't really see it, like I wouldn't celebrate all the small things." Now, she makes sure she's always talking on the court and celebrating the successes. "I can't walk by somebody and not high-five them," she says.

Breen has learned a lot off the court, too. After finishing a sociology degree, she decided to use her remaining years of eligibility to complete a master's in education. Now she's completing certificate programs in social work and criminology.

Breen serves on the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee, is one of her team's captains, and—

> "I CAN'T WALK BY SOMEBODY AND NOT HIGH FIVE THEM."

maybe most joyfully—takes care of her dog, Turbo. It all adds up to a lot of growth: "Since coming to UMass I've learned a lot of responsibility that I didn't know I needed to learn."

Verdi predicts Breen "will go down as the best player to ever play here when she's done." Building on last season's unprecedented team success, the team won the Atlantic 10 Championship for the first time, made the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1998, and Breen was named Atlantic 10 Women's Basketball Player of the Year.

After this season, Breen plans on letting her rekindled excitement for the game carry her for a while. "I want to play overseas for as long as I can—for as long as my body will let me," she says. She's excited to travel around the world and make a living playing the game she loves.

"I like making relationships that will last after basketball's done," she says. "That's something that's definitely important to me, not just in basketball but in life."

Watch highlights of Breen on the court: umass.edu/magazine/breen

Photo: John Solem

SHORT READ >

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

Photo: Yoko Saito

> ALEXIS ALI

When Katrina Spade '13MA started her master of architecture program, she had no idea she would be redesigning funerary practices in the United States. But, with the encouragement of her professors and inspiration from her own life, she found herself writing a culminating thesis on human composting as a form of natural urban burial.

In 2020, Spade opened Recompose, a first-of-its-kind, full-service funeral home based in Seattle, Washington, that specializes in the greenest burials available in the funeral market. As of this writing, the Seattle location has composted over 200 people so far. The process starts when the deceased is laid out in a vessel—called the "laying in." Staff, family, and friends place wood chips, straw, and alfalfa around the body. Over the next 30 days, the body breaks down into nutrient-dense soil, which is removed and then cured for another two to six weeks. After that, the soil can be taken by loved ones to be used in gardens and yards or donated to help with conservation lands—providing a source of new life.

UMass Magazine caught up with Spade to get a better feel for the company and her unconventional mission.

When did you first get the idea to redesign death?
I had just turned 30 and was feeling quite mortal. I also had two young kids growing up every day in front of my eyes, and I realized that I was aging that fast too. I took those mortal feelings and looked at the funeral industry. I knew I didn't want to be cremated or buried in a conventional way. I loved the idea of green burial, where the body is buried directly in the ground with a shroud, but I knew that wasn't an urban solution long term.

Where did the inspiration come from?
A friend of mine knew I was thinking about this and asked me if I had heard about what farmers do to compost whole cows, and I hadn't heard of it but found it fascinating. Like, if you can do that with a cow, you can probably do that with a human.

All along, I've been amazed at how many people are excited about this. I think it's for a few reasons. One, unless you have a faith tradition or a cultural tradition around death care, you tend to choose the default option, like cremation . . . there's a desire for something new. The second is climate change. We are all feeling the crisis and grief of it. And I, for one, started thinking about my final gesture on earth. I want it to be sustainable.

How did your experience at UMass help you?
Your job in grad school is to go down a rabbit hole—to research and design and be thoughtful. So, I approached my professors and told them, "Hey, I think I should design a process and a space for composting humans." And they all said it sounds like a great idea. We laughed a lot, but I think it speaks to the quality of teaching at UMass that I was encouraged to take on this idea and take it seriously. They helped solidify that it wasn't so much about the composting part as it was about the need to redesign the experience friends and family have throughout this process.

Do you have a favorite story you can share?
One of my favorite stories actually comes from the use of the soil. The sister of one of our clients came to get all of it. It's a cubic yard, so it's a good amount of soil. She took it back to the neighborhood where the deceased had lived, and all of his neighbors took a portion of it to place in their gardens.

Spade is working with various state legislatures to legalize human composting. Currently, five states allow for this type of burial, and several others, including Massachusetts, are considering bills.

> **I started thinking about my final gesture on earth.**

Photo: Recompose

▶ Spade displays a vessel of compost produced from human remains at Recompose.

> Make a virtual visit to the Recompose center: umass.edu/magazine/recompose

How to Change the World

Varshini Prakash '15 builds the modern climate movement

BY HEATHER KAMINS

PHOTOS BY LISA BETH ANDERSON

After a roller-coaster year and a half of debate and dealmaking, Congress finally passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which was signed into law by President Biden last August. The law includes $369 billion in spending to address the climate crisis—the largest climate investment in the nation's history. And it might not have happened if it weren't for the Sunrise Movement, co-founded by Varshini Prakash '15.

As a student, Prakash helped organize the successful Divest UMass campaign, which pushed UMass Amherst to become the first major public university to remove its investments in the fossil fuel industry. Since then, she has become a national leader in the modern climate movement as Sunrise's executive director, and she has been profiled by *Forbes, Vice, Rolling Stone,* and other outlets. Her own writing has been featured in *The New Yorker, The New York Times, The Washington Post,* and elsewhere. Sunrise has fought hard for the Green New Deal—the congressional resolution introduced by New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Massachusetts Sen. Edward J. Markey in 2019—which lays out an ambitious proposal to curb the nation's use of fossil fuels, reduce greenhouse emissions, and create high-paying jobs in clean energy industries. While the IRA only gets partway toward those goals, it is a hard-won victory and an important first step.

Prakash turns 30 this year, her youthful energy balanced by her thoughtful wisdom. She visited campus in 2022, returning to the place where her activism took off to inspire the next generation of young leaders. Like the newest members of the Sunrise Movement currently on campus, she and the organization she helped build are looking ahead to determine how to follow up on the IRA's "down payment" on our collective climate future to ensure it's a livable one.

'Wanting desperately to do something'

Although Prakash's activism caught fire at UMass, her roots as an environmental advocate stretch back further. "Ever since I was a kid I was really concerned about the degradation of our environment and the fact that so many people around the world didn't have clean air, clean water, clean soil, just basic necessities," she says, "and so many of those people were poor, were people of color, were people from the global South." Throughout her childhood, she witnessed things on the news like the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina. In India, the country where her ›

> **“Growing up brown and a woman, you don’t often get told that you can change the world.”**

parents were born and the place Prakash considers a second home, she saw footage of horrific monsoon seasons and remembers “wanting desperately to do something to prevent the loss and the suffering for people who look like me all around the world.”

In high school, Prakash became active in environmental efforts, but felt like she wasn’t having the impact she wanted. “I joined my recycling club. I screamed a lot to my friends and my family,” she says, laughing. “I was very frustrated and sad, and felt really powerless in a lot of ways.” But her desire to do more drove her to UMass, attracted by its variety of sustainability programs. “I made it my mission when I arrived on campus that my college years would be given to this journey of figuring out how to use my power and potential to make the world a healthier, safer, more sustainable place for as many people as possible.”

Prakash’s first venture on campus was with the UMass Amherst Permaculture Initiative, founded the year before she arrived. From there, her efforts expanded. “I took a class called Grassroots Community Organizing and realized the power of ordinary people to come together and build power in their communities to achieve extraordinary things.”

Around this time climate justice movements were taking off around the globe, including fossil fuel divestment, which called on universities and other organizations to sever their endowments’ and pensions’ investments in oil and gas companies. Prakash attended a protest in early 2013 where 40,000 people were calling for a stop to the Keystone XL pipeline. She returned to the university with a renewed sense of purpose and joined the fledgling UMass Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign, which staged a series of demonstrations and in-depth negotiations—resulting in UMass Amherst becoming the first major public university to divest its endowment from direct holdings in fossil fuels in 2016.

‘Surpasses anything I had previously imagined’

The successful divestment campaign provided Prakash with a number of valuable lessons. “I learned a ton of skills for how to organize, how to have thousands of conversations with people all over campus about the climate crisis and our capacity to stop it.” Perhaps most importantly, she discovered how much agency she actually had. “I learned that my capacity to create change far surpasses anything I had previously imagined.”

Prakash leads Sunrise Movement action at House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s office, November 2018

That lesson was no small thing to someone who had often felt small herself. “Growing up in America, and feeling small—like physically, I’m five feet tall—but also feeling small figuratively in a lot of ways, growing up brown and a woman, you don’t often get told that you can change the world,” she says.

Prakash gives a lot of credit to the older students she met on campus. “I derived a ton of inspiration from young people who were using their UMass years to fight for a student union or for labor reforms and people who were fighting for gender justice and to end rape culture on campus,” she says. “There were teaching assistants in the political science department who helped me connect the dots between my on-the-ground organizing and academic theory.” Campus organizations like the Permaculture Initiative and the Center for Education Policy and Advocacy (CEPA) created institutional knowledge so the hard work students put into organizing and activism could be passed down to others. “Having institutions like CEPA, where people could gather, commiserate, brainstorm, be creative together, and really build a community of practice around our organizing work was a huge, *huge* reason why I think the work was sustainable in any kind of way,” she says.

Prakash graduated in 2015, before the divestment campaign’s demands were implemented, and she recognized that part of what she needed to do was train the students coming up behind her. “I knew my time was short,” she says. “A lot of my junior and senior years were spent building a bench of young people, predominantly women and women of color, who went on to lead the divestment campaign into its actual victory.”

Understanding the importance of training the next generation of leaders provided the seeds for the Sunrise Movement, and the skills Prakash learned at UMass helped them grow. In running the divestment campaign, she says, “I learned leadership skills. I learned planning and project-management skills. I learned how to have conversations with people who disagree with me. I learned how to deeply fight for what I believe in without giving up at the first sign of resistance, and so I learned a ton of resilience as well.”

Divest UMass protest on campus, April 2016

“There were specific skills around recruitment, facilitation, public speaking that I learned at the Permaculture Club that I brought into divestment, that I took from divestment and brought into Sunrise,” says Prakash. “So you can see this really clear trajectory of how those leadership skills have really served me as I’ve gotten older.”

‘A movement specifically for young people’

In the months following Prakash’s graduation, she and about 11 others from across the youth climate movement came together to talk about how to carry the movement forward. “All of us were coming up against a similar challenge—that our work had felt meaningful and powerful, and yet it still didn’t feel like enough to truly tackle the climate crisis on the scale that it required,” she says. “We wanted a movement specifically for young people that could

connect the dots between politics and climate. By the middle of 2017 we had a blueprint, essentially, for a new movement organization that contained a four- to five-year strategy, a story of what it was like to be young people growing up at the precipice of climate catastrophe, and a structure for how potentially thousands and thousands of new young people who felt just like us about the climate crisis could get politically engaged and involved," says Prakash.

Thus, the Sunrise Movement began, and it wasn't long before it garnered national attention. *The New York Times* has noted that "the present-day climate left was effectively born, in the United States, with the November 2018 Sunrise Movement sit-in." That protest—in which members of the group joined then-congresswoman-elect Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to call for congressional action on climate change at Nancy Pelosi's Capitol Hill office—launched the group into the public consciousness.

Sunrise has grown exponentially since then, with more than 400 local hubs across the country today. One of those hubs is right here at UMass, and its members had the opportunity to connect with Prakash when she visited campus last year. Jack Minella '24, Sunrise UMass co-president, says, "What I took away from that discussion with her was that we all are capable of making change and having a major impact."

Co-president Liam Zielony '23 notes that Prakash "was able to articulate feelings and ideas in a way that pushed my beliefs deeper," and says, "Her advice was to keep pushing and growing within UMass, fighting for the things we want."

'A huge first step'

"When we launched in 2017, our core mission was to make climate action that was rooted in racial and economic justice a priority in American politics for the first time," says Prakash. The Sunrise Movement has motivated tens of thousands of young people to take action, from confronting politicians directly and holding demonstrations to participating in climate youth strikes. "We actually pushed every major Democratic politician to swear off oil and gas money, as well as release some of the most ambitious climate plans that we have ever seen."

What can we do to help?

Big problems like climate change can feel overwhelming—how can a single individual have an impact? That's where collective action comes in. "What we need are millions and millions of people to wake up and come to clarity about the unique and powerful role that they can play in addressing this issue," says Prakash.

"If you're a young person, or you know a young person, you can tell them to join the Sunrise Movement," she says. She also suggests finding ways that you can fight against climate change whoever and wherever you are. Because the climate crisis is so far-reaching and pervasive, she says, "it touches virtually everything in the world." That means there are opportunities everywhere.

Not sure where to start?

- Make climate part of the conversation by talking about it with your family, friends, and colleagues.
- Consider ways to incorporate climate into your job, whether you're a teacher reading climate-themed books with your students, an engineer making buildings more sustainable, an office worker advocating for more sustainable business practices, or anything else.
- Volunteer at your local community or school garden.
- Connect with local Get Out the Vote organizations to provide election information, give voters rides to the polls, or become a poll worker.

Prakash herself participated in the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force committee on climate, formed after Biden's Democratic primary win, to bring together supporters from across the party to shape his platform. After President Biden took office, Sunrise fought hard to push climate legislation forward through Biden's proposed Build Back Better agenda. "When it became clear that negotiations were stalling out between Biden and West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, we threw everything that we had at the wall to try to push the legislation forward. For about six months it looked like it was absolutely dead in the water. And then, all of a sudden, a deal came together."

That deal was the IRA, which marked the largest investment in climate in U.S. history. "It's not enough, and it certainly continues to leave some communities behind," says Prakash, "but it is a huge first step, and we plan to continue to fight to win the rest of it."

'I've dreamt of being where we are'

Sunrise Movement leaders recently gathered once again to set a blueprint for the next five years. They came away with plans for two new major campaigns: The Green New Deal for Schools and the Green New Deal for Communities. These campaigns aim to bring the climate fight to the local level, empowering students to push their colleges and universities to "take action on climate and be more sustainable," says Prakash, "as well as running local and state campaigns that help fight for the Green New Deal and fight to stop the climate crisis at all levels of government."

The UMass Sunrise hub is already working on those types of campus environmental initiatives. "We have organized initiatives to reduce carbon waste like the push toward the UMass Carbon Zero plan," says Zielony, referencing the university's goal to power campus entirely with renewable energy by 2032. "We also organized the Earth Day Extravaganza with a large farmers market, dozens of climate related events, and a large concert."

The campus group has also taken to heart the idea that true power lies in community. "We're heavily focused right now on coalition building," says Minella. The group aims to collaborate with other campus clubs and organizations, "some of them environmental, some of them not, to put on events, make things interesting and fun for our members, because that's also a very big part of our mission."

At the federal level, Prakash says, "we are going to continue to put pressure on Biden to stop burning fossil fuels, to stop allowing for new oil and gas drilling leases." She adds, "There are a ton of things that the president and his cabinet can do over the remaining term of his presidency and beyond, and we will be campaigning and actively pushing for him to do it."

But challenges abound. Political gridlock and stratification, particularly at the national level, can be roadblocks to moving forward on big policy initiatives. "I think the single greatest challenge that we are facing," says Prakash, "is the amount of oil and gas money that is in our political system."

These struggles are real and substantial—but they're not a reason to give up hope. Prakash and the Sunrise Movement have worked extremely hard, and it's important not to lose sight of the gains they have achieved. "I've dreamt of being where we are five or six years ago, and I'm not surprised because this was the vision that we had," she says. "At the same time, it's still hard for me to believe everything that has transpired in the last few years."

For Prakash personally, the mission continues to be educating and motivating the next generation of climate activists. "I think my core role is elevating other young leaders who are coming up behind me, supporting them to discover their own superpowers, their agency, their wisdom," she says. "It's to show people again and again that the first step of changing the world is believing that it is possible."

ONLINE

More about the movement and climate justice: umass.edu/magazine/sunrise

MIND THE GAP

FINDING A WAY THROUGH SOCIAL DIVISION

Our country is more deeply divided than it's been in generations. When two sides can't agree, they can go to war—or try this.

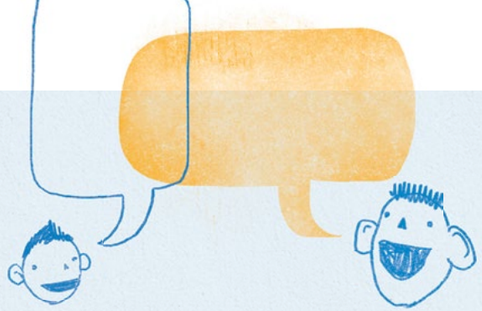
by Naomi Shulman illustrations by Thom Dudley

Americans are segregating themselves geographically, philosophically, and racially more than they used to. Behind the so-called tofu curtain here in western Massachusetts, I am surrounded by neighbors who mostly look like me, consume similar media, and vote the same way I do. There's nothing wrong with hanging out with people who put me at ease, but when I come face-to-face with folks who have different perspectives from my own, I realize that sometimes (and slightly embarrassingly) I don't know how to talk to them. More and more, folks on opposing sides simply avoid talking much at all these days. Until, of course, a conflict arises—and we begin shouting. From news outlets to social media sites to protests on my street corner, the shouting seems to be getting louder.

What I don't know is what to do about it. Luckily, renowned social psychologist and UMass faculty member Linda Tropp has been thinking about social divides for a long time. "I study what I study because of where I grew up: Gary, Indiana," says Tropp. Gary was once a big steel town, a prime stop on the Rust Belt. The rise and decline in steel production coincided with Black migration from the South and subsequent white flight. "When my older brothers and sisters were growing up there, the neighborhood we lived in was predominantly white. Most people left their doors unlocked, and kids would be running in and out of each other's homes. But by the time I was growing up, in the '70s and '80s, the local population was 80–85% Black, and suddenly many homes had security alarm systems," Tropp says. No more kids running into each other's homes; no more doors unlocked during the day. But why, exactly? "I understood there were differences, but I didn't understand *why* those differences mattered."

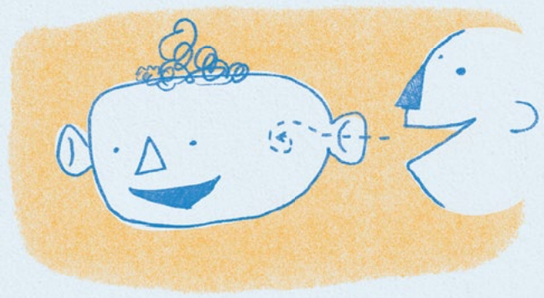
Tropp, like me, is a white, Jewish member of Generation X. But she hasn't always been pegged as such right away. Thanks to a study-abroad stint in Ecuador, Tropp is fluent in Spanish; she also happens to be petite and has an olive complexion. "Given my stature and skin tone, I passed as Ecuadorian all the time," she explains. "I was ethnically ambiguous," she says. "A lot of people thought I was a woman of color, and I remember some circumstances when I was asked flat out—and received a different response once they learned I was white. They no longer thought I was one of their sisters." This offered Tropp a rare chance to toggle between an insider/outsider vantage point. "Through crossing group boundaries, intentionally or not, I became even more interested in how group memberships shape our relationships with others and our perceptions of the world. I tell my students all the time that our perspectives on the world are a function of our lived experiences. If we have different lived experiences, it's understandable why we would have different perspectives."

Tropp's lifelong project has been digging into the who, what, and why of those differences. And she has been working closely with nongovernmental organizations such as the International Organization for Migration and the Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit of the World Bank to help put her research into action. This past summer, in partnership with Beyond Conflict, a nonprofit devoted to peacebuilding,



Cultivate Compassion

"We should reflect on all we've been dealing with these last few years and give ourselves and others some grace and compassion," says Tropp. This isn't just a call to being kind, it's practical guidance—without a compassionate mindset, we quickly begin making damaging assumptions. "When we're under threat we're more likely to make snap judgments that can protect our cognitive and emotional resources," she says. "We're exhausted and depleted, so we have to be even more careful in this historical moment."



Foster Trust

"We tend to call people names rather than differentiating between the fundamental goodness that there is in every person versus a person's behavior," says Tropp. "Understandable—people get defensive. When we feel a wholesale judgment made against us based on something we say, we shut down or respond in kind, and that's how conflicts escalate." You don't have to be best friends to do this; even campaign canvassers have learned that asking a few questions about the person on the opposite end of the phone can lower defenses, allowing for deeper listening. It can be hard to remember that a person who just said something you find cringe-worthy still means well, but if they trust you, you can explain the problem with what they're saying in a way that makes an impact. "We can harness the relationship toward deeper communication," Tropp says, "rather than simply allowing distance to grow."

Tropp also published *Renewing American Democracy: Navigating a Changing Nation,* a report on why we should care about social divides in the United States—and what we can do about them.

Tropp notes that one thing that divides us is what exactly we're divided *about*. Is this problem political? Racial? Class based? It depends on who you ask. "A lot of people would characterize the current moment as one of political divisions, mostly between liberals and conservatives," she says. That's my tendency, for sure. "But from where I sit, how we conceive of the problem depends on differences of perspective," Tropp says. Researchers of social division are not immune to their own polarization, as Tropp has seen firsthand. "There were moments as we were working on this report where I could see that some white contributors were more focused on the political divide, and more of the contributors who also happened to be people of color raised the question of what undergirds those political divides." This dynamic may sound familiar—remember how in the aftermath of the 2016 election, people couldn't agree on whether white working-class voters were animated by economic anxiety or racism? We tend to focus on things that we personally find threatening, and different groups sense different threats.

Of course, there can be more than one threat in play, which is both good and bad news. Does greater racial diversity in a community breed a sense of threat, or does it provide opportunities for greater contact, leading to greater ease? It turns out that both of these things can be true at once. Tropp explains, "If we merely have the knowledge that people from other groups exist in our communities but don't personally know them, we're more likely to feel threatened, but if we get to know them on a person-to-person level, we feel lower levels of threat and anxiety about navigating differences." She adds, "You can see both pathways in the data."

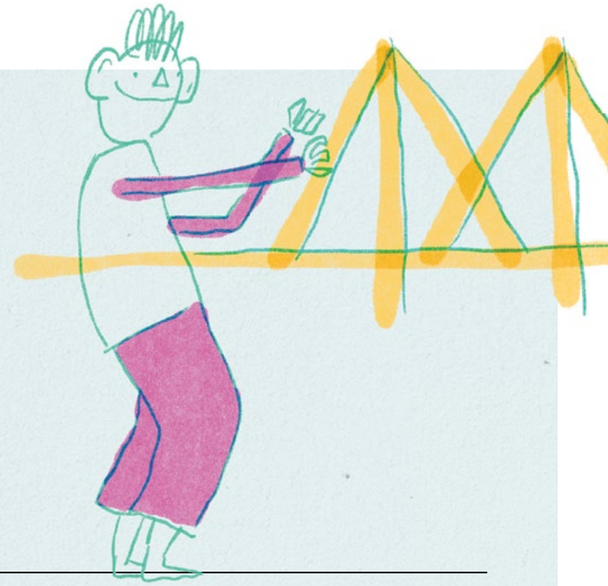
Luckily for Tropp and her colleagues, the differing pathways ended up validating both sides of ongoing debates about diversity. That's crucial, because feeling validated is a necessary starting point for communication. "When it comes to how we see and associate with others, there are many important processes going on in the brain," Tropp explains. "We have very basic needs, which include a desire to belong, to feel safe and secure, a desire to feel valued and good about who we are, a desire to understand our world and to feel understood." This is elemental stuff, akin to Maslow's hierarchy of needs—food, clothing, shelter, and so on, all the way up to self-actualization and transcendence. "When we don't feel safe, we have a choice—either we try to find safety or we live in fear," Tropp says. Oftentimes, to find safety, we flock toward other people like ourselves, which is why we see deepening spots of red and blue across our political maps. "We fear those who are different because we don't know how to act, what to do, or how they'll respond to us," she says. "We do what we can to fit in, or we have to face feeling alienated or excluded, which can be traumatic."

So much of what Tropp is talking about comes back to a sense of inclusion—to a sense of identity, really. An overlay of identity on top of philosophy and values makes for a powerful sense of kinship. But that means those on the outside become Others. "We give the benefit of the doubt if someone acts rudely or aggressively in our own group," Tropp points out, "but we're more likely to fault a person in another group for the same behavior."

Act Locally

"I would encourage people to invest in their local communities. Get to know neighbors who might be different in various ways but have some shared goals," Tropp says. This means getting out into the physical world we inhabit to meet real, live people. "Public parks, sports leagues that draw people from many different backgrounds, community gardens, dog parks, playgrounds—all of these are structures within our communities where different groups can live and work together toward shared goals."

This tracks with my experience of, oh, everything in the last five years or so: discourse online getting so accusatory that many of us squirrel away in our own echo chambers, resulting in a steady stream of confirmation bias; violence breaking out over actions as seemingly inconsequential as driving a little too slowly in the passing lane. We've been undergoing a mass reckoning regarding race relations and the police, sexual misconduct in Hollywood and a host of other fields, and oh yeah, a global pandemic, one where large swaths of people can't seem to agree on mitigation strategies like masks and vaccines. "It's a lot. It's a lot," Tropp agrees.



Stick to It

"When we first start to get to know others across group lines, don't talk about differences. Get to know each other. Feel each other's humanity," says Tropp. We didn't find ourselves in this situation overnight and we won't get out of it overnight either. "If we live in a bubble, the first time we have a face-to-face encounter with someone from a different group, we can't expect to have that deep level of engagement during our first interaction. Those first interactions involve building a sense of trust and rapport, so we grow to feel more comfortable with each other and trust we'll be given the benefit of the doubt," says Tropp. It's going to take time and goodwill. Deep breaths, everybody—we can do this.

JUST BECAUSE THE PROBLEM IS TOO BIG TO FIX BY OURSELVES DOESN'T MEAN WE CAN'T ALL PITCH IN TO HELP.

What do we do when it seems like the only thing we can agree on is that we *don't* agree? The challenges we face are much bigger than what any of us can solve alone, of course, and some folks stand to profit from the deepening polarization. "There are societal structures and influences that continue to stoke the flames of division, and that works against what might be possible at that person-to-person level," Tropp says. And yet, just because the problem is too big to fix by ourselves doesn't mean we can't all pitch in to help. "My hope," she says, "is that as we move forward, that we will not simply focus on these broad societal divisions, but that we will be able to connect across divisions at more local levels, where we recognize that we actually do value a lot of things in common: we want to be good neighbors, we want our kids to be happy and healthy, we want to live in safe neighborhoods. There are a lot of really fundamental things we have in common and could use to find common ground toward shared goals."

> More research-based recommendations for reaching across differences: umass.edu/magazine/gap

WORKING ON IT

Exploring the inner workings of labor—through art

> ARI JEWELL

Photo: Brett Wallace

From Amazon to the trucking industry, artist Brett Wallace '99 has devoted his career to examining the underbelly of modern labor. A multidisciplinary artist, he examines ideas and exposes truths using whatever tool is best for the job—from performance pieces and installations to documentary film.

When he was a teen, Wallace picked up a book of Henri Matisse masterworks and, after trying his hand at copying the paintings, he was hooked on artmaking. By his junior year at UMass, he says, "I really started to get experimental." In awe of his fellow students, who he says were "blowing it out of the water," Wallace saw their work as an invitation to bring his best. His senior thesis project—a commentary on the intersections between humans and technology—combined sculpture made of recycled parts and intricate paintings.

Years later, Wallace can easily see the throughline to his current work, saying that the intersection of technology and labor is the focal area for his practice. Though his dedication to this subject remains steadfast, his artistic proficiency has broadened to encompass a wide range of media. His most recent solo exhibition, *Working Conditions* (NURTUREart, 2019), welcomed the viewer into installations modeled after workplaces, each accompanied by a video essay. The exhibit examined the effect of surveillance and artificial intelligence on workers. In one installation, viewers were invited onto a bed like those found in the cabs of long-haul trucks. Meanwhile, a video played that discussed the increase in surveillance on trucks and of truckers themselves, via cameras and GPS tracking.

> "ART MAKES THE INVISIBLE WORLD VISIBLE."

For Wallace, art is more than expressiveness, it's a way to document and understand the fabric of society. "Embedded in labor is the human experience of working people, and that's the world I can most relate to," says Wallace, who grew up in a working-class neighborhood outside of Boston. "Art makes the invisible world visible."

Now, Wallace is neck-deep in a different project, but one that explores familiar themes. After hearing news of a unionization drive at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, he promptly drove south. This became his next effort—a feature documentary, *American Union*, that captures the parallel labor struggles of the Amazon workers and coal miners on strike at a nearby mine.

Wallace dove into the filming process, spending at least half of his time living in Alabama. He's creating a film, but he's also totally joining the movement. "I've been on the picket line at 5 a.m., and then at 5 p.m.," he says. "I'm embedded." If he's not present to witness and capture the action, then no one else will be, since he's a one-man crew.

Despite the sacrifices required for the project, he says, "I am all in on this film."

And there's another reason he wants to be where the action is: "I had to build trust within a community, which took months," he explains. "My intention is to create a firsthand account of this labor battle," he says. "It's my documentary, but it's not my story."

See more from Wallace's projects: umass.edu/magazine/wallace

Illustration: Stephen Oparowski

Hellah Sidibe '13 keeps on 'running for those who can't'

> ALEXIS ALI

You may know Hellah Sidibe '13 as the first Black man to run across the United States. Though it's hard to keep up with him, we can confirm that he hasn't stopped. In November 2022, Sidibe hit day 2,000 in his running streak, which he is using to inspire and change lives through his online presence. "I am very excited to have hit 2,000 days running," he says. "I'm one of those kinds of people who let things come to me. The streak started because I was facing a fear of running. Now I've been running every day for years."

His incredible 84-day nationwide trek—which started in Los Angeles and ended in New York City on May 23, 2021—was just one part of his running streak. After that, an unusual opportunity arose, pushing Sidibe to race the Leadville Trail 100 Run—an ultramarathon through the Colorado Rockies—just to see if he could. "With the Leadville Ultra, the saying is that 'the Leadville finds you; you don't find it,'" he explains. "So, when I was listening to the book *Born to Run*, which was talking about this ultra-endurance run, it found me, and I got the idea to test myself to see if I could run 100 miles."

Sidibe's philosophy of letting things come to him stems from his own experience with finding happiness. "I don't want to always be forcing myself to have the 'next something' to do because I believe that if I am always chasing stuff, I will never be satisfied."

But things keep finding him. In 2019, he was given a slot in the New York City Marathon. Without any training, he entered and just tried to hit a set racing time. After that experience, he says he "got the bug" and became eager to run another one—this time with specialized training. "Now, I'm going to take the opportunity to properly train for a marathon. I've never really dedicated a training block for a marathon race." In 2023, he plans to "go full force and train the best I can for a spring marathon; either the London Marathon or Boston."

Sidibe believes his time at UMass was a major catalyst for where he is now. "UMass had a huge impact on me," he shares. "My whole goal in life was to become either a pro soccer player or a pilot, but for reasons outside of my control . . . I got pushed off that path. But I found a way to create my own path, with help from my late soccer coach Sam Koch and the lessons I learned at UMass . . . they pushed me to become who I am today. And now, I can't even imagine another life."

> "I got pushed off that path. But I found a way to create my own path..."

Using each experience he has had with running, Sidibe has become skilled at finding creative ways to give back. "I like to say I run for those who can't," he explains. Sidibe is currently fundraising for Soles4Souls and for Charity: Water. Long term, he plans to do something specifically for his home country, Mali, one of the poorest nations in the world, sharing the joy—and resources—he has found in running with his community. "I want to have a running club for kids that provides everything they need, whether it's shoes or clothing. I also want to create my own nonprofit in the future, using all my networks now to build it up and raise funds to give more access to people who don't currently have basic human necessities."

He also plans to do a "Hellah Good" running tour—going to big cities around the world—finding a way to combine his love of travel, food, and, of course, running.

ONLINE

Catch up on Sidibe's journey: umass.edu/magazine/hellahgood

FORM, MEET FUNCTION

The future of tech is wearable

> SCOTT WHITNEY
PHOTOS BY LISA BETH ANDERSON

Devices such as the Fitbit and Apple Watch may have transformed workout routines, but the next generation of wearable tech promises much more: improved sleep, instant communication with your doctor, and potentially saving your life (no, we're not being dramatic). Innovative researchers at UMass have been hard at work turning the stuff of science fiction into wearable, washable garments and accessories that will revolutionize the way we live. Here's a peek at a few in the pipeline.

Heart-Monitoring Vest

Lead researcher: Yeonsik Noh, assistant professor
Laboratory: Nursing Engineering Laboratory
Modeled by: Sina Razaghi '28PhD, electrical and computer engineering

For the more than six million adults in the United States affected by heart failure each year, early detection can mean the difference between life and death. This wireless system monitors the wearer's heart rate, rhythm, and respiration in just five to ten minutes a day—essentially giving patients an at-home electrocardiogram. In addition, the data it collects can be transmitted in real time to a smartphone app, allowing doctors to monitor their patients remotely and intervene if the vest's readings indicate that a heart event could be imminent.

Chesma Eye Mask

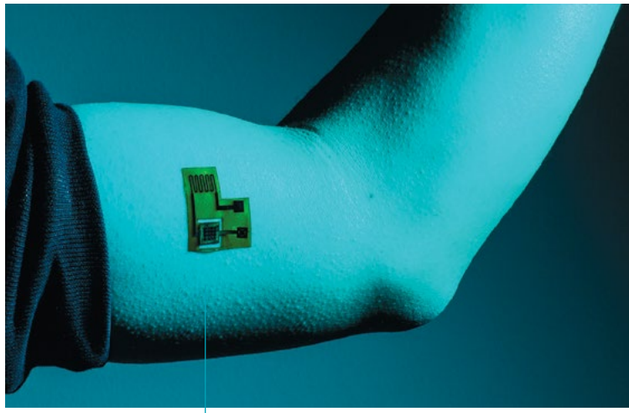
Lead researcher: Trisha L. Andrew, associate professor
Laboratory: Wearable Electronics Laboratory
Modeled by: Zohreh Homayounfar '23PhD, chemistry

Could your sleepwear hold the cure for insomnia? If you're wearing the Chesma eye mask, it just might. Equipped with five fabric-based hydrogel electrodes and a single pressure sensor, this face mask tracks eye movement and pulse rate to determine a sleeper's REM sleep patterns. Paired with customized pajamas that employ similar technology, researchers will be able to collect data on the wearer's respiration, posture, and overall sleep quality, bringing the power of a sleep lab to your bedroom. You may also find the Chesma eye mask in the next generation of virtual-reality headsets, which would track eye movement and allow your favorite game to detect your sight line and respond in real time. (Get ready for more jump scares!)

Mobile Health Ring

Lead researchers: Sunghoon Ivan Lee, associate professor, Donna M. and Robert J. Manning Faculty Fellow
Laboratory: Advanced Human & Health Analytics Lab
Modeled by: Yunda Liu '22MS, '25PhD (left) and Fareya Ikram '28PhD (right), Manning College of Information and Computer Sciences.

Following a stroke, regular exercise is critical to ensuring that survivors recover use of weakened limbs and maintain balance and mobility. But once patients leave a clinical setting, doctors must rely on inconsistent self-reporting from patients—until now. Through a sensor that looks like a ring and an accompanying wristband, patients can track the frequency and intensity of their arm movements. The motor performance information captured by the wearable sensors can then be processed and delivered to the patient's medical team, keeping doctors informed.



Energy-Producing Biofilm

Lead researchers: Jun Yao, assistant professor; Derek Lovley, research professor
Department: Electrical and Computer Engineering
Modeled by: Xiaomeng Liu '23PhD, electrical and computer engineering

Of course, wearable tech is only as good as the batteries that power it—but what if the energy required came from you? UMass researchers have developed a biofilm made from a paper-thin sheet of bacterial cells that, when applied to human skin, converts evaporating sweat into usable energy. The biofilm relies on structural and surface chemistry properties that exist even after the bacteria has died, so there's no need to feed and maintain a living colony. The energy produced by the biofilm can power a range of wearables; recharging your watch could mean taking a few laps around the backyard.

ACCOMPLISHED >

Photo: Vonecia Carswell

$8,880 >

Amount raised by donors to pay for 100 sleeping bags, 30 suitcases, medical supplies, transportation, and accommodations for Ukrainian refugees at the border of Poland. Charli Carpenter, professor of political science and director of the Human Security Lab, led the effort and assisted refugees on-site.

REACHING OUT TO REFUGEES

The United States is just one country feeling the impact of a historic era of global upheaval and displacement. The United Nations Refugee Agency cites some 103 million people forcibly displaced worldwide—a figure that has more than doubled over the past 20 years. Conflicts and unrest in Ukraine and Afghanistan are contributing to this increase. Even from its far-flung locations in western Massachusetts, the UMass community is stepping up to help. And these efforts are making a real impact—one refugee at a time.

—Sally Parker

1,500 >

Number of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees in Massachusetts receiving mental health support through the Social and Emotional Wellbeing intervention at UMass. Funded by a grant from the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, the intervention teaches techniques for reducing stress and solving problems in order to thrive in a new country. Associate professors Kalpana Poudel-Tandukar and Krishna Poudel lead the program.

15+ >

Number of Afghan women refugees living in western Mass who attend biweekly empowerment teas at the Center for International Education (CIE). Sessions are run by the participants themselves and cover the challenges of resettlement, including navigating the health care system, managing isolation, learning English, and other skills. A spinoff children's group meets in the room next door. The center has raised $5,000 for the program from CIE alumni and support agencies since it began in April 2022.

Photo: Mike Peters, Montclair State University

12,000 PEP TALKS

Looking for a motivational poke in the ribs? Call the Success Hotline. Every day for 30 years, **Robert Gilbert '69, '79PhD**—a public speaker, author, and associate professor of sport psychology at New Jersey's Montclair State University—has recorded a three-minute phone message to cajole and inspire listeners.

Gilbert set up the hotline in 1992 to record daily "you've got this!" messages to inspire his graduate students between class sessions. He hasn't missed a day since. Gilbert borrowed the idea from his days as a wrestling coach, when he pumped up his athletes during practices and meets.

The hotline—with a wonderfully muffled, crackly sound quality reminiscent of an old-school rotary phone—reaches millions today, including celebrities and high achievers. New Jersey Senator Cory Booker recently gave it a shout-out on TikTok, sending the phone lines into overdrive.

Listeners can still call the hotline at (973) 743-4690. Or they can subscribe to the podcast, *Success Hotline With Dr. Rob Gilbert*, and listen to the nearly 12,000 messages he's recorded so far.

—Sally Parker

> Listen to some of Gilbert's daily messages: umass.edu/magazine/hotline

FINDING THE CORE

With the United States in the midst of a national reckoning on racism and other forms of discrimination, **Monique (De La Oz) Lorenzo '01** is leading the way in sparking discussion and action as president and chief executive officer of the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ).

The Connecticut-based organization provides in-person and virtual education, consulting, and advocacy programs that stimulate dialogue and promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice regardless of race, sex, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, ability, age, or body size. "NCCJ is all about courageous conversations, not confrontation," Lorenzo says. "We understand that life is complex, and it's our mission to create safe spaces to 'help humans, human better,' together."

A legal studies and political science major while at UMass, Lorenzo participated in the 1997 student takeover of the Goodell building that successfully demanded more support and access to higher education for minority students. This experience helped shape Lorenzo's keen interest in social justice.

"UMass encouraged me to become my true authentic self—a relentless civil leader, tireless change agent, and fearless disrupter," Lorenzo says. "For me, that is social justice, standing in the face of oppression, standing with marginalized communities, leading change and social transformation one person at a time."

—Annika S. Hipple

▼ A facilitator speaks to the circle of participants at an Anytown summer program, a signature initiative of the NCCJ.

Photo: Parker Louison

SUSTAINABLE CINEMA

Nicholas Mazzone '17 oversaw the sustainability department for Jordan Peele's award-winning film *Nope*. "Some of our accomplishments include eliminating the use of plastic water bottles on set and not having any waste go into the landfill. We partnered with an organization called Rock and Wrap It Up who helped us donate 2,200-plus meals to the Hollywood Food Coalition using leftover food from on set," says Mazzone. "UMass helped me get to this point and I am very excited where this journey is going to take me." The next stop on that journey: working as a post coordinator for the Apple TV+ series *The Last Thing He Told Me*.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

A love of science and math was part of the upbringing of siblings **Vladimir Geneus '09, Christian Geneus '11, and Olivia Geneus '17**, leading all three of them to the College of Natural Sciences at UMass. Now, the trio has followed their physician parents into careers in STEM, with Vladimir working at the pharmaceutical firm AbbVie; Christian at Procter & Gamble; and Olivia at Eli Lilly and Company. Within and beyond their respective careers, they collaborate at workshops and conferences, on scientific papers, in founding a scientific consulting company—Mergen Research—and in nonprofit endeavors that support students of color in pursuing careers in STEM.

CLASS NOTES

1960s

Roberta Bernstein '66 has been named Chevalier (Knight) of the National Order of the Legion of Honor, the highest French distinction for civil and military accomplishments, for her work bringing the groundbreaking art of Jasper Johns to a wider audience. This award recognizes Bernstein's contributions as an art historian, author, curator, and professor.

Dennis N. Cohen '69 retired in 2020 after 46 years in practice as a dentist. After transitioning from private practice in 2009, Dr. Cohen worked at Community Health Connections, a nonprofit community health center in Gardner, Massachusetts. "It is satisfying to treat patients and to be able to help improve the quality of their lives," he says. "UMass allowed me to achieve this, and for that I am thankful."

1980s

Duncan Putney '83, Gary Galone (Gary Galonek '86), and **Howie Breslau '86** recently worked on the critically acclaimed HBO Max series *Julia*, about the life of cooking legend and cultural icon Julia Child. Season two of the series is expected to air this year.

Josh Meyer '87 has joined the USA Today Network in the newly created role of domestic security correspondent. Meyer is an author and currently does freelance writing on security matters for various publications, including *Time, Vice, Al Jazeera,* and *The Washington Post*.

1990s

Lisa (Cavanaugh) Linde '92 was recently inducted into the Massachusetts Instrumental and Choral Conductors Association (MICCA) Hall of Fame. Linde has been the instrumental music director at Newton South High School since 1998. Her selection to the MICCA Hall of Fame was based in part on her advocacy for gender equality in jazz and her work as the founder of the nonprofit organization called jazzhers, which is committed to helping young female and nonbinary musicians connect to and feel empowered within the jazz community.

Martin Fisher '94 was cast in the first Broadway national tour of *My Fair Lady*, which ran from January to August 2022. He is the first Black actor to portray Alfred P. Doolittle. He also has several upcoming TV projects: *Extrapolations* on Apple TV+ and *Lioness* on Paramount+.

Former head coach **Derek Kellogg '95** returned to the coaching staff of UMass Minutemen basketball. Director of Athletics Ryan Bamford says, "Adding a coach that knows and loves UMass is a huge victory for our men's basketball program."

Jeremy Bucci '98 was confirmed as a Massachusetts Superior Court justice and sworn in last November. Bucci has more than two decades of experience as a prosecutor, beginning his career in 2001 as an assistant district attorney in Suffolk County and serving most recently as chief trial counsel for the Northwestern District Attorney's office.

2000s

Timothy Fields '00 is the co-author of *The Black Family's Guide to College Admissions: A Conversation about Education, Parenting, and Race,* published last September by Johns Hopkins University Press. The book was highlighted as one of "15 Titles to Help Students and Families with College Prep" by *School Library Journal*.

Ana Reyes '03 is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The House in the Pines*, published by Dutton/Penguin Random House in January. Her debut novel is described by the publisher as "a captivating psychological suspense debut" and was selected by Reese Witherspoon for Reese's Book Club.

Alison George Dover '06MEd, '10EdD recently published her second academic book, *Radically Inclusive Teaching with Newcomer and Emergent Plurilingual Students: Braving Up* (Teachers College Press, 2022), which focuses on her work with hundreds of teachers and thousands of plurilingual students in Southern California. Dover's programs have received awards from their county and state departments of education and are in the second year of a $400,000 grant from the Spencer Foundation that engages middle and high school newcomers and emergent plurilingual students as co-researchers exploring issues and assets that impact their communities.

Sam Skura '06 was named president of Baystate Medical Center and senior vice president of hospital operations for Baystate Health. With extensive experience in hospital leadership, Skura previously served as chief operating officer reporting to the president at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center of Boston.

Jennifer Ferrari '08, the visual arts teacher at Lt. Job Lane Elementary School in Bedford, Massachusetts, was selected as the state's art educator of the year by the Massachusetts Art Education Association. Ferrari uses a choice-based model of art education that centers on developing students' personal voice through their learner-directed curriculum.

2010s

Sarah Nagamine '19 is a second-year student at the UCLA School of Dentistry, where she earned a prestigious full-ride scholarship through the National Health Service Corps. Nagamine is committed to caring for underserved communities after graduation.

2020s

Jakob Kreuze '21 won the President's Cup Cybersecurity Competition and was honored in a ceremony at the White House in July 2021. In this multiround virtual challenge aimed at training and recognizing cybersecurity professionals in the federal workforce, participants must outmaneuver over 300 competitors in a series of tests simulating real-world situations.

> Submit your note at: umassalumni.com/classnotes

Photo: Gilles Rolland Monnet

BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SUN

Patricia Doherty '72, director and senior research scientist at Boston College's Institute for Scientific Research (ISR), died in July at age 72. A leader in the study of space weather and its impact on global navigation systems, she was a beloved mentor to countless scientists in the field.

Doherty was recognized internationally for her research on Earth's upper atmosphere and its impact on communication and navigation. The ISR conducts solar-terrestrial research and studies on the physics, chemistry, and weather of space. "Under Pat's leadership, the ISR became an international leader in theoretical and experimental research to help us better understand the science of the vast space, as she liked to say, 'between the surface of the Earth and the center of the sun,'" DeLuca Professor and Vice Provost for Research Thomas Chiles told Boston College.

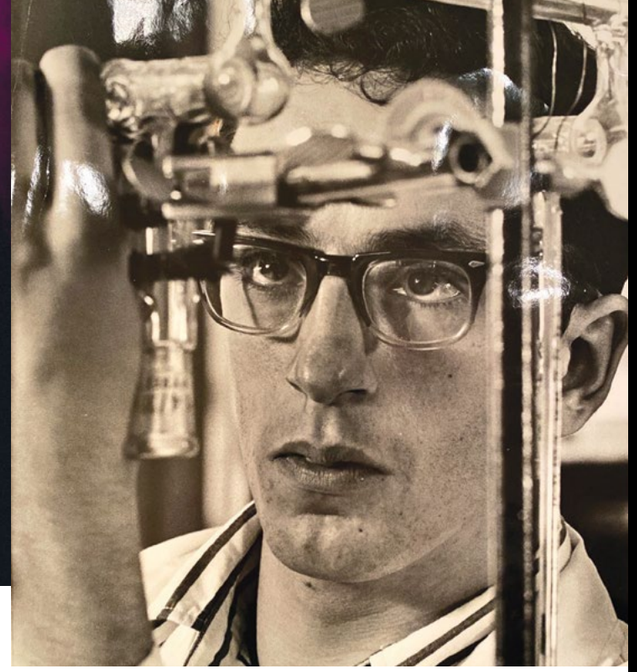
Doherty was also an early champion of the international proliferation of satellite-based technology to overcome deficits in traditional infrastructure, traveling the world to organize conferences and workshops, particularly in the Global South. Her efforts built fruitful collaborations among scientists and bolstered much-needed research infrastructure and education. Chiles notes that she played "a vital role in the expansion of science education in developing countries, and worked tirelessly to increase the participation of women in global navigation satellite systems and space science research."

THE TASTEMAKER

David LaSalle '77, a beloved DJ, died July 4, 2022. A lifelong music lover best known for fueling 37 years of dancing at the Atlantic House nightclub in Provincetown, Massachusetts, LaSalle began to turn his passion for music into a career at UMass, where he cut his teeth spinning tunes at fraternity parties while working toward his degree in hospitality and tourism management. LaSalle began working in Provincetown in 1983, where he would eventually meet his husband, Wayne Johnson, and his best friend, Peter Goldman.

At the "A-House," one of the oldest gay bars in the country, LaSalle was admired for his exceptional taste and his aptitude for reading a room. "It was an art," Goldman says. And LaSalle's tastemaking reached past the dance floor—as a reporter for *Billboard* magazine, his votes helped to determine the chart-topping songs of the moment. "If there were songs he liked in June, he would make sure people liked them in August," Johnson says.

LaSalle's curated set lists provided the soundtrack for countless nights for the queer community, and his reputation extended far beyond Provincetown—visitors to the A-House hailed from all over, descending on the scene during highly anticipated summer visits. As the gay news outlet Edge Media Network wrote of LaSalle in 2010, "the world comes to him."



LOUD AND CLEAR

Robert "Bob" Oliveira '67MS, whose easygoing manner belied the grit that brought him success in business and science, died in September. He was 79.

Oliveira, who was raised in New Bedford, Mass., was a biochemist and inventor who held 17 patents. While working for 3M in the 1980s, he led the program for the first FDA-approved cochlear implant—a revolutionary treatment for severe hearing loss caused by inner-ear damage. In 1990, Oliveira founded Hearing Components, a research and development firm that manufactures foam earpieces to make hearing aids and listening devices more comfortable.

Along with his wife, **Deanna "Dee" Oliveira '66PhD**, Bob founded Oliveira R&D Foundation, a Minneapolis nonprofit that provides educational scholarships to local young adults interested in STEM fields.

Oliveira was someone who smiled and introduced himself when a stranger stepped into the elevator. He loved modern art, Louis Armstrong, and bicycling around the French countryside with new friends. "At his service, we listened to Armstrong's recording of 'What a Wonderful World,'" says Dee. "That was really Bob's world."

A FOUNDING MOTHER OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

Mary Ellen Reilly '73PhD died September 18, 2022, at the age of 81. One of the founders of the Women's Studies program (now Gender and Women's Studies) at the University of Rhode Island (URI), Reilly led the program for 15 years and was instrumental in expanding it into a full academic department. She retired in 2003 after 30 years of teaching.

"Mary Ellen was a strong leader with a passionate vision for the Women's Studies program," says Karen Stein, professor emerita of English and Women's Studies at URI. One of Reilly's proudest achievements was securing a million-dollar donation from Eleanor M. Carlson to fund an endowed professor of Women's Studies and an annual public lecture. A sociologist by training, Reilly was internationally recognized for her groundbreaking research on sexual harassment and sexual abuse.

"Although she was generally soft-spoken, she could be tenacious when challenging people or policies that she found unacceptable," says Barbara F. Luebke, Reilly's partner of 32 years with whom Reilly also collaborated on a book about the first generation of women's studies graduates. "She deserves praise for her decades-long advocacy for girls and women on campus and in Rhode Island and elsewhere. She never hesitated to speak truth to power when it came to their concerns and issues."

Please submit nominations for remembrances to: updates@umass.edu
For a full list of alumni and faculty whose deaths were reported to the UMass Amherst Alumni Association between September 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023, please visit: umass.edu/magazine/s23memoriam

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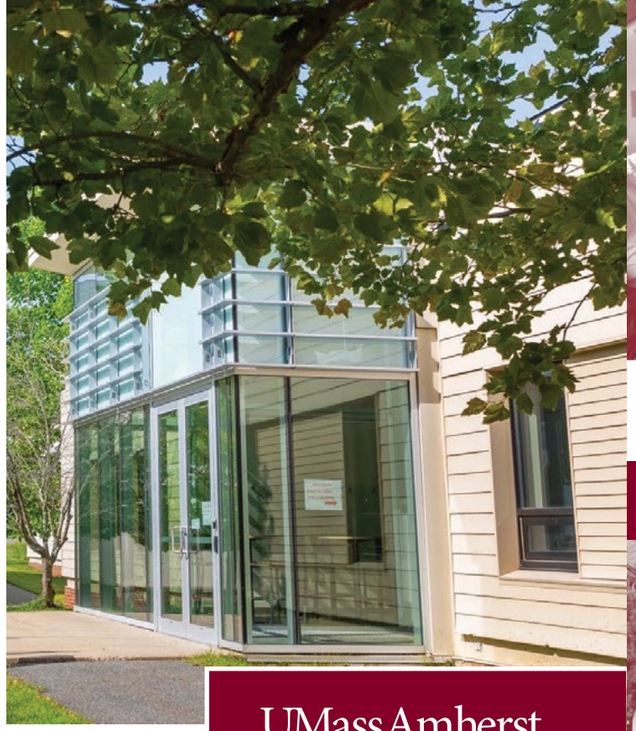

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CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

How one student untangled race-based hair discrimination

> DEANNA COOK '23

In my sophomore year of high school, I got called up to the teacher's desk. The room was silent while other students worked, so everyone heard when the teacher broadcasted that my braids violated the school rules. The same thing happened to my twin sister, Mya. It was the beginning of a battle. The school kicked me off the track team, banned us from after-school activities (including prom), and handed us detention after detention, all because of our hair. As a woman of color, I wanted to wear my hair in braids as part of my cultural expression. But because of that, I was punished for months by teachers, administrators, and students.

I'm not really sure why people thought telling us to just give up would make us give up, but we didn't. We organized protests and spoke to reporters. Some people would tell us they had never heard of discrimination based on hairstyles. On the other hand, we also heard from a ton of people all over the country who said, "I went through this privately on my own. My school did this to me, but we were forced to keep quiet about it." We understood then that it was important to bring this issue to light and raise awareness that this type of discrimination does happen, and that it's incredibly painful and destructive.

> "I'm not really sure why people thought telling us to just give up would make us give up, but we didn't."

Massachusetts Rep. Steven Ultrino reached out to support us and asked me and my sister to share our experiences and advocate for passage of the CROWN Act (which stands for Creating a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural hair) at the state level. It took five years, but just after completing my sophomore year at UMass, in July 2021, Massachusetts became the 18th state to pass the law, extending protections against hair discrimination to everyone in the commonwealth.

This experience has made my time at college feel even more important, because I know that armed with my education, I can push back against discrimination. People who go through what Mya and I experienced will now have clear legal rights to back them up, thanks to the CROWN Act. But there are many other places to make progress.

When it comes to any type of discrimination, we all have a role to play to stop it in its tracks. It's especially important for people who don't experience the type of hair discrimination that I went through to speak up, acknowledge that it exists, and become allies in the fight.

Deanna Cook '23 is an anthropology major and business minor at UMass Amherst.

> Celebrate the achievements of the CROWN Act: umass.edu/magazine/crown

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