MONEY MATTERS

> BABOONS AND BEYOND
> WHAT LIVES ON YOUR HANDS
DID YOU KNOW: The campus pond—a haven for geese, ducks, and students alike—was once just a stream that ran through campus! In the winter of 1890–91 two students dammed the stream into a pond, which was used as a natural source of ice before the days of refrigeration. The pond also became the site of many student activities, including an annual rope pulling competition between the first-years and sophomores, and in 1909 as the home rink for the men’s intercollegiate hockey team.
True innovation requires creative thinking—and often creative equipment as well. The UMass Amherst Scientific Glassblowing Laboratory creates such equipment, allowing researchers in the College of Natural Sciences more flexibility as they design experiments.

Run by Sally Prasch, who has more than 40 years of experience as a laboratory glassblower, the lab works with researchers to custom design, fabricate, modify, and repair specialty scientific glass instruments that can’t be found in a catalog. The instruments created here can even be tried out and then brought back to be modified as needed. “We adjust it and have it done for them in a day, and they can keep going,” says Prasch.

Prasch is excited about having in-person classes in the lab again this semester. In addition, she says, “We’re trying to promote glass on campus, not just in science, but also in the arts.” To that end, the lab has partnered with the Hampden Gallery to install a show called Formed with Silica, open through the end of December and viewable online.
A DEFINING QUALITY

What does success look like? Is it coming through in a crisis (p. 42) or is it following your curiosity into the jungle of a faraway land (p. 6)? Is it examining how seemingly small changes can help millions or spreading the word about innovation (p. 30)? Or is it completely scrapping plans altogether and discovering a whole new passion along the way (p. 14)?

Rankings and accolades are great, but we must remember that those glowing numbers are just a reflection of the amazing UMass people who are part of our community, and the successes that they have achieved.

And as the UMass community members featured in this issue demonstrate, sometimes a crowning achievement isn’t the end of the road, but just the beginning of an even grander adventure.

Read on to learn more about the pivotal moments—and leaps of faith—that showcase how so many UMass alumni, researchers, and students are striving to reach new heights in their fields and personal lives, and are restlessly redefining success along the way.

Happy reading,
Anna Weyher ’21PhD, a UMass doctoral student in anthropology, watches from a discreet distance as a young baboon swings on a low-hanging vine in Zambia’s Kasanka National Park. “He’s changing so fast,” says her companion, Zambian wildlife scout Marley Katinta. “They grow up too fast,” Weyher responds ruefully, like a parent wishing she could keep her child from venturing into the outside world for just a little while longer.

Weyher and Katinta are observing Kinda baboons that live in Kasanka’s mixed forest-woodland-grassland habitat. Formerly classified as a subspecies of the yellow baboon, the Kinda baboon has recently been recognized as an entirely separate species.

The founder and director of the Kasanka Baboon Project, Weyher is the first to study the Kinda baboon. Conducting field research in Kasanka for more than a decade, she has gained valuable insights into the Kindas’ social structure and behavior, which are dramatically different from those of other baboon species.

Typically, baboons have a reputation for being noisy, aggressive opportunists. Males hold alpha rank for short periods and often resort to infanticide so a female will stop nursing and become ready to mate again. In contrast, male Kindas maintain their rank for multiple years, and there is little fighting for access to females. Instead, they develop long-term relationships with females and interact with infants much more. “What we’re seeing in the Kindas is that males are instead staying with the same females over multiple births and reproductive cycles,” Weyher says. “The males are spending more time with the females in all reproductive states, kind of ‘helping’ with the infant, doing a lot of the grooming and protection and things like that. These relationships last for a long, long time.”

A BAT–BABOON CONNECTION
In 2010, with the support of a Fulbright grant, Weyher set up a long-term field site at Kasanka National Park—an approximately 150-square-mile refuge in Zambia’s Central Province. Establishing and maintaining a field site in Africa on her own while pursuing graduate studies in the United States was no easy task. But when Weyher transitioned to UMass for her PhD, it turned out to be an ideal fit. “It’s been the most accepting, rewarding, motivating place,” says Weyher. “UMass has just kind of tied everything together, and I feel such support.”

BY ANNIKA S. HIPPLE
FIELD WORK, LIFE’S WORK
Anna Weyher ’21PhD decodes the social structure of Kinda baboons and empowers women in the local community

Photo: Gregoire Dubois
Weyher’s advisor, Jason Kamilar, associate professor of anthropology and director of the Comparative Primatology Lab, has known her since before she started the Kasanka Baboon Project. In addition to Kamilar and three other researchers, Weyher has worked with the baboon project since 2012. He knows all the baboons, even from a distance, and keeps the data collection going when Weyher is away.

For identification, Weyher and her team name the baboons after musicians. The baboon troop includes Aretha, and Ella. To make it easier to trace genealogy, it’s common for primate researchers to give mothers and their babies names that begin with the same letter—Ella’s offspring include Elvis, Elton, and Eminem.

Poaching is a big problem in the park, and initially, Weyher was concerned that habituating the baboons to humans would put them at greater risk, but the research project actually seems to provide protection for the baboons. “We have boats on the ground every day,” Weyher explains. “We’ve been told by the ecologists and people doing studies that they can see a difference since we’ve been there... We’re kind of like our own little anti-poaching unit.”

Weyher has also noticed a change in the attitudes of local people as they have absorbed some of the scouts’ enthusiasm for the baboons. The scouts “talk about their personalities and how different and interesting they are, and I think that the community has started to understand how similar we are to them, which has been a big step forward,” Weyher says.

BEYOND BABOONS

From the start, Weyher has been committed to making community work a key part of her project. “For me, it wasn’t just about going in and getting some data and leaving,” she explains. For a scientific research project to be sustainable, it needs to benefit local people as well as wildlife. Weyher specifically wanted to find ways to empower local women. She started a weekly math and science club for girls to help create an educational community and provide opportunities for hands-on learning. She also established a weekly after-school conservation club—open to everyone—and a conservation club for girls to help create an educational community.

Weyher has also noticed a change in the attitudes of local people as they have absorbed some of the scouts’ enthusiasm for the baboons. The scouts “talk about their personalities and how different and interesting they are, and I think that the community has started to understand how similar we are to them, which has been a big step forward,” Weyher says.

Kamilar. “We’re interested in looking at how those fruit bats affect the resident mammal species—the bats that live at Kasanka year-round, the baboons, maybe the other primates.”

Weyher’s research on the Kindas also has broader implications. “People use baboons as a model for early humans or human ancestors,” explains Kamilar. “Kamilar’s discoveries indicate that in terms of social structure and behavior, Kindas more closely resemble ancient humans than they do other baboons. Their home may be more similar to our own little anti-poaching unit.”

While school is free through grade seven in Zambia, high school is not. Since there are no high schools near Kasanka, only students whose parents can afford to pay for room, board, and travel—as well as tuition and other school-related expenses—are able to continue their education. Zambian parents with limited resources often prioritize boys, so in order to give young women the same opportunities, Weyher established the Sarah Darlene Hogle Scholarship Fund in honor of a close friend who passed away. “Studies show that the higher the education of the mom, the higher the education of the kids, and women put a lot more back into their community than men do in general,” she says. It currently costs about $1,000 U.S. to send a girl through high school in Zambia.

So far, three girls from the local community have received scholarships and completed high school. With additional financial support from Weyher, a first recipient, Leah Mwamba, has also gone on to graduate from nursing school. “She was so shy at first but really, really bright, and she’s just blossomed into the most amazing, smart, go-getter woman,” says Weyher. Together, Weyher and Mwamba have developed a new project to help village women gain more economic freedom by making cloth door mats out of used clothing and selling them in the local market. Although the seed money comes from the Kasanka Baboon Project, the hope is for the project to become self-sustaining.

Recently, Weyher was also pleased to be able to hire the national park’s first female scout to work with the baboon project. Weyher hopes to continue working with the research and the community work at Kasanka for a long time. “Some of the most amazing projects on baboons have been going on for 40-plus years,” she says, “and now the data that they have and the questions that they can answer about human health and stress, and environmental change, and all of these things over multiple generations, is where you really learn.”

Watch the Smithsonian Channel’s episode focused on Weyher and the project: umass.edu/magazine/baboons
For many of us, the pandemic has inspired a new obsession with keeping our hands clean. Yet much is still unknown about the microbes that live on our hands and how to protect their health—and ours. Skin microbiome researcher Kelly N. Haas of the UMass Amherst biology department recently began a research partnership with GOJO Industries—the makers of Purell—to study the relationship between the microbiome, hand hygiene, and hand health. Research into the skin microbiome is barely a decade old, and scientists are still in the process of answering fundamental questions about what makes up the hand microbiome. They believe it is composed of millions or even billions of microorganisms—primarily bacteria and yeasts/fungi, but possibly also viruses, bacteriophages, and microscopic eukaryotes. These microorganisms provide important protection for humans’ first line of defense—the skin—by shielding us from “bad” bacteria. According to Haas, a healthy skin microbiome provides a low pH—which, combined with the physical competition for space and nutrients, prevents colonization and proliferation by most pathogens. The microbiome also trains and regulates the immune system so that the body can adjust the skin microbiome to limit certain pathogens. “This self-regulation has its limits,” says Haas, “which is why we rely on targeted hand hygiene to keep ourselves healthy and reduce disease transmission.”

In addition to getting a clearer picture of what a healthy hand microbiome looks like, Haas is also seeking to understand what changes when that microbiome is disrupted—for example, by hand-washing or sanitizing. The goal is to learn how to manipulate that process for our benefit. But the hand microbiome is complicated to assess because people are constantly touching things. The trick is teasing apart which microbes belong there versus which ones were picked up from the environment. “For example, we know that farmers who work in the dirt end up looking like they have a soil microbiome on their hands,” Haas explains. Haas is also beginning work to close a major gap in scientists’ knowledge. Over half of the organisms processed in her lab’s sequencing surveys cannot be mapped to known species. Her new research will develop a collection of hand isolates (pure cultures of individual organisms isolated from human hand microbial communities) and their genome sequences—an enormous boon for hand microbiome research.

THE RISKS OF OVERCLEANING

“Because of the pandemic, many people have gone overboard about cleaning everything,” says Haas. The visible signs of over-washed hands, familiar to many of us, include a dry, red, itchy rash called atopic dermatitis. But this discomfort may also signal damage at a microbial level. Haas describes a trade-off between hygiene and health, saying it’s both futile and potentially dangerous to try to kill all microbes in the environment. “When we try to kill everything off, we end up making it easier for certain organisms to colonize those spaces because there’s not that normal colonization resistance anymore,” she says. “People who are really heavily washing their hands or overusing hand sanitizer run the risk of harming their hand health by disrupting that microbial and lipid barrier.”

IMAGINING BETTER PRODUCTS

Products currently available to cleanse hands include soap—which washes off microbes but doesn’t usually kill them, and sanitizers—which typically use ethanol, a broad-spectrum killing agent. Scientists like Haas hope to translate their research into developing more microbiome-friendly products in the next three to five years, exploring the possible use of probiotics, prebiotics, and post-biotics to support the microbes that should be living on hands. While each of these options has its own pros and cons, they all have the potential to “give a competitive advantage to the organisms we want to be growing on hands and help them repopulate themselves faster after a hand hygiene event,” says Haas.

Advice for Healthy Hands

To keep her hands clean, Haas typically uses soap and water when she’s home, and hand sanitizer out in public. She prefers sanitizers made with ethyl alcohol, explaining that it can actually be gentler on hands than soap and water, which breaks up the lipid barrier and pulls water out and down the drain. Antibacterial soaps are not necessary unless a person has had known contact with a “large quantity of infectious bacteria,” she says. In general, Haas advises people to clean their hands after coming into contact with high-touch surfaces or those in restrooms. And always wash before eating or after blowing your nose.

Why in the World
Many of us grew up hearing that video games would rot our brains, but as it turns out, some games may actually benefit us. Sunghoon Ivan Lee, assistant professor in the College of Information and Computer Sciences, recently received a grant for approximately $436,000 from the National Institutes of Health to study the use of “serious games” to improve the brain function of older adults with mild cognitive impairment.

Lee is developing a platform to motivate patients to follow a therapeutic regimen of playing Neuro-World, a collection of six simple tablet games, on their own at home. In one game that’s designed to stimulate short-term memory using visual information, animals enter and leave the screen, and players must identify in which direction the animals left. Other games focus on stimulating selective attention.

In a small pilot study, Lee and his colleagues found that Neuro-World games could not only improve stroke survivors’ cognitive function but also predict their expected improvement. The findings are exciting given that, as Lee says, “There aren’t many solutions to stimulate cognitive ability in people with cognitive disabilities, especially in their homes, outside clinical settings.”

**WHISTLEBLOWERS, UNITE!**

UMass commemorates Pentagon Papers’ 50th anniversary

> SCOTT WHITNEY

Long before Chelsea Manning, WikiLeaks, and Edward Snowden, there was Daniel Ellsberg. Fifty years ago, the military analyst turned whistleblower exposed shocking truths about the United States’ engagement in Vietnam in a leaked dossier known as the “Pentagon Papers.” In 2019 the UMass Special Collections and University Archives acquired Ellsberg’s papers, and this spring, the university explored the impact of Ellsberg and Ellsberg himself.

In a historic pairing, the conference featured a virtual discussion between Ellsberg and fellow whistleblower Edward Snowden, moderated by Democracy Now! host Amy Goodman. In that dialogue, Ellsberg and Snowden described their respective paths to dissent—and grounded their actions in the tradition of civil disobedience.

The conference was the culmination of a year-long seminar taught by history professor Christian Appy and journalism professor Kathy Roberts Forde. The seminar students—who spent the past academic year immersed in Ellsberg’s papers—presented their research and findings at the conference, an experience that Grace Simmons ’22 counts among the most impactful of her academic career. “I’ve always been drawn to activism, but this experience taught me how social justice intersects with research,” says Simmons. “And in this case, we literally had our hands on history.”

In addition to the year-long seminar and culminating conference, UMass partnered with Charles Sennott ’84 in developing a five-part series recounting Ellsberg’s experiences as a whistleblower for the tenth season of Sennott’s award-winning GroundTruth Project podcast. The podcast, titled The Whistleblower: Truth, Dissent and the Legacy of Daniel Ellsberg, tracks Ellsberg’s decision to leak classified Pentagon documents and contends with explosive blowback, including the threat of a 115-year prison sentence. “Ellsberg’s courage as a truth teller speaks to a time when it feels like truth is eroding all around us,” says Sennott on his podcast website. “We need to be reminded that dissent can be the ultimate expression of patriotism.”

In addition to the year-long seminar and culminating conference, UMass partnered with Charles Sennott ’84 in developing a five-part series recounting Ellsberg’s experiences as a whistleblower for the tenth season of Sennott’s award-winning GroundTruth Project podcast. The podcast, titled The Whistleblower: Truth, Dissent and the Legacy of Daniel Ellsberg, tracks Ellsberg’s decision to leak classified Pentagon documents and contends with explosive blowback, including the threat of a 115-year prison sentence. “Ellsberg’s courage as a truth teller speaks to a time when it feels like truth is eroding all around us,” says Sennott on his podcast website. “We need to be reminded that dissent can be the ultimate expression of patriotism.”

**THE FUTURE OF FUN**

When the pandemic started, students weren’t able to gather in person, but that didn’t mean the fun had to stop. Student activities shifted online—everything from fitness classes to trivia nights and beyond. Now, with campus opened up again, what does the future of student programming look like?

As students return to in-person activities, they’ll see some of favorites like the annual Arcade Night and Food Truck Festival, made fresh by the sparkling new Student Union building. But that’s not the only change. “Returning students will see some remixed iterations of our usual programs on campus,” says Pete Smith, director of Student Affairs and Campus Life Communications and Professional Development. For example, esports—a form of competitive video gaming—has proven to be popular and will be incorporated into future events: “We don’t want to abandon all virtual practices,” says Smith, since bringing events online did make programming more accessible to many students. “We will make sure to support our remote communities, providing spaces for engagement in the virtual world.”

**BRAIN GAMES**

Many of us grew up hearing that video games would rot our brains, but as it turns out, some games may actually benefit them. Sunghoon Ivan Lee, assistant professor in the College of Information and Computer Sciences, recently received a grant for approximately $436,000 from the National Institutes of Health to study the use of “serious games” to improve the brain function of older adults with mild cognitive impairment.

Lee is developing a platform to motivate patients to follow a therapeutic regimen of playing Neuro-World, a collection of six simple tablet games, on their own at home. In one game that’s designed to stimulate short-term memory using visual information, animals enter and leave the screen, and players must identify in which direction the animals left. Other games focus on stimulating selective attention.

In a small pilot study, Lee and his colleagues found that Neuro-World games could not only improve stroke survivors’ cognitive function but also predict their expected improvement. The findings are exciting given that, as Lee says, “There aren’t many solutions to stimulate cognitive ability in people with cognitive disabilities, especially in their homes, outside clinical settings.”
Adam Markel ’87 had everything: a happy marriage, healthy kids, a great career. So why was he so anxious? “At the beginning of each day I’d feel dread,” he recalls. And then: “I’m supposed to be at my son’s baseball game, and instead I’m on a gurney at the local emergency room.” It was a panic attack—and a wake-up call. Markel knew it was time to make a big change.


Laura Manley ’08 always knew she wanted to be an executive director for a mental health nonprofit. Right after she graduated she got a job as (surprise!) the executive director of a mental health nonprofit. “It was my dream come true,” she recalls. Except it wasn’t. “I had had such a laser-like focus on that topic, I hadn’t taken time to think about what else I was interested in.” So she left for Southeast Asia, volunteering with aid organizations that were using technology in ways that intrigued her. Today, Manley is the inaugural director of the Technology and Public Purpose Project at Harvard Kennedy School. “Students are frustrated because they don’t know exactly what they want to do. There’s nothing wrong with that!” she says. “It’s okay to switch course and change your mind.”

John Elder Robison learned he was autistic at the age of 40. Finally, Robison felt he could live his life “as a perfectly typical autistic person, rather than a second-rate human.” Back when he was a teen faculty brat, Robison flunked out of school and instead hung around the UMass engineering lab, receiving a de facto education. Then he went on to design special effects guitars for the rock band KISS, restore high-end European automobiles, and advocate for autism research. “How many thousands of other people like me are there,” he says, “who didn’t have the advantages I had?”

A Perfectly Typical Autistic Person

By Naomi Shulman

Photos and Illustrations by Lisa Beth Anderson

The One Constant: Change

How do we make it happen—or cope with it when it happens to us?

By Naomi Shulman
For Ana Torres-Ocampo ‘21, an entire career resulted from a casual chat. “I saw my friend sitting on a bench,” she recalls. “He said, ‘I’m going to lab.’ I was like, ‘Lab?’” Torres-Ocampo followed along and signed on as a volunteer. “I had envisioned really, really smart people working there,” she says. But knowing that her friend was part of the lab made it less intimidating. Now Torres-Ocampo is a PhD candidate digging into cutting-edge molecular and biochemical neuroscience, and the novelty has not worn off. “I get giddy like a little kid. It’s amazing to me that I get to do this.”

When former head of sport management Glenn Wong offered Anne Flannery ‘89 a coveted internship with the Boston Celtics, Flannery surprised everyone by saying no. “My heart was set on a position with the Women’s Sports Foundation (WSF). Glenn was like, ‘The who?’ Flannery stuck to her guns, turning away the brass ring of the Celtics in order to pursue something that, for her, felt much bigger. “And it changed my life.” She did get the job at the WSF, and many others followed, including leadership positions at Spaulding and the Boys & Girls Clubs.

After years of climbing the corporate ladder, Bill Russell ‘97 MBA opted for a slower life. He opened a food truck—which turned into a café, and then turned into a full-fledged restaurant. Then he bought a cranberry bog. And started an... alpaca farm? (So much for slowing down.) “My father passed away when he was 60,” Russell says. “He worked until he retired and then passed away within a year. And I thought, well, that’s kind of silly.” And so Russell remains mindfully open to the twists and turns that make life interesting.

More alumni and staff share their pivotal moments: umass.edu/magazine/change
connecting with others,” Watson says. “I had to learn
what people were going to be a source of support for
me during this unique moment.”

Our world shrank in March 2020. But inside that
loss, many of us discovered what activities and
connections truly fulfill us—and which don’t. As
the world reopens, Watson says, we can and should
continue to be intentional about where we invest our
energy, reflecting on whether there are friendships
we’ve outgrown or communities we now feel less
connected to. Imperfection is fine, though! “We can
embrace the messiness of it and appreciate it as a
process and a practice,” Watson explains.

SHOW YOU CARE
If you ask Lynnette Arnold, PhD, a linguistic anthro-
pologist at UMass, language isn’t just a grammatical
system, it’s also a form of social action. Arnold
researches how language creates care, particularly
for transnational families. Her work became espe-
cially relevant during the pandemic as
she watched the world attempt to
do the taxing relational work
that families scattered across the
globe have been forced to do
for decades.

Even casual everyday
chats are “really vital for
building and maintaining
relationships,” says Arnold. But communication
is complex: “There’s the real conversation we are
having or the topic we’re discussing, but underneath
that, there’s the relationship,” she says.

Our tone, body language, and vocabulary commu-
nicate care—or a lack thereof. Arnold recommends
choosing modes of communication that work best
for you. If you feel exhausted on Zoom, try a phone
call. If you don’t have the capacity to connect in real
time, try sending a voice message or a photo from
your day instead. You have the power to choose the
kinds of communication that are sustainable for
you and still communicate care.

USE TECHNOLOGY FOR GOOD
Tenzin Dhardon Sharling ’25, a PhD candidate in
communication at UMass, used the pandemic to
explore how we communicate compassion online.
Part of her research is an investigation into how
technology makes positive change in the world.
“Technology should aid in human wellness, not
hinder it,” Dhardon Sharling says.

As a former activist in the Free Tibet movement,
Dhardon Sharling frequently used social media to
promote her beliefs, but she found those digital
interactions emotionally and physically draining.
“I started to wonder if social media was designed to
make you [feel bad],” she says. Now that boundaries
between the digital and physical world are even
blurrier, Dhardon Sharling recommends thinking
about technology as a relationship, not just a tool.
Much like you choose to be around people who bring
you joy, you can choose to spend time in online
spaces that energize and empower you.

Or, as Dhardon Sharling says, “With technology,
the well-being of our communities and our planet …
[should be] the primary goal.”

FINDING PATIENCE, TAKING STOCK
After the destabilizing effects of the pandemic,
we have the opportunity to do things differently.
“We all have to relearn how to communicate face
to face,” Arnold says, “and that can be an important
moment to think about how we’re doing things, and
how we want to do things.”

Taking the time to reflect on effective communi-
cation and establish new habits, rather than falling
back on old behaviors, can help us sustain richer
bonds and stronger communities.

The pandemic forced us to think about our
proximity to others in strange new ways—and
reevaluate the concepts of connection
and community. What do we want to carry with us
from our days in lockdown, and what do we want
to leave behind?

Inspired by work in Buddhist studies and psy-
chology, linguistic anthropology, and communication,
three UMass experts encourage us to reflect on
building healthy relationships.

BE INTENTIONAL
For Alex Watson ’18, a Buddhist studies scholar
now studying social work at Smith College, the
pandemic was an opportunity to reflect on how he
creates community. “I had to be intentional about

HOW TO BUILD RESILIENT RELATIONSHIPS
Three UMass experts weigh in on healthy relationships post-COVID

> REBECCA VALLEY ’20MFA

IN BRIEF INQUIRING MINDS >
Once, I took some photos from the top of the not-yet-completed Lederle GRC [Graduate Research Center] tower. I’m sure that I would have gotten into a bunch of trouble if I had been caught, but the idea of taking ‘aerial’ photos was too tempting to resist.”

I was, and still am, fascinated by older architecture. It was fun to wander around in my spare time and investigate the old buildings. As the university has grown, I have been pleased that the school did not demolish the old buildings, but instead has created an interesting mix of structures—old and new.”

Over the decades, building renovations and new construction have reshaped the look of various parts of the campus. These additions, trims, and remodels give students, faculty, researchers, and staff access to cutting-edge facilities that prepare them for an ever-changing job market. Though things have evolved with the times, nostalgia for favorite spots on campus can still be felt—including for those that live on only in treasured photographs.

Karl Gerdes ’75 was kind enough to share some of his photos—and favorite memories—from the winter of 1972–73. I liked to lug my old Canon SLR around a lot during my college years, and enjoyed trying to capture the ‘perfect shot.’ I often got up early to wander around the campus, even in the cold, if only to get out of my dorm room for awhile. As is still the case, the campus was beautiful, with lots of photographic opportunities.”

I was also awestruck by the brick buildings and their impressive icicles. It seemed that almost every one of the older buildings were adorned with them, some more than 6 feet long!”

I often tried to get some ‘arty’ shots. Back in those days, there wasn’t the instant gratification of digital photography. You sent your film away to be processed, and hoped that a few of the shots on your 36-exposure roll were good ones—which was not always the case.”
Predicting financial trends and policy shifts can be challenging even during typical economic times—and most economists would agree, these times are anything but typical. We asked some of the UMass community's top economic minds, alumni and professors alike, about key trends or policy ideas they believe will have considerable impact on the economy and the lives of Americans—and citizens across the globe—over the next few years.

BY SCOTT WHITNEY

In her new book, What We Owe Each Other: A New Social Contract for a Better Society, global economist Minouche Shafik ’83 argues that the implicit social contract that once ensured shared societal benefits is in desperate need of reinventing. “The old social contract was premised on the idea that women took care of the young and the old for free, that most people would have only a few jobs over a career, and the education they received in school would be sufficient to last a lifetime,” says Shafik. “Most of those assumptions are no longer valid.”

Shafik posits that living under an obsolete social contract is at the root of rising political divisiveness and economic insecurity among our most vulnerable populations. However, she offers a brighter path forward, suggesting that if we recognize our interdependence, a new social contract is possible. “For example, investing more in young people’s education will make them more able to contribute to the health care and pension costs of the elderly,” she explains. “Providing better child care infrastructure will enable more women to stay in the labor market and make both men and women more productive. Addressing environmental degradation is key to a more just intergenerational social contract.” By recognizing that we owe each other more, says Shafik, we lay the groundwork for greater security worldwide and improved economic opportunities for many.

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

BARONESS MINOUCHE SHAFIK ’83
Director, London School of Economics and Political Science

In her new book, What We Owe Each Other: A New Social Contract for a Better Society, global economist Minouche Shafik ’83 argues that the implicit social contract that once ensured shared societal benefits is in desperate need of reinventing. “The old social contract was premised on the idea that women took care of the young and the old for free, that most people would have only a few jobs over a career, and the education they received in school would be sufficient to last a lifetime,” says Shafik. “Most of those assumptions are no longer valid.”

Shafik posits that living under an obsolete social contract is at the root of rising political divisiveness and economic insecurity among our most vulnerable populations. However, she offers a brighter path forward, suggesting that if we recognize our interdependence, a new social contract is possible. “For example, investing more in young people’s education will make them more able to contribute to the health care and pension costs of the elderly,” she explains. “Providing better child care infrastructure will enable more women to stay in the labor market and make both men and women more productive. Addressing environmental degradation is key to a more just intergenerational social contract.” By recognizing that we owe each other more, says Shafik, we lay the groundwork for greater security worldwide and improved economic opportunities for many.
In November 2020, the U.S. Federal Reserve announced a seemingly minor change to their monetary policy framework that made recent doctoral graduate Devika Dutt sit up and take notice. Instead of targeting a strict 2% cap on inflation, the Fed will now aim for inflation that “averages 2% over time.” What makes the difference between 2% and an “average” of 2% so notable? Dutt explains that traditionally, in balancing lower inflation against lower unemployment, the Fed has favored policy that controls inflation, which some economists believe discourages job growth and contributes to income inequality over time. However, Dutt sees in this recent announcement a marked shift in monetary policy. “It’s high time the Fed acknowledges that it’s a policy choice to weight lower inflation over higher employment levels,” she says. “Now, it seems they are giving some priority to unemployment rates, and not just as a whole, but among the differential rates you find among various population groups, including Black unemployment.”

In the face of an expanding income gap, Misra believes that the monthly child tax credit that became a centerpiece of this year’s American Rescue Plan will have a meaningful impact on working families. The legislation temporarily expands the child tax credit for most households to $3,600 for children under the age of six and $3,000 for children ages six to seventeen, and she holds out hope that this could become a high-impact standing policy. “When Canada put a similar program in place, it lowered poverty by nearly 50%,” she explains. “I’m very hopeful that legislators will be willing to make this a permanent program.”
**IMPACT INVESTING**

ANGELA BROWN ’83  
Vice President for Policy and Program, CF Leads

Most philanthropic foundations give painstaking consideration to the research and nonprofit work their grants support, ensuring that this work is closely aligned with their mission. However, Angela Brown ’83 stresses that when it comes to ethical stewardship, outgoing grants are only half the equation; equal thought needs to be given to how granting organizations are investing their endowment dollars. “If a foundation’s assets are held in traditional financial vehicles, those investments are often going toward companies that don’t align with their mission,” explains Brown, an expert in philanthropic development. “There also need to be procedures on the finance side to steward the endowment ethically.” Brown cites carbon emissions and extractive labor practices as examples of issues that foundations may want to divest from—while also focusing on the impact they can have in their communities through thoughtful reinvestment.

Brown cites a growing trend toward impact investing among private foundations, with national organizations such as the Ford Foundation and the Heron Foundation leading the charge. “There are many good examples of foundations making responsibly underwritten investments that will actually produce a return and preserve capital,” says Brown. “It can be tricky, but there are more and more examples of organizations making it work.”

**WAGE GROWTH**

ARINDRAJIT DUBE  
Professor of Economics, University of Massachusetts Amherst

After four decades of eroded wage standards, UMass Professor Arindrajit Dube sees an encouraging—and unintended—consequence of labor policy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to a confluence of social and economic factors, including expanded unemployment benefits and a tightened labor market, lower-wage workers are experiencing new bargaining power with prospective employers. Dube is hopeful that this trend will continue. “If we get to a national unemployment rate of 3%, the balance of power could really change,” he says. “That would be a game changer for many workers at the bottom half of the pay scale, including service workers.”

According to Dube, sustained wage growth is a social issue that concerns all people, not just low-wage earners. “The most immediate impact of wage growth is to provide a greater standard of living. For example, if a parent has the resources needed to provide their children with adequate nutrition, that has a long-term impact on [child] development and, subsequently, can lead to human-capital accumulation over time,” says Dube. “Ultimately, an adequate wage standard would mean inclusive prosperity for the entire country.”

More experts on our financial future: umass.edu/magazine/money
VERSATILE ARTIST, COSTUME DESIGNER, AND TECHNICIAN

Christina Beam ‘18MFA was an “unapologetically nerdy” and inventive child. She once built a Victorian dollhouse for her brother’s Power Rangers toys, dressing the figurines in handmade outfits using a stapler and bits of tape. Beam knows it was the images of this dollhouse that she included in her application to the UMass graduate program in costume design that made her portfolio stand out. She credits UMass with inspiring a crucial turn in her trajectory as an artist.

“The day that I found out I got in, it changed my world. I suddenly went from working my customer service job to being in an environment where I was surrounded by people passionate about the things that I was passionate about—where people were supportive of me learning and growing. It opened up my mind and my eyes to a much broader picture of the world and my place in it.”

Beam particularly valued her dramaturgy courses. She asserts that, when shaping a theatrical production, the first step is always establishing the story “because everyone on the team needs to have the same story and understanding of what is we want to put on stage, how we want the audience to feel, and what we want them to take away from it.”

Costume design is another crucial element in telling a cohesive story, and there’s a synergetic relationship between the living actor on stage and the written character. As Beam puts it, “As much as the actor is honoring and portraying what’s in the text, you still see their mannerisms and their body, and the way that they move and carry themselves. And it’s kind of a combination of putting someone in something where it feels right—that’s why fit is so important—and it’s also about helping them to wear the clothes the way that they are meant to be worn.”

As she visualizes characters, she has to consider where they live, where they buy clothing, and a multitude of socioeconomic and cultural factors—all of which are “indicators to help the audience understand the second that character walks on stage who they are before they even open their mouth. And sometimes it’s a very subtle thing. Sometimes it’s just a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, but it’s exactly the way that it fits or the way that it is worn, and it’s like, ‘I know that person.’”

Beam fondly recalls late nights in the UMass costume shop, where—in collaboration with shop manager Kristin Jensen—she led design on her graduate thesis, Taylor Mac’s The Lily’s Revenge. Beam oversaw the creation of numerous elaborate flower costumes and designed and draped the character Dirt’s ensemble: a cascading sequin gown and a delicate twig crown.

Currently a designer in residence for PaintBox Theatre and costume shop supervisor at Western Connecticut State University, Beam has executed an extraordinary range of projects. She is collaborating with filmmaker Ben Tobin on a series of photos of actors in costumes constructed with printer paper, Tyvek, and cardstock made to look like the pages of the storybook in which the characters originally appeared. As Massachusetts residents become vaccinated and mask mandates are lifted, she is thrilled to be finishing a show with several other UMass alums—her “artistic family.”

Re/Emergence, “a post-apocalyptic performance” directed by fellow alum Jennifer Onopa ‘18MFA, premiered in June at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton, Massachusetts. “This feels like a really lucky and exciting way to reenter working again,” Beam says.
SMART FARMING TAKES ROOT

Jaren Huie '22 with newly planted crops under solar arrays at the UMass experimental farm site.

ENRICHED BY TECHNOLOGY, HARVESTS FLOURISH ANEW

BY NAOMI SHULMAN

PHOTOS BY JOHN SOLEM
"I'm an apple person. But I do know how to use a smartphone."

Grab your phone: An apple tree in bloom is Instagram-worthy.

"We're rooting for clean energy, and we're rooting for farming and food."

In many parts of the country, solar panels dot the landscape in empty fields. But what if those fields didn't need to be empty? Dwayne Breger, PhD, director of the UMass Clean Energy Extension, says, “With dual-use solar, you do simultaneous solar collection and farming on the same land, together.” In theory, placing solar panels higher off the ground and spacing them farther apart allows the sun to hit both the panels and the plants sufficiently. In the mid-2000s, UMass installed one of the first dual-use arrays in an experimental farm in South Deerfield to test the theory.

Now, Breger’s team is working with three solar developers on eight different farms. “These site trials will greatly expand the data,” Breger says. “You’ll see active agriculture taking place under the array. It could be raw crops or a field of hay or sheep grazing,” Breger says. “Raising the panels helps distribute the shading, and also allows farm machinery to get under and around them.” Fine-tuning dual-use farming can provide farmers with another revenue stream and more solar power for the rest of us. “We're rooting for clean energy, and we're rooting for farming and food.”

Jacob Suarez tends trees at UMass Cold Spring Orchard.

"I'M AN APPLE PERSON. BUT I DO KNOW HOW TO USE A SMARTPHONE."

Grab your phone: An apple tree in bloom is Instagram-worthy. Researcher Dan Cooley, professor of plant pathology at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, hopes that smartphone for something else: thinning the crop. “Apple growers need to knock off a certain amount of fruitlets,” he explains. A common practice is to use chemicals, but farmers first have to gauge a number of variables—including the weather, the temperature, and blossom size—to judge how much to spray. The alternative is to “select a number of tiny fruitlets, measure fruitlets all day? “We should be able to use computer vision and artificial intelligence to measure fruitlets,” Cooley says. His goal is to evolve the process from working with large, very expensive cameras down to simple cellphone cameras. “I'm pretty confident it will happen,” he says. “I don't consider myself a computer person. I'm an apple person. But I do know how to use a smartphone.”

"WE KNOW WHAT THE PROBLEM IS."

A few years ago, geosciences Assistant Professor Isaac Larsen was driving along in the Midwest, near where he grew up. “The hilltops in the landscape no longer had organic rich soil—just subsoil. I could tell by the color,” he recalls. A big driver of soil erosion and degradation is the plow. “Every time a plow goes across the landscape, it flushes the soil,” Larsen explains, “and the soil moves down the slope.” Over the course of a century and a half, that’s a lot of soil.

What to do? Supported by NASA, Larsen and his team are utilizing satellite imagery to analyze the problem. “We can relate soil color that we see in satellite imagery to the amount of carbon in the soil, and then relate that amount of carbon to a soil horizon,”—or soil layer—explains Evan Thaler, a doctoral student working with Larsen. The team has been able to show that around a third of all cultivated land in the United States has lost its rich topsoil. “The next step,” says Thaler, “is for policy makers to incorporate this information. If we can rebuild the carbon in the hilltops, we’re actually pulling carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and putting it back in the soil, so it’s absolutely a climate change issue as well.” Larsen backs that up. “We have to mitigate the effect we’ve had,” he says. “Restoration of carbon to soils is one piece of the solution.”

"IT'S EVERYONE'S RIGHT TO HAVE ACCESS TO LAND AND GROW FOOD."

Some technology optimizes existing farmland. But at the New England nonprofit Land For Good, connecting farmers to the land is the name of the game. “Some people explain what we do as a kind of matchmaking,” says Assistant Professor Isaac Larsen was driving along in the Midwest, near where he grew up. “The hilltops in the landscape no longer had organic rich soil—just subsoil. I could tell by the color,” he recalls. A big driver of soil erosion and degradation is the plow. “Every time a plow goes across the landscape, it flushes the soil,” Larsen explains, “and the soil moves down the
Shemariah Blum-Evitts ’09, program director. “There are older farmers who don’t have family ready to take over, and there are first-time farmers who need to find and finance suitable land.” Land For Good helps put the two together—and also identifies land just waiting for someone to start planting.

How best to match up a new, eager farmer with land? Having studied landscape architecture and regional planning and written her master’s thesis on geographic information systems (GIS) mapping, Blum-Evitts has some ideas that she’s putting to good use. “GIS enables you to work with different layers of information,” she says. “You have a street layer and waterways layer and forest layer. You can use it to see what’s currently in active farming, and what is available for farming.” Once her team extracts that data, they work with municipalities to identify plots for agricultural use. And who says farms have to be acres of fields? Some small pieces of farmland are actually located in urban centers. “A lot of people are interested in farming on two acres and creating a business model,” Blum-Evitts says. “It’s everyone’s right to have access to land and grow food. There’s a lot of land here in New England that can be used to grow food locally.”

Okay, who really understands blockchain—you know, the technology behind Bitcoin? “I would never pretend to,” laughs Hannah Leighton ’17MS. “But I do understand the impact it can have.” Leighton wears two hats.

First, she’s the director of research and evaluation at Farm to Institution New England, which serves as a network backbone connecting institutions to farms. How does food get from point A to point B? “The food supply chain is pretty behind in terms of transparency and traceability,” Leighton says. Transparency matters when, for example, a large college campus commits to procuring a significant chunk of its dining hall food from local farms, as UMass has.

Which brings us to Leighton’s second hat: working as a value chain specialist for Ripe.io—a startup created by former finance folks. “Ripe.io extracts essential information to follow an item along the supply chain, and puts it all in one place—that’s the blockchain,” Leighton explains. “Where is the farm located, really? Is it women or minority owned? The blockchain identifies those key metrics,” she says. Blockchain can’t be altered, only added to, which is why it’s so secure. “Eventually, if you put enough false information on the blockchain, you’ll get caught,” says Leighton. “It weeds out bad actors.”

Having accessible information about your food sources is useful for individuals as well as institutions. “We’ve done pilots where college students can scan a QR code at a salad bar and see different attributes about the food,” Leighton says. The technology is still young, but Leighton is excited. “There will be a bit of a boom coming up in the local food/tech space.”

Some farming problems require satellites and data sets. Others can be addressed more simply—assuming someone takes a moment to consider them. Steve Fernandez, engineering engagement specialist at the College of Engineering, makes sure students in his Engineering Service Learning class do just that. “This class focuses on community-based and grassroots organizations,” Fernandez says, “because I felt they were the ones who had the greatest need.”

Take Nuestras Raíces, a grassroots urban farming initiative in Holyoke. After learning about the farm, Fernandez showed up on their doorstep. “I said in Spanish, ‘I’m dropping in—Puerto Rican-style,’” says Fernandez, who is himself Puerto Rican. “In our culture, when someone stops by, you drop everything and socialize.” Together, Fernandez and the folks at Nuestras Raíces arrived at a project: protecting exposed irrigation pipes in cold weather.

Students landed on an elegant solution—foam insulation coverage for the pipes and a thermal blanket on the ground. “This solution doesn’t consume any fuel, and there’s no need for irrigation in the winter.” It’s a truly sustainable technique for a farm like Nuestras Raíces. “I did my degree in engineering because of my knowledge of my heritage, and my sense that through engineering we could address people’s needs,” Fernandez says. “This is exactly the work I wanted to do here.”

The future of farming, in other words, has taken root—in the soil, in data clouds, in satellites, and even in your phone.
Whether out on the trail or unloading your kayak at the local dock, you may notice something missing—the uniformity of people on the trails is in stark contrast to the diversity in the nature around you. Now that’s changing, thanks in part to Latino Outdoors—a nationwide organization with a new chapter in Massachusetts led by UMass graduate students Sebastian Moreno ’25PhD and Jackie Dias ’19, ’23MS.

“The goal of Latino Outdoors is to connect and engage Latinx communities in the outdoors and embrace our culture as part of the outdoor narrative. Ultimately, we want to create outdoor spaces where everyone can feel welcome and safe,” explains Moreno, whose research focuses on the intersectionality between humans and wildlife in urban environments.

For some, it may be difficult to imagine not feeling welcome on a trail or in a natural setting, but for many in the Latinx community, that is the case. As Dias explains, “Recreation and the ‘outdoor community’ have traditionally been very white and gear heavy, with the mindset of ‘If you don’t have the gear, you’re not doing it right.’ We want to get kids—especially Latinx children and families—into the outdoors. You don’t need the newest backpack or hiking boots to form a connection with nature.” Dias is currently researching the economic benefits of conservation programs in the United States.

Remembering her own experience, Dias says, “My undergraduate experience was pretty lonely and I often felt as though I didn’t ‘fit in’ to any one group. I didn’t feel like I was outdoorsy enough for UMOC (UMass Outing Club); I didn’t have the traditional background as someone pursuing sustainability. It was hard finding my place. Now, with Sebastian, we are creating a welcoming environment for people who are like us, to do the things we like and want to do.”

A key part of the Latino Outdoors mission is to explore the idea that nature can be found anywhere—families participate in events in local parks, city greenways, and even in their own backyards. In the spring, Latino Outdoors Massachusetts teamed up with other groups and collectives for events, creating pandemic-friendly activities to get their 43 members outside and in nature, including scavenger hunts and birding exploration.

Ultimately, we want to create outdoor spaces where everyone can feel welcome and safe.
I think [that having access to these centers] contributes to our success greatly because it gives us that sense of home so that we are comfortable enough to go out and try new things and progress.
—JASMINE PIERRE ’19

The Center for Women and Community (CWC) is founded
Recognizing the lack of resources for women in the area, the CWC has spent nearly 50 years providing informed education, leadership opportunities, advocacy, and support services to the Pioneer Valley—addressing the causes and impacts of sexism and oppression experienced by women of all cultures and backgrounds.

The Josephine White Eagle Cultural Center (JWEC) is created
Named after one of the earliest advocates for a Native cultural center at UMass, JWEC’s mission is to provide a cultural and social support system for Native students, faculty, and staff while also offering itself as a cultural diversity awareness resource for the UMass campus and the Pioneer Valley.

The Center for Multicultural Advancement and Student Success (CMASS) is instituted
Working with the individual cultural centers on campus, CMASS advocates for and helps advance the personal growth and academic and professional success of diverse populations on campus through inclusive and supportive programs and services. Having recently celebrated their 10th anniversary, CMASS created an even more in-depth timeline of the remarkable history of the cultural centers on campus.

The Latinx American Cultural Center (LACC) is established
Originally named the Hispanic Cultural Center, LACC is a place to celebrate and engage in Latinx culture. The center reopened in 1995 with the added goals of cultural education and inclusivity.

The Yuri Kochiyama Cultural Center (YKCC) is founded
As the first Asian cultural center on campus, then called the United Asia Cultural Center) YKCC has spent over 30 years supporting the growing population of Asian and Asian American students.
CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR’S RECIPIENTS

2021 UMASS ALUMNI HONORS
Celebrating the Flagship’s Finest

Distinguished Leader Award
Charles M. Sennott ’84

Excellence in Service Award
The Honorable Rachael Splaine Rollins ’94

Outstanding Young Alumni Award
Benjamin James Anderson Gallacher ’16

Lifetime Achievement Award
Richard J. Mahoney ’55, ’83 H

Revolutionary Spirit Award
Dr. Susan Hagedorn ’77

Randolph W. “Bill” Bromery Legacy Award
Dr. Michael J. Weir ’76 & Dr. Mirian M. Graddick-Weir

By the time Brandon Tory ’10 first set foot on the UMass Amherst campus, he had already taught himself how to write code and had built a computer from parts he found dumpster diving. However, this programming prodigy didn’t exactly have a smooth transition to college life. After a financially unstable childhood and years spent in a homeless shelter, Tory viewed college as a means of escape, even though he had never really been interested in school. It took meeting another Black engineering student—one who also seemed like an outcast—to find the camaraderie and inspiration he needed to apply himself. By the time he graduated, Tory was a straight-A student with a job as an engineer. Soon after, the reality of having a 9-to-5 position came crashing down on him. He wanted more. So, he decided to try his hand at his other lifelong passion—music. That’s when he reached out to Interscope Records, Jimmy Iovine of Interscope Records, who agreed to meet with him. Tory credits this meeting with inspiring him to start his own tech company, FORMLESS—where he combines music and technology.

Today, on top of continuing to build his company, he works on artificial intelligence at Google—and is working on a new album.

On February 18, 2021, people around the world watched in anticipation as the Perseverance Mars rover landed safely on the red planet’s dusty surface. But perhaps no one was on the edge of their seat more than UMass electrical and computer engineering alum Dragana Perkovic-Martín ’98PhD—leader of the team responsible for the rover’s landing radar system.

Following in the footsteps of other UMass engineering grads (including Sharmila Padmanabhan ’04EMS and Razi Ahmed ’06EMS, ’11PhD), Perkovic-Martín landed a job at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory where her work quickly made an indelible impression.

“The Mars 2020 mission came up and I was offered the lead role on the landing radar system engineering team. I doubted my abilities at the time, but I also knew that opportunities like this don’t come around often, so I jumped at it,” she says.

Her career path was not exactly linear. Originally, she focused her studies on telecommunications, but once she got the chance to work in the Microwave Remote Sensing Laboratory at UMass, she discovered a passion for researching, designing, and building radar systems.

“Before starting work on my post-graduate degree I did not think I would be working on anything related to space,” she says. “Once I started learning and working with radar instruments, I realized their potential and how wide-ranging their applications in science actually are.”
Sam Wilkinson ’02, Collegian managing editor: I remember—it is burned in my brain—the brightest blue sky you have ever seen, just an incredibly beautiful morning. I always stopped by the Collegian before I went to classes. I walked into the office, and there were already people gathered around the old-school television …

Dan Lamothe ’04, assistant op-ed editor and columnist: I was in one of my first journalism classes that morning. It was a news writing class. Your basics—the inverted pyramid, that stuff. [Norman Sims, the professor] disappears to his office across the way for 15 minutes and comes back, and you can see the look of shock on his face. I walked straight to the Collegian from there. Part of it, I think, was feeling compelled to participate in some way, and part of it was this fascination: How are we going to deal with this?

Scott Eldridge ’04, staff photographer: Once I was in the Campus Center or the Student Union, I started to see more TV screens with the news on. By the time I got to the newsroom, it was clear that whatever was going on, we would try to document it. This was not news going on in Amherst, but it was news that was affecting Amherst. So, it was sort of, how do you capture that idea or capture what was going on without being at the place where everything is happening? It’s sort of telling a story of people finding out about a story.

Lamothe: There was already a big group of staffers [in the newsroom]. People were already working the phones. I remember cellphones were down, so it was a struggle to reach people in New York—it was a struggle to reach people who might have actually seen this. But I recall that there were enough people with connections in the region and in the city that we were actually working the phones, not unlike any other professional newspaper. Not to recast what we were seeing in other newspapers but to actually do the work ourselves. … I think a lot of us grew up that day.

Wilkinson: So, here’s this enormous thing that happened—what is going on in our local community, the community of UMass, and the broader community of the Five Colleges?

Jim Pignatiello ’03, assistant sports editor: It was the first time I’d ever had to work through something tragic. It showed the different mentality that we have to have in our field. Looking back at the paper and the performance of everyone, I think it’s so impressive to see the quality of the work. It’s a student newspaper … It was something to be really proud of.

Twenty years ago, in the windowless basement of the UMass Campus Center, a group of college kids running a student newspaper watched the biggest event of their lives unfold on television. Then, as countless journalists did in Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and everywhere else in the world that day, they found a way to cover it.

WORKING THROUGH A TRAGEDY
What covering 9/11 meant to student reporters

> WILL KATCHER ’21

Excerpted from “A lot of us grew up that day: Reflections from Collegian staff who covered 9/11,” first published on the Massachusetts Daily Collegian website.

Scott Eldridge ’04 is assistant professor in journalism studies and media at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Will Katcher ’21 is a freelance reporter for MassLive. Dan Lamothe ’04 covers the military and the Pentagon, and national security for the Washington Post. Jim Pignatiello ’03 is the director of sports coverage at MassLive. Sam Wilkinson ’02 is a senior project manager at the West Virginia University Research Corporation.

Read the full article and the Collegian’s coverage: umass.edu/magazine/reporting9-11
Many UMass alumni work at UNICEF and similar international organizations. So, what is it about UMass that helps people find this career path? According to Kimberly Parekh ’19PhD, senior education advisor at UNICEF, “The Center for International Education (CIE) is really building that capacity.”

As part of the College of Education, CIE was founded in 1968 to manage research studies and education development projects and serve as a learning community for graduate students with an interest in international education systems. “I spent most of my 20s in the field,” says Parekh. She picked this UMass program because, as she says, “I wanted to think a little bit more deeply about everything that I had been doing.”

Parekh’s career has taken her around the globe, from Afghanistan to India to Japan, with work ranging from teaching to starting and running schools to engaging with donors. Currently, she works with UNICEF in the Middle East in a bigger-picture role, consulting on safe school reopening after COVID-19 and other issues of importance in the region.

CIE offered Parekh a place to consider the kind of impact she wanted to have in the world of education. “It’s a blend of theory and practice, which I love.” She also appreciated how closely students and faculty worked together, along with the international diversity of the community she found there. “It was such a right decision for me,” she says.

WHAT IS LIFE WORTH?

Film chronicling victim compensation fund to be released for 9/11 anniversary

For attorney Kenneth Feinberg ’67, ’02Hon, the question of how to determine the value of human life is far from theoretical. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Feinberg was called upon by Congress to administer the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund—a task that required him to assign a monetary value to the lives lost.

Feinberg, a native of Brockton, Massachusetts, and a former UMass professor, chronicled his journey in the 2006 book, What Is Life Worth?: The Unprecedented Effort to Compensate the Victims of 9/11. Last year, a film version of his experience, Worth, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. The film, starring Michael Keaton as Feinberg, was acquired by Barack and Michelle Obama’s production company, Higher Ground, and debuted on Netflix in September, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the attacks.

Worth explores the emotional impact Feinberg experienced while working closely with the families of victims, and how their grief, frustration, and courage guided his process. “The 9/11 fund was unique,” Feinberg told the L.A. Times. “You begin to realize you can’t just use a calculator. It won’t work. People are injured and they’re psychically impacted and you better find a way.”

A STEADY DIET OF FRIENDSHIP

In 1983, Hillary Wright and Elizabeth Ward were junior nutrition majors taking the same organic chemistry class together. Now, nearly 40 years later, the pair of 1984 nutrition alumni, registered dietitians, and lifelong friends have written their first book together, The Menopause Diet Plan: A Natural Guide to Managing Hormones, Health, and Happiness.
UMass Amherst alum and basketball star George “Trigger” Burke ’56, now a Quincy attorney, donated $500,000 toward the construction of the new Newman Catholic facility. In 1956, Burke made his mark as the first basketball player ever to lead UMass in both scoring and assists during the same season.

1960s

Joan Lester ’81EdD published her memoir, Loving Before Loving: A Marriage in Black and White, a book about her marriage to Julius Lester and the challenges they had to overcome in the days before the Loving v. Virginia Supreme Court ruling which struck down bans on interracial marriage.

Chemical engineering alumn Andrew Hoffman ’83 published two books this year with Stanford University Press. Management as a Colluion Leading Business, Serving Society and The Engaged Scholar: Expanding the Impact of Academic Research in Today’s World, adding to his long list of publications focused on sustainability, climate change, and social engagement.

Carol F. Barton ’86 was selected as a 2020 recipient of the prestigious National Professional Advisor of the Year by the American Cancer Society. This award was given to recognize her dedication to the American Cancer Society’s mission and her work in the Planned Giving Program.

After over two decades dedicated to designing, developing, and engineering work touching almost all of Apple’s products, Dan Riccio ’96 will take his leadership skills to a new role as he embarks on a new project—reporting to CEO Tim Cook directly.

Former monetary policy head Anna Slive Hardwood ’05MS, restored and raced her 1911 Ford Model T and now races alongside her husband, Jeff. The couple uses the car in events promoting women and diversity in motorsports.

Drew O’Brien ’92, Brendan Keenan ’00, and Spencer Moore ’16 have made a major health care breakthrough in the treatment of multiple myeloma, a type of cancer that attacks white blood cells. Working for Bluebird Bio, the trio developed a new drug called Abecma that the FDA has just approved. It is the first B-cell matura-

Maju Varghese ’99 was featured in the Hindustan Times for his work on the Biden–Harris 2021 inauguration. Varghese also served as chief oper-

Submit your note at: umassalumni.com/classnotes
IN MEMORIAM

A CAREER THAT BLOOMED

Frances Elizabeth “Betsy” Fitzpatrick ’76AS, ’96 died on January 27, 2021, at the age of 65. A graduate of the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, Fitzpatrick began her horticulture career at the UMass Cold Spring Orchard, learning how to care for tree stocks and researching fruit viability.

From there, she secured her first professional position in the commercial flower industry and quickly became an expert on growing roses. This experience served her well when she moved on to overseeing the greenhouses at Butler and Ullman Inc. in Hadley. There, her dedication and kindhearted nature soon got the attention of fellow employee Robert Foley, whom she later married.

In 1988, she became director of research for an open-air flower-growing company situated on a 600-acre farm in Northern California. Fitzpatrick not only loved floral diversity but also enjoyed meeting growers and buyers from around the world. With a large number of employees who only spoke Spanish, she learned the language to better engage with them.

Fitzpatrick deeply valued the impact that her time at UMass made on her life and her career. Therefore, her family requests that donations be made in her honor to the Cold Spring Orchard Endowment, enabling others to follow in her footsteps.

MIXING RELIGION AND POLITICS

Nicholas J. “Jay” Demerath III, retired UMass sociology scholar, professor, and department chair, died on February 5, 2021, at the age of 84. Demerath was a leader in the field of religion and culture, focusing his research on the intersection of religion and politics.

A prolific writer and editor, Demerath authored or co-authored 12 books, including three case studies on the roles that religion, public life, and politics play in America and abroad.

Demerath was also a passionate educator. In 1970, he joined UMass Amherst as a sociology professor and was department chair from 1972 to 1977 and then again from 1981 to 1986. With his leadership, the UMass sociology program became one of the top 20 sociology programs in the country by 1982. In 2002, Demerath’s accomplishments were acknowledged when he received the Chancellor’s Medal for outstanding contributions to the campus. Additionally, Demerath was appointed as the Emile Durkheim Distinguished Professor, which—never one to turn down an opportunity for humor—he dubbed the Emile Durkheim “Extinguished” Professor when he retired from UMass in 2008.

BIG ISLAND MAYOR DEFINES SPIRIT OF ALOHA

William “Billy” Punapaiaala Kenoi ’93, former mayor of Hawaii County from 2008 to 2016, died in January at the age of 62. Kenoi’s two terms in office were marked by an ambitious string of public works projects, all focused on leaving the people he loved and the island better off than when he arrived.

Kenoi became a YouTube sensation in 2014 thanks to the commencement address he gave in his trademark Hawaiian pidgin at Hawai‘i Pacific University. “When I told people I was going to college, they said, ‘Easy, Hawaiian, maybe you better throttle back some of that ambition and dreams,’” he said. “I’m here for you guys, no listen to them!”

In addition to his career in politics, Kenoi was a fervent athlete, surfing whenever possible and competing in the Ironman competition in 2014—just months before being diagnosed with a rare form of cancer called myelofibrosis in 2015. He is remembered for the renewed vigor with which he pursued public projects in the wake of his diagnosis, as well as his commitment to traditional Hawaiian values. “Love, aloha, it doesn’t cost any money and it doesn’t take any effort,” said Kenoi. “And the most amazing part? The more you give, the more you have—and you’ll never run out.”

BEAUTY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Wynora Aquila Ayana McCants ’99, artist and learning specialist, died in August 2020 at the age of 70. Aquila spent her early years in an Alabama town of just 150 residents. Raised with the help of her Muscogee Creek grandmother, she found beauty in everyday life—weaving baskets, embroidering, and dancing through the tall grass. After moving to the South Bronx, Aquila was enrolled in a notable school for the arts thanks to her mother, a local minister and activist. She later attended the Pratt Institute and finally UMass Amherst, where she studied art and selected the name Aquila Ayana as an addition to her birth name.

Aquila spent the majority of her nearly 40-year career in roles supporting student opportunities and development. She was an advocate at what’s now the Center for Women and Community, an associate director of Undergraduate Admissions, director of Native American Student Support Services, and a learning specialist for Disability Services.

During her semi-retirement, she devoted more time to artistic pursuits. In 2016, the Fine Art Center Augusta Savage Gallery presented A Point of View, a retrospective exhibition of Aquila’s writing and artwork, which tied together her colorful and expressive art and her deep interest in the stories of the people around her.

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 March 1, 2021 and August 1, 2021, visit umass.edu/magazine/fall2021/inmemoriam
CREATE YOUR LEGACY. SECURE HIS FUTURE.

When you include UMass Amherst in your estate plan, you empower future students to be revolutionary—to push boundaries, stretch academically and become the next generation of doers.

There are many ways to support UMass while also receiving benefits. We would be happy to help you find a giving option that meets your needs and charitable goals.

Upon creating your future gift, you will be welcomed into The William Smith Clark Society, a group of generous, like-minded donors who have had the foresight to include UMass in their plans. Contact us today to find out how you can create your legacy at the university.

TO LEARN MORE, CONTACT US OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE TODAY.
Joseph K. Jayne
Interim Executive Director
Gift Planning
UMass Amherst
Nelson House South
505 East Pleasant Street
Amherst, MA 01003-9259
(413) 577-1418
gift.planning@umass.edu
umass.myplannedgift.org

Ensure Your Day Is Unforgettable

Our campus in the Pioneer Valley is a gorgeous place with exceptional options to make your wedding perfect.

Inquire today!
umasshospitality.com

MORE UMASS GEAR THAN ANY OTHER STORE!
CIVILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA

As social networks have become pervasive around the world, they’ve been used as tools for social change. Democratic revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were coordinated and documented on Facebook. The #MeToo movement took its name from a Twitter hashtag, turning into an international movement against sexual harassment in the workplace.

Build online spaces that aren’t just accidentally civic spaces, but intentionally so.

Even before the social media platforms Telegram and Parler were used to organize the invasion of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the civic role of social media had become inescapably massive. What citizens—and government leaders—do online has real implications for the health of our democracy and our society.

But the social media tools most widely used today were not designed with citizens in mind—they were designed to allow college students to flirt and co-workers to stay in touch. As companies like Facebook have become multibillion dollar enterprises, they’ve fine-tuned their tools to keep users engaged with highly emotional content, which likely increases political polarization and makes it less likely that social networks can bridge existing social differences.

My work at UMass centers on the idea that social media could be something radically different: a set of tools specifically designed to make us better citizens and neighbors. The systems my team is creating aren’t meant to put Facebook out of business. Instead of being used by three billion people, they’re meant for groups of 30 to 3,000—for communities that already exist in the physical world, or for communities of interest, connecting people who would have a hard time meeting physically.

The social media software we are developing differs from tools like Facebook in key ways. The community members are responsible for making decisions about what speech is acceptable and how transgressions should be handled, instead of a central authority deciding. In addition, these systems are open-source, so they can be customized, and they interoperate with existing networks like Facebook, so people can participate in networks like Twitter and these new networks simultaneously.

Why create alternatives to powerful, financially successful corporate products? The importance of social media in our public life makes clear that these spaces are too important to be left entirely up to the market. Instead, we need to experiment with building tools with explicit civic goals and purpose, looking for ways to build online spaces that aren’t just accidentally civic spaces, but intentionally so.

We know a great deal about how social networks can be made entertaining and compelling, thanks to billions of dollars spent and billions of users posting on existing systems. We still have lots to learn about how to create online conversations that are healthy, productive, participatory, and democratic.

Ethan Zuckerman is an associate professor of public policy, communication, and information, as well as the director of the UMass Initiative for Digital Public Infrastructure, focused on reimagining the internet as a tool for civic engagement.
**DID YOU ATTEND IN PERSON OR VIRTUALLY THIS YEAR?**

Send us a homecoming memory from any year and we may share it at umass.edu/magazine. Email us at magazine@umass.edu, post to Instagram with #umassmagazine, or send it by postal mail.