Library services are essential to the university, but how do students access them when learning remotely? Although library spaces are closed to the public, patrons can obtain materials through contactless pickup, including items requested from regional libraries. In addition, many online resources continue to be available, such as databases, periodicals, and e-books—and research consultations are being offered remotely. Some materials (such as the Special Collections and University Archives, where this photo album of students from 1884 is housed) can be visited by appointment.
Electrical engineering major Xavier Farrell ’21 uses the M5 makerspace to work on a class project. So far, he’s made a motorized LEGO vehicle, a digital clock, and, he laughs, “I’ve used that space to fix my laptop.”

The M5 includes labs, a machine shop, a 3D printer, a media studio, study spaces, and classrooms. Lecturer Chuck Malloch says, “To have a really well-balanced education, you should have hands-on experience building projects. M5 is the place for making things . . . or breaking things to find out how they worked, or fixing things.”

Farrell is motivated to help others span the “gap between the people who need help and those resources that can help them,” he says. Whether through infrastructure, smart grid technology, or policy, Farrell aims to help make electricity more accessible for underserved communities.

Visit the M5 makerspace virtually:
umass.edu/magazine/m5
On campus, the university is sustaining its mission to provide an affordable and accessible top-notch public education amid the physical and financial constraints of the pandemic. The university’s new Office of Equity and Inclusion is leading campuswide work to ensure UMass Amherst is a welcoming learning environment for all, and the Institute of Diversity Sciences is working to advance equity through STEM research. An inspiring group of alumni are helping more students benefit from a UMass education. And some students with disabilities are finding the silver lining of remote learning.

The future we hope for and are working toward is even more resilient, collaborative, and equitable than the world we knew before. Now, as ever, we need our UMass community to lead the way in creating opportunity and reshaping what’s possible.

ACCESS
Providing equal access—to education, to health care, to opportunity—is one of the great challenges of our time. Creating and expanding college opportunity for talented students from every community is core to UMass Amherst’s land-grant mission and is in our DNA. We’re proud of how our faculty and research teams are developing positive solutions to these pressing issues and helping build a more equitable world. This momentous year has spurred us on to find more ways to make a difference.

For a variety of firsthand perspectives on big issues like access, we’ve invited a host of alumni, students, and faculty to share their take on what the world will need to get back on its feet—and how we can help shape a future with more open doors.

Around the world, people’s ability to move and mingle is slowly taking shape in the form of a distanced, masked “new normal.” But how did those masks evolve and how can we anticipate where they will be needed? Anna Nagurney explains how to equip communities for this pandemic—and the next.

Across the country, protests demanding racial equality (p. 20) have jump-started a national conversation about how to create racial equality (p. 26) have jump-started a significant event and also affected us in every way. Fifty years later the students of today see the common realities of the past. And as a nurse, we have the power of language in the world we knew before. Now, as ever, we need our UMass community to lead the way in creating opportunity and reshaping what’s possible.

Maya Angelou: “As a nurse, we have the opportunity to touch the heart, mind, soul, and body of our patients, their families, and ourselves. They may forget your name, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

We often tell our students, “The future’s in your hands. But I think the future is actually in your mouth. You have to articulate the world you want to live in first.”

Doug Conway ’73
toward normalcy only seem to highlight the strangeness of life in a pandemic. Perhaps it’s better for all of us to stop chasing what was, learn from this moment, and embrace “the new normal”—as these members of the UMass community have done.

Everyone’s saying it: “We’re living through history.” Doomsscrolling through pandemic pandemonium and divisive politics, leavened only by photos of everybody’s sourdough bread—2020 has been a year that will not soon be forgotten, no matter how hard we may try. Yet while the headlines mark important events sure to go down in future textbooks, day-to-day life seems less momentous and more monotonous. Days and weeks blur together and life just feels—pretty weird. We’ve met all our co-workers’ cats when they derail video meetings. Unaware instructors give lectures while accidentally muted. Grocery delivery apps feel more like a game of Russian roulette, with only a slim chance you will get everything you ordered (seriously, what happened to all that toilet paper?).

Yet, we’ve adapted. Some of us have even tried to make the most of it. We took up gardening, adopted dogs, started running, and got famous for our dance moves on TikTok. The campus also partially reopened this fall; the semester started just before Labor Day and ended at Thanksgiving to minimize travel for the on-campus population. Though the majority of classes were held online, exceptions were made for courses where face-to-face instruction was absolutely essential. Students with in-person classes were allowed to live on campus under strict health guidelines, and everyone was tested for COVID-19 frequently. Even the award-winning UMass Dining Services revamped campus eateries to provide outdoor seating and a simplified menu to minimize wait times. But these steps toward normalcy only seem to highlight the strangeness of life in a pandemic. Perhaps it’s better for all of us to stop chasing what was, learn from this moment, and embrace “the new normal”—as these members of the UMass community have done.

I really miss making people laugh, which is always easier for me when I’m in the same physical space as another person. As an improv comedian, I get to bring out all of my goofiness and celebrate the awkward parts of myself in ways that help audiences—I hope—connect with their own humanity and find the laughter in that. It’s so much more fun to goof around in 3D!”

JIM YOUNG ’92, CHIEF POSITIVITY OFFICER (LIFE, LEADERSHIP, AND BUSINESS COACH) AT THE CENTERED COACH

“Every time I had a Zoom class, we always had a sharing show-and-tell kind of moment where we went around the whole class and would bring in our pets or a piece of art that we did recently, or share a poem . . . Some family members sat in on classes . . . it just made it feel like a much more intimate experience because Zoom can feel super dissociative.”

BRIANNA SILVA ’21, JOURNALISM MAJOR
“I’ve had a great time scheduling park walks for work where we do our three things: wash your hands, wear your mask, social distance. But there are a bunch of nice walking paths where you can go . . . and have a fairly good time. It’s important to continue to engage with colleagues off Zoom. So, if you need to have a meeting, go for a walk.”

GREGORY THOMAS ’92, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND LECTURER, BERTHIAUME CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP MANAGEMENT

“I just can’t wait, once everything is better—and I have to believe that everything will get better because I believe there are a lot of smart scientists and doctors out there who are trying to work together to figure this out—but the first thing I’m going to do is just hug my parents.”

NITA TRIVEDI ’02, CONTRACTS ANALYST

“My friends and I do virtual hangouts, and before we figured out livestreaming, we would all work really hard to press play at the exact same time, and you know, make comments about the movie.”

MAKALEY COOKIS ’22, COMMUNICATION MAJOR

“‘I’m an introvert, so being quarantined is not too bad for me because I’m like, ‘Ah, my introvert self, my hermit self is thriving and it’s beautiful.’ But I think being forced to be inside feels a little bit different . . . so I try to look at it in a way of trying to help others instead of just how it impacts me. And I take everything day by day.”

CYNTHIA NITINNU ’19, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, EMERSON COLLEGE

Got your own story? Share it on social media with umassmagazine for a chance to see it on umass.edu/magazine/coronavirus
R andolph W. “Bill” Bromery served as chancellor of the university from 1971 to 1979. His rich legacy as a transformative Black leader, scientist, and lifelong saxophonist is now memorialized by the Fine Arts Center building that will be named in his honor.

The Randolph W. Bromery Center for the Arts is a fitting tribute for Bromery, who recruited jazz legends Max Roach, Archie Shepp, and Fred Tollis (see p. 45) to the music department faculty and oversaw construction of the Fine Arts Center. Chancellor Kumble R. Subbaswamy recommended the honor and noted that as we “reflect on the campus’s history working in support of social justice and inclusion, we are eager to appropriately acknowledge a chancellor who has had such an enormous impact on our space, reputation, and path toward excellence.”

Bromery arrived at UMass Amherst in 1967 as a geology professor and became the first African American to lead the campus. Under his leadership the campus became a catalyst for racial equity, increasing admissions and support for minority students. Bromery worked tirelessly to bring the archives of W.E.B. Du Bois and Horace Mann Bond to campus and helped form the Five College Consortium. He died in 2013 at the age of 87.

IN BRIEF  AROUND THE POND

FINE ARTS CENTER NAMED FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER

TESTING, TESTING . . .

100+ junior and senior nursing students performed COVID-19 testing at the Mullins Center over the fall semester, earning clinical hours that counted toward their degrees.

1,500 students lived on campus during the fall semester (pre-pandemic, the campus housed 13,000 students in 52 residence halls).

99% of COVID-19 test results were processed and reported within 24 hours, many of them at the IALS lab on campus.

2,175 COVID-19 testing appointments were available at the Mullins Center each week, including drive-through options.

THINKING BIG—AND VERY SMALL

In the new Physical Sciences Building that opened in 2019, researchers are contributing to experiments on another continent—and helping to unravel the secrets of the universe.

Professor Stéphane Willocq is the lead physics coordinator of the ATLAS experiment at CERN (the European Laboratory for Particle Physics) in Switzerland, home of the Large Hadron Collider—the world’s largest and most powerful particle accelerator. The experiment uses the collider to smash particle beams together, creating new forms of matter that can then be measured by the ATLAS particle detector. “We are creating new particles that we can study to understand what are the most fundamental constituents of matter,” says Willocq. “This is very closely tied to how we understand the universe: how it was formed, how it evolved over time, and how it ultimately will evolve.”

Willocq has worked on the ATLAS experiment since 2004, and in the state-of-the-art lab at UMass, he and other physics faculty are playing a significant role in developing two components for a major upgrade of the detector: an inner tracker that measures the trajectories of charged particles, and a muon trigger system. The upgrades will support a tenfold increase in luminosity of the collider, allowing for an even wider range of research. “There are still very many unanswered puzzles to address,” says Willocq. “We are far from being done.”

REACHING A FORGOTTEN FRACTION

Many systemic factors make it difficult for people with a criminal record to rejoin society, but Annie Raymond, assistant professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, may just have a solution: math.

Raymond learned that math courses are one of the biggest barriers to the completion of an associate degree. Offering math classes to inmates can bridge that gap. And studies show that as the level of education goes up, recidivism goes down—sharply. The recidivism rate drops from nearly 70% for those without a degree to 13.7% for those who’ve earned an associate degree and 5.6% for those with a bachelor’s degree.

Raymond began teaching inmates in 2016 at the Monroe Correctional Complex in Washington state and was struck by the eagerness and curiosity of the inmates in her class. When she came to UMass in 2018, she started teaching at the Hampshire County Jail. One of her courses, called Math for the Real World, covered “introductory topics in combinatorics, probability, statistics, linear algebra, and optimization.”

Classes at the jail have been suspended during the coronavirus pandemic, but Raymond says, “I hope to resume once it is safe to do so,” and notes that “visits and programs run by volunteers make prison life more bearable.”
UMass students, faculty, and staff have shown incredible creativity in adapting top-notch educational experiences to conform to public health guidelines during the coronavirus pandemic. And the university’s innovations in multi-modal instruction meant that even before the virus, many courses had already integrated online learning—so when the pandemic struck, faculty and staff were able to swiftly move 3,600 courses online to keep students on track.

While many classes could be converted to remote learning, others—like Wind Ensemble—simply couldn’t accomplish their work from a distance. With the help of outdoor tents, social distancing, and some perseverance, the class was able to make music in person. “There really is no online way to simulate the energy of people creating something together,” says Matt Westgate, ensemble conductor and director of wind studies. Of course, not every session provided gorgeous weather like the October day pictured here, but Westgate says, “It has been a true gift to be able to make music with one another, despite the circumstances.”

Whether using videoconferences, in-person labs, a hybrid model, or an outdoor tent, UMass students are getting the experiences they need to fulfill their personal, academic, and professional goals. And this year of challenges will surely prove to be a hurdle that our students will not only surpass, but will learn from. Their efforts will help them become smart, creative, competent citizens—the changemakers the world is seeking.

We hope to see a larger proportion of our students able to live and learn together on campus in spring 2021.

In lieu of concerts this semester, the Wind Ensemble was able to create videos showcasing their performances. Read more and tune in umass.edu/magazine/alltogether
The Office of Equity and Inclusion weaves webs of connection across differences.

From the number of programs, virtual events, and communications on the flagship campus related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, it’s surprising to learn that the Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI) at UMass, headed by Interim Vice Chancellor for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer Nefertiti Walker, has a staff of only four. Walker’s superpower is not the ability to be in many places at once—it’s actually her ability to create and support an interdisciplinary network of people who are responsible for inclusion across campus.

The university’s profile as a destination of choice for talented students from across the country and around the world means the campus draws people of all stripes, hues, and creeds. Supporting this very diverse population is a key part of the OEI’s mission. As Walker says, “We have to ensure that the campus feels like a place where everyone belongs.”

She explains, “No one knows a particular department or microculture better than those people living in it, so we try to empower our partners campuswide and connect them with resources.” The office has launched dozens of events and programs with partners in every corner of campus. “We think of ourselves as the connecting point of a matrix of people doing diversity, equity, and inclusion work,” says Walker.

Campus community members apply their own initiative to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion with the support of Campus Climate Improvement grants. These small project-based grants, ranging from $250 to $2,500, support a variety of creative ways to engage the campus community in conversations about difference and enrich the cultural life of the campus. Since its inception in 2017, the program has supported nearly 60 projects, including a Food Justice Symposium that educated students about food insecurity and increased access to nutritious food; an Asian American Film Festival that brought filmmakers to campus; and a collaboration that produced 3D models to assist blind and low-vision students in STEM fields.

Another example is the OEI’s partnership with the Office of the Provost for faculty recruitment. STRIDE (Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence) workshops bring research-driven best practices to faculty who are on search committees to help them run effective searches and find diverse pools of qualified candidates. In the past two and a half years, more than a quarter of the university’s faculty members have been trained.

The office continues to innovate in response to campus needs—the Learning Community book groups are now in their third year, a Student Advisory Board was created this fall, and a newsletter and podcast are freshly launched. All of these programs and more help put into action the university’s stated value of “freedom of expression and dialogue among diverse groups in a community defined by mutual respect.” Walker acknowledges that it’s a complex task. “As a society, we’re constantly evolving. . . . The idea of inclusive excellence is something that will always be constantly evolving and we will continue to evolve our work toward it.”

Walker’s enthusiasm for her work is fueled by “the immense energy on our campus from students, faculty, and staff who are absolutely engaged in developing an inclusive environment rooted in social justice and anti-racism. Of course, we have lots of work to do—but, many people are on board.” She also notes, “Will people stumble? Absolutely. People struggle with the best way to be inclusive and lead from a place of social justice. And they will struggle with understanding how to deconstruct systemic racism and what it means to engage from a place of anti-racism.” But, she says, “I think the fact that people are so engaged and wanting to learn is cause for great optimism.”
When asked about his UMass experience, Bercovich says, “I always thought the school was very supportive, especially when you were pushing the boundaries of what other students had done before.” For example, the M5 lab started by Baird Soules gives students a space to build all kinds of projects (see p. 2). “Following the program is good, but what are the things people are going to do outside of the traditional path?” he says. Bercovich recently left Amazon and is figuring out where his compass will take him next. In the meantime, he’s taking the opportunity to support others.

**Systems for success**

As a young man in India, Hanuma Kodavalla ’88MS dreamed of studying in the United States, but doing so wasn’t financially feasible. “Luckily I got admission to UMass, and in fact I was given a scholarship, so that helped me actually start my studies,” he remembers.

UMass offered him the flexibility to follow his own path in computer science, and he found his calling in systems. “Throughout my career I have been working in databases, so that has been my passion. I am still excited by the opportunities in the field, and my education at UMass gave me a great foundation to thrive.” After graduation, he worked at Digital Equipment Corporation, and today is a technical fellow at Microsoft.

Now, Kodavalla is helping others thrive through his philanthropy. “I feel a sense of gratitude for the great education I got,” he says. “As I established myself in my career, I decided to give back as much as I can.” Kodavalla has contributed to multiple scholarships honoring faculty in the College of Information and Computer Sciences, and has established several additional scholarships himself. “Recently, my wife and I started a scholarship to encourage women students,” he says. “I know that there’s a lot of talent out there.”

**Off the path, on target**

Even before Ivan Bercovich ’09 moved from Argentina to begin college at UMass, he had big dreams for success. In the spring before his first semester, he attended his stepbrother’s graduation and noticed the 21st Century Leader Awards—the top honor for seniors—which he hoped to win someday. Then in his first year, he heard about the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering Senior Design Project, and decided he wanted to win that as well. “So, I did both of those things,” he says. “That was sort of my compass.”

After graduating, Bercovich headed for California, eventually leading the team at Graphiq to build technology that does natural language understanding—a branch of artificial intelligence. Graphiq was acquired by Amazon in 2017 to help improve its Alexa smart speaker, so now, “If you go to a smart speaker and you ask what is called an open domain question like ‘What is the price of Bitcoin?’ or ‘How tall is the Eiffel Tower?’—any question that is encyclopedic in nature—my team answers,” he explains.

The flagship campus offers students myriad opportunities to take their learning to the next level and put their skills into practice. To name just a few:

- HackUMass puts developers, designers, and entrepreneurs together to give students “an outpost for their crazy ideas,” creating over 100 hardware and software projects in its intensive 36-hour time frame.
- Art students can draw inspiration from talks by visiting artists at Hampden Gallery, then show their own work in one of several campus exhibition spaces.
- The Innovation Challenge hosted by the Berthiaume Center for Entrepreneurship assists students in developing new ventures and provides a venue for honing their pitches, attracting funding, and launching startups.
- Career offices connect students with internships—including remote internship opportunities during the coronavirus pandemic—and at the Mount Ida campus, match students with Boston-area employer partners.
A SPORTING CHANCE

Being active changes young lives—so how do we invite more children into the game? > HEATHER KAMINS

Playing sports can transform a child’s life by offering lessons about teamwork, instilling a feeling of pride, and providing a sense of belonging. But many children don’t have access to organized sports programs, either because of cost or a lack of transportation, or due to language or technology barriers to filling out the required forms.

That’s where America SCORES comes in. This nonprofit organization partners directly with schools to administer sports-based youth development and literacy programs to children in urban areas across the nation. Yuri Morales ’03, chief program officer at America SCORES Bay Area, says, “The impact is huge because it provides access where there is none, and it provides opportunities for kids to experience joy, to be connected to their classmates in a different way, to build friendships and connections.”

Morales adds, “Sometimes there are kids who are having a tough time in school, and when they join the team it provides them with an outlet for some of that stuff, a place where they really feel like they belong.

And I’d say even more importantly, [it gives them] a mentor, a coach, a caring adult who can reach out to the kid and say, ‘You matter. You belong here. I see potential in you.’”

One way to get more kids involved in sports is by increasing access to recreational games and activities. “The operators of public and private athletic facilities and parks should give more access to local community members by providing time, space, and equipment for unstructured play,” Morales suggests. Right now, athletic fields and facilities are often so overbooked by corporate soccer leagues and other groups that many children don’t have a safe space to play. “I think if there were more opportunities for safe, unstructured play,” he says, “more kids would find a lifelong joy of sport.”

See how Alannah Scardino ’21 is working to increase access in sports, particularly for girls and women: umass.edu/magazine/sportingchance
UNMASKED: A BRIEF HISTORY OF PPE

> EMMA FULLER

PPE version 1.0: Doctors’ garb during the black plague featured glass goggles and beaked masks. The beaks contained aromatic spices to fend off the "vapors" thought to transmit the disease.

One of the infirmary buildings constructed on campus for patients during the 1918 influenza pandemic. The college seems to have fared well, as evidenced by the Collegian headline on October 6, 1918: “Health Conditions at College Exceedingly Bright.”

Two thousand. That’s the number of handmade masks that theater faculty members Kristin Jensen and Felicia Malachite, along with three of their graduate students, sewed and delivered to local businesses in the first six months of the coronavirus pandemic.

From the infamous plague doctors’ beaked masks of the 1600s to the face shields and N95 masks of today, personal protective equipment (PPE) has evolved significantly and has proven instrumental to health and safety in the medical field and in civic life. In our current struggle facing COVID-19, UMass has helped make and distribute much-needed PPE to area hospitals, essential service providers, and frontline health care workers.

But the new coronavirus isn’t the first time UMass has experienced an epidemic. When the 1918–19 influenza pandemic came along, Massachusetts Agricultural College (as it was known then) was prepared with nurses and dedicated space for patients. Then, as now, UMass is working to uphold the health and safety of the community. You can even purchase your very own UMass face mask from the campus store.

Felicia Malachite wears one of the masks that she and the UMass costume shop team have sewn. “It feels good to be able to serve the community in this way,” says colleague Kristin Jensen.
This fall, UMass created a broad contact-tracing and coronavirus testing program. Nursing students earned internship credit for becoming contact tracers and tracking possible exposure among their peers. Bolstered by the success of this program, the campus is planning to welcome back approximately 60% of its residential students in the spring.

Faculty and graduate students have also trained their research lenses on the pandemic—studying how best to bolster remote learning for preschoolers in low-income families, innovating ventilators and rapid virus tests, sharing epidemiological expertise with the CDC, and contributing to the growing body of scientific knowledge about COVID-19.

Alternately pummeled and buoyed by the events of 2020, we’re all searching for ways to help others—and ourselves—emerge from this ongoing emergency and create a brighter future.

Amid national conversations about racial equity, appetites for discussing difficult topics have been met with opportunities to do so—Learning Community book groups across campus read What If I Say the Wrong Thing? by Vernā A. Myers to help create a more inclusive culture at UMass Amherst, and the Alumni Association chose So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo for the Read UMass Virtual Book Club.

As a learning community, we encompass multiple perspectives on how the world might move forward after this tumultuous year. We reached out to members of the UMass community to share their vision for what happens next.

The pandemic is not a game, but game theory can help

As our world continues to reel from the pandemic, there is a resulting shortage of medical supplies. And with coronavirus cases persisting and businesses continuing to reopen, intense worldwide competition for testing kits and PPE is not going away anytime soon. However, a theoretical framework called game theory—the study of strategies in a competitive setting—can help.

Scholars in disciplines from math to business to political science use game theory to understand how people are likely to make decisions in response to actions by others. To capture the intense competition among health care organizations for limited medical supplies and to look for solutions, our research group constructed a computer-based supply chain network game theory model.

The model weights many complex factors including the prices of the medical items charged by different suppliers, the transportation costs to points of demand, and even risk. It also includes penalties associated with shortages or surpluses, and enables a multiplicity of scenarios.

This research yields insights to help organizations more effectively and economically procure critical medical supplies under demand unpredictability and competition. And the findings from our model confirm that, in the case of the coronavirus, more supply points are required in order to ensure that organizations have the critical supplies they need.

One solution to the supply shortage is for governments to invest in domestic production facilities rather than importing and offshoring so much. Luckily, we are now starting to see more countries doing what our model proposes: setting up local production sites for supplies.

The pandemic will be with us until a vaccine and lifesaving medical treatments are widely available. We must also be prepared for future pandemics. And game theory will remain a powerful tool to identify ways that our nation and the world can more effectively prepare for and mitigate health care disasters.
In mid-March, 16 UMass public health undergraduates who were studying in Cuba were abruptly evacuated because of the alarming spread of COVID-19 across the globe. I was scheduled to teach these students a course on comparative health care systems in Havana, but had to rapidly adjust my course to one that could be taught online. As part of my new plan, I trained the class in qualitative research methods and asked them to interview each other and additional college students about their experience with—and perceptions of—the emerging pandemic, including mental health effects.

The students far exceeded my expectations, conducting a total of 35 interviews in April and May. Class members Eva Chow ’21, Meghan Fernandes ’21, Natalia Putnam ’22, and Kate Wallace ’21 continued to work extensively on the study over the summer to analyze the interview data. Their analysis identified several important themes, including precariousness. The many uncertainties associated with the pandemic, such as worry about family members’ health, loss of jobs, and not knowing when the pandemic will end, were generating a great deal of anxiety among the college students interviewed.

These four remarkable students are now submitting the work for publication—a great achievement made more stunning by the fact that it is taking place during such severe disruption. As the team began winding down our weekly meetings, one of the students wrote, “I’m feeling kind of sad we are nearing the end of our special project. It has been so nice being able to stay connected with you and everyone, especially during such scary and uncertain times. What a fun and grounding activity this has been!” This kind comment made me think that in addition to helping students increase their research skills, perhaps providing them with opportunities to work on such projects during the pandemic could help mitigate, in a small yet meaningful way, its negative emotional effects.

Sarah Goff ’18PhD, Associate Professor of Health Policy and Management, UMass Amherst School of Public Health and Health Sciences

Kandace Montgomery ’12 has become an essential voice in the fresh wave of activism for racial justice. A Black, queer, nonbinary community organizer, Montgomery moved to Minneapolis to work with TakeAction Minnesota in 2013, and helped start Black Lives Matter Minneapolis a year later. After the BLM chapter disbanded, she cofounded Black Visions in 2017, where she works to engage young Black, queer, and trans people and their families to increase the power of Black people over the long term.

She spoke to UMass Magazine about her vision for the future.

ON FINDING HER PATH
A grassroots community organizing class with UMass Alliance for Community Transformation was one of the first times in my life that I really understood that injustice and inequality were systemic and institutional. . . . Then moving from campus activism to really being out in the community was so exciting, and I just remember saying to my mentor, “I want to do what you do for the rest of my life.”

ON ENVISIONING SAFETY
We’re putting all our eggs into one basket saying if we dump money into the police we will get the kind of results and level of community safety we want, and that’s obviously and fundamentally not true. . . . Safety also looks like people’s basic needs being met. If we have the millions of dollars—clearly we can invest in things like that.

ON BUILDING NEW MODELS
I want people to not just focus on defunding the police but having a conversation around transitioning to a model that really invests in communities at the forefront. Building up the life-affirming institutions that we know we need to keep each other safe. That should be the top line, not fear around what happens when we don’t have police to call, but hope around what happens when we don’t need police to call.
Richard DuCree ’91 grew up playing with his mom’s old Brownie camera, listening to his father’s sermons, and attending meetings for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. When he became the first Black photo editor of the Massachusetts Daily Collegian, he sought out cultural icons such as Jesse Jackson who were visiting campus, and also documented campus protests for racial justice. “UMass has always been a great melting pot to me, with different cultures coming in, sharing ideas,” DuCree says. “All-star people were coming in, like Chinua Achebe, Angela Davis, Bill Strickland. I really started getting into photography by documenting that.”

His lenses have captured several presidents, the late Representative John Lewis, and many protests for racial justice. “At times hope has seemed doubtful,” he says, “but witnessing these peaceful protests and documenting the optimism of people really wanting change gives me a very good perspective. . . . Every generation has their moment.”

Joanna Buoniconti ’21 has type 2 spinal muscular atrophy, a genetic neuromuscular disorder. I first met Joanna as a journalism classmate and was struck by how her disorder seemed to strengthen her resolve and motivation to succeed. We recently spoke about her college experience.

What did your college application process look like? After meetings with the disability departments of several colleges that I was really interested in, it became more and more apparent that they didn’t have the resources to help me. Throughout my life, I encountered many people who were blown away by the fact that I am intelligent and handicapped. UMass was the only place that seemed unfazed by my needs.

What does your experience as a student journalist mean to you? Being one of the managing editors at the Amherst Wire to me means that I have finally found my community. It’s just amazing to be a part of the camaraderie that I’ve always dreamed of. I’m so grateful that they accepted me with open arms.

Due to COVID-19, UMass students learned remotely for much of the spring semester, with most students continuing remote learning in the fall. How did you feel about that switch? Before the pandemic, my classroom access assistants sat in the classrooms as “me” while I was Zooming in, but that made it nearly impossible to connect with my peers, because I was like a phantom figure in the classroom. Having everyone on Zoom removed that barrier because they could now see my face and that I was not this absent, omniscient being. I felt like, “Yes! I’m finally on the same level as everyone else!”

What is something you wish others knew about people with disabilities? I wish everyone knew that we’re just as human as everyone else—and we want the same things that everyone else does. I want to live in Boston or New York one day, be the editor of a publishing house, and have a family. Ultimately, I hope to be happy.

What is your hope for access to education for others who are disabled? I have had to be relentless to get where I am today, and without my mom advocating for me when I was younger, I definitely would not be here. In the future, I hope there aren’t as many obstacles for people with disabilities within the education system. Many get discouraged, and that’s not fair. If people, regardless of their physical limitations, want to pursue a college degree, they should be able to.
From his home office in Concord, Massachusetts, Glenn Ruga ’81—a graphic designer, social documentarian, and human rights activist—created the Social Documentary Network (SDN), a global center for documentary photography. Since 2008, Ruga has grown his network into a community of over 2,000 exhibitors whose work is seen by more than 10,000 visitors each month. To potential members, the network’s website explains, “We want the real stuff, your stuff—messy, awkward, jubilant, filled with contradictions, in want of answers, but the stuff that the world is made up of everywhere, every day.” This appeal to authenticity is felt in the hundreds of stories on the site and in the pages of ZEKE magazine, its print companion—examples of photos from them are showcased here. Ruga is keenly attuned to controversies of representation and the importance of having people on the ground tell the stories they’re closest to. “We have special issues once a year with a guest editor who is either from these communities or has special access to them,” he explains. In many cases, he says, “the photographers who are creating this work are from these regions. We’ve had lots of exhibits that show very intimate portraits of communities and environments that we just wouldn’t see otherwise.” For those with smartphone cameras in their pockets, Ruga has this to say about getting out there and telling their own stories: “Having a good quality technical device doesn’t make somebody a good photographer, but it certainly has allowed people’s innate skills to really shine.” In a passionate essay titled “Aesthetics of Documentary: Why Good Pictures of Bad Things Matter,” Ruga reminds us why the effort is worthwhile, writing, “Beauty is not separate from suffering. On the contrary, perfection and beauty give us hope that things can be different and better, that we can rally, we are an intelligent species, and we can rise from the ashes to heal.”

By Lori Shine ’04MFA
Salima’s parents think that weightlifting will deform her body and that she will no longer be able to marry the man they wanted for her. She feels... that it is the body she has always dreamed of.
Linder Miques Viquia, a member of the Sepahua Community Vigilance Committee, patrolling the upper Sepahua River, where illegal land grab schemes are leading to rapid deforestation and threatening the people and nature of multiple critical protected areas.

Maryam Ashrafi / March 31, 2015, Kobanê, Syria. A Kurdish YPJ fighter looks over the wreckage left by fighting on a street. She was later killed while fighting ISIS in northern Syria.

Negar Aghi Ali Tari / April 3, 2020, Iran. Corona–Stricken New Year.
COMPLEX PROBLEMS, COMPLEX SOLUTIONS

With the coronavirus pandemic shining a light on health disparities, housing insecurity, and many other issues, it’s clearer than ever how complicated the big problems of the world can be. That’s why the Institute of Diversity Sciences takes a multidisciplinary approach to solving them. Program Manager Leyla Keough-Hameed ’08PhD says, “We’re interested in bringing together scientists, engineers, technologists, people from all around campus and all the Five Colleges in order to tackle some of these really big social problems.”

One such project funded by the institute this year brings together a sociologist and a public health scientist to examine how everyday police discrimination impacts Black people’s health and aging. Other recent projects have focused on biodiversity’s connection to wellness, and how to price clean energy at a rate that maximizes implementation while remaining affordable.

In addition to addressing important issues related to health, the environment, and social equity, the institute also seeks to prepare a diverse new generation of STEM students for the workplace. “All of these projects involve students—either graduate students, undergrads, or a combination of both—and the mission there is to have students see how science and engineering really make a difference in the real world through what they’re learning in the project,” says Director Nilanjana “Buju” Dasgupta. “They’re learning the technical skills of how to do the project, but it’s not abstract or made up. It’s something that is really meaningful.”

“Our second mission is really to grow the next generation of diverse STEM students and workers in Massachusetts,” says Keough-Hameed. To that end, the institute offers mentoring support through its BRiDGE initiative, which brings scientists from underrepresented backgrounds to speak to current graduate students about research and career development.

Dasgupta sees these two missions as intertwined. “Multidisciplinary STEM research that is focused on equity problems offers exactly the kind of topics that attract underrepresented students and women into STEM.”

DREAMER JOURNEYS TO THE STATE HOUSE

In 2001, 14-year-old Danillo “Dan” Sena ’19 moved to Massachusetts as an undocumented immigrant from Brazil. Today he is the Honorable Danillo Sena, a state representative from Acton, Massachusetts, after handily winning a special election in June and retaining the seat in November.

“The fact that I’m the first Brazilian and first Latino immigrant elected from this district shows people want a change and a different kind of leadership,” he told CommonWealth Magazine.

Sena’s journey from a farming community in northeastern Brazil to Massachusetts lawmaker is an American dream story—and Sena calls himself a “dreamer.” He applied for and received protection from deportation under the federal program Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Sena worked for State Senator Jamie Eldridge as a district director and legislative liaison for six years. He became a U.S. citizen in 2018, and completed his bachelor’s degree in political science the year after.

INCLUSIVITY PAYS

Professor M.V. Lee Badgett of the Department of Economics analyzed the financial cost of discriminatory policies, practices, and environments, and found that they cost countries a staggering 1% or more of their gross domestic product. In her new book, The Economic Case for LGBT Equality: Why Fair and Equal Treatment Benefits Us All, Badgett outlines just how these policies cost money and offers counterexamples of how inclusivity can increase the bottom line for countries and businesses.

Watching a video of student and faculty researchers who studied teen drivers, ADHD, and automation in a project funded by the institute, umass.edu/magazine/diversitysciences before it became academic. “I got interested in studying these issues back in the 1990s when I started reading about the stereotype that gay men and lesbians were an affl uent elite,” she says. “That never made sense to me. Discrimination makes groups worse off , not better off . As a lesbian, I knew many people who didn’t fit that stereotype.”

Badgett’s book analyzes anti-LGBT practices across multiple countries, revealing how our economies suffer when our LGBT citizens do. When it comes to equality, we shouldn’t need to have a financial incentive. But Badgett’s research gives us a fresh understanding of discrimination’s financial costs.

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Twenty high school STEM enthusiasts from underserved communities will be hosted in an on-campus summer program each year, getting a leg up on science and math skills and a taste of college life. For many of them, they will be the first in their families to participate in anything at a collegiate level.

The Samuel E. Massenberg Sr. Foundation, which was created by Michael Weir ’76 and his wife, Mirian Graddick-Weir, is constructing a sturdier ladder for more students of color and low-income students interested in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields by launching the Massenberg Summer STEM Institute with a $1 million gift. All too familiar with the barriers that Black people face on the road to success, the Weirs designed the program to show kids of color that they can succeed, by surrounding them with college students who look like them and share their interests.

“Many of these students are inspirational—and frankly, brilliant,” says Weir. “But never in their wildest dreams was UMass on their horizon. And because of their participation in the Massenberg Summer STEM Institute, that has changed!”

For too many high school seniors, college is out of the question. Not from their own lack of achievement, smarts, or motivation—but simply because their families can’t afford it.

Partnering with UMass, an inspiring set of alumni are envisioning programs, scholarships, and unique learning opportunities to make the numbers work for more college applicants. Here’s how a few transformative gifts are impacting young lives.

Children of deceased or disabled veterans will be able to attend UMass with help from the Abraham Bohn Children of Veterans Scholarship. The $1 million endowment, created by Lawrence “Larry” Bohn ’74, honors his father—a World War II airman who was shot down and spent 18 months in a POW camp before returning home.

After their father’s death, Larry and his sister Rhonda Bohn ’82 were able to attend UMass only because they received substantial support under the postwar GI Bill. “Studying at UMass was an essential step in my career, and it was an essential step toward Rhonda eventually earning her Ph.D from Harvard,” Lawrence says. “I’ve been forever grateful for the opportunities we were given. And I want to be sure that veterans’ children today can benefit as we did.”

High-achieving seniors from Norwood High School who otherwise would not be able to afford college can enroll at UMass, thanks to the John F. and Margaret P. O’Connell Endowed Memorial Scholarship Fund. As a first-generation undergraduate from a working-class family, John F. O’Connell Jr. ’70, ’72MBA credits a scholarship he received as a senior at Norwood High as his ticket to a different life. Since 2013, two students from the school have matriculated to UMass each year with the help of the scholarship. With an estate gift valued at $5 million, O’Connell is ensuring that future students continue to benefit from this opportunity.

“Achievement legacies are short-lived, and they get quickly forgotten,” O’Connell says. “The only legacy that lasts is a human legacy.” And he hopes to help provide as many young people as possible with the exciting, challenging, mind-expanding experience of college.
On May 25, 2020, George Floyd called out that he couldn’t breathe. Theresa ‘Terry’ Jenoure ’81MEd, ’95PhD—director of the Augusta Savage Gallery at UMass—watched the news coverage of Floyd’s death with increasingly heightened emotions. In his face she saw her brother, her father, and other men she knows and cares for. Too many Black people in the United States are targets of unwarranted suspicion—perpetuated by a culturally pervasive, deep-seated, and often subconscious racism. Knowing from her decades of experience how art can act as a powerful catalyst for change, Jenoure and her team sent out a call for submissions asking artists around the world to send in works reflecting—through their unique perspectives—the brutal death of George Floyd and the racially motivated harassment of Central Park birder Christian Cooper.

Internationally known, the Augusta Savage Gallery was named after the late Harlem Renaissance sculptor and civil rights activist who advocated for Black artists to receive equal treatment in the arts community. This season’s exhibition, titled “Breathing While Black,” reaches back to the very roots from which the gallery sprung—and that clearly resonated with artists. In just two months, the gallery received over 400 paintings, sculptures, photos, and videos from roughly 130 artists. Jenoure’s panel of judges had their work cut out for them as they pored over the entries from around the world and selected the final pieces. Although a great deal of care went into the art selection for the exhibition, its digital configuration was an equal priority—making sure that the online experience reinforced the crafted story these pieces tell when they are exhibited together.

“There is so much here,” Jenoure explains. “There are cautionary tales told through the camera lens, ideological symbolism, and use of digital tools to create outrage. And of course, there are those images that will not let us forget the pain of this pandemic that further complicates and accentuates the horrors of racism.”

View more of the exhibition: umass.edu/magazine/breathing
On the 250th anniversary of the Boston Massacre, activist-artist Bob Tomolillo ’74 has replicated Paul Revere’s famous 1770 copper engraving—with one significant change. The scene now includes Crispus Attucks, the Black man historians believe was the first person to die in the American Revolution.

“This is revisionist history,” Tomolillo says of his piece, Boston Massacre plate engraving with PAUL REVERE REDUX Art: Bob Tomolillo. He notes that Revere’s original engraving did not portray Attucks. “A lot of history is written from a personal standpoint and so the more voices we have that can tell the true story, I think, we are better off as a society.”

Tomolillo traces his creative beginnings to his undergraduate days as an art major in the early 1970s. One of his first forays into activist art was crafting Richard Nixon face masks used by protestors at anti-Vietnam War rallies. The prints from Tomolillo’s engraving are the first project from a new printmaking facility at Artists for Humanity, a South Boston nonprofit organization that offers paid creative jobs to young people. The print will also hang at several museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

‘TO TELL A STORY IS EMPOWERING’

Natasha Trethewey ’95MFA, two-time U.S. poet laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner, released her latest book, Memorial Drive: A Daughter’s Memoir, this past year. The book recounts her mother’s murder at the hands of an ex-husband and the ways that trauma shaped Trethewey’s life. She acknowledges her mother as “the reason that I am a writer,” and said in an interview with PBS, “We all tell ourselves stories about our lives, whether we’re writers or not. That’s the way that we give meaning and purpose and shape to what seems chaotic, random. Being able to do that, to tell a story, to tell one’s own story, I think, is empowering.”

The debut novel from Gabriel Bump ’17MFA, Everywhere You Don’t Belong, has been called “astute and touching” by Publishers Weekly. The novel, most of which was completed during Bump’s time at UMass, tells the story of a young Black man coming of age on the South Side of Chicago. Though the book is fiction, Bump takes inspiration from his own life and says, “I wanted to tell this story because I felt like Claude [the main character] and I come from a misunderstood place. It’s not necessarily that I wanted to show that part of the world in gritty realness, but I wanted to have magic and funny aspects. I wanted to find a balance.”

Watch Natasha Trethewey’s full interview with PBS: umass.edu/magazine/trethewey

CHAMPIONSHIP COACHES RETIRE

Two beloved UMass coaches—who led their teams to numerous championships and nurtured athletes for success in and outside of their sports—recently retired.

Julie LaFreniere ’77, ’86MS, who challenged norms and competed with boys in high school, retired as head coach of the women’s cross country and track & field teams after 33 years. LaFreniere’s impressive record includes three indoor Atlantic 10 Championships and two outdoor Atlantic 10 Championships. She was named Atlantic 10 Coach of the Year 13 times. LaFreniere plans to take time to pick apples this season with her 88-year-old father, breed border terriers, and spend more time with her alpacas.

Rusa Yarworth ’78, ’84MS, bade farewell as head coach of the men’s swimming and diving team, ending a 41-year career that began in 1979. Yarworth led his teams to 16 Atlantic 10 Championships and won accolades as Atlantic 10 Coach of the Year 14 times. For the first time in 25 years, Yarworth enjoyed his summer without running a swimming camp and is taking time to contemplate his next steps.
CONNECTIONS

COMEDIAN RAISES FUNDS—AND LAUGHTER

Rob Corddry ’94, winner of four Emmy Awards, didn’t like feeling powerless against the pandemic. So he did what he does best: He joined other comedian friends and made the video “Funny You Should Mask” to generate laughter and to raise funds for donating PPE to hospitals and health care workers in need.

CLASS NOTES

1948
George Epstein has had not one, but two successful careers. He retired from his first calling in 1991 as an accomplished engineer in the aerospace industry. His second calling is poker—he is now writing his fourth book about it.

1976
Irma McClain ’76MFA, ’89MA, ’93PhD is assembling a robust collection of papers and ephemera of Black feminists for the archive that bears her name and resides at the W.E.B. Du Bois Library. This year McClain was awarded a $15,000 grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research to help expand the archive.

1980
Ellen M. Snyder-Grenier, an award-winning exhibition developer, curator, and writer, had more interesting information about the storied Henry Street Settlement House in New York City than she could fit in the exhibition she was planning. So she captured the story in a highly acclaimed book, The House on Henry Street. The Enduring Life of a Lower East Side Settlement, featuring a foreword by Bill Clinton.

TAKING COMMAND

Lieutenant General Jody J. Daniels ’93MS, ’97PhD received her third star and became the first woman to serve as the chief of the U.S. Army Reserve in its 112-year history. Before her more than three decades of Army service, she attained her doctorate in computer science and worked for Lockheed Martin. “I want to foster a mindset of teamwork, continuous learning, and growth,” Daniels told the Army Times. She now leads nearly 200,000 soldiers and civilian employees stationed in all 50 states and around the world.

1990
William R. Li has had not one, but two successful careers. He retired from his first calling in 1991 as an accomplished engineer in the aerospace industry. His second calling is poker—he is now writing his fourth book about it.

1991
Erin McDermott was appointed athletic director at Harvard, the first woman to lead the largest varsity sports program in the country. Her appointment came with high praise from Harvard officials: “Erin knows better than anyone the power of a strong community united by common values.”

1993
Emily Amico drew her inspiration to become a nurse from being hospitalized as a child. She is now a public health nurse for the town of Southborough, Massachusetts, where she is on the front lines of COVID-19 prevention efforts.

1998
Caroline DuBois, a poet and author, wrote her first novel in narrative verse, The Places We Sleep is a coming-of-age story set during the tumult of 9/11. DuBois is also an educator, and in 2016 was named the Nashville Blue Ribbon Teacher for her commitment to students and her excellence in teaching adolescents.

2000
Joe Maruca co-founded TRE Olive, a family-run firm that produces award-winning olive oil from its groves in Italy. Maruca says traditional methods and lots of love produced the oil that won gold and silver prizes at the 2020 New York International Olive Oil Competition.

2004
Hope Zeiling, a former top lacrosse player at UMass, scored big in another arena: She is the first woman and the youngest lawyer to be named managing principal of the Miami office of Bressler, Amery & Ross, a national firm.

2007
Leigh Whiting-Jones switched career gears, from working for social justice organizations to teaching in public schools. She is now the principal of Pulham Elementary School in Massachusetts.

2010
Sean P. Sullivan, an investigative reporter for NJ Advance Media—along with lawyers from the Last Resort Exoneration Project—helped expose the wrongful conviction of two Black men in Camden, New Jersey. The men were freed this year after spending 25 years in prison. Sullivan’s first newspaper job was with the Massachusetts Daily Collegian as a student.

2012
Mallory Ottarino invested in a $100 sewing machine to start an Etsy shop out of her parents’ basement the day she graduated with a fine arts degree. Today she is CEO of Kind Apparel—a company based in Missouri, Montana, that designs and sells clothes made out of recycled materials, many printed with her own graphic designs.

Kevin Drew was appointed to the North End/Waterfront Neighborhood Council, a volunteer community organization that helps improve the quality of life for residents of Boston’s North End/Waterfront area by advising the city on issues from land use and clean streets to food and beverage licenses.

Submit your note at: umassalumni.com/classnotes
THE MAN WHO MADE LIFE TASTE BETTER

Remember what it was like to shop for produce in the ‘70s? Maybe it’s better you don’t remember. Tomatoes, especially, were barely edible except for a few summer months. In stark contrast, the current varieties of tomatoes are sure to please all year round. And that is thanks in part to Karakan “Kutty” Bedrosian ’54, food scientist and inventor, who died in July but made sure to preserve his legacy.

After starting his academic career in food science at UMass Amherst, Bedrosian went to work in the food research and development departments at Whirlpool Corporation, Lever Brothers Co., and DCA Food Industries, before landing at Natural Pak Produce Inc., where he first patented his produce preservation system. He hypothesized that tomatoes in particular were being harvested too early and never really had a chance to ripen. Bedrosian proposed picking produce when ripe and shipping it in absorbent packaging that held oxygen levels low to delay decay.

Throughout his life, Bedrosian’s passion for food science and innovation remained strong. In 2011, he helped fund the Fergus M. Clydesdale Center for Foods for Health and Wellness—a collection of six new laboratories in the UMass Amherst College of Natural Sciences.

“Kutty was an amazingly entrepreneurial food scientist,” says Eric Decker, head of the Department of Food Science, “and a true role model for our students and alumni. His dedication, commitment, and generosity to UMass food science will be with us forever. He will be sorely missed.”

‘HE SAID WHAT HE SAW’

Robert Levey ’60, a trailblazing reporter on racial inequities for The Boston Globe, died in June at the age of 81. According to the Globe, “Upon retiring in 1992, Mr. Levey noted that during a 30-year Globe career he had been ‘an education reporter, a magazine editor, a lifestyle reporter, a national roving reporter, and a restaurant critic.’”

Levey witnessed the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech up close and went on to report about Boston’s Black leaders, undeterred by the racist notes he occasionally found in his mailbox. He went on to receive a prestigious fellowship from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard.

From the Globe’s remembrance:
When Robert Levey arrived in the Globe’s newsroom in 1962 after a couple of years as a Holyoke newspaper reporter, he found a Boston school system rife with inequities for poor children and students of color… Mr. Levey won awards for a series he wrote about Boston’s troubled school system in 1964—a decade before a federal judge ordered the city to use busing to desegregate its schools.

“Bob said what he saw,” recalled his wife, Ellen Goodman, a former Globe columnist and an author. “He said what he saw when he covered civil rights for the Globe, and he said what he saw when he covered food for the Globe. That’s who he was.”

A VITAL FORCE FOR ART AND CULTURE

Frederick C. Tillis, professor emeritus in the Department of Music and Dance, died in May at the age of 90. Tillis was also director emeritus of the UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center, as well as a composer, performer, poet, and one of the major influences on cultural life at UMass Amherst for over 40 years.

The Times remember him as a composer known for “creating and performing versatile works that spanned American jazz and European traditions.”

The Times continues:
Professor Tillis wrote more than 100 compositions, as well as 15 books of poetry and a textbook, Jazz Theory and Improvisation (1977). His work included compositions for piano, voice, orchestra, chorus, and chamber ensembles. A frequent source of inspiration was African American spirituality…

He taught at colleges in Texas, Louisiana, and Kentucky before being recruited to teach full time at Massachusetts in 1970. Appointed director of the school’s Fine Arts Center in 1978, he helped jump-start several university arts initiatives, including what became the Jazz & African American Music Studies and the annual Jazz in July summer intensive programs.

Always Ready with Tea and a Listening Ear

Joanne Eldred ’91, ’94 used her fierce love of her two children to turn her life around. She joined Alcoholics Anonymous to become sober, clearing an obstacle to her goals. She earned an associate degree in arboriculture and park management from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture and a bachelor’s degree in environmental conservation, which enabled her work at state and national parks. She also helped people in the trenches of addiction and violence as a drug and alcohol and domestic abuse counselor. Her résumé included work as a landscaper and a caterer, and she loved volunteering at local music venues. Legions of friends mourned her death in April from COVID-19 complications.

Eldred, 63, is just one of many from the UMass community to die prematurely from the coronavirus. And like others during the pandemic, she died in the intensive care unit, isolated from visitors. She listened to her children, and she made tea. There she would sit and listen and you felt better.”

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 February 1 and September 30, 2020, visit: umass.edu/magazine/20memoriam

Photo: Geriann Butler

IN MEMORIAM
Discover the many ways you can receive support from your UMass community—and give to others as well.

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Planning ahead can help you leave a legacy you are proud of. Writing your will is your first step. This important document protects your family while also supporting the places that have helped shape who you are—like UMass Amherst.

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“I am very proud of UMass and want it to continue to grow and succeed.”

—BOB LITTLETON ’71 on one of the factors that influenced his decision to include a gift to UMass in his future plans.
HUMANIZING DIGITAL MEDICINE

My career has focused on ultra-rare diseases that have very few patients. Their clinical trials can be smaller and faster than those of a typical drug used in a broader population. It’s been exciting to see several rare diseases go from untreatable all the way to the holy grail of gene therapy.

Traditionally, clinical drug trials have been dependent on multiple in-person clinic visits, which can put immunocompromised patients at risk. But the pandemic has forced the accelerated adoption of digital data collection to keep drug development on track—digital sensors can potentially collect data in ways that replace physical exams, and some follow-up studies can rely on “remote visits” to gather post-approval data. The FDA is supporting this rapid evolution and recognizing the validity of that data. Even home health visits have been altered to reduce risk to the patient while staying within the trial protocol.

Leveraging digital innovations has most certainly helped get critical medicine to more people quickly while reducing COVID-19 exposure, but there are also drawbacks to be wary of. Ultimately, these changes have sped up the advancement of health care delivery. It’s definitely a positive development that companies can continue a clinical trial with modified collection of data using sensors or telehealth, so the drug’s march toward approval is not arrested. However, the intervention of a caring practitioner is proven to be healing itself. We should be wary of removing some of the human component to care.

I’ve seen digital connectivity help erode the loneliness of a rare disease diagnosis, too. Terrified parents receiving a devastating diagnosis for their child can have their isolation eased by connecting with others. A mom can hold her crying, newly diagnosed newborn at 3 a.m. in Boston and Skype with a “mum” in London who was in those shoes just six months ago but found a therapy or trial that is helping her child. This human connection is such a fabulous thing to witness—informed parents supporting each other in genuine, warm ways with hard-earned wisdom, and able to share it at the exact moment it is most needed.

If we’re thoughtful about how we deploy new digital innovations, we can get patients the treatments they need more quickly, we can keep them safe during a pandemic, and we can keep the human element in the healing equation.

Courtney Rice ’96 is a consultant specializing in the development and marketing of rare disease therapies.

Illustration: Nathalie Lees, courtesy Guardian News & Media LTD
WHAT DO YOU STILL HAVE FROM YOUR DAYS AT UMASS?

An object? An image? A feeling? Whether it’s proudly displayed or rediscovered in a drawer, photograph it or draw it and share it with us! We may feature your memento on umass.edu/magazine.

1. Snap a photo of your object in the frame — or draw, collage, or paint it.

2. Post to Instagram or Twitter with #umassmagazine, email it to us at magazine@umass.edu, or cut it out and send by mail.

3. Include the background story of your UMass memento along with your name and class year.