Dear Alumni and Friends of Biology,

Greetings! I am completing the last year of my term as chair of Biology in August 2010, and I’m pleased to be passing the baton to a very capable teacher and scholar known to many of you, Rick Kesseli. Rick has been at the helm of the Biology graduate programs over the last three years, where he has revitalized our PhD and Masters Programs, instituted an award program to recognize our top teaching assistants, and put forward a new Professional Science Masters degree in Biotechnology. So he comes to the chair with a lot of energy and great ideas. For my part, I can hardly believe that three years have passed so quickly. It has been a time of major change for the Department and the University, which certainly has made the chairmanship lively and challenging. This will continue even more so in Rick’s term.

Among the many new developments, the new Integrated Sciences Complex, a part of the UMass Boston Master Plan, is fully underway. The groundbreaking for construction is still on schedule for Fall 2010 and we hope to occupy our new building in Fall 2013. Other events that promise to enhance the Department’s teaching and research include several successful searches for new faculty. Two young scientists will join us in the upcoming academic year: Jennifer Bowen, a microbial ecologist from Princeton, and Liam Revell, an evolutionary bioinformaticist from the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center (NESCent) at Duke University (more on them inside). Also, we are negotiating to bring Roya Khosravi-Far, a senior scientist in Experimental Pathology, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and an Associate Professor, Department of Pathology, Harvard Medical School. We hope that she will fill the Brann Endowed Chair in Science and Mathematics and serve as an academic leader in work related to the Center for Personalized Cancer Therapy (CPCT) to be established at UMass Boston as a joint effort with the UMB-Dana Farber/Harvard Cancer Center partnership.
Also, thanks to your kind donations and support, we continue to provide a rich science experience for our students. In particular, two years ago we established the Biology Alumni Fund to directly support undergraduate research activities in the Department. This Spring we awarded research grants in a competitive application process to several undergraduates to help support their independent research projects in the Department. Also we want to thank the family of Dr. Nancy Goranson for establishing the graduate student research fund in her name. This year, for the first time, the endowment provided research funds to five graduate students working towards their MS and PhD degrees. We are indeed fortunate to have generous alumni like you, who remember the fine biology education that UMass Boston provides to its citizens. As always, we are proud of our alumni. We love to hear about where you are, what you are doing and your latest achievements. Please send us a letter or an email to share your news with us and your fellow alumni in the Alumni Newsletter and the updated Alumni page on the Biology Department Web site (www.bio.umb.edu).

Michael Shiaris  
Chairman, Biology Department

**New Faculty**

_JENNIFER BOWEN_, currently a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Geosciences at Princeton University, will be joining the Department in Fall 2010. Her research addresses fundamental questions regarding controls on the composition and function of microbial communities critical to the biogeochemical cycling of carbon and nitrogen in coastal and oceanic environments. She is interested in developing a quantitative framework that links changes in gene expression, gene abundance, and community composition of microbes to the underlying geochemistry that structures the distribution of microorganisms in the environment.

_LIAM REVELL_, currently a postdoctoral fellow in the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center (NESCent) at Duke University, will be joining the Department in Spring 2011. His research interests include using phylogenies to make inferences about the evolutionary process for continuous characters. In particular, he is interested in extending existing methods and developing new methods for the analysis of multivariate phenotypic data in a phylogenetic context.
Professor Garrison Wilkes, a towering figure of the Biology Department, will retire this winter, after serving the University for more than 40 years. During his academic career, Garrison taught a variety of courses, but the course he will be most remembered for is Nutrition - one of the most heavily enrolled courses in the sciences that benefited thousands of students. In this course, Garrison brought together his tremendous knowledge of plants, human health, and world cultures in a manner that intrigued and inspired all. Often called a walking encyclopedia or perhaps wikipedia now, Garrison is one of the few persons who have the wealth and the depth of knowledge to teach this type of course in a unique style.

Throughout his research career, Garrison had one passion that prevailed over all others—his interest in the origin and evolution of maize. His doctoral degree from Harvard University was on the genetics of maize. He devoted his whole life to the study of maize and its wild relatives in Mexico and other parts of the world, becoming in the process, one of the world’s leading authorities on this crop that feeds hundreds of millions of people. He helped establish the world’s leading facility for conserving genetic resources of maize, the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico, and is now regarded as a leading expert on conservation of crop genetic diversity. Professionals recognized his many contributions to the study of wild plants by electing him as President of the Society of Economic Botany in 1985, and to many other distinguished panels.

Garrison’s love of plants indeed extends beyond wild plants. The biology office staff will miss bouquets of fresh flowers and vegetables from his garden every summer. Garrison, a man with many talents, shows us how you can grow flowers, fruits, and vegetables, fix a house, teach, and above all, be the spokesperson for the world’s food crops that sustain humanity - all at the same time!

Retirement for Garrison means a renewed effort to complete 3 books: How the CIMMYT Maize Gene Bank Came to Be, Picture Atlas of Mexican Food Plants, & The Mexican Milpa as an Ecosystem/Genetic Advancement Model for Balanced Nutritional Achievement.

Garrison will be giving a Seminar Presentation summarizing key aspects of his career on Friday, April 22nd at 2:30pm in S-1-006.
Faculty Honors, Awards, and Distinctions

Alan Christian

Jeff Dukes
Former Assistant Professor in Biology, was awarded tenure and promoted to Associate Professor of Forestry and Natural Resources at Purdue University.

Kenneth Kleene
Recipient, Chancellor’s Outstanding Achievement Award for Scholarship

Professor Emerita Ruth Bennett

STILL PASSIONATE ABOUT TEACHING

Ruth Bennett is Professor Emerita of Biology at UMass Boston. Before retiring she taught at many levels, concentrating on neurobiology and physiology. Her research delved into mechanisms of color vision in insect eyes. Since her retirement she and her husband (Fuad Safwat) have traveled quite a bit, including to three sites that are connected with evolutionary biology: the Galapagos Islands, Darwin’s home in Downe, England, and the Darwin exhibition when it was in NYC and Boston. This course, Darwin, Evolution, and Biology Today has been offered three times, in the Fall of 2006, the Spring of 2007, and in the Spring of 2008. New materials get added each time, and this time around we will see that a lot has happened during the last couple of years, especially during the bicentennial year (2009) of Darwin’s birth. She taught the course at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at UMass Boston:

Darwin, Evolution, and Biology Today

All of modern biology is based on an understanding of how living creatures have evolved over time, by natural selection. The origins of this understanding lie in the observations and perceptions of Charles Darwin during his voyage on HMS Beagle (especially his explorations in South America and the Galapagos Islands) in the 1830s. We will explore the origins of the idea of evolution by natural selection, discuss its development over time, and especially look at how modern work in genetics has solidified and amplified the understanding of evolutionary processes and the timeline of evolution. Many examples of evolution even during our lifetimes can be discussed. We will describe current thinking about the evolution of our own species (Homo sapiens) – there are many new findings here! Class discussions will, hopefully, be wide ranging -- e.g., they might focus on how scientists use their understanding of natural selection in their work – whether in developing new treatments for disease, or understanding how microbes evolve resistance to antibiotics.
**BOOKS AND BOOK CHAPTERS PUBLISHED**

**Kamal Bawa**  

**Greg Beck**  

**John Ebersole**  

**Ron Etter**  


**Linda Huang**  


**Michael Rex**  

**Publications, Research and Grants**

**JOURNAL ARTICLES**

**Kamal Bawa**  

**Greg Beck**  

**Alan Christian**  


**Adan Colón-Carmona**  


**John Ebersole**

**Ron Etter**

**Katherine Gibson**

**Rick Kesseli**


**Michael Rex**


**Robert Stevenson**

**Michael Shiaris**

**Manickam Sugumaran**

**Alexey Veraksa**


**Garrison Wilkes**
Molecular Evidence of Gene Flow between Teosinte Species and into the Domesticated Maize Gene Pool. Marilyn L. Warburton, Garrison Wilkes, Suketoshi Taba, Alain Charcosset, Celine Mir, Claudia Bedoya, B. M. Prasanna, X. Xie, Sarah Hearne, and Jorge Franco. Paper accepted by both the Journal of Heredity and the American Journal of Botany. We are going with AJB.

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**RESEARCH GRANTS**

**Kamal Bawa**
NSF Workshops to Articulate and Disseminate Research Priorities in Forest Canopies $36,575.00 9/1/2009-8/31/2010.

Harvard University Sustainability Program. Harvard Mid-Career Fellowship in Sustainability Science $60,000.00 9/1/2009-1/31/2011.

Harvard Forest, Harvard University Charles Bullard Fellowship in Forest Research $40,000.00 1/1/2010- 12/31/2010.

**Greg Beck**
PADI Foundation, Immunity and a Marine Epidemic: Mass Mortality of Diadema. $5,000.00 5/1/2010-4/30/2012.

**Jennifer Bowen**
NSF: Environmental Control of Microbial N20 Fluxes and DIN Loss in Salt Marsh Sediments. $231,067. 01/01/2011 - 12/31/2013.
Solange Brault

Alan Christian
URS Corporation Fayetteville Pipeline Express Project $17,035.00 6/1/2009-5/31/2011.
Arkansas Game
Fish Commission Life History Research on the Special Concern Southern Hikorynut $8,418.00 08/01/2009-03/31/2011.

Adan Colon-Carmona
NIH UMB/DFHCC Comprehensive Cancer Partnership Program (Supplement 1) $154,000.00 9/1/2009-8/31/2010.

NIH UMB/DFHCC Comprehensive Cancer Partnership Program (Supplement 2: John Perez) $304,990.00 9/1/2009 – 8/31/2010.

Jeffrey Dukes
NSF REU Supplement to the Boston-Area Climate Experiment $29,000.00 6/1/2009 – 5/31/2011.

Ron Etter and Michael Rex

Linda Huang

Rick Kesseli, Adan Colon-Carmona, Michael Shiaris and Jeff Dukes
NSF Division of Integrative Organismal Systems. Genetic Bases and Ecological Significance of Plant-Microbe Interactions in the Rhizosphere $695,545.00 7/15/2009-12/31/2012.

Rick Kesseli
NSF Plant Genome (DBI 0820451): Comparative Genomics of Phenotypic Variation in the Composite 3/1/20/09 to 2/28/2010 ($113,156.00 of $408,768.00 awarded to UMB within the $8,092,370.00 multi-university grant).


Michael Shiaris
Rachel Skvirsky

Robert Stevenson
NSF Fine-Grained Semantic Markup of Descriptive Data for knowledge applications $158,380.09

Alexey Veraksa
NSF - Molecular scaffolds in Drosophila signal transduction. $390,000 06/01/07-05/30/10.

Brian White

NSF: NOYCE Scholars Phase II: Teach Next Year in Boston and Randolph $749,996.00
10/01/2010 - 9/30/2015

Alumni Corner

Anam Ahmad who graduated with Honors in 2009 now works as a Quality Control Analyst with ETEX Corporation, a small bio-materials company producing Bone Substitute Material.

Olayemi (Yemi) A Ajayi who graduated with Honors and was awarded the Biology Service Award in 2009 will be starting an MD/PhD program at the University of Connecticut this fall.

Rony Barbara, who received Honors and Distinction awards at UMB in 2007, has been working in various research labs including Harvard-Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. Rony will be starting the MD program at UMass Worcester this fall.

Tim Menz who graduated with honors and distinction from UMB in 2005 just finished his 3rd year at UMass Worcester Medical School. He has chosen pediatrics as his specialization but will be extending his program for another year, to continue with a research program.

His first publication as a co-author is just out; C., Keeler, A., Braag, S., Menz, T., Tang, Q., Flotte, TR. “Modulation of Exaggerated-IgE Allergic Responses by Gene Transfer-mediated Antagonism of IL-13 and IL-17e.” Molecular Therapy. 2010 Mar;18(3):511-8.
Trevor J. Morin, PhD U Mass Medical School, student commencement speaker 2010 staff scientist MassBiologics.

Emmanuel Obusez (Case Western Reserve University, Medical School) received the 2009 Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA) Student Research Fellowship Award.

Dr. Jennifer Forman Orth who earned her PhD in Environmental Biology from UMB in 2003 is the State Plant Pest Survey Coordinator for the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. She has been involved with efforts to eradicate or manage several new invasive species in the state including the Asian Long-horned Beetle, Mile-a-Minute and Pepperweed.

Dr. Ellen Pritham who graduated with a PhD in Molecular Cell and Organismal Biology from UMB in 2002 is an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas, Arlington. She returned this past spring to give a wonderful seminar entitled “Mobile DNA and the Dynamic Genome.” She also has her own new (15 mo.) “mobile element” son by the name of Remy.

Deepa Ramaswami who was part of our REU programs and graduated with honors and was awarded the Biology Research Award from UMB in 2009 will be starting a Graduate Program at the Mt Sinai School of Medicine in NYC this fall.

Dr. Patty Szcsys who graduated with a PhD in Environmental Biology from UMB in 2004 is an Assistant Professor at Eastern Connecticut State University. Patty has had a busy summer. Along with leading her annual field trip for students to Costa Rica, Patty also welcomed a new member, Asa, to her family in July. Congratulations Patty!!!


Mei Tong, who graduated in Spring 2010, is now a PhD student at UMass Worcester Medical School.

Manuel Valdes, who graduated in Spring 2010 and worked for the IMSD program, entered a PhD program at Duke University.

William A. Woods is now Assistant Research Professor at Tufts University, and is working on Caterpillar Locomotion. He co-authored the following article, which was also featured on NPR: Simon Michael A, Woods William A Jr, Serebrenik Yevgeniy V, Simon Sharotka M, van Griethuijsen Linnea I, Socha John J, Lee Wah-Keat, Trimmer Barry A. Visceral-locomotory Pistoning in Crawling Caterpillars (Manduca sexta). Current Biology, 2010.
The following students submitted theses for their PhD and Master’s degrees:

**Ph.D Degrees**

**Jana Bagarova,** *Translational Regulation of the Sperm Mitochondria-Associated Cystein-Rich Protein (Smcp) mRNA by CIS-Elements in Both UTRS*  
Advisor: Kenneth Kleene

**Jonna Grimsby,** *Invasive and Endangered: Population Genetics of Plant Species at Both Extremes, Japanese Knotweed and Eastern Silvery Aster*  
Advisor: Rick Kesseli

**Reinmar Seidler,** *Biodiversity Conservation as a Driver of Development in the Populous Tropics*  
Advisor: Kamal Bawa

**Stephanie Wood-Lafond,** *Dynamics of Recolonization: A Study of the Gray Seal (Halichoerus grypus) in the Northeast U.S.*  
Advisor: Solange Brault

**Master’s Degrees**

**Crystal Baker,** *SPO71 is Required for Proper Prospore Membrane Size in Saccharomyces Cerevisiae*  
Advisor: Linda Huang

**Jonathan Drake,** *Abnormal Involuntary Movement Expression upon D2 Dopamine Agonist Challenge is Determined by the Nature of Prior Dopamine Receptor Stimulation (priming) in 6-Hydroxydopamine-lesioned Rats*  
Advisor: Alexia Pollack

**Renee Eriksen,** *Morphological and Genetic Variation in Populations of Yellow Starthistle (Centaurea solstitialis). Evidence for Rapid Evolution in the Invasive Weed Yellow Star Thistle*  
Advisor: Rick Kesseli

**Bruce Kline,** *Distribution Dynamics of Enterococci in Marine Intertidal Sediments and Coastal Waters at an Urban Beach, Wollaston, Quincy, MA*  
Advisor: Michael Shiaris

**Nicholas Faiella,** *Interactions Between ColV-Producing and Non-Producing Bacterial Strains in a Nutrient-Rich Liquid Environment*  
Advisor: Rachel Skvirsky
Graduate Student Corner

Jaymie Lowe Czornyj, *The Effect of Residual Moisture on Lyophilized Proteins*  
Advisor: Steven Ackerman

Katherine McHenry, *The Impact of Dry Stone Walls on the Distribution of The Red-Backed Salamander (Plethodon cinereus)*  
Advisor: John Ebersole

Landon Merrill, *HSP70 genes, L254 and L393, in the Mimivirus Genome*  
Advisor: Michael Shiaris

Thao Nguyen, *Canine Reticulocyte Quantification: Comparison of Two Automated Hematology Analyzers and a Manual Counting Method*  
Advisor: Kenneth Campbell

Tobias Stover, *Methyl Mercury Measurement in Lepomis Sunfish (Enzyme Assay vs. Direct Method)*  
Advisor: William Hagar

William Walker, *Early Progressive Renal Function Decline Among Patients with Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus is Influenced by Two Distinct Forms of the Soluble TNFR1 Protein*  
Advisors: Rick Kesseli and Kenneth Kleene

Aimee Young, *Undergraduate Biology Students Abilities to Construct Phylogenetic Trees*  
Advisor: Brian White

Grants Awarded

Anna Aguilera - National Science Foundation Pre-doctoral fellowship. 2007-2009

Emelia DeForce - Nancy Goranson Research Award $1000.00 Spring 2010

Stefanie Gazda - Nancy Goranson Research Award $1000.00 Spring 2010  
- National Geographic Society/Waitt Grant Individual Niche Specialization in a Top Marine Predator: Using the Bottlenose Dolphin to Study the Niche Variation Hypothesis $14,520.00 4/1/10–8/31/10.

Suzanne Grant - Graduate Student Research Award $1500.00 Fall 2009

Anastasia Mozharova - Fulbright Fellowship. 09/2008-08/2010

Christian Slubowski - Nancy Goranson Research Award. “An evolutionarily conserved motif in the GCK-family Kinase Sps1p is required for function during sporulation.” $600 Fall 2009

James Stark - Doctoral Dissertation Grant “The role of the SHY2 Gene in the Control of the Root System Architecture in Arabidopsis thaliana” $2,000.00 Fall 2009


Daniel Trask - Graduate Student Research Award $2,000.00 Spring 2010

Scholarships Awarded

Jenn Kerry was awarded the Hank Emory Scholarship for 2010 by the New England Chapter of the Geospatial Information & Technology Association (GITA). GITA is a nonprofit educational association serving the global geospatial community. Each year the New England Chapter awards $2,000 scholarships and internship opportunities to students who have made a commitment to study disciplines related to geospatial technology and to obtain practical experience in this field from a competitive pool of applicants.

Undergraduate Student Corner

Congratulations to all of our 2010 Biology and Biochemistry Graduates!

GRANTS & AWARDS

Denise Butler Alumni Donor Student Research Fund $452.75. Mentor Dr. Colon-Carmona 2/1/2010
Abigail Duffy “Environmental Ecoli train differences in adhesion to sediment particles in water” Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Shiari 2/1/2010

Keith Ferguson “ID of Microbes in Urine Sediments by a PCR/reverse line blot technique” Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Campbell 2/1/2010

Erik Holzwanger “Spatial patterns and relatedness of Lampsilis radiata in a New England pond” Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Christian 2/1/2010

Paulina Kocjan “Spatial patterns and relatedness of Ellipotio complanata in a New England pond” Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Christian 2/1/2010

Raina Milne Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Campbell 2/1/2010

Mariam Monem Alumni Donor Student Research Fund $450.00 2/1/2010

Lauren Mullin “Microbial community analysis of Arabadopsis thaliana rhizosphere in treated soils” Undergraduate Research Funds 370.00. Mentor Drs. Dukes and Kesseli 2/1/2010
  McCon Recipient $225.00. Mentor Drs. Dukes and Kesseli 2/1/2010
  Alumni Donor Student Research Fund $149.40. Mentor Drs. Dukes and Kesseli
  Special Departmental Award in Biology. Mentor Drs. Dukes and Kesseli 6/1/2010

Katarzyna Plotrowska Alumni Donor Student Research Fund $472.00. Mentor Dr. Colon-Carmona 2/1/2010

Henry Rogalin “Chimeric Receptor Protein Generation” Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Colon-Carmona 2/1/2010

Mei Tong Special Departmental Award in Biology. Mentor Dr. Veraksa 6/1/2010

Chiedozie Uwandu “Orphan kinesin in regulating cell division and growth” Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Colon-Carmona 2/1/2010
  Attended the American Society For Microbiology Conference Travel Fellowship $700.00 1/6/2010. Mentor Dr. Adan Colon-Carmona
Max Viner Undergraduate Research Funds $500.00. Mentor Dr. Gibson 2/1/2010

Dana Williams “Characterization of Antimicrobial Peptides from Ctenophores and Coelenterates” Undergraduate Research Funds $475.00. Mentor Dr. Beck 2/1/2010

RESEARCH EXPERIENCES FOR UNDERGRADUATES (REU)

The Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) in Integrative and Evolutionary Biology, is a program sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) that offers undergraduate students the opportunity to work closely with a faculty advisor and a research group to carry out independent research projects in Biology. This summer, 13 students, from different parts of the country, were accepted from a highly competitive pool of over 300 applicants. The participants spent 10 weeks researching topics pertaining to Biodiversity, Bioinformatics, Cell Morphogenesis, Cell Signaling, Conservation Biology, Genetics, Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, Gene Regulation, Microbiology, Microbial Ecology, Molecular Evolution and Population Biology. They presented the results of their studies during a Poster Symposium on August 13th.

BRIDGES 2010

The University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB), in partnership with Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) and Roxbury Community College (RRC), runs the Bridges to Baccalaureate Program, which is funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The objective of the Bridges Program is to advance the careers of community college students interested in pursuing a biomedical research career. Through facilitated discussion courses, pre-calculus and molecular biology methods workshops, intensive advising/mentoring, and research opportunities, the program helps minority students succeed in obtaining 4-year degrees in the Biomedical Sciences.
At the College of Science and Mathematics, we’re creating new teaching and learning environments to increase student success. It’s critically important that freshman have the resources to become confident and engaged learners. In helping them achieve their potential, we’re also developing more and better-prepared scientists.

-- Dean Andrew Grosovsky, College of Science and Mathematics

Launched in Fall 2009, the Freshman Success Community (FSC) program began with two communities each with 24 freshmen connected to departmental faculty members. The students were assigned to the same sections of math, chemistry, and biology as well Science Gateway Seminars led by the CSM Dean Andrew Grosovsky and Associate Dean Bill Hagar. Due to its success and popularity, the program has tripled in size for the 2010-2011 academic year, with six Communities suitable for all CSM majors serving approximately 140 first-time/full-time freshmen, and each anchored by a Science Gateway Seminar led by a tenure/tenure track CSM faculty member.

As the FSC program has garnered attention across campus and beyond, the support of the Biology department has been key to its development and success. Biology faculty members are leading 3 of the 6 seminars this year, ensuring that a significant portion of freshman Biology majors start off college on the right track. Selina Imboywa, a senior Biology major, initiated the role of FSC peer mentor, providing academic and personal support to participants as they navigate through their first year of college. Several students from last year’s Biology FSC have gone on to assume leadership roles in this year’s community, either as Dean’s Ambassadors, Community Assistants, or peer mentors for the new students. Graduate students have contributed as well: current PhD student Mandi Cass is serving as the TA for Dean Grosovsky’s community after Aimee Young (M.S. Biology, ’10) worked with him on the pilot.

These exciting partnerships have resulted in the program making a serious impact on both retention and student satisfaction: 90% of the 09-10 FSC participants have continued onto their sophomore year, with 60% earning a GPA of 3.0 or better. Based on student essays, focus groups, and surveys from last year’s group, students indicated they felt more connected to their fellow peers, their professors and ultimately, their university.

For more information about the Freshman Success Community program, please contact the Student Success Center at 617-287-3974 or studentsuccess@umb.edu.
STAFF ADDITIONS

The Biology Department is pleased to mention that we have three new members, all of whom are contributing in many ways to the success of our programs.

Alexa MacPherson was an undergraduate Biology major here several years ago. She left the program and is “the proud mommy of two girls, Heavenne, 6 years old and Gabrielle, 3 years old.” She came back to work as a staff member in the Biology Department office in August of 2008 and is currently managing the Graduate Programs in Biology among other activities. Somehow while doing a great job in the office and raising her two very cute girls, she was able to complete her double major in Biology and Psychology in 2010. Alexa would like to eventually get into a PhD program in Neurobiology.

Anshika Verma also recently joined the Biology Department office staff in November 2009. She is working on payroll activities in the department and dealing with the many undergraduates who walk into our office each day with new and complex issues. She too has amazing perseverance. Anshika is double majoring in Psychology and Sociology and earning a minor in Women’s Studies. She will probably need all of her psychological and sociological skills to deal with the constant “excitement” in the Biology Department office. She plans to graduate in June 2012.

Finally we have a new research technician in the department. Dina Tsirelson, was a Biology major at UMass and graduated in 2007. She has worked as a part-time research assistant in Rick Kesseli’s lab for the last couple years and was recently hired full time in the department. She will support various research projects within the department over the next couple years. She is also in the process of applying to PhD programs and has developed a keen interest in plant-insect interactions and genetics.
JESSICA THOMAS

After ten years of dedication and service, Jessica Thomas has decided to leave the Biology Department to go on to new adventures. Jessica was admitted to the University in 2000, and as a biology major, studied under the direction of Dr. William Hagar. She was extremely interested in taking science classes and studying vernal pools. She quickly adjusted to campus life and became involved with the Biology Club, serving as Club President from 2002 to 2004, during which she participated in fund-raisers and club trips to Nantucket.

Additionally, Jessica worked in the Biology Department as a student employee under the direction of Charlie King where she utilized her purchasing and clerical skills. She helped Charlie to keep the teaching and research labs filled with necessary supplies and equipment. In 2005 she was hired as the Administrative Assistant in the Biology office before she decided to leave and go to California to study on a research vessel and collect data on marine life. To the Biology Department’s good fortune, Jessica returned in the summer of 2006 during a staffing crisis, which helped out the Department greatly. With all the skills and experience she gained over her years of service, Jessica was hired in 2008 as the full-time coordinator for Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity (IMSD). In collaboration with Drs. Rachel Skvirsky and Adán Colón-Carmona, Jessica was extremely helpful in establishing this NIH funded training program with the college. Jessica helped organize and coordinate student activities in the areas of the biomedical sciences, including IMSD-Biology seminars, student participation in local and national conferences, professional development workshops, course enrichment study sessions for key courses Biology majors take, and facilitated interactions between IMSD and other training programs. In addition, as an alumna of the Biology program herself, she served as a mentor and counselor to IMSD Fellows.

Through her years at UMass Boston, Jessica interacted with many different people across numerous offices on this campus and is looked upon as not only a valued employee, but also as a friend. She will be greatly missed and we wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors.

Department Staff: Anshika Verma, Charlie King, Laney Digiovanni, Yvonne Vaillancourt, Michie Yasuda, Maria Mahoney, Jessica Thomas, & Maureen Kelly take time out to pose during set up for June 2010 Graduation.
Dear Alumni, 2009/ 2010 Graduates, Faculty, Staff and Students,

We would love to hear from you! Please keep us updated by emailing Alexa or Anshika.

Alexa.MacPherson@umb.edu
Anshika.Verma@umb.edu