Kristen Wendell Awarded NSF CAREER Grant to Study the Effects of Community-Based Engineering

Kristen Wendell, assistant professor in the College of Education and Human Development, was recently awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the amount of $598,269 for the project “CAREER: Community-Based Engineering as a Learning and Teaching Strategy for Pre-Service Urban Elementary Teachers.”

In tune with recent changes to K-12 science education, this project seeks to develop a community-based engineering module, as well as assessment tools, which can be used to provide novice elementary school teachers with community-based engineering experiences. Wendell and her colleagues expect to see these experiences influence and improve the teachers’ engineering and science curriculum and improve their ability to engage and interact with student ideas and practices. (continued on page 10)

Richard Fleming Leads NIH-Funded Study on Weight Loss Approach for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities

In the intensifying battle against obesity, adolescents and young adults with intellectual disabilities have been overlooked. “There’s virtually no research on what works for weight loss with such young people,” said Richard Fleming, PhD, associate professor of exercise and health sciences.

Funded by a four-year $1,722,000 grant by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Fleming will study a family-based weight-loss and weight-maintenance approach with this population. The NIH-funded program grew out of pilot studies completed between 2005 and 2011 that tested variations to the current study, which is open to adolescents and young adults with a variety of intellectual disabilities and their family members. Recruitment for the new program started in May and the first session will launch in fall 2013.

Parents must typically take the lead in helping young people with intellectual disabilities to adopt healthier habits. “The parent needs to be an effective coach and change agent,” Fleming said. “They learn that from our study staff and by doing what amounts to ‘homework’ each week.” (continued on page 7)
Provost Langley Appoints a Working Group for an Urban-Based Research Action Initiative

To fulfill our mission as a public urban research university with a teaching soul, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Winston Langley recently appointed a Working Group for an Urban-Based Action Initiative for UMass Boston.

The four primary purposes of this working group are, one, to coordinate, promote, and lead our university-wide efforts in community-based research and engaged scholarship.

Two, to play a key role in establishing and supporting a Boston node of the national Urban Research Based Action Network (URBAN) to connect scholars across local higher education institutions and community organization leaders to foster collaborative research that serves the needs of the Boston-area communities.

Three, to facilitate and organize interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and trans-disciplinary teams across departments, colleges, and institutions for seeking external resources to support our projects or programs in community-based research and engaged scholarship.

Four, to advise the provost and his research leadership team on the effective ways for promoting, supporting, evaluating, and rewarding community-based research and engaged scholarship.

The Working Group is co-chaired by Mark Warren, associate professor of public policy and public affairs (see page 4), John Saltmarsh, professor of leadership in education (see “And a River of Public Engagement Runs Through Scholar Saltmarsh,” RISC Quarterly, Summer 2012, p. 8).

To gather the views of the UMass Boston research community, the Working Group reached out to faculty, researchers, and graduate students to participate in facilitating conversations with members throughout the day during the Second Annual Community-Engaged Partnership Symposium that took place on April 10, 2013.

Photographs and titles of other Working Group members appear to the immediate right, and on the opposite page is a story on the symposium’s success.
UMass Boston Holds Second Annual Community-Engaged Partnership Symposium

The Campus Center ballrooms at UMass Boston were buzzing on April 10th, 2013, as faculty, staff, researchers, graduate students, and community members engaged in cross-disciplinary workshops, facilitated conversations, and a poster session at the Second Annual Community-Engaged Partnership Symposium.

In line with UMass Boston’s commitment to engage with its urban community, the symposium was convened with the hopes of fostering a conversation about the ways in which the university can create new opportunities for community-engaged scholarship, as well as support and grow those current partnerships that support university teaching, research, and service.

Provost Winston Langley opened the symposium by stressing that a commitment to its surrounding communities is not just a line in UMass Boston’s mission statement, but a core value; a value that is becoming increasingly more important.

“We call ourselves an urban university,” said Langley, “and with many reputable scientific studies pointing to a future in which an overwhelming majority of the world’s population will live in an urban setting, we have a special responsibility.”

The recently created Office of Community Partnerships (OCP) and the UMass Boston Working Group for an Urban Research-Based Action Initiative (Working Group) provide great examples of UMass Boston’s commitment to rising to meet this responsibility by facilitating and encouraging high-quality and valuable community-engaged research.

When OCP was established in 2011 (a joint initiative of the Division of Governmental Relations and Public Affairs and the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs), they found that there were many community-engaged projects already underway at UMass Boston—in fact, they spent roughly two years simply cataloguing existing university-community initiatives. A quick glance around the afternoon poster session underscored this point: 90 posters were hung, each highlighting a unique community-engaged project or initiative involving faculty, staff, community members, and graduate and undergraduate students. Many of these projects are working in isolation, and often find themselves competing with each other for funding.

“We need to move away from a history of competition, and begin to promote intentional collaboration,” said Luciano Ramos, director of OCP.

OCP plans to foster both new and existing university-community relationships through establishing this environment of intentional collaboration. Their first step is to create a network in which both researchers and community members have greater awareness of the partnerships already ongoing, which they hope will foster new collaborations as well as strengthen existing partnerships.

As their work progresses, OCP plans to aid in generating new initiatives and partnerships, as well as increase the efficacy of community-engaged research. The symposium, which was made possible by the efforts and funding of OCP marked an important and valuable step towards this future.

Throughout the day, Working Group members led facilitated conversations amongst researchers and academics from across the campus, graduate students, and community leaders, with the goal of sharing thoughts and ideas about both community-engaged scholarship in general, and more specifically, how the university can advance its commitment to and support for this research.

Mark Warren, co-chair of the Working Group and associate professor of public policy and public affairs at UMass Boston, also introduced the newly formed Urban Research-Based Action Network (URBAN), which seeks to establish connections between academics, researchers, community members, and community organizers, at both the local and national levels. The Working Group at UMass Boston has similar goals, and will work closely with the Boston node of URBAN.

“Urban communities are facing unique and more numerous challenges,” said Warren. “We need to bring scholars and community activists together in order to develop new forms of knowledge that can address these pressing social issues. Community members can help researchers ask relevant questions, and the research and resulting data can help community groups develop new initiatives and policy proposals that meet their needs.”

To illustrate the benefits of university-community collaboration, the symposium featured a joint presentation by the UMass Boston Gastón Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Affairs and the Puerto Rican Cultural Center (PRCC) in Springfield, Massachusetts. The presentation provided an overview of Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CB-PAR), its benefits, and some of the current collaborations.
Mark Warren, associate professor of public policy and public affairs at UMass Boston, likes to take on big issues. Warren is the author of nine journal articles, four books, and thirty other publications, but he says he prefers to write books. Books allow him the space to flesh out his ideas and data in more depth and comprehensiveness, and are also more accessible to the larger public than journal articles. The urge to reach a wider audience stems from Warren's commitment as a sociologist who studies bottom-up approaches for building and revitalizing communities. Rather than seeing community members as passive victims of an unjust system, Warren sees them as active agents of change in their own lives and communities.

Take for example, Warren's latest book, *A Match on Dry Grass: Community Organizing as a Catalyst for School Reform*. Co-authored by Warren and Karen L. Mapp, lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), the book was a product of a national research project conducted under their leadership with students at the HGSE. The study investigated how community organizing groups work for school reform and educational justice, and the scholarship it produced in the form of the book and related materials is now being used by community leaders and educators to improve quality and address equity in public education.

Warren has always been committed to producing scholarship that is relevant to policy and social change. Producing knowledge for the sake of knowledge, Warren says, should not be the real purpose of graduate school. “Many students come to graduate school,” Warren explained, “because they wish to bring about social change, but as soon as they get here, they are put inside silos. Instead, we should teach students how to do collaborative work. To collaborate not just with professors and peers but also with communities that are working for social change.”

The commitment to collaborate with community members is the motivation behind URBAN, the Urban Research Based Action Research Network of which Warren is a national co-chair. URBAN is a network that brings together scholars and communities to create new forms of knowledge that address pressing social justice concerns. Warren envisions URBAN’s Boston chapter to be an incubator for projects that investigate issues such as school reform, the quality of jobs available in the new economy, and the effects of gentrification on low-income communities. Ultimately, their goal is to improve people’s capacities via workshops and other activities in which scholars and community activists collaborate on research that brings about social change.

How can members of different communities come together to work toward social change? In two previous books, *Fire in the Heart: How White Activists Embrace Racial Justice* and *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, Warren found that the motivation to take action for racial justice is profoundly moral and relational. His study, the first of its kind, showed how white activists come to find common cause with people of color when their core values are engaged, and when they develop a vision of a racially just future they understand to benefit everyone—other whites and people of color.

The same principles apply in Warren’s teaching. He sees research, service, and teaching as tightly integrated, and believes in giving students opportunities that get them out into the community. “I am a member of many communities in which I am active,” he explained. “There’s a community in the classroom, there’s my professional community, and there’s a community in the town where I live. I want to help build a community of learners and action-oriented people. In the classroom, I want my teaching to really matter. I want my students to think differently as a result of it.”

Warren has a similar vision for the larger community. “In Brookline where I live, the parents are empowered,” said Warren: “Whereas in marginalized communities parents often aren’t organized and empowered.” In these communities, Warren has found that parents, young people, and educators want to work to bring about social change together. The tools are there. What’s needed is collaboration.
On May 6, the White House honored fifteen Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) women as “Champions of Change.” Among them was Karen L. Suyemoto, an associate professor of clinical psychology and Asian American studies at UMass Boston.

A part of the White House’s observance of AAPI Heritage Month, this event recognized Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander women who are doing extraordinary things to create a more equal, safe, and prosperous future for their communities and the country.

When asked to describe her role and effectiveness as a mentor, Suyemoto hesitates and explains, “The best reporters of my mentoring are my students.”

Indeed, with glowing recommendations from both former and current mentees, her work is a contribution that her students find personally and professionally rewarding.

“Karen is incredibly dedicated to her students, and like the best of ‘academic parents’ [she] is both warm and demanding,” says UMass Boston alumna Stephanie Day, who graduated with her PhD in December 2010. “While she has high expectations of her students, her expectations of herself are even higher. I was constantly amazed by the time and energy she put into mentoring me — including reviewing my research, discussing my professional development, and writing letters of recommendation.”

Suyemoto, who has been with UMass Boston since 2000, is also the associate director of Asian American studies at UMass Boston, and during any given semester she mentors 4-6 doctoral students and 1-3 undergraduates. Her dual roles in clinical psychology and Asian American studies often intersect because clinical cultural psychology, she says, allows for an opportunity to incorporate “inter-disciplinary perspectives” into research.

When mentoring students on research endeavors, she encourages them to pinpoint their passions and direct those passions into making social and cultural differences.

“For me, research is not abstract,” she says. “It is a means to contribute to justice, a way to contribute to personal and social healing.”

Suyemoto says she encourages her students to consider what exactly it means to be a psychologist as they complete their doctoral studies because her understanding is that “clinical psychology is more than a focus on mental health and the individual. It is also a commitment to social and racial justice.”

This approach to research is reflective in Suyemoto’s own teaching and research. Most of her research focuses on Asian American race and ethnicity, the way individuals and communities contribute to resisting oppression, and how they create an identity. Another research path includes her study of what she calls “the colloquial meanings of race and identity,” which, she says, is essentially the question: What do people process when they read about race or racism?

In addition to the work she does with the students whom she advises, she mentors students of color at the university. Her mentoring extends to members of professional organizations in clinical psychology who can benefit from professional development guidance related to being a psychologist of color.

“Mentoring is more to me than what I do for my particular students,” she says. “There are issues that emerge for what it means to be a psychologist of color,” and Suyemoto says that she helps students resolve and make sense of these issues that may arise in the classroom or in the field. Likewise, she is also available to provide students with information regarding specialized conferences, organizations, and funding opportunities.

As for the award, it all comes back to her mentees, Suyemoto explains. “My students are amazing,” she says. “What makes this award most meaningful for me is that my students and colleagues thought enough to recommend me for it.”
What tops the list of achievements that are a source of pride for Peter Kiang, director of the Asian American Studies Program? His answer: UMass Boston’s receipt of a five-year $2 million U.S. Department of Education grant award as an Asian American, Native American, Pacific Islander Serving Institution, the only award of this kind given to any research university in New England. Kiang calls the university’s perfect score on the application “a reflection of our program’s commitment and capacity, something the entire campus can be proud of.”

Notably absent from his response are solo achievements like the many national and local awards he has garnered for leadership in human rights and in Asian American program development, including the UMass Boston Chancellor’s Distinguished Teaching and Distinguished Service Awards. In 1986, for example, the same year Kiang earned his EdM from Harvard, the Boston Rainbow Coalition gave him its first annual Asian Constituency Award. In 1991, the same year he earned his EdD from Harvard, he received the Massachusetts Teachers Association’s Human and Civil Rights Award.

These and other awards recognize Kiang’s talent for integrating history, pedagogical theory, activism, and ethnography to raise awareness about Asian American populations. His multidisciplinary approach stems from an eclectic background that includes a double major in geology and film animation as a Harvard undergraduate. He pursued the latter with an aim to create empowering educational films for Asian American children, but was eventually drawn into academia, where he found equally compelling ways to promote Asian American educational equity. His work has debunked stereotypes, exposed racism, revealed untold history, raised social issues, and altered pedagogy.

By studying the interactions of Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Lao refugees and immigrants within urban educational systems and settings, he has also drawn attention to some of the most underserved and under-researched of Asian American subgroups. He is now one of a handful of nationally recognized experts in that field.

Mainstream policy and research typically focus on subgroups like Chinese Americans, explains Kiang. Or they uncritically treat the Asian American “umbrella” as undifferentiated—as when reporting data on academic success—thereby ignoring the realities of other subgroups. So when the White House recently requested input regarding the need to disaggregate educational data on Southeast Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Kiang was delighted. “I’m not taking credit for it,” he states, “but I know my work has contributed to that awareness.”

Underserved and under-researched subgroups are also a priority of the Asian American Studies Program. This nationally recognized model of transdisciplinary education and community engagement draws on strong faculty and a robust network of students and alumni from local refugee and immigrant families and communities. Through them, he says, “we have access to every critical public policy issue for an urban research university to take on: immigration, health disparities, educational achievement gaps. You cannot find this combination of resources in one place in most universities.”

Kiang devotes much of his current research activity as a resource to colleagues, contributing to their projects or co-authoring articles. Some projects and ideas, he says, “emerge from issues we see among our students, such as access and equity in the transition from high school to college.” Some projects arise in response to mainstream research focusing on second-generation Asian American students of privilege, while overlooking the realities facing UMass Boston’s Asian American students. This drives Kiang, colleagues, and students “to mobilize [their] resources to empirically show the realities for underserved populations and under-researched issues.”

These issues include Kiang’s long-time interest in Asian American veterans, stemming from his early UMass Boston teaching experiences. When he first arrived on campus (continued on page 10)
Maria Idali Torres, director of the Gastón Institute, and Ivette Cruz, director of the PRCC, explained that while all community-involved research may focus on and even involve the community, CB-PAR is the most important and useful because it also makes research results available to those in the community who have the ability to use the data to enact real change.

“CB-PAR is grounded in social experience and is more relevant to the community involved,” said Torres. “It is also co-productional and bi-directional. In other words, the community is involved in producing the knowledge, and both the researchers and the community members gain from the research process and results.”

While CB-PAR is able to enact powerful social change, Torres was careful to stress that it takes time to build these relationships and trust within the community, particularly in light of the way research has traditionally been performed, with the researchers returning to academia at the project’s conclusion to publish their results in elite journals. These publications are not readily available to the community, nor are they in a format that is easily understood and applied.

“CB-PAR is based on a relationship that is built upon trust and a common goal,” said Torres. “When we first began our collaboration with the PRCC, we did not always have funding, but effective and important community-based research continues beyond the constraints of funding.”

Recent developments seem to indicate that these difficulties may be a thing of the past. Torres was proud to note that the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities now requires any funding proposals to include PAR elements even to be considered. And with OCP and URBAN both working at UMass Boston to better establish and foster university-community relationships, the future of research appears to be rooted in these community partnerships.

For more information, please visit www.umb.edu/ocp; www.urban-boston.org; www.umb.edu/gastoninstitute; or www.prccma.org.

Fleming Leads Weight-Loss Study

The pilot studies showed that while every family is a little different, giving parents special training in behavioral change can improve results of such programs.

“The messages you give also have to be much simpler,” Fleming explained. Instead of in depth discussions of nutrition and exercise physiology, “We talk about how if you eat a bit less every day you will lose weight, and if you make the effort to get moving, you’ll feel better and burn some extra calories.”

Families will meet once a week with dietitians and behavioral counselors, engage in group activities and even get personalized counseling. A six month post-program follow up for some families will track participants’ progress keeping the weight off, and offer advice on avoiding relapses. Adolescents and young adults with moderate to mild intellectual disabilities may be eligible, including those with Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, and other conditions.

“We’re trying to teach the families a whole variety of skills, including how to select healthy foods, prepare nutritious meals, make better buying decisions, and stay active,” said Fleming. “We do very little lecturing but have lots of hands on activities and games.” The families are taught how to stock their refrigerator, schedule and do physical activity, use non-food rewards, and essentially change their activities and environment to encourage healthier living.

Such wellness instruction could have a profound impact on these young peoples’ lives. “We hope that many of them will become more independent, and even live on their own at some point,” Fleming said. Forming healthy habits now, with their parents and maybe other family members or peers, could prevent health problems later.

This weight-loss program is funded for up to four years and could serve as many as 48 families.

The above story uses material from an April 2013 story written by Malorye Banca of the UMass Medical School’s Office of Communications.
The following article provides a look at some of the exciting student research happening at UMass Boston, and the faculty mentoring that enriches and makes this research possible. Be sure to read the upcoming special issue of RISC Quarterly that will focus on student researchers, their projects, and the faculty who mentor them.

The idea of a machine being independent of and able to outperform its creator is an anxiety and fascination easily felt and seen throughout our popular culture. As it currently stands, for better or worse, we have not yet reached this point in our creative capacity. Yet, robotics and artificial intelligence, once only the realm of the science-fiction author, now appear alongside more traditional technology courses in a college catalogue. And while our technology seems to move at a faster-than-light pace, we still have one great hurdle to overcome as we move towards this level of technological genesis: the workings of the human mind and body.

Marc Pomplun, professor of computer science at UMass Boston, is performing research in his Visual Attention Lab that sits at the crossroads of these two areas: an attempt to map and understand the way that humans are able to focus their attention, and to create computer models that mimic this ability.

Pomplun was introduced to the field of visual attention when he was a graduate student, with an interest in robotics. “A professor in the psychology department, who had no experience with computer science, asked me to work with him in his lab, tracking and modeling eye movement,” says Pomplun.

Now, with the roles reversed, Pomplun brings students into his lab to continue this research with the goal of advancing the understanding of how humans perform selective attention—the ability to focus on one object or stimulus while others are present—as well as writing more advanced computational models that allow computers to perform the task as well.

Daisuke Tanaka, who received his BS in computer science on May 2013, is one of those students who worked in Pomplun’s lab. Also primarily interested in robotics, Tanaka was introduced to Pomplun’s lab through a course covering artificial intelligence (AI). At the beginning of the course, Pomplun talks to his students about the research he’s performing and about the opportunities to come work with him in his lab.

“In bringing undergraduates into the lab, I hope to get them involved in research and show them that they can have a career in research, either in academia or the private sector,” says Pomplun. “As mentors, I think this is something we should all try to do.” Undergraduates don’t often express interest in research because they tend to be more focused on getting their degrees, but Tanaka was drawn to research because of the challenge it provides.

“The biggest thing about research, for me, is that it is a challenge,” says Tanaka. “The things we research are traditionally thought of as difficult to understand, and I enjoy overcoming those difficulties.”

This is a boon for Tanaka, as he admits that scholars in the visual attention field are somewhat skeptical about being able to mimic this ability in machines: humans are able to process a lot of visual information focusing extremely quickly and with seeming ease. But for Tanaka, this derision only furthers his dedication.

“When Daisuke first joined the lab, he was very motivated, and quickly read several articles and books about selective visual attention,” says Pomplun. “And he was already very good at programming.”

The ultimate goal of Tanaka’s research with Pomplun is to create a model that allows a computer to mimic the human ability to take in an image and pick out particular aspects or objects on which to focus. Currently, they are able to do this with a fairly basic object in an easy image, but they hope to progress to picking out more difficult and varied objects from more complex backgrounds.

And this interests Tanaka, as he sees this as something that could be used to advance the field of robotics.
“Research allows for freedom, which allows people to focus on things that interest them and pursue the questions and goals that they want to investigate,” says Tanaka. “The great thing about computer science is that it isn’t part of any one specific field. Today, other fields all need computer programs, so, if you are a computer programmer, you can pick and choose the field you want to perform research in.”

Tanaka’s sentiment is the one Pomplun hopes to foster in a lab that is populated by undergraduates and graduate students from both computer science and psychology, all with different specialties and interests. For example, the researchers with a psychology background may be more interested in how humans perform attention tasks, while the computer scientists want to know what this means for their programming and AI. But through collaboration, these can often be combined to achieve great results.

“It is important to show students how important research can be, and to build the next line of researchers,” says Pomplun. “Our lab has many different kinds of expertise, and my goal as a mentor is to get them motivated, and to teach them how to work together.”

When he first started mentoring new undergraduate researchers, Pomplun thought he would give them as much freedom as possible, expecting them to relish the opportunity to be off on their own. But after his first student was apprehensive, he decided he needed to take a more active role at first, to help get the ball rolling. Filling his lab with both undergraduate and graduate students with different kinds of expertise, he helps them appreciate research by pointing them towards questions and problems that are tailored to each of their particular interests.

“When the students get motivated, they start to develop their own ideas, and then become independent researchers” says Pomplun. “Inspiring new research is quite fascinating, and my students turn around and teach me new things I never would have thought about.”

This collaborative effort is something Pomplun hopes to develop into more than a relationship between his researchers and himself as a mentor, to the point in which the students work together and mentor each other.

Typically, the undergraduates work with the graduate students, but Pomplun hopes that everyone in his lab will build this type of relationship.

“I like to see the students start advising each other,” says Pomplun. “The students work together on projects, and begin to help each other with questions and advice.”

This trust and collaboration is an important feature of research, but Tanaka worries that this is sometimes missing in computer science. “Computer programming allows you to take complete control because you are the one writing the program. But this can lead to some isolation in the field.”

In Pomplun’s lab, Tanaka had the opportunity to work with people from a variety of disciplines, acted as a subject for the psychology students, and even learned how to run his own subjects through the tests. And whether or not Tanaka remains interested in visual attention, his research with Pomplun has allowed him to pursue individual interests while also garnering a respect for the collaboration computer science is able to support.

For the Visual Attention Lab, collaboration means not only a multidisciplinary approach, but also work with other labs and universities. This has led to work with other colleges at UMass Boston, as well as labs at Boston University and Harvard University, where their work has ranged from the computational models—on which Tanaka is working—to human computer interfaces for people with disabilities.

Whatever our visions of the future may be, it is certain that the research that Pomplun and his students are performing is paving the way to make them a reality. Whether it is the ability to replace lost human functionality through better understanding of how our minds and bodies work, or the creation of computational models that lead to robots that are able to mimic our cognitive and physical processes, the cross-disciplinary work in the Visual Attention Lab is providing the methodology, results, and researchers of the future to get us there.
Stephanie Hartwell Appointed as Senior Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Graduate Admissions

With the UMass Boston graduate studies profile continuing to expand at an unprecedented pace, enhanced support and services for both graduate programs and graduate students are essential, beginning with admissions and enrollment, and continuing through graduation. It is in this context that Provost Winston Langley recently announced that Stephanie Hartwell, professor of sociology, has agreed to serve as senior associate dean of graduate studies and graduate admissions.

Stephanie earned a BA in Sociology from Bucknell University, and a PhD in Sociology from Yale University, where she was a National Institute of Mental Health pre-doctoral fellow. Her scholarly endeavors all include community-based public/academic partnerships, showcasing her ability to build teams that include representatives of state agencies and non-profit organizations.

In addition to her faculty position at UMass Boston, she also holds an appointment as an adjunct professor of psychiatry at the UMass Medical School. Stephanie is widely admired as a superb teacher, and was honored with the 2012 Chancellor’s Award for Distinguished Teaching.

Since arriving at UMass Boston in 1997, she has been at the forefront of program development in sociology as a founder and director of the Forensic Services Program; as director of the Criminal Justice Program (overseeing an increase in the number of majors from 100 to more than 600); and as a graduate program director leading the outstanding Master’s in Applied Sociology Program, and now ushering in the new PhD in Sociology Program.

As a long-term graduate program director, Stephanie possesses insight into the complex organizational issues facing our Office of Graduate Studies and Graduate Admissions during this time of rapid programmatic and enrollment growth. She also has extensive experience with mentoring and advising graduate students, and has financially supported more than thirty graduate students through her grant-funded research.

NSF CAREER Grant for Wendell

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The grant, which runs from 2013-2018, will provide the opportunity to investigate the current engineering abilities and practices of three cohorts of 30 novice elementary teachers each, who are working on pre-service coursework and practice teaching. Researchers will provide them with community-based engineering experiences, and analyze the effects of these experiences on their ability to teach and engage with science and engineering in their classrooms. A subset of 48 of these teachers will be followed into their first year of in-service teaching, allowing for researchers to document how these teachers bring this experience into their new position at the head of their own classroom.

The goal of this research is to produce a field-tested strategy for incorporating these types of engineering experiences into training new elementary school science teachers. Wendell also aims to develop a digital guide that will provide helpful information for incorporating these types of community-based engineering experiences into the existing elementary science teacher education programs.

Faculty Profile: Peter Kiang

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25 years ago, he recalls, “it was remarkable to have Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees in the same class as Vietnam veterans.” Among the new generation of Asian American veterans now at UMass Boston are children of Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees who fled their home countries to escape war, only to see their own sons and daughters—for a variety of reasons—choose to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan. “Giving voice to those commitments and life experiences across generations,” he says, “is still on my agenda.”

A few words about this issue’s Guest Editor:

For a little more than a year now I have had the great pleasure of working with Brad Smith, the guest editor of this issue of RISC Quarterly. Brad’s intelligence and curiosity are governed by a quiet confidence in himself, as well as what I am certain will be the enduring traits of approaching life and people with great dignity and a disarming smile. While he would say otherwise, I have learned more from him this one year than I could ever hope to impart to him in ten years. Brad received his MA in English at UMass Boston’s Commencement Ceremony on May 31. And in September he will be a student in Tufts University’s PhD Program in English.
Great Book Events on Campus
By: Brian Halley, Boston-Based Acquisitions Editor for the University of Massachusetts Press

For scholars, especially in the humanities, writing a book remains a major, celebrated achievement. Here at UMass Boston, we recently celebrated faculty publications and had a discussion with published faculty about their experiences getting their books out to the world.

In December, the American Studies department celebrated the publication of Well Met: Renaissance Faires and the American Counterculture (NYU Press), by Professor Rachel Rubin. Colleagues read their favorite sections from this entertaining book, in which Rubin examines how these faires started, from the perspective of labor, education, aesthetics, business, the opposition they faced, and the key figures involved. Rubin puts to use fascinating archival research with personal interviews to answer questions about the faires’ origins, their connections to the counterculture, and their intervention into contemporary popular culture.

In April, the department came together again to celebrate another new faculty publication: Assistant Professor Aaron Lecklider’s Inventing the Egghead: The Battle Over Brainpower in American Culture (University of Pennsylvania Press). Lecklider discussed the book’s argument, read key passages, and answered questions from attendees who considered their own run-ins with cultural representations of intelligence. In the book, Lecklider examines wide-ranging twentieth-century texts to explore how images of brainpower could both diminish intellectuals (e.g., the hapless egghead) while also establishing claims to intellectual authority among ordinary women and men (e.g., union-run summer schools).

Later in April, I hosted an event co-sponsored by the Office of Faculty Development wherein faculty who had published books discussed their experiences so as to help demystify the publishing process. The four panelists, all associate professors, were Ruth Miller (History), Nadia Nurhussein (English), Erin O’Brien (Political Science), and Pratima Prased (Modern Languages).

(Nurhussein and her colleague, Assistant Professor Alex Mueller, both have books coming out from Ohio State University Press in May. The English department will celebrate with them soon.) Though experiences varied, there was agreement on the need for a good fit between your project and your press, and the value of the peer review process. I hope to hold more such events to create conversations, as well as motivation, around book publishing.

I see the labor every author puts into writing a book, and I am pleased to see venues here on campus where we can celebrate this labor. Look for more such events on campus in the next academic year.
New Sponsored Awards (a sampling)

Lois Biener (Senior Research Fellow, Center for Survey Research) has been awarded a $284,434 grant by Wake Forest University to design, implement and analyze the results of the survey “Dissolvable Tobacco Perceptions and Use Among Young Adults.” The prime sponsor is the National Cancer Institute. (2012-2014)

William Brah (Executive Director, Venture Development Center) has been awarded a $206,568 grant by the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation of Boston to “Operate a Life Science Internship Training Program as part of the Metro Boston Skilled Careers in Life Sciences Initiative.” The prime sponsor is the U.S. Department of Labor. (2013-2016)

Robert Chen (Professor of Environmental, Earth and Ocean Sciences) has been awarded a $164,140 grant by the National Science Foundation for implementing a full-scale development project to investigate the impact of an Out-of-Home Multi Media (OHMM) exhibit on adults riding Boston’s subway system (the “T”). The project’s goal is to design, implement, and study the efficacy of an OHMM model for free-choice science learning about our changing climate. (2012-2015)

Ellen Douglas (Associate Professor of Environmental, Earth and Ocean Sciences) has been awarded a $500,000 grant by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to lead a technical workgroup to conduct a pilot study to evaluate the effects of extreme weather events on Boston’s Central Artery. The prime sponsor is the Federal Highway Administration. (2012-2014)

Eduardo Gonzalez (Assistant Professor of Mathematics) has been awarded a $42,255 grant by the National Science Foundation to support participants to attend the special session “Advances in Symplectic Geometry and Topology” in the first edition of the Mathematical Congress of the Americas, which will be held in Guanajuato Mexico, August 5-9, 2013.

Jason Green (Assistant Professor of Chemistry) has been awarded a $50,000 grant by Northwestern University for “Dissipative Fluctuations in Nonequilibrium Self-assembly Pathways.” The prime sponsor is the U.S. Department of Energy. (2013)

Darren Kew (Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution, Human Security, and Global Governance) has been awarded a $738,021 grant by the Interfaith Mediation Centre for the “Training of Leaders on Religious and National Coexistence Programme.” The prime sponsor is the U.S. Agency for International Development. (2012-2017)

Anthony Roman (Senior Research Fellow, Center for Survey Research) has been awarded a $188,832 professional services contract by the Massachusetts Department of Health to provide survey design and delivery for the project “Youth Health Survey.” (2013)

Crystal Schaaf and ZhongPing Lee (Professors of Environmental, Earth and Ocean Sciences) have been awarded a $973,275 grant by the U.S. Geological Survey for the project “North American Land Surface Albedo and Nearshore Shallow-Bottom Properties from Landsat and MODIS/VIIRS Measurements.” (2013-2018)

Kurt Jacobs (Associate Professor of Physics) has been awarded a $460,023 grant by Applied Communications Sciences for the project “Quantum Computer Science - Phase 2.” The prime sponsor is the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence. (2012-2015)

Michael Ward (Director of Municipal Services, Collins Center for Public Management) has been awarded a $300,000 grant by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Administration and Finance for the Center to expand its performance management system into additional Massachusetts municipalities. (2013)