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Community Co-op Scholars

THE UMASS LOWELL COMMUNITY CO-OP SCHOLARS

The benefit of professional co-ops, internships, and community co-ops at UMass Lowell equates to more than **\$25 million in economic impact** on Northern Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire. In the 2015-16 academic year, more than 1,000 students actively engaged in some form of co-op activity and more than 345 students were hired for professional coop experiences with 148 unique employers—including P&G, Raytheon, iRobot, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, Fidelity Investments and General Electric.



While the Professional Co-op Program at UMass Lowell provides excellent talent-building opportunities for students in engineering, computer science and business fields, majors that are often overlooked in these types of programs are the fine arts, humanities and social sciences. Students studying subjects like English, history, psychology, sociology, art and design are clamoring for work experience that fits their passions and their desire to solve our communities' most pressing problems. They come to UMass Lowell with the energy and potential our local nonprofits and governmental agencies look for. To meet this student and nonprofit need, UMass Lowell developed the Community Co-op Scholars Program, which matches student passion and talent with community-based organizations seeking assistance. The program engages students early in their college careers, urging them to participate in meaningful, practical experiences that enrich learning and prepare them for work, life and the world.

Community Co-op Scholars receive a scholarship/stipend from UMass Lowell to work in a community-based organization during the summer after their freshman year or throughout the sophomore academic year. Each student serves at least 300 hours of time. Students who have received this award are recognized as outstanding students, having earned a 3.8 GPA or higher in high school, as well as high scores on college entrance exams. The Co-op Scholars experience allows students to gain practical experience while addressing the needs of partner organizations. Since 2011, 92 students have been placed in over 50 local organizations. Students have made a strong and positive impact that one-time (e.g., day of service) volunteer opportunities rarely can achieve. Our community partners agree: polling reveals that they find it highly efficient and worthwhile to have a committed intern invested in their organization for 300 hours. Total student service hours for Community Co-op Scholars to date is 27,600, which translates to an economic impact of \$368,000 directly benefiting nonprofits. Students become a part of the staff, working on the mission of the organization alongside other staff.

As an example, this past year, two students partnered with a new afterschool program in Lowell, SayDaNar, which is focused on assisting students from refugee or new immigrant families, particularly from Burma/Myanmar. Because of UMass Lowell student Kevin Pillone's contributions, more children were provided academic and social skills support throughout the school year. Says Kevin: "You can see it in their faces. They would get mad at themselves for not understanding [the language]. When they start to understand, you see it in their faces, the 'ah I got it' or 'yay I did it.' They thank you. After a few months of working with them and getting to know

the kids, they open up. It is so rewarding.” He said the experience was life changing. By supporting program development, tutoring and mentoring, he fell in love with the program and the work they do. He knew before he became a Community Co-op Scholar that he wanted to teach, but the experience affirmed that goal and focused his attention on at-risk youth. Kevin will be entering UMass Lowell’s Graduate School of Education program in fall 2016 and continues to volunteer with SayDaNar.



Another Community Co-op Scholar, Aaron King is a UMass Lowell English major who worked with Lowell Telecommunications Corp (LTC), the local access television network that provides community-driven programming produced by and for local residents. In addition to serving as a camera operator for various shows in the TV studio, Aaron has filmed programs and PSAs (Public Service Announcements) for nonprofits, such as Budget Buddies, a local organization that helps low-income women become more economically self-sufficient by pairing them with personal financial coaches. His supervisor, Gloria Polites, shared, “He is also an excellent video editor and has often been called on to edit others’ pieces as well as his own, such as those of our ENG (Electronic News Gathering) crews covering the Lowell Folk Festival.” Because of Aaron’s skilled contributions, LTC hired him after his co-op ended.

Co-op Scholar Jennifer Lomonte, meanwhile, worked with renowned artist, Mico Kaufman, spending the summer learning how to be a professional archivist by cataloging Kaufman’s artwork. “I learned more than I could ever have expected,” she says. “Of course I learned how to take an inventory and write a methodology, but also a world of things from Mr. Kaufman and his work. Now I not only know the history behind his work, but also about the many techniques that an artist can use to create masterpieces. I am very thankful to have had the opportunity.”

Other community partners include the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Lowell and Boston, the Lowell, Methuen and Boston Police Departments, Merrimack Valley Watershed, Habitat for Humanity Restore, Roudenbush Community Center, Open Pantry of Lowell and the Center of Arts Natick.

The UMass Lowell Service-Learning and Community Co-op Resource Office identifies and recruits non-profits and governmental agencies looking for a student Co-op Scholar, helps them develop job descriptions, and matches student interests with organization needs.

Annual surveys are conducted with host organizations to determine their level of satisfaction with the project or student placement—and also to learn how the students’ contributions affected their organization’s success. Every community organization that participated in this program responded with positive feedback.

Whether it’s a funded, research-based opportunity in our Co-op Scholars or Emerging Scholars programs; paid employment in our Professional Co-op Program; a cost-share internship; servicelearning internship; or a Community Co-op, our students are getting experience that’s

making them work- and world-ready and are making a \$25 million impact on the local and regional economies.