

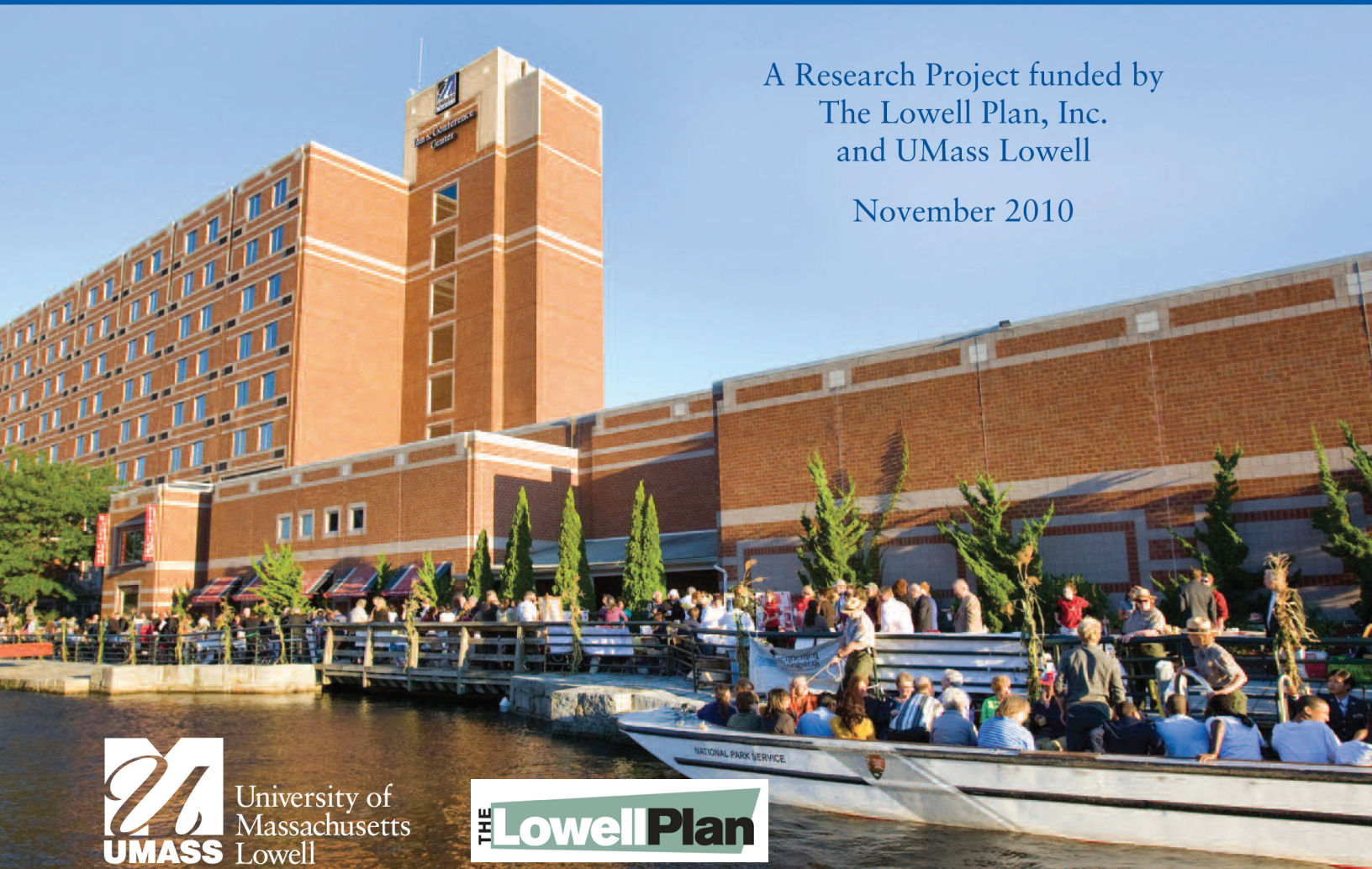
# THE INN & CONFERENCE CENTER AND BEYOND:



## THE LOWELL PLAN, INC. - UMASS LOWELL DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE REPORT

A Research Project funded by  
The Lowell Plan, Inc.  
and UMass Lowell

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University of  
Massachusetts  
Lowell



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*“...The Lowell Plan, Inc. and UMass Lowell sponsored a first of its kind research project to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the impact of students, staff, and faculty on the city’s downtown...”*

# THE INN & CONFERENCE CENTER AND BEYOND:

## THE LOWELL PLAN, INC. - UMass LOWELL DOWNTOWN INITIATIVE REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The opening of the Inn & Conference Center (ICC) in Fall 2009 signaled UMass Lowell's continued commitment to Lowell's downtown and raised several questions about the University's impact on the city's economy. UMass Lowell employed nearly 1,200 people in 2009 with a total payroll, including benefits, of \$121 million, a significant stimulus to the regional economy. Close to 300 of these employees lived in Lowell, earning \$23 million in wages and benefits. In addition, UMass Lowell contributed approximately \$200,000 in direct and in-kind support in 2009 for community partnership programs including support for the American Textile History Museum, the Cultural Organization of Lowell, Lowell High School Athletics, The Lowell Plan, Inc., the Merrimack Repertory Theatre, the Mayor's Harvest Ball, and the Paul Sullivan Foundation. Finally, University expenditures for research topped \$56.7 million in FY09 and will rise significantly with the completion of the \$70 million Emerging Technologies and Innovations Center in the Fall of 2012.

Close to 400 students moved into the ICC in the fall of 2009 and some 500 students made the ICC their home at the start of academic year 2010-11. To explore the radiating effects of the ICC and the University on downtown civic life and business activity, in September 2009 the Lowell Plan, Inc. and UMass Lowell sponsored a first of its kind research project to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the impact of students, staff, and faculty on the city's downtown and to determine ways to enhance that impact. Evidence was gathered through business interviews, surveys of students, faculty, and staff, student focus groups, and a review of the 'Best Practices' of other universities. The report includes recommendations for future steps we believe UMass Lowell can take to enhance its activities in Lowell.

### Business Interviews

Of the 33 downtown business owners we interviewed in 2009 and 2010:

- 85 percent expressed interest in UMass Lowell expanding further downtown.
- 81 percent reported no increase in sales and 19 percent reported a sales increase in the past year.
- 78 percent characterized their relationship with the University as good or excellent.
- Nearly 60 percent attend UMass Lowell events two to three times a year.
- 58 percent give student discounts and would be happy to continue doing so.
- 39 percent employ current UMass Lowell students or UMass Lowell graduates.
- 27 percent host unique events of interest to students.

### Faculty, Staff, and Student Survey Findings

Of a representative sample of 619 faculty and staff in early 2010:

- 91 percent visited Lowell's downtown within the past year; on average, they do so 4.9 times a semester.
- 81 percent visit the downtown to eat.
- 58 percent attend cultural events and festivals.
- 41 percent said a movie theatre would encourage them to go downtown.
- 30 percent have volunteered in Lowell.



Of a representative sample of 1,661 students in Fall 2009:

- 82 percent visited downtown in the past year; 30 percent go once a week or more.
- 74 percent eat at local restaurants.
- 63 percent have attended a concert at the Tsongas Center.
- 59 percent said a movie theatre would make the downtown more appealing.
- 50 percent have visited at least one of the city's museums.
- 43 percent have attended the Lowell Folk Festival.
- 38 percent attend festivals and concerts.
- 37 percent said more clothing stores would attract them downtown.
- 34 percent have volunteered in Lowell.
- 28 percent shop downtown.

*"91 percent of staff/faculty and 82 percent of students reported visiting Lowell's downtown within the past year."*

## Faculty and Staff Spending

A representative sample of 619 UMass Lowell faculty and staff completed our survey. We applied a weighted average to determine the results of the following two questions:

*"If you go downtown, how much money do you spend during each visit?" and*

*"If you have been to downtown Lowell, on average how often do you go?"*

Based on survey responses, faculty and staff spend approximately \$30.70 on each visit downtown. Those who so indicated (81 percent of total respondents), visit the downtown an average of 4.9 times a semester.

In other words:

- 91 percent (530) of faculty/staff respondents reported going downtown in the last year. Of these, 81 percent (501) responded to the question, "How often do you go downtown." On average, these faculty/staff visit downtown 4.9 times a semester or 9.8 times during the academic year. If each of these 501 faculty/staff spend \$30.70 a visit, they individually spend approximately \$301 during the academic year. And together, the 501

faculty/staff spend close to \$151,000 downtown during the academic year.

- If 81 percent of all faculty/staff (972 out of 1,200) behaves like our survey respondents, they would each spend approximately \$301 downtown during the academic year. This would equal a total of \$292,500 during the academic year. This, we feel, is a conservative estimate because we are only accounting for spending of faculty/staff who indicated how often they visited downtown.

## Student Spending

Five focus groups with sixty-eight UMass Lowell students and six meetings with a tracking group of 12 students were held to learn about their spending habits. From this information, we've assembled a spending picture and a projection of the potential impact of that spending if the sample patterns and our survey data were realized in wide-spread behavior among students. Some focus group participants lived in the ICC, others were from a freshmen Honors history class, and a group of Resident Advisors. Ten of the 12 tracking group students were female. Male and female spending habits were grouped together due to the small sample size. Nearly half this group were seniors, however all class levels were represented. Tracking group students lived in the ICC and other campus housing and off campus in Lowell and in surrounding cities. Three students' parents paid for their education and nine of the participants received financial aid or student loans. So, what did we learn?

- Among the 12-student tracking group only three students spent more money in Lowell than outside the city. Not surprisingly, the three participants living outside of Lowell spent significantly less in Lowell, \$8.50 a week, than those living in Lowell on or off campus, \$47.50 a week.
- On average, tracking group students spent \$37.80 a week in Lowell (excluding gas, vacation expenses, rent, and other bills). Of this figure, 13 percent (\$4.81) was spent on campus in dining halls, on laundry, in vending machines, and in the bookstore; 35 percent (\$13.25) was spent eating out; 45 percent (\$17.01) on shopping (including groceries, clothes, and other supplies); and 7 percent (\$2.65) on other items (concerts, movies, museums, etc.). Of the \$37.80 spent weekly in Lowell, based on students' expense data, we estimate that each student spent approximately \$25.00 a week specifically in the downtown last winter and spring.

*“On average, tracking group students spent \$37.80 a week in Lowell (excluding gas, vacation expenses, rent, and other bills).”*

- This same group spent on average \$60.00 a week outside Lowell (excluding gas, vacation expenses, rent, and other bills). Of this, 19 percent (\$11.40) went to dining out; 72 percent (\$43.20) on shopping (including groceries, clothes, and other supplies); and 9 percent (\$5.40) on other items like concerts, movies, and museums.
- Given this information, we can project the impact of student spending campus-wide (11,085 undergraduate and graduate students in 2009-2010) if the spending group’s behavior was replicated by the 82 percent of the students in our survey who said they spent time downtown. If these 9090 students spent the same \$37.80 a week in Lowell, during the academic year they would spend approximately \$10.3 million. Similarly, 74 percent of our student survey respondents said they eat at Lowell (mostly downtown) restaurants. If these 8,202 students spent the same \$13.25 a week as our spending group did, they would spend approximately \$3.3 million eating out during the academic year.

These are useful metrics to work with in developing strategies to increase UMass Lowell’s financial impact downtown. The baseline data are a starting point for the next phase of studying student spending downtown. Comparative figures will allow analysts to see the difference in year two of UMass Lowell’s heightened presence and involvement downtown, including a substantial increase in residents at the ICC for academic year 2010-2011.

Common places where students eat and shop include: Brew’d Awakening, Dharma Buns, Dunkin Donuts, Eggroll Café, Etsogo, Mambo Grill, Mr. Jalapeno, Old Court, Suppa’s, Viet Thai, CVS, Battambang Market, Hannaford’s, Humanity, Market Basket, Target and Walgreens.

## Regarding Safety

- In the student survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the day? —80 percent of students felt “mostly safe to very safe.”

- In the student survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the evening? —29 percent of students felt “mostly safe to very safe” while 33 percent of students felt “not very safe to not safe at all.”
- In the faculty/staff survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the day? —91 percent said they felt “mostly safe to very safe.”
- In the faculty/staff survey when were asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the evening? —56 percent felt “mostly safe to very safe.”

## Best Practices Review of 27 Academic Institutions

Nearly all universities we researched utilized a version of the UCard (a student ID card), which could be used as a meal and debit card on and off campus.

The University of Akron’s food service provider, to support the local economy and ensure healthy eating options, purchases food extensively from and maintains relations with local farms and bakeries.

The Colleges of Worcester, MA Consortium builds partnerships with local businesses to promote economic development in the region. They organize events jointly during the academic year and produce coupon books for students at the 13 colleges.

UMass Dartmouth and Clark University are among the many schools that have acquired classroom, office, and housing space in their city’s downtown, in many instances taking over empty storefronts.

The University of New Mexico established a Parent Relations Program to bring families to the region and increase student retention rates through strengthened parent involvement.

Portland State University invests in a variety of transportation alternatives including a light rail system, car-sharing, and bicycling systems, which have become assets to their students and the city.

## Major Recommendations

*Continue to strengthen university-downtown partnerships:* Expanding university development in ways that blend with the downtown is vital to the long-term success of the city and the university. A vibrant city makes faculty and student recruitment and retention easier and offers exciting after-graduation employment opportunities for students. Importantly, a forward-looking and engaged university makes the city an attractive place for new private investment and increases the likelihood that spin-off firms based on university research will stay in the area. Put simply, more students engaged in downtown life translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell.

The recommendations listed below are of equal importance. We elaborate on these specific topics in the full Report.

### Business

*Establish a discount awareness campaign:* While many businesses offer student discounts, too many students remain unaware of this fact. For example, there is no information about student discounts on UMass Lowell's website. A student designed marketing campaign of all available discounts would be beneficial.

*Re-launch the UCard program:* The UCard has not worked as intended, but with better marketing and a review of success stories regarding student discounts and downtown or local dining options from other universities it can indeed become successful.

### Events

*Create better awareness of and access to city and university events:* The university, City, National Park Service, Middlesex Community College, and business and cultural communities should collaborate to co-brand events in the city as a whole. In surveys and interviews, campus and community members indicated great interest in attending each other's events, but asked for better access to information.

*Support the development of under-21 venues and events:* There is a significant need for entertainment venues that focus on the under-21 student population. Students want to go to stores, restaurants, and shows, as opposed to going to bars and nightclubs. The University should promote downtown events that cater to younger students.

*Organize events targeted for students' parents:* One student summed it up best: "I'd love for my parents to come to Lowell more so I could go out to dinner

downtown for free! I think they would come if there were lectures, free concerts, or parent nights at the Tsongas Center."

### City Life

*Continue improving the campus transportation system:* The possible extension of the National Park Service's historic trolley system is a promising development.

*Continue improving public safety and launch a campaign to educate students about downtown safety:* Public safety is much improved, yet there remains a perception among many in the University community that the city is unsafe, particularly at night. Making the downtown brighter and livelier will help change this perception.

*Deepen and broaden partnerships with local, cultural, educational, state, federal and other organizations.* The university has received national awards for its many successful partnerships and should continue to collaborate with community partners and expand faculty/staff/student engagement downtown.

*Continue to strengthen and broaden volunteer, service-learning, work study, and other outside learning experiences.* Immersing students in more downtown life experiences translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell.

*Develop graduate student housing, new faculty housing, and classrooms downtown:* This could encourage young families to settle in the city, expand foot traffic downtown, and introduce students to the downtown.



## Possible Next Steps

Based on our findings, the team suggests several next steps to enhance and sustain downtown engagement.

Consider offering undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education classes downtown and establish a downtown student drop-in center accessible to Lowell High School, Middlesex Community College and UMass Lowell students.

Organize more student events downtown and plan more public events at the ICC and Tsongas Center. Tickets for events could be paired with restaurant discounts and these events could showcase food from local restaurants.

Increase the focus on and better track student, faculty, and staff volunteering off-campus. Volunteering is an important way to get students involved in and familiar with the city and its various neighborhoods. Additionally, students living in the ICC should be encouraged to volunteer in the downtown.

Launch a second phase of research to analyze the impact the three major educational institutions have on the city: Lowell High School, Middlesex Community College, and UMass Lowell. Survey students and faculty at the three institutions on their participation downtown and their spending habits. And, conduct focus groups to discover perceptions and attitudes about downtown events.

Conduct a UMass Lowell faculty/staff survey yearly or bi-yearly to monitor perceptions, opinions, and spending habits, and to analyze changes in perceptions, opinions, and spending habits over time.

Conduct an annual student survey and convene student focus groups to monitor student perceptions, opinions, and spending habits over time. Doing this will show changes that occur over time and it also helps to enhance and sustain interest in downtown engagement.

*“Expanding university development in ways that blend with the downtown is vital to the long-term success of the city and the university. A vibrant city makes faculty and student recruitment and retention easier and offers exciting after-graduation employment opportunities for students. Importantly, a forward-looking and engaged university makes the city an attractive place for new private investment and increases the likelihood that spin-off firms based on university research will stay in the area. Put simply, more students engaged in downtown life translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell.”*

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### Introduction

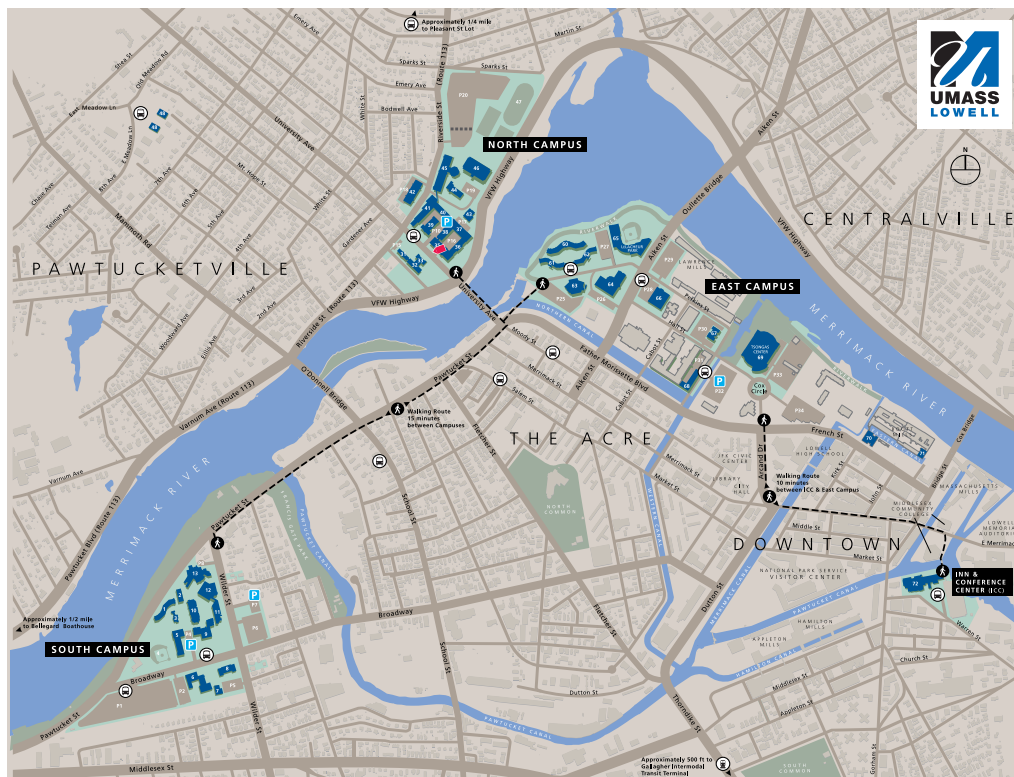
In the 1890's, with college campuses situated on either side of the Merrimack River, Lowell became a college town. UMass Lowell's predecessor institutions—the Massachusetts State Normal School and the Lowell Textile School—were established by the legislature in 1894 and 1895 respectively to serve the region's industrial and educational needs. In 1932 the Normal School became the Lowell Teachers College, a four-year institution that prepared teachers for the Massachusetts public school system. In 1975 the institutions merged into the University of Lowell and in 1991 ULowell became the University of Massachusetts Lowell, a part of the five-campus Massachusetts university system.

In the mid-1990s the University began focusing on the development of regional economy predicated on the notion that a sustainable economy depended upon a skilled and ever-replenished workforce, innovative products, environmental protection, and strong public health and public education infrastructures. Integral to its mission, the University fostered the enhancement and protection of the historical fabric of the community, supported K-12 and continuing education, and worked to strengthen the region's social and cultural life.

To extend its activities, in 1996 faculty secured a three-year \$400,000 Community Outreach Partnership grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

A key objective was to promote research that provided information and analysis pertinent to the resolution of significant urban problems. Ensuing conversations about regional development and the University's role in it considered: how firms could adopt cleaner production techniques; how production could be designed to be mindful of worker health; how to develop measures of sustainable production and community development; how the social sciences and the humanities could more broadly frame what is meant by sustainable social and economic development; and, how Lowell residents could participate in these discussions and make their ideas known on a consistent basis.

This distinguished record of engagement with the city and surrounding communities over the years resulted in UMass Lowell being designated a community-engaged campus by the Carnegie Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and also being named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This record of engagement deepened in 2009 with the opening of the Inn & Conference Center in the former DoubleTree Hotel. The ICC's opening marked UMass Lowell's further commitment to the downtown and raised several questions about both the ICC and the University's current and future impact on the downtown economy.



## What We Studied

During the 2009--2010 academic year, UMass Lowell faced a significant challenge: How to integrate a downtown residence hall with 400 students and a new event center into daily campus and community life? The administration sought ways to bridge the geographic gap, given that the main street downtown, Merrimack Street, is about twenty minutes on foot from North and South campuses, and about a fifteen minute walk from the East campus, where the majority of students live. A beefed-up campus transportation system, new signage and print- and web-based information, and additional campus and community programming helped to close the gap.

*"...The Lowell Plan, Inc. and UMass Lowell sponsored a first of its kind research project to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the impact of students, staff, and faculty on the city's downtown..."*

To better understand the current situation and explore the radiating effects of the ICC and University on downtown life and business, The Lowell Plan, Inc., and UMass Lowell teamed up in September 2009 to undertake a comprehensive

analysis of the impact of students, staff, and faculty on the city's downtown and to determine ways to enhance that impact. This research had four goals: 1) To assess the dollars and cents economic impact of the University on the city; 2) To identify innovative ways to encourage student engagement downtown and improve student life downtown; 3) To strengthen existing community and business partnerships and develop new ones; and 4) To learn how the ICC can enhance the quality of life for downtown residents and workers. Along with summarizing our research findings, this report briefly describes several of the University's long-standing and emerging business and community partnerships and offers recommendations for future engagement.

To discover student, faculty, and staff perceptions of Lowell's downtown and to hear from business owners and residents just how they felt about the ICC, from September, 2009 to April, 2010 the study team:

- Conducted 33 initial and 31 follow-up interviews with a range of downtown businesses and with five non-profit organizations.
- Met with several downtown neighborhood associations and business groups.
- Carried out 5 student focus groups with a total of 68 students to learn about student attitudes toward the downtown.

- Monitored the spending habits of 12 students.
- Conducted informal discussions with city development and planning officials.
- Administered on-line surveys to 1,661 students (a representative sample) and 619 faculty and staff (50 percent of total) to assess their impressions of the downtown, the frequency of their visits there, and what they did when they went downtown.
- Distributed email questionnaires to nine universities that bought or leased property, reviewed eight peer universities and analyzed their student discount and food service options, and reviewed nine universities based on interviews from prior research.

To ensure that the research benefitted from the expertise of downtown leaders and members of the campus community Jim Cook, executive director of The Lowell Plan, Inc., and Jacqueline Moloney, UMass Lowell's executive vice chancellor, formed a community advisory committee for the project that provided valuable input and feedback as our work unfolded. Advisory Committee members are listed in Appendix A.

## Building on a Solid Record of Engagement

Of the 13,000 students enrolled at UMass Lowell in 2009-2010 (an increase of more than twenty percent in two years), 4,558 lived in Lowell. The University employs 1,197 people with a total payroll including benefits of just over \$121 million in 2009, a significant stimulus to the regional economy. The close to 300 employees living in Lowell earned \$23 million in wages and benefits in 2009. University expenditures for research topped \$56.7 million in FY09. In addition, the University contributes significantly to the education of the city's and the region's workforce. For example, approximately 4,300 Lowell residents are UMass Lowell graduates, and 41,000 alumni live in the Commonwealth.

A 2007 study indicated that UMass Lowell purchased approximately \$10 million in goods and services—including construction—from Lowell businesses. Approximately \$78 million was spent on goods and services (excluding construction) in FY07. Additionally, between 2005 and 2008, UMass Lowell provided \$40,000 to the City of Lowell's cultural affairs office, which leveraged more than \$400,000 in grants and private donations for the Destination World (DW) downtown cultural expo series. One economic

impact study showed that local businesses enjoyed a twenty-four percent increase in sales on DW dates. Twenty thousand dollars from UMass Lowell helped leverage \$300,000 for the western debut of the Cambodian rock opera *Where Elephants Weep* in Lowell (2007) and \$150,000 for the award-winning museum exhibition of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* Scroll Manuscript (2007).

The University's concept of engagement is deeply rooted in the history of land grant colleges, which were established in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. Fifty years ago President Lyndon Johnson urged universities to address the needs of the city.

The role of the university must extend beyond the ordinary extension type operation. Its research findings and talents must be made available to the community. Faculty must be called upon for consulting activities. Pilot projects, seminars, conferences, TV programs, and task forces drawing on many departments of the university should be brought into play.

UMass Lowell has seized Johnson's challenge.

As a result of its record of engagement, in 2008 UMass Lowell received prestigious national recognition as a 'community-engaged' university from the Carnegie Foundation for Excellence in Teaching. The designation signifies that UMass Lowell ranks among the nation's top institutions in the benefits it contributes to the world outside its walls. In announcing its designation—one of 119 so named in the country—the Carnegie Foundation determined that UMass Lowell qualified for the honor in two distinct areas: as a source of classroom-related engagement benefiting communities and for its community outreach and partnerships. Examples of the work honored by the Carnegie Foundation include: the University's assistive technology project, which develops creative solutions to the needs of disabled people; the Memory XL project, a path to working with healthy adults to try to delay the onset of Alzheimer's Disease; and the Artbotics program, which puts computer technology within reach of women and minorities for the creation of public art.

In further recognition of its off-campus efforts, UMass Lowell was named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll in 2009. This is the highest federal recognition a college or university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement. The projects highlighted in UMass Lowell's application were: Village Empowerment in Peru



(College of Engineering); Media Literacy and Engaged Education (Department of Community Health and Sustainability, and Division of Media Services); and Project IMPACT (Office of School Partnerships). UMass Lowell's students provide more than 44,000 hours of public service in the region annually.

In 2009, UMass Lowell established a Center for Arts and Ideas to help it coordinate cultural activities that enrich both campus and community life. Twice yearly the Center publishes "Arts & Ideas," highlighting a variety of cultural activities, major lectures and talks, and special events taking place at UMass Lowell and in the community. UMass Lowell gave \$200,000 in direct and in-kind support in 2009 for community partnership programs including support for the American Textile History Museum, the Cultural Organization of Lowell, Lowell High School Athletics, the Lowell Plan Inc., the Merrimack Repertory Theatre, the Mayor's Harvest Ball, and the Paul Sullivan Foundation. The ICC represents the further maturation of this process. Further examples of these connections include numerous partnerships with the Lowell public schools, such as:

- \$3.5 million for the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) for low-income students at Lowell High School funded by the U.S. Department of Education.
- \$759,800 for the Partnership for College Success at Lowell High School funded by the Nellie Mae Foundation.
- \$756,000 for the Science of Small Things program that promotes understanding of nanotechnology among junior high students in Lowell funded by the National Science Foundation.
- \$500,000 for ICODE Tech Creation, the Internet Community of Design Engineers after-school project for middle school students funded by the National Science Foundation.
- \$450,000 for Artbotics project that teaches robot technology and design principles to Lowell High Students in collaboration with the Revolving Museum funded by the National Science Foundation.
- \$46,000 for Project IMPACT, a new Commonwealth Corps project in which fifteen UMass Lowell students serve as math and science tutors for Lowell High freshmen funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

UMass Lowell's Center for Family, Work and Community organized a Service-Learning Summit (via a *Learn and Service America* grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service) in early 2010 with 60 nonprofit leaders and university faculty and staff to explore service-learning opportunities in Greater Lowell. The summit's goal was to help bridge the community-university divide for enhanced student learning and greater community engagement. Following the summit, UMass Lowell faculty mini-grants were awarded to support service-learning courses in the coming year. Several community conversations about university-community collaborative work are taking place in Fall 2010, organized by the Center.

Expanding university development in ways that blend with the downtown is vital to the long-term success of the city and the university. A vibrant city makes faculty and student recruitment and retention easier and offers exciting after-graduation employment opportunities for students. Importantly, a forward-looking and engaged university makes the city an attractive place for new private investment and increases the likelihood that spin-off firms based on university research will stay in the area. Put simply, more students engaged in downtown life translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell. Students create a very visible vibrancy that translates into more and more well-educated young people staying around once they complete their education.

At a time when regions compete mightily over job growth and retention one secret to success remains having a highly talented workforce. At the 2010 Innovative Cities Conference held in Lowell it was reported that the education level in Ann Arbor (University of Michigan) is one of the highest in the U.S. at 69 percent. When UMass Lowell graduates exit our region this hurts long-term development. The ICC, embedded in a community that promotes the talents of its students, celebrates the creative economy and the best of what local food purveyors have to offer, embraces its rich diversity, and that offers exciting educational events and activities for residents of the city will solidify Lowell's reputation as a "destination city" and help us to retain those graduates.

More than four hundred students became downtown residents when the ICC opened. The Dean of Students Office and the Residence Life and Student Activities staffs worked with the Office of Academic Affairs to organize students into "learning communities" to nurture their academic success and cultivate their interest in the downtown.



*Gathering space behind the Inn & Conference Center provides easy access to Downtown Lowell.*

Acting as an intellectual and cultural hub, the ICC hosted several events. In October 2009, the ICC hosted four performances of “The Rivalry,” an acclaimed play based on the Lincoln-Douglas presidential campaign debates. Also in the fall, UMass Lowell in partnership with Middlesex Community College offered three Lunchtime Lectures at the ICC, where experts discussed economic topics from the future of pensions to the local impact of the “Great Recession.”

Several major conferences were held at the ICC, including the US/Ireland Emerging Technologies Conference in September 2009 and the Innovative Cities Conference in June 2010, co-sponsored by the Lowell Plan, Middlesex Community College, Congresswoman Tsongas’s office and the National Park Service.

UMass Lowell joined with The Lowell Plan, Inc. to employ the services of urban planning expert Jeff Speck to revise and update the Downtown component of the City of Lowell’s Master Plan. The planning process included a public forum at Middlesex Community College to elicit ideas from the community and reactions to early-stage concepts. The areas around the Inn & Conference Center and Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell are two sections of the downtown that Speck and his team examined closely. The plan will include proposals for business and commercial developments, traffic improvements, pedestrian path and bikeway upgrades.

Following is a select list of activities that demonstrate UMass Lowell’s commitment to downtown partnerships that are mutually beneficial to the campus and community:

- Following extensive negotiations with the City of Lowell, the university acquired the Tsongas Arena and re-named it the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell. With the university managing the facility, the community will benefit from having a stable venue for hosting educational, cultural, sporting, business and civic events.
- UMass Lowell’s Honors Program introduced a first-year experience course, “Lowell as Text,” designed to introduce students to the city at large. This course is being expanded with an eye toward a more active use of the city as an undergraduate learning laboratory.
- UMass Lowell researchers were awarded a \$750,000 federal grant to expand broadband access and training for youths, elders, the jobless, immigrants, and others. Other recent grant projects impacting the community include \$100,000 for the after-school Future Engineers Center to enrich science and technology learning among young people and an \$83,000 grant for UMass Lowell students to serve as mentors in Lowell schools.
- Professor Bob Forrant and Professor Kay Roberts produced a number of cultural programs downtown with grants from the UMass President’s Office Creative Economy Fund. Working with the Revolving Museum, Professor Forrant’s project yielded a set of large-scale, movable murals depicting Lowell’s ethnic heritage and social issues facing immigrants and refugees; Professor Roberts presented several concerts in downtown locations with the New England Orchestra, Lowell Youth Orchestra, guest artists, and UMass Lowell musicians. A new \$35,000 grant awarded to Paul Marion and Professor Michael Miller will fund a website and a permanent orientation exhibit about Jack Kerouac in the National Park Visitor Center.
- UMass Lowell offered financial support for major cultural activities such as the Lowell Folk Festival, Lowell Summer Music Series, Southeast Asian Water Festival, African Festival, New England Quilt Festival, Massachusetts Poetry Festival, Lowell Film Festival, the Discover Lowell series, the City of Lights Festival, Winterfest, Merrimack Repertory Theater, American Textile History Museum, and the expanded Kerouac Literary Festival.

- Plans are underway for a March 2011 Whistler House Museum of Art and UMass Lowell symposium on the Armenian-American artist Arshile Gorky and the influence of the Armenian genocide on his work and the first Lowell Creates! festival, a month-long arts celebration in April 2011 featuring visual, performing, and literary arts programs on campus and downtown.

One area of emphasis for the Downtown Initiative was to enhance the quality of life for downtown residents and workers. Upon acquiring the Inn & Conference Center several practical steps were taken to ‘embed’ students into the city’s daily life:

- 125 Resident Advisors (RA’s) were taken on a National Historical Parks tour including downtown, the Boott Mill, and the canal boat tour.
- RA’s received training by the staff at the Greater Merrimack Valley Convention & Visitor’s Bureau to introduce them to the city of Lowell.
- 1/3 of the programming budget for student activities and events is now allocated toward programs in the city.
- Opening day at the ICC included a meet and greet for new students and their parents. UML staff and United Teen Equality Center (UTEC) staff helped students move in.
- An opening week Scavenger Hunt attracted 170 students with seventeen participating businesses. The Scavenger Hunt required students to interact with businesses to find out answers to questions (participants were freshman and ICC residents).
- A Monday movie night of first run movies is held at the ICC.



*UMass Lowell students participating in Opening Week Scavenger Hunt in Downtown Lowell.*

## The University’s Economic and Social Impact

The primary area of emphasis for the downtown initiative was to study the economic and social impact students, staff, and faculty have on the downtown, as well as examine best practices for successful downtown-campus connections. We used

various methods (described below) to analyze the economic and social impact on businesses, students, and faculty/staff.

### Businesses

In Fall, 2009, we collected baseline data from 33 businesses, and conducted follow-up interviews in Spring, 2010, with 31 of them.

- 6 percent were clothing stores.
- 6 percent were event venues.
- 6 percent were convenience/grocery stores.
- 9 percent were beauty/nail salons.
- 12 percent handled financial/real estate business.
- 21 percent were specialty shops.
- 40 percent were bars, restaurants, and cafes.
- In addition, we held pre- and post- interviews with five non-profit organizations.

We learned that businesses are quite supportive of having more students in the downtown and they endorse the idea that the ICC will have a positive impact on the economy. A handful of businesses reported that students were a great asset because they brought their families, significant others, and friends downtown with them, which helped with business.

Of business owners we interviewed:

- 85 percent expressed interest in UMass Lowell expanding further downtown.
- 81 percent reported no increase in sales and 19 percent reported they had seen an increase in sales in the past year.
- 78 percent characterized this relationship as good or excellent.
- Nearly 60 percent of business owners attend university events on average two to three times per year.
- 58 percent give student discounts and would be happy to do so in the future.
- 39 percent of businesses employ current students or university graduates.
- 27 percent of businesses host unique events that could be of interest to students.

Business owners suggested the following ideas to increase student activity downtown: more discounts, more university-focused shopping and eating nights, businesses staying open later, better transportation, more lighting, Wi-Fi access downtown, more student housing downtown,



maps of downtown at the ICC, UCard improvements, a movie theatre, more retail stores, and better advertising of events.

We heard several ideas and sentiments from business owners, including: disagreement with a potential new restaurant in the ICC; the need for more parent involvement to bring families of students downtown; the creation of a coupon book that might help bring more students downtown; UMass Lowell should buy the Dunkin Donuts and other surrounding buildings; the need for more free events at the ICC open to the general public; the need for more artsy/“underground” events; the development of a plan to put restaurant menus in the ICC; a suggestion that the University utilize more public green spaces for events; the need to work to change people’s perceptions of students as being a problem downtown. Here is a sampling of comments made by downtown business owners during our interviews:

*“I’d love to see more classroom space and student housing downtown.”*

*“As a result of UMass taking over the DoubleTree, I have seen a big increase in students from Middlesex Community College coming into my business. Now that they park on the other end of downtown, they are always walking by on their way to class. This change was an unexpected, yet pleasant surprise.”*

*“Businesses need to do more to reach out to students and let them know about the discounts we offer. We need to sell things they want and be open during the hours they want to come.”*

*“Having Wi-Fi everywhere downtown would help bring students. People need to make this investment and publicize it.”*

*“The university needs to set up forums for businesses and create partnerships with the city.”*

*“It has been wonderful having the university take over the DoubleTree. The service is much better now than it used to be and the food is excellent.”*

*“I was worried about there being more noise and vandalism, but those things haven’t been a problem at all. The students have been a welcome addition to the downtown.”*

*“Students need a map of downtown when they come. All of the one-way streets can get confusing. This might help with that.”*

*“I was hoping to see more of an increase in students coming to my business, but there hasn’t been. I wish I hadn’t invested in the UCard because it hasn’t worked for me.”*

*“91 percent of staff/faculty and 82 percent of students reported visiting Lowell’s downtown within the past year.”*

### **Faculty and Staff**

In Spring 2010, 619 faculty and staff responded to an online survey:

- 91 percent visited Lowell’s downtown within the past year; on average, they go downtown 4.9 times per semester.
- 81 percent visit the downtown to eat.
- 58 percent attend cultural events and festivals.
- 41 percent said a movie theatre would encourage them to go downtown more often.
- 30 percent have volunteered in Lowell.
- Less than 14 percent of faculty requires students to utilize downtown resources as a part of coursework.

### **Students**

In Fall 2009, 1,661 students responded to an online survey:

- 82 percent visited downtown in the past year; 30 percent go once a week or more.
- 74 percent eat at local restaurants.
- 63 percent have attended a concert at the Tsongas Center.
- 59 percent said a movie theatre would make the downtown more appealing.
- 50 percent have visited at least one of the city’s museums.
- 43 percent have attended the Lowell Folk Festival.
- 38 percent attend festivals and concerts.
- 37 percent said more clothing stores would get them downtown.
- 34 percent have volunteered in Lowell.
- 28 percent shop downtown.



### **Student Focus Group Impressions**

Five focus groups with a total of 68 students took place from late September 2009—November 2009. These are some of the comments we heard:

*“Lowell’s downtown is smaller than I thought.”*

*“It’s nicer during the day; at around 10:30 PM it’s not exactly safe. At nighttime (8 PM and later) I do not feel safe.”*

*“Lots to do.”*

*“Not enough to do/boring. Not as good as Boston.”*

*“I don’t have a reason to be down there”  
(downtown).*

*“Need to add more good stores.”*

*“The bus makes infrequent stops, and doesn’t stop downtown.”*

*“There are not a lot of young people down there after 6:00 PM.”*

*“Not accessible enough by public transportation.”*

*“People give you ‘the look’ when you say you go to school in Lowell.”*

*“Good art community/sculpture park.”*

*“Downtown is cute.”*

*“All there is to do is drink. Awful if under 21.”*

*“Good restaurants.”*

*“It’s a lot cleaner than it used to be; downtown has evolved.”*

*“Some freshmen have reported they think it’s scary, not well lit.”*

*“Good for families” (i.e., canal boat tour).*

Focus Group participants suggested the following ideas for ‘new’ activities downtown: an antique car show, sales tax-free day, a student job fair, a block party, UMass Lowell club night, more stores, connections between Middlesex Community College and UMass Lowell, collaborations with the United Teen Equality Center, cultural/food/music festival, discount nights at certain restaurants, a fashion show, focused community service, sports bar for all ages, bingo nights, ICC should have more events on weekends, downtown dance party.



*Downtown Lowell provides a variety of eateries and hosts a year-round calendar of events.*

As for marketing downtown events one student summarized her feelings this way: “It would be useful if all in-coming students were given a card listing all businesses that give student discounts that could be kept on a keychain so students would always have that information with them. A map of the stores and museums would also help orient newcomers to the downtown.” The Colleges of Worcester Consortium offers ideas for what could be done in Lowell. It has an online newsletter and calendar about upcoming college and city events. UMass Lowell could create a similar online events guide for students partnering with Middlesex Community College, Lowell High School, and the city. Flyers advertising events could be inserted in weekly issues of *The Connector*, the University’s student newspaper.

The Worcester Consortium partners with *Worcester Magazine* to produce an annual “College Guide” for university students, featuring coupons, bus guides, city maps, events, a directory of local media outlets, and articles about college and city life. Perhaps UMass Lowell could partner with a media outlet such as *The Sun* to produce something similar. The Baltimore Collegetown Network (BCN) is a partnership of 15 colleges in and around Baltimore who have worked over the years to make the city a more interesting place to go to school. From street festivals to historical museums, Baltimore has much to offer college students; about 11,000 new students attend college in the Baltimore area each year, and 60 percent of upperclassmen in BCN schools have said they would like to stay in the area after graduation.

### **Food Matters**

Students frequent the campus dining commons and on campus food retailers daily. UMass Lowell could incorporate more alternative food-buying practices for the ICC and university-wide to bring the campuses and the region’s merchants and farmers closer. A way to do this is to expand the purchase of more locally grown and produced food. Already Aramark at UMass Lowell uses Garelick Farms Dairy, which works with farms located within 150 miles of Boston and Sid Wainer and Sons for produce, which is committed to purchase from farms in the New England Region. Fifty percent of

fresh produce is purchased through Lowell Fruit, breads come from Fantini Bakery in Haverhill, MA and potato products come from McCain's in Easton, ME. Ice cream comes from family-owned Cronin's Ice Cream in Andover.

One university we spoke with purchased most of its baked goods from local bakeries. The University of Akron, a public university, buys muffin batter from a local bakery and then bakes the products on campus. They purchase other baked goods from nearby bakeries and produce from local farmers. UMass Amherst gets food from local bakeries and nearly a quarter of its produce locally. It also operates the People's Market, a student-run co-operative food store on campus. The University of Akron has an active Downtown Akron partnership where the University works with local businesses and neighbors to promote relationships in the downtown.

In one of our business interviews concern was expressed that Aramark has "too much control over university food catering." UMass Lowell might consider expanding on the steps it has already taken with Aramark to expand the use of local food purveyors on campus and at the ICC. In the coming year UMass Lowell could request feedback from students regarding meal plan flexibility. Akron established "dining dollars" so that students had the option of eating off campus. Akron gets a percentage of dining dollars back from off-campus purchases to cover the plan's administrative costs, but the local economy still benefits.

Clark University owns several commercial buildings near its campus in an area that looks much like University Avenue near North Campus or parts of Central Street in downtown Lowell. This handful of buildings houses local restaurants frequented by students and faculty. Because students can use these restaurants as options on their meal plan, it encouraged them to explore their nearby neighborhood. "Dining dollars" options make the school more marketable to potential students and generate neighborhood economic growth.

With regard to expanding dining options and the establishment of more linkages with area food providers and farms UMass Lowell might consider UMass Amherst's extensive efforts to rely on the purchases of local dairy and vegetables. In early 2010, Ken Toong, executive director of the award-winning dining services at the UMass Amherst, was named a Leader in Retail Foodservice by *Fare* magazine, a trade publication for nontraditional and retail foodservice channels. For the past eleven years, Toong has been executive director of UMass dining services, the third largest campus dining

operation in the country with 14,500 students on the meal plan and annual revenue of \$60 million. In 2009, 25 percent of produce came from local farmers, and UMass dining services serves only sustainable seafood.

If UMass Lowell incorporated alternative food practices in the ICC and on campus it could decrease what we see as a "food divide" between students and the downtown. In one focus group a student stated, "It's really hard to eat healthy when you are on campus, your choices are very limited and most of the healthy stuff isn't fulfilling." By purchasing even more fresh food locally, students would gain healthy eating options and local dairy, fruit, and vegetable farms would receive a badly needed boost in sales.

## The Downtown Spending Engine

### Students

Five focus groups with sixty-eight UMass Lowell students and six meetings with a tracking group of 12 students were held to learn about their spending habits. From this information, we've assembled a spending picture and a projection of the potential impact of that spending if the sample patterns and our survey data were realized in wide-spread behavior among students. Some focus group participants lived in the ICC, others were from a freshmen Honors history class, and a group of Resident Advisors. Ten of the 12 tracking group students were female. Male and female spending habits were grouped together due to the small sample size. Nearly half this group were seniors, however all class levels were represented. Tracking group students lived in the ICC and other campus housing and off campus in Lowell and in surrounding cities. Three students' parents paid for their education and nine of the participants received financial aid or student loans. So, what did we learn?

- Among the 12-student tracking group only three students spent more money in Lowell than outside the city. Not surprisingly, the three participants living outside of Lowell spent significantly less in Lowell, \$8.50 a week, than those living in Lowell on or off campus, \$47.50 a week.
- On average, tracking group students spent \$37.80 a week in Lowell (excluding gas, vacation expenses, rent, and other bills). Of this figure, 13 percent (\$4.81) was spent on campus in dining halls, on laundry, in vending machines, and in the bookstore; 35 percent (\$13.25) was spent eating

*“On average, tracking group students spent \$37.80 a week in Lowell (excluding gas, vacation expenses, rent, and other bills).”*

out; 45 percent (\$17.01) on shopping (including groceries, clothes, and other supplies); and 7 percent (\$2.65) on other items (concerts, movies, museums, etc.). Of the \$37.80 spent weekly in Lowell, based on students’ expense data, we estimate that each student spent approximately \$25.00 a week specifically in the downtown last winter and spring.

- This same group spent on average \$60.00 a week outside Lowell (excluding gas, vacation expenses, rent, and other bills). Of this, 19 percent (\$11.40) went to dining out; 72 percent (\$43.20) on shopping (including groceries, clothes, and other supplies); and 9 percent (\$5.40) on other items like concerts, movies, and museums.
- Given this information, we can project the impact of student spending campus-wide (11,085 undergraduate and graduate students in 2009-2010) if the spending group’s behavior was replicated by the 82 percent of the students in our survey who said they spent time downtown. If these 9090 students spent the same \$37.80 a week in Lowell, during the academic year they would spend approximately \$10.3 million. Similarly, 74 percent of our student survey respondents said they eat at Lowell (mostly downtown) restaurants. If these 8,202 students spent the same \$13.25 a week as our spending group did, they would spend approximately \$3.3 million eating out during the academic year.

These are useful metrics to work with in developing strategies to increase UMass Lowell’s financial impact downtown. The baseline data are a starting point for the next phase of studying student spending downtown. Comparative figures will allow analysts to see the difference in year two of UMass Lowell’s heightened presence and involvement downtown, including a substantial increase in residents at the ICC for academic year 2010-2011.

Common places where students eat and shop include: Brew’d Awakening, Dharma Buns, Dunkin Donuts, Eggroll Café, Etsogo, Mambo Grill, Mr. Jalapeno, Old Court, Suppa’s, Viet Thai, CVS, Battambang Market, Hannaford’s, Humanity, Market Basket, Target and Walgreens. Their comments on spending include:

*“The UCard is annoying because I cannot remember the password or add money, so I don’t bother to use it. It is too much trouble to reset the password and so forth.”*

*“I would go downtown in Lowell more if there was a mall-clothing store.”*

*“I love the quaintness of downtown; someone should write up a guidebook for downtown.”*

*“Need more affordable clothing stores.”*

*“It’s really hard to eat healthy when you are on campus; your choices are very limited and most of the healthy stuff isn’t fulfilling.”*

*“I bought bakery goods at Charo’s for cheap and they were good. Partnerships between downtown food places and the University would allow students to eat more yummy food that is healthy and affordable.”*

*“One of my favorite restaurants in Lowell is “Hong Cuc Sandwich Shop” the Vietnamese sandwich shop that also makes good bubble tea. I love the passion fruit flavored one. This shop is located on Dutton Street, and I would love to use my UCard there because it’s affordable and yummy.”*

## **Faculty and Staff**

A representative sample of 619 UMass Lowell faculty and staff completed our survey. We applied a weighted average to determine the results of the following two questions:

*“If you go downtown, how much money do you spend during each visit?” and*

*“If you have been to downtown Lowell, on average how often do you go?”*

Note that the two questions differ in the number of respondents; therefore we include projections here for both scenarios.

Based on survey responses, faculty and staff spend approximately \$30.70 on each visit downtown. Those who so indicated (81 percent of total respondents), visit the downtown an average of 4.9 times per semester.

In other words:

- 91 percent (530) of faculty/staff survey respondents reported going downtown in the last year. Of these, 81 percent (501) responded to the question, “How often do you go downtown.”

On average, these faculty/staff visit downtown 4.9 times per semester or 9.8 times during the academic year. If each of these 501 faculty/staff spend \$30.70 a visit, they individually spend approximately \$301 during the academic year. Together, the 501 faculty/staff spend close to \$151,000 downtown during the academic year.

- If 81 percent of all faculty/staff (972 out of 1,200) behaves like our survey respondents, they would each spend approximately \$301 downtown during the academic year. This would equal a total of \$292,500 during the academic year. This, we feel, is a conservative estimate because we are only accounting for spending of faculty/staff who indicated how often they visited downtown.

*How can we bolster spending?* Focus group findings reveal that students do not know how to obtain accurate information about downtown Lowell. Several students reported, “Student discounts weren’t advertised well.” They were not sure which businesses offered discounts because “businesses do not advertise discounts well.” For some students retail items were “too pricy.” For others, “everything closes too early” Other students suggested that downtown merchants and restaurants hold well advertised “Student incentive days and nights”. No information regarding student discounts is available on the UMass Lowell website.

The UCard provides students, faculty, and staff with identification, residence halls, labs, and parking lot access, dining, vending and laundry machine capabilities, library checkout, bookstore purchases, and purchases at participating off-campus merchants. However, the evidence to date is that the card is not utilized very much off campus. As of April 2010, total on-campus sales with the card since September 2009 were \$31,259, while off-campus sales for the same period were \$8,721. While monthly off-campus UCard sales increased between September and November 2009 from \$475 to \$1,561, monthly usage fell to \$944 in April 2010.

For downtown business owners the UCard remains a *potentially useful* tool for offering students discounts and for helping them reach out to students and faculty. However, the UCard is not accepted everywhere because of the high cost associated with obtaining the necessary equipment on just the “promise” of additional sales and in the absence of aggressive card promotion to students. Of the businesses we interviewed that take the UCard, half had not had any students use their UCards when we did follow-up interviews with them in the Spring 2010. Out of 68 students in our

focus groups just a handful use the UCard. One student commented, “The UCard is more hassle than a debit card, and you don’t need it if you have a debit card.” Most students expressed greater interest in using their dining commons points at off campus eateries rather than using the UCard.

*What can be done to enhance card usage?* First, the University needs to better promote card usage. Second, UMass Lowell could provide businesses with access to University publications to advertise their businesses and the fact that they take the card. A “We take the Card” campaign focused on University athletic events might generate greater awareness. And, UMass Lowell could hold a series of downtown business meetings to educate business owners about the benefits of the UCard.

We reviewed the practices of eight peer universities to learn how their student spending cards worked. They each have a student ID that can be used as a meal card and a debit card. Students swipe the card at dining halls and can purchase food on and off campus with it. Clark University, Salem State University, and UMass Dartmouth promote student downtown spending with the card via coupon booklets and the promotion of student discounts. In some cases students deposit money on their card and use it for on campus vending machines, laundry services, printing services, and at campus retailers. Some universities use “flex points” or “flex dollars,” money allocated to student meal plans for use on and off campus. Removing restrictions on where students can spend their dining dollars and the better marketing of downtown discounts and incentives will likely produce significant increases in student spending with the card.

However, students identified several barriers to spending money downtown, including: store hours that do not coincide with student schedules; sporadic marketing of student discounts; lack of an identifiable and significant cluster of stores and restaurants where the UCard can be used; and, the inability of students to use their UCard in conjunction with their dining plans. The University might offer incentives for students to use their UCards. By encouraging on campus UCard spending students will grow more confident using it off campus. The University could also promote UCard use downtown with discount coupon books and in ads on its shuttle buses.

Focus group discussions identified the need for more under-21 events and venues downtown. Students also indicated a need for better marketing of events to students. When asked how they find out about events, this is a sample of the most common student responses:



*“There isn’t a central place for this information.”  
(Students residing in different Resident Halls  
reported inconsistent method of dissemination  
depending on the Hall they lived in).*

*“I find out from flyers in the elevator  
(of a Residence Hall).”*

*“Twitter.”*

*“I find out from word of mouth.”*

*“A Professor telling me about an event carries a  
lot of weight.”*

*“My department listserv sends information.”*

Event calendars/schedules exist for many local businesses and the Cultural Organization of Lowell and UMass Lowell have extensive event calendars and web site listings, but students do not routinely consult them. Students living in the ICC expressed an interest in having weekend events there and stated there was “little or no college atmosphere on the weekends.”

A number of students living in Residence Halls reported that when their parents or other family members visit, they go out to eat at local restaurants.

We asked students for ideas for greater parent engagement and this list represents some of their suggestions:

- Free parents night hockey game and restaurant gift certificate raffle.
- Canal boat tours with the Lowell National Historical Park during student orientation and commencement.
- Survey parents about their perception and attitudes of the downtown.
- Parents’ downtown orientation at the ICC as part of freshman orientation.
- Invite parents to teacher award ceremonies and lectures at the ICC.
- Host a Merrimack Repertory Theatre parents’ night with ICC pre-show reception.
- Limited time discounts at downtown stores and restaurants for ICC parents.
- Host a restaurant sampling festival for parents early in the fall every year.
- Host a downtown scavenger hunt for parents.
- Have student-made films about a typical day in Lowell for a student shown to parents at orientation.

- “Saturday College” for parents and downtown residences where they can attend lectures by faculty and enjoy guided visits to downtown galleries and museums.

Downtown Lowell could benefit from enhanced university-business partnerships. As one example of what could be done, Worcester’s restaurant-rich Shrewsbury Street holds a “College Shuffle” Labor Day weekend. The date, established with the help of the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, is a collaboration of the Consortium and the Shrewsbury Street Area Merchants Association. UMass Lowell might consider a “student shuffle” with Middlesex Community College, Lowell High School and downtown businesses at the start of each school year. Since many of the city’s cultural festivals take place during the summer, too few UMass Lowell students attend them. Perhaps the university could collaborate with the city to rearrange the dates of some festivals, or the two could host a “cultural festival” of their own behind the ICC along the canalway at the start of each school year.

## Volunteering and Service-Learning Opportunities

When it comes to volunteering and service learning, the opportunities are endless for UMass Lowell students. There are numerous museums, schools, healthcare facilities, outreach programs for youth, and many other initiatives UMass Lowell students can get involved with. Approximately 34 percent of students already volunteer in the downtown and 15 percent venture into the downtown for course work. UMass Lowell needs to come up with creative ways to sustain, track, and increase these numbers.

Business interviewees recommended that Resident Advisors hold events in the downtown. If UMass Lowell promoted this with all students they could form connections with people in the downtown and frequent shops, retailers and restaurants more often. As a result of these relationships, students may have better opportunities to have internships and jobs in the downtown area. UMass Lowell’s Information Clearinghouse provided community groups, students, and faculty a “gateway” to make connections and find opportunities for collaboration via volunteerism or service learning. The Clearinghouse is now dormant, but the University is considering a re-launch.

UMass Lowell could offer faculty housing in the downtown to help new professors and their families



*The early story of America's Industrial Revolution is commemorated at Lowell National Historical Park in the midst of this lively city. See <http://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm>*

locate in Lowell. By doing so, art galleries, restaurants, and museums will benefit from a newly situated community in the downtown. UMass Lowell could be a better resource for students searching for off-campus housing, and at the same time make certain its students become good downtown neighbors. The University of Florida's Office of Off-Campus Affairs is the liaison between students and community members. Its staff goes directly to students with neighborhood concerns and vice versa. The ICC Resident Director and Community and Cultural Affairs Office at UMass Lowell attend the Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association meetings for this purpose.

UMass Lowell might adopt a similar practice to Northwestern College and have its ICC students commit to community engagement projects as part of residence life. In this way, students become familiar with the downtown area and sustainable relationships are formed between downtown residents and students living in the ICC.

## Perceptions of Safety

Safety came up repeatedly in student focus groups. And, faculty/staff and students were surveyed regarding their perceptions of safety.

- In the student survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the day? —80 percent of students felt “mostly safe to very safe” while only 4 percent felt “not very safe to not safe at all.”
- In the student survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the evening? —29 percent of students felt “mostly safe to very safe” while 33 percent of students felt “not very safe to not safe at all.”
- In the faculty/staff survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the day? —91 percent said they felt “mostly safe to very safe” and just 3 percent felt “not very safe to not safe at all.”
- In the faculty/staff survey when asked—How safe do you feel when you are downtown during the evening? —56 percent felt “mostly safe to very safe” and 18 percent felt “not very safe to not safe at all.”

Focus group participants expressed concerns with inadequate downtown lighting, especially along the walkways that connect North Campus with the downtown, to the Tsongas Center, and in front of the police station. Most of the student tracking

group participants felt safe downtown, and some felt even safer there than on the other campuses. About half of the students in the group grew up in Lowell, and reported feeling very comfortable in the city. With respect to the ICC, students living there requested to be notified of crimes or suspicious activity in the area when they occur. And ICC residents reported that 24-hour security was not always present.

## Smoothing Transportation

Faculty, staff and student opinions on traffic and transportation were collected via survey, focus group participation, and tracking group participation.

- 95 percent of surveyed faculty drive to work and 78 percent of them use their car to move between the campuses during the day.
- At present nearly all faculty/staff drive when they want to go downtown though nearly 40 percent of surveyed faculty/staff indicated they would use a reliable trolley or bus system to get downtown if one existed.
- 61 percent of surveyed students drive to campus daily, 23 percent walk, and 11 percent use the city or the University's bus system.
- 17 percent of students ranked the university's transportation system to be very good, while 48 percent ranked it somewhat good, and 19 percent rated it *in need of improvement*.

The University offers students free shuttle service between the North and South Campus during the academic year. And, there is limited shuttle service from the campuses to the downtown and other parts of the city. This poses a problem for students, faculty and staff wanting to go downtown or to other parts of Lowell. For example, 50 percent of faculty/staff responded that downtown needed "More frequent and better transportation."

When school is in session UMass Lowell runs five distinct shuttle bus lines between 7:00 AM and 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday. In addition to shuttle buses, UML runs four vans from 7:00 AM – 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday and two additional vans from 10:30 AM – 6:30 PM. Sunday through Wednesday nights, four vans provide service from 6:00 PM – 1:00 AM on a campus-wide loop and a loop that travels between the ICC, the campuses and Gallagher Terminal. Thursday through Saturday nights, six vans provide service from 6:00 PM – 3:00 AM on a campus-wide loop, a loop that travels between the ICC, the campuses and Gallagher Terminal, and an East to

North Safety Shuttle. Saturday and Sunday service consists of two vans that make a campus-wide loop from 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM.

One student focus group participant reported, "Shuttle buses don't come frequently enough to the ICC, and I am often late for class because of this. The wait is usually longest in the afternoon and on weekends." Another student told us, "I use the shuttle daily out of necessity, but sometimes I wait more than an hour for the shuttle bus. The schedule can be illogical and unpredictable." A third student reported "never having problems or waiting long for the Shuttle service." In an ICC focus group, residents reported that there were never more than two buses per hour coming to the ICC and that the smaller shuttle buses were often over-crowded. But, it should be noted that ICC focus group students reported that even with their concerns about transportation, service between the ICC and North and South campuses had improved during the academic year.

Suggestions for improving transportation further that came from our focus groups include:

- More frequent and reliable transportation between the campuses and from the campus to downtown, and service available during the summer.
- More places to lock or store bikes on campus and at the ICC.
- More bike lanes and safer options for bikers.
- More support for bike-share or car sharing, i.e., zip-car options.
- Partnering with the city transportation system to provide discounts for students, faculty and staff riding public transportation.
- More frequent shuttle buses from Gallagher Terminal directly to North and South campuses.

Because UMass Lowell's North and South Campuses and the ICC are located in different parts of the city, with the two academic campuses on the edges of the downtown, the majority of students and faculty are unlikely to go downtown during the normal academic day absent convenient transportation. For example, traffic jams and troubles finding parking often mean that members of the University community are reluctant to get in their vehicle for a trip downtown for lunch. A way for UMass Lowell to facilitate the movement of faculty, staff, and students downtown, in addition to the further development of the shuttle service, is to collaborate with the city's existing public transportation infrastructure.



The Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) could be an important asset to UMass Lowell. With 30 years of service, the LRTA serves 13 communities in Greater Lowell with bus and para-transit services (which consist of a handicapped accessible service and the Road Runner, which takes the elderly to various appointments). It operates with federal, state, and local government support and has a budget of approximately \$10 million. Two of its shuttles cover a loop between the Gallagher Terminal and downtown until 11PM.

The LRTA offers reduced fares to the elderly, the handicapped, and children six to twelve years of age. Monthly passes are available to high school students for \$20. UMass Lowell might consider a partnership whereby students, faculty and staff ride for free or at a reduced rate on LRTA routes serving the downtown and campus locations while non-University students ride University shuttles for free or at a reduced rate on routes such as Broadway from South Campus to the Lowell National Historical Park Visitor's Center.

Among the 27 universities we contacted, 17 partner with their local transit system, including: Brown University, Ohio State University, Portland State University (Oregon), Providence College, the Rhode Island School of Design, the University of Akron, the University of Maine, UMass Amherst, UMass Dartmouth, and the University of Rhode Island. In these partnerships, schedules are made easily accessible to students. For example, Ohio State University has a link to the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) on its website, which includes route maps, timetables and trip planning links. Students show their 'BUCK-ID' to ride the bus. At some universities students are charged a fee as part of their tuition and they are then able to use their version of the UCard to ride on public transportation. Several universities have carried out innovative research on alternative transportation strategies with their local or regional transit systems to improve public transportation for everyone.

The Colleges of Worcester Consortium provides students with free transportation on the "Woo Bus", a privately funded system running Friday and Saturday nights until 1:00AM. It connects to participating colleges, the downtown, and other city destinations and benefits the universities and the city by attracting students to Worcester as a place with accessible student entertainment. The "Woo" draws students to places where they will spend money. Similar free shuttles exist at Salem State University and at UMass Dartmouth. In Providence, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority offers a free bus service connecting

Brown University, Providence College, the Rhode Island School of Design, and other universities and colleges. Like Worcester, Providence wants to enable students to take advantage of what the city has to offer in terms of entertainment, the arts, and sporting events.

Portland State University contributes funds to downtown Portland's Light Rail and Trolley System. The University contributed \$7 million for a light rail project that runs through the campus and \$2.5 million for a new streetcar line. The projects increased property values, encouraged pedestrian activity, lowered commercial vacancy rates, and helped create a lively street scene around the campus. A similar partnership between UMass Lowell, Middlesex Community College, the City, and the Lowell National Historical Park to fund trolley links around campus and to the downtown could help alleviate traffic and parking woes and encourage more visits downtown.

## Further UMass Lowell Downtown Expansion

Nearly 85 percent of businesses interviewed support further downtown expansion. And, though somewhat concerned about the uptick of noise and more traffic, the neighborhood groups we met with concur with this opinion. Suggestions for expansion include building additional student housing downtown and establishing a more formal campus with classrooms in the ICC. The point was made that students would be more likely to spend money downtown if they lived and attended classes there. Twenty-one percent of the businesses interviewed hoped the University would move the Art Department downtown or open a student-run gallery. The formation of a university-sponsored arts community downtown could provide opportunities for service-learning partnerships with local museums and non-profits. Not surprising, real estate brokers hoped the university would lease their space for faculty offices and classrooms.

How do other universities deal with their off-campus issues? The University of Florida in Gainesville has nearly 60,000 students, contributes nearly \$6 billion annually to Florida's economy and is responsible for nearly 75,000 jobs. The University of Florida operates student apartments in downtown Gainesville. Concerns residents have with the students living downtown are managed through its Office of Off-Campus Life. Neighborhood groups meet monthly to stay on top of residents' concerns. And, the University has a community development agreement whereby they



help to defray costs for road and traffic improvements and the public transportation system.

The University of New Mexico is partnering with the city of Albuquerque to build a 12,900-acre mixed-use community. The project emphasizes walking, bicycling and transit use, reducing the need for students to get in their cars. The University's Mesa del Sol collaboration encourages greener practices across the campus, including an expanded shuttle bus system and more bicycle racks. Mesa del Sol also contains a research center where the University is developing more solar projects.

Vacant and underutilized space is scattered throughout downtown Lowell—especially on the floors above several street level retailers—that could be utilized for vibrant undergraduate and graduate student housing and classrooms. Lowell might incorporate a “new urbanism,” style of housing similar to the Mesa del Sol project in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Mesa Del Sol promotes neighborhood walk ability and supports the local economy by attracting retailers and offering tax incentives for companies wanting to invest in the development. UMass Dartmouth centralized their continuing education office in downtown New Bedford. This connected the community and University and offered residents courses in an accessible location.

The Enterprise Center at Salem State University, an over-a-decade-old business incubator, is owned by

the Salem State University Assistance Corporation and provides office space to ten tenants in addition to offering over 80 programs annually for small business owners. It also organizes an annual Business Plan Competition which awards three individuals \$10,000 to start their own company. The Enterprise Center has brought thousands of people to the campus for workshops and events since its opening in 1999, and thus has played a large role in boosting Salem's economy. The School of Management and the Art Department at Salem State University utilize the Enterprise Center for classes, seminars, and as an art gallery.

UMass Lowell had a business incubator in the Wannalancit building, aimed at promoting economic development in greater-Lowell. The incubator spurred the development of Konarka Technologies, based on UMass Lowell's research in advanced materials. More recently, the Massachusetts Medical Device Development Center (M2D2) was established there to bridge a gap that has developed over the past ten years in start-up funding for new medical device companies. M2D2, through UMass Lowell's College of Management, offers such entrepreneurs assistance in determining their product's market feasibility and the opportunity to partner with engineers at the Lowell campus or clinical teams at UMass Medical in product development. Similar focused incubators could be set up to work with other important industry clusters in the region.

*“Expanding university development in ways that blend with the downtown is vital to the long-term success of the city and the university. A vibrant city makes faculty and student recruitment and retention easier and offers exciting after-graduation employment opportunities for students. Importantly, a forward-looking and engaged university makes the city an attractive place for new private investment and increases the likelihood that spin-off firms based on university research will stay in the area. Put simply, more students engaged in downtown life translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell.”*

## Major Recommendations

Based on our research, we offer eleven recommendations for the Lowell Plan's and UMass Lowell's consideration to: (1) increase the University's economic and social impact downtown; (2) encourage and increase student and faculty/staff engagement downtown; (3) provide high quality-of-life experiences for downtown residents and workers; and (4) further strengthen community and business partnership programs.

Continue to strengthen university-downtown partnerships: Expanding university development in ways that blend with the downtown is vital to the long-term success of the city and the university. A vibrant city makes faculty and student recruitment and retention easier and offers exciting after-graduation employment opportunities for students. Importantly, a forward-looking and engaged university makes the city an attractive place for new private investment and increases the likelihood that spin-off firms based on university research will stay in the area. Put simply, more students engaged in downtown life translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell.

The recommendations listed below are of equal importance. We elaborate on these specific topics in this Report.

### Business

*Establish a discount awareness campaign:*

While many businesses offer student discounts, too many students remain unaware of this fact. For example, there is no information about student discounts on UMass Lowell's website. A student designed marketing campaign of all available discounts would be beneficial.

*Re-launch the UCard program:* The UCard has not worked as intended, but with better marketing and a review of success stories regarding student discounts and downtown or local dining options from other universities it can indeed become successful.



*The Lunchtime Lectures at the ICC present speakers from the university community and the business world. Free and open to the public, the series is co-sponsored by The Parker Lectures, Middlesex Community College, and UMass Lowell.*

### Events

*Create better awareness of and access to city and university events:* The university, City, National Park Service, Middlesex Community College, and business and cultural communities should collaborate to co-brand events in the city as a whole. In surveys and interviews, campus and community members indicated great interest in attending each other's events, but asked for better access to information.

*Support the development of under-21 venues and events:* There is a significant need for entertainment venues that focus on the under-21 student population. Students want to go to stores, restaurants, and shows, as opposed to going to bars and nightclubs. The University should promote downtown events that cater to younger students.

*Organize events targeted for students' parents:* One student summed it up best: "I'd love for my parents to come to Lowell more so I could go out to dinner downtown for free! I think they would come if there were lectures, free concerts, or parent nights at the Tsongas Center."

### City Life

*Continue improving the campus transportation system:* The possible extension of the National Park Service's historic trolley system is a promising development.

*Continue improving public safety and launch a campaign to educate students about downtown safety:* Public safety is much improved, yet there remains a perception among many in the University community that the city is unsafe, particularly at night. Making the downtown brighter and livelier will help change this perception.

*Deepen and broaden partnerships with local, cultural, educational, state, federal and other organizations.* The university has received national awards for its many successful partnerships and should continue to collaborate with community partners and expand faculty/staff/student engagement downtown.

*Continue to strengthen and broaden volunteer, service-learning, work study, and other outside learning experiences.* Immersing students in more downtown life experiences translate into economic, social, and educational benefits for the city and UMass Lowell.

*Develop graduate student housing, new faculty housing, and classrooms downtown:* This could encourage young families to settle in the city, expand foot traffic downtown, and introduce students to the downtown.

## Possible Next Steps

Based on our findings, the team suggests several next steps to enhance and sustain downtown engagement.

Consider offering undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education classes downtown and establish a downtown student drop-in center accessible to Lowell High School, Middlesex Community College and UMass Lowell students.

Organize more student events downtown and plan more public events at the ICC and Tsongas Center. Tickets for events could be paired with restaurant discounts and these events could showcase food from local restaurants.

Increase the focus on and better track student, faculty, and staff volunteering off-campus. Volunteering is an important way to get students involved in and familiar with the city and its various neighborhoods. Additionally, students living in the ICC should be encouraged to volunteer in the downtown.

Launch a second phase of research to analyze the impact the three major educational institutions have on the city: Lowell High School, Middlesex Community College, and UMass Lowell. Survey students and faculty at the three institutions on their participation downtown and their spending habits. And, conduct focus groups to discover perceptions and attitudes about downtown events.

Conduct a UMass Lowell faculty/staff survey yearly or bi-yearly to monitor perceptions, opinions, and spending habits, and to analyze changes in perceptions, opinions, and spending habits over time.

Conduct an annual student survey and convene student focus groups to monitor student perceptions, opinions, and spending habits over time. Doing this will show changes that occur over time and it also helps to enhance and sustain interest in downtown engagement.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### UMASS LOWELL PROJECT TEAM

**Patty Coffey**

Project Manager, Offices of Community Affairs & Government Relations

**Bob Forrant**

Professor of History; Co-Director, Center for Family, Work and Community

**Paul Marion**

Executive Director, Office of Community and Cultural Affairs;  
Co-Director, Center for Arts & Ideas

**Allishah Mohammed**

Graduate Student, Regional Economic and Social Development

**Allegra Williams**

Staff Associate, Office of Community and Cultural Affairs (2009-10)



## APPENDIX 2

### ADVISORY GROUPS

The UMass Lowell project team met several times over the past year with an internal Advisory Group.

#### ***Members:***

Ann Ciaraldi	Dean of Student Affairs Office
Mary Connelly	Student Development
Brenda Evans	Student Activities
Tasha Henderson	Student Services
David Jones	Residence Life
James Kohl	Residence Life
Amy Liss	Student Activities
Pascha McTyson	Multicultural Affairs
Jennifer Nolan	Multicultural Affairs
Paul Pinheiro	Residence Life
Larry Siegel	Dean of Student Affairs Office

The UMass Lowell project team met twice with an external Advisory Group.

#### ***Co-Chairs:***

Jacqueline Moloney	UMass Lowell, Executive Vice Chancellor
Jim Cook	Lowell Plan, Executive Director

#### ***Members:***

Peter Aucella	Lowell National Historical Park
Adam Baacke	City of Lowell
Deb Belanger	Greater Merrimack Valley CVB
Emily Byrne	UMass Lowell
Leif Ericksen	UMass Lowell
Andrew Hostetler	UMass Lowell
Stacie Hargis	Congresswoman Niki Tsongas's Office
Anna Isaac-Ross	UMass Lowell
Jay Linnehan	Middlesex Community College
Kathleen Marcin	Lowell Downtown Neighborhood Association
Charlotte Mandel	UMass Lowell
Patti McCafferty	UMass Lowell
Jeanne Osborn	Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce
LZ Nunn	Cultural Organization of Lowell
Tom Parrish	Merrimack Repertory Theatre
Molly Sheehy	Middlesex Community College
Larry Siegel	UMass Lowell
Anthony Szczesiul	UMass Lowell
Joanne Talty	UMass Lowell
Steve Tello	UMass Lowell
John Thibault	Greater Lowell Community Foundation

## APPENDIX 3

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whether they gave us ideas, edits, or simply time, we give special thanks to the following people.

Big thanks to the Lowell Plan, Inc. and UMass Lowell for funding the project and the internal and external Advisory Groups, the students, staff, faculty, downtown Lowell business owners, and many universities that participated in our research, thanks for being patient with us and answering our questions, large and small.

To the downtown restaurants that hosted our tracking group meetings and provided delicious meals and great service to a new group of customers—The Athenian Corner, Dharma Buns, Espresso Pizza, Etsogo Sushi, Garcia Brogan's, and Viet Thai—we'll be back.

Our thanks to the city's neighborhood groups—Back Central, the Center City Committee, the Downtown Neighborhood Association, and JAMBRA—for speaking with us and allowing us to present our work and share our ideas with them.

To the 2007 Committee on Industrial Theory and Assessment Summer Team—Shaun McCarthy, Allegra Williams, Patrick Chhoy, Thuquynh Dinh, Beatrice Donkoh, Eika Hunt, Ekaterina Konovalova, Robert Moreau, Raksa Son, and Peter Thornton—we stood on your shoulders.

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