



# ADVANCING FACULTY EQUITY & RESILIENCE



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## Advancing Faculty Equity & Resilience

The aim of this publication is to promote faculty diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in a resilient, empowering, and healthy academic environment.

This newsletter will present articles and other relevant materials on DEIB in addition to publishing news and activities from the Office for Faculty Equity and Resilience (OFER).

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**CHAMPIONING EQUITY  
& RESILIENCE:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH CHANCELLOR**

# JULIE CHEN

> The ADVANCE Office for Faculty Equity and Resilience (OFER) at UMass Lowell provides support, resources, and opportunities to all faculty members. OFER promotes equity and inclusivity by supporting marginalized faculty, fostering an inclusive environment, addressing biases, and improving policies. Aligned with the university's core values, OFER is crucial to UMass Lowell's diversity and inclusion plan, collaborating with other entities and focusing on mentoring and policy analysis to remove barriers for minoritized faculty.





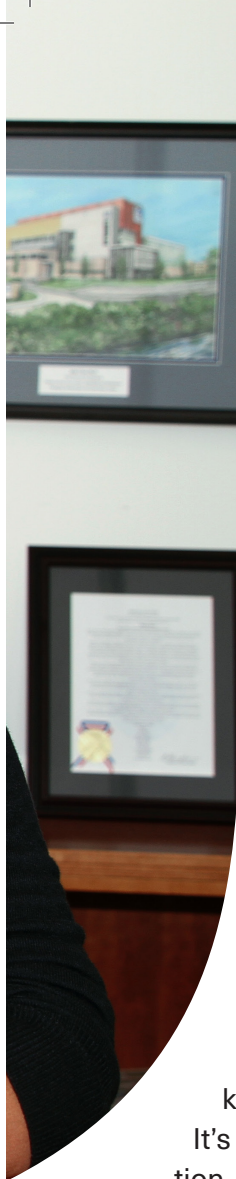
**CHANCELLOR CHEN ON**

# **THE IMPACT OF THE ADVANCE OFER**

**BY SUMUDU LEWIS**, Associate Clinical Professor, School of Education

I recently had the immense pleasure of interviewing Chancellor Julie Chen about the pivotal role of the ADVANCE OFER in promoting an inclusive and supportive academic environment at our university.





**Q: What OFER initiatives do you see as being most critical for supporting faculty at UMass Lowell?**

Chancellor Chen spoke passionately about the many OFER approaches stating that, “The key thing is that it’s not just one initiative. Helping our faculty to be successful translates to helping our students be successful.” She emphasized OFER’s holistic approach involving recruitment, retention, and belonging. Referring to the OFER summit held in March, this year, on recruiting a more diverse faculty pool, Chancellor Chen specified, “It’s not just about evaluating the pool, we need to build relationships to help strengthen the pool. In addition to focusing on recruiting the best candidate, OFER also plays a critical role in ensuring faculty are successful in promotion and tenure.” She stressed the importance of community.

“We want faculty to stay and thrive here and know that they don’t have to succeed alone.

It’s about creating opportunities for collaboration, mentoring, and support. If we can create an inclusive environment where faculty here feel connected, they will feel supported.” Chancellor Chen firmly believes that through OFER initiatives, we can establish a community of faculty members who are willing to give back to the university to be mentors and allies to other faculty members, staff, and students.

**Q: How do you see OFER interacting with other offices on campus that support students and staff, for example, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and River Hawk Academy?**

Chancellor Chen’s appreciation for cross-campus collaboration was clearly evident. “With the Office of Multicultural Affairs, we aim to integrate cultural events and initiatives into our everyday life in a shared community. By connecting faculty, staff, and students in these efforts, we boost our community’s inclusivity and support.” She envisions

“

I love the fact that so many of our faculty are also first-generation. It’s important for the River Hawk Scholars Academy students to see some of their professors are also first-generation and realize that they too can achieve similar success.

a campus culture where events often celebrated in isolation, like Black History Month, become woven into the fabric of our daily lives in recognition and respect of the labors and achievements of diverse groups of people.

She emphasized the importance of students seeing faculty who resemble them or have had similar struggles to generate that sense of belonging. She added, “I love the fact that so many of our faculty are also first-generation. It’s important for the River Hawk Scholars Academy students to see some of their professors are also first-generation and realize that they too can achieve similar success.”

The chancellor perceives OFER as central to connecting with these and other offices on campus to celebrate diversity, embedding it at the core of our daily lives on and off campus.

**Q: How would you like to see OFER impacting the overall culture and climate of our university over the next five years?**

Chancellor Chen's vision for OFER's impact on UMass Lowell's culture and climate is truly inspiring. Her acknowledgment that changing culture requires sustained effort and attention demonstrates her commitment to inclusivity, faculty success, and well-being. She reiterated her dedication to establishing a community and belonging on campus.

“Changing culture takes time and constant attention, and OFER is key in supporting faculty at the departmental level. Individual experiences within departments shape the sense of belonging. We aim to continue moving towards everyone feeling like they belong and are supported, especially during tough times.”

**Q: How will you support the OFER office at UMass Lowell during your time as Chancellor?**

In discussing her support for OFER, Chancellor Chen's admiration of the work OFER has taken on was very clear. She fondly reflected on the inception of OFER and providing a comfortable space for faculty. She outlined her efforts to enhance OFER's visibility and integrate its resources into

the broader faculty experience. “We want it to be an expectation for all faculty to engage with OFER,” she emphasized.

Making OFER's work more visible is also crucial, so faculty are aware of and take advantage of the available resources. She wants all faculty, not just new ones, to engage with OFER. “Experienced faculty can also benefit and contribute by sharing their knowledge. Mentoring is a two-way street; even experienced faculty can learn from newer colleagues.” She stated.

While OFER is the core for supporting faculty success, Chancellor Chen would like to make it part of a broader community effort to support faculty, staff, and students on and off campus. “Our role as a university is to educate and support the greater community, and OFER is integral to that mission.”

Chancellor Chen's views on faculty success and her deep commitment to creating an environment where faculty can thrive, coupled with a genuine understanding of the complexities involved highlight her dedication and devotion to creating a more inclusive and supportive university community. Through her leadership, the ADVANCE OFER is poised to make a lasting impact, paving the way for a more connected, supportive, and inclusive community at UMass Lowell.



## INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES & PRACTICES GROUP HOSTS

# TOWN HALLS ON FACULTY EQUITY IN RESEARCH



OFER summit held March 2024

> The Institutional Policies and Practices Group recently held two Town Halls —one on North Campus on September 16 and another on South Campus on September 24 —providing UML faculty with a dedicated space to discuss research and equity. These sessions aimed to gather faculty insights on issues related to equity within distinct research communities across the university.

Beyond identifying equity-related concerns, the events created an opportunity for faculty to share their personal experiences, challenges, and ideas for workable solutions. This feedback will be instrumental as we work to understand and address the unique needs of our faculty community.

Following a review and discussion of the topics raised, the group will compile a priority list of actionable next steps to promote a more equitable and resilient research environment at UML.



## A SECOND LIFE IN JAZZ:

# CHARLIE KOHLHASE'S INSPIRING JOURNEY

> On October 22, Professor Chuck Gabriel from the Music Department, invited Charlie Kohlhase, a multi-read instrumentalist and composer, to perform at the Maloney Arts Center.

**BY JANET WELBY**, Assistant Teaching Professor, Music

With his band, the Explorers Club, he played selections from their latest album, *A Second Life*, dedicated to victims of the AIDS epidemic and inspired by Kohlhase's experiences as a gay jazz musician living with HIV. Kohlhase shared his journey with a captivated audience of students, faculty, friends, and family, openly discussing his life and the album's inspirations.

In the album's liner notes, Kohlhase writes: "I am a Gay man living with HIV—and the accent

should be on *living*, as the disease is treatable today... I feel like I am living a 'second life' now and am grateful for the excellent medical care I've received in Massachusetts." Reflecting on his path he added, "After working up the courage to come out to my fellow musicians, I found my jazz community to be very welcoming and supportive." He continued, describing a conversation with a young queer musician who said "I need to talk to you because so many of your generation died." That pivotal moment encouraged Kohlhase





# A SECOND LIFE

CHARLIE KOHLHASE'S EXPLORERS CLUB

to share his story with younger generations, hoping to bring more members of this community into jazz as he perceives his involvement in the industry saved his life.

*Kohlhase and the Explorers Club's* music has been praised for its depth and beauty. *The Boston Globe's* Jon Garelik described *A Second Life* as “a tantalizing tension between form and freedom... arrangements that meld song forms and grooves with stretches of free improvisation.” *The*

*Times-Standard* of Eureka, CA, called it “the work of an artist brimming with spirit and the will to live and keep creating.”

Since moving to Boston in 1980, Kohlhase has toured globally with numerous jazz ensembles and collaborated with jazz legends from diverse backgrounds. Today, he leads the *No Boundaries Big Band* and *JCM Art Ensemble* at the Longy School of Music of Bard College and hosts jazz radio on WMBR-FM in Cambridge.

**CELT'S WORKSHOP SERIES:**

# **SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL STUDENT SUCCESS**



> This semester, the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) hosted three workshops titled “Teaching for Multilingual Student Success: Practical, Time-Saving Classroom Strategies.” Led by Milena Gueorguieva, Associate Teaching Professor of English, the sessions offered invaluable tools and insights to help multilingual students at UMass Lowell build confidence, a sense of belonging, and academic success.



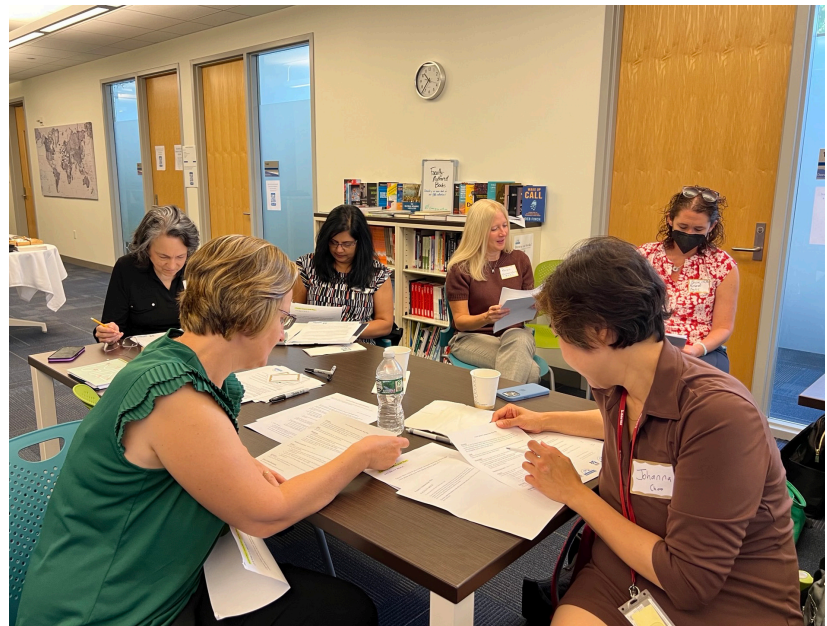
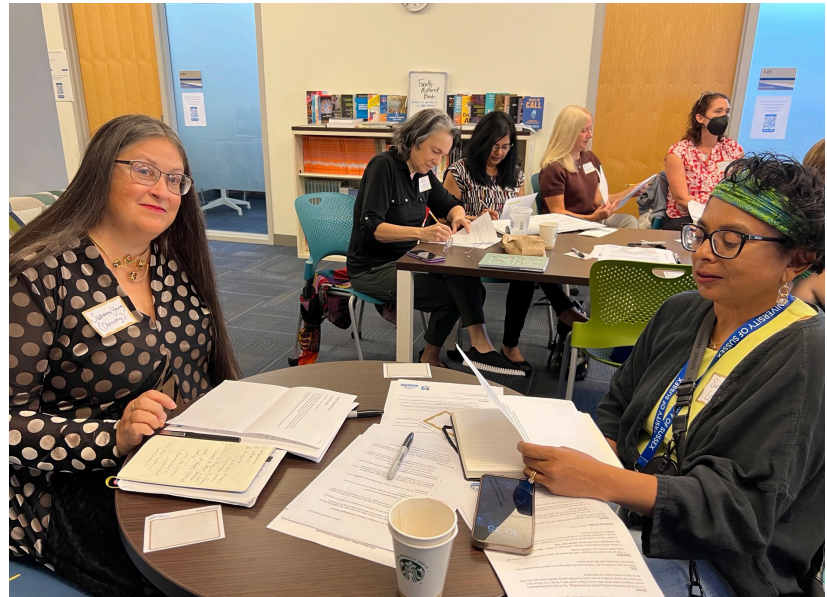
## Workshop 1: Multilingual Students – Who Are They and How Can We Support Their Learning?

During this workshop, Professor Gueorguieva presented the diverse experiences and needs of multilingual students at the university. Participants learned about the three primary types of multilingual students: international students, resident immigrants, and the 1.5 generation (those born in the U.S. or who arrived as young children).

The workshop debunked common misconceptions, revealing that most multilingual students are U.S residents with academic and language skills comparable to their monolingual peers.

However, it is essential for faculty to provide academic support to all students in need.

Attendees engaged with practical strategies for creating inclusive learning environments. Role-playing activities and discussions emphasized how a strong command of literacy in a student’s first language correlates to academic success and second-language acquisition resulting in a positive impact on a student’s academic performance. Professor Gueorguieva introduced a tried and tested approach to cross-cultural communication, which stressed the importance of slowing down, observing, and asking questions. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was also presented as a framework to minimize barriers and enhance learning for all students.



## Workshop 2: Academic Writing and Multilingual Student Success

This session explored the cultural specificity of academic genres and the challenges multilingual students face in mastering academic writing conventions. Participants discussed how writing genres vary across disciplines and cultural contexts. For example, American writing culture favors “writer-responsible” prose, requiring clear, direct, and explicit communication putting the responsibility of writing on the writer. In contrast, many other cultures employ “reader-responsible”





models, where the reader is expected to infer meaning. Professor Gueorguieva explained how these differences reflect broader cultural values, such as individualism versus collectivism, and how they shape students' approaches to reasoning and organization in writing.

In addition, faculty explored strategies for clarifying genre requirements and coaching multilingual students in academic writing, and how students' prior experiences influence their approach to writing. Professor Gueorguieva also addressed the potential bias in AI writing tools, offering alternative methods for upholding academic integrity.

### **Workshop 3: Effective Writing Feedback for Multilingual Success**

The final workshop focused on providing impactful and culturally informed feedback on multilingual students' writing. Participants learned to align feedback with pedagogical goals, such as advancing content mastery and critical thinking.

Professor Gueorguieva encouraged Faculty to prioritize grammar-related feedback over stylistic corrections, as grammar errors are rule-governed and teachable, while stylistic issues often rely on idiomatic fluency that develops over time with immersion. The workshop concluded by distinguishing between global errors, which interfere with meaning, and local errors, which do not. Faculty were advised to focus feedback on where it has the most impact. Practical methods for diagnosing and addressing common grammatical challenges were introduced, emphasizing a supportive approach to grammar feedback to empower multilingual writers.

By the end of the series of workshops, faculty were equipped with new insights and actionable tools to support the academic success and sense of belonging of multilingual students. Those who attended all three sessions received a certificate as Multilingual Student Advocates, highlighting their commitment to inclusivity in the classroom.

# PROVIDING FACULTY SUPPORT: THE OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

> While instructors may first encounter the Office of Disability Services when a student requests course accommodations, the office provides many additional resources for faculty. Jodi Rachins and Brandon Drake, Director and Assistant Director of Disability Services, respectively, regularly organize workshops to help faculty enhance their understanding of disability-related topics and support an inclusive classroom environment.

This semester, they offered two parts of the “Access Ally Training” workshop series. The first workshop addressed general topics on disability categories and ableism, providing practical guidance on creating inclusive learning environments through universal design for learning (UDL). The second workshop focused on accessibility technology, with specific tips on crafting accessible digital documents and presentations. Faculty who attended both sessions received a Diversity Certificate from the Office of Human Resources. Past training courses have covered topics like self-advocacy skills (in a workshop designed for parents) and additional UDL support strategies. Videos of these workshops are available on the office website for further viewing.

In addition to workshops, the Office of Disability Services offers valuable resources, including newsletters, a podcast, and a calendar of events.

To explore more, visit their website at [Office of Disability Services Programs](#).

December 3 was the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, and in recognition, the office created a short video spotlighting Riverhawk students who identify as people with disabilities. You can watch it here: [UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#).

Take advantage of these resources and observances to deepen your engagement with inclusive practices in teaching and supporting students with disabilities.

Contact Disability  
Services for  
important upcoming  
observances in 2025

[Check details on  
their website](#)



## HIGHLIGHTING DIVERSITY:

# THE DEPARTMENT OF WORLD LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

> The Department of World Languages has had an exciting semester celebrating the diverse cultures that enrich the UMass Lowell community.



BY MARIA MATZ, Chair of the Department of World Languages

Throughout the semester, the department fostered linguistic immersion through regular **conversation hours** across multiple languages. Students had the opportunity to enhance their language skills in a relaxed, supportive environment during Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish conversation hours. These sessions not only provided valuable speaking practice but also served as cultural gateways, where students could discuss traditions, current

events, and daily life in various regions of the world while enjoying snacks and beverages. The informal setting encouraged students of all proficiency levels to participate, creating a welcoming space for language learning and cultural exchange.

This academic year, the Department is delighted to welcome a new **Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) from Taiwan**, Pei Miao Liu. This



in addition to our teaching staff has significantly enriched our Chinese language program and brought authentic cultural perspectives to our community. Beyond teaching language classes, our FLTA has been instrumental in organizing cultural activities, facilitating conversation hours, and sharing firsthand knowledge of Taiwanese traditions and contemporary life. She has helped bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world cultural understanding, making Chinese language and culture come alive for our UML community.

In collaboration with the Centers for Learning, the Department hosted its **10th annual Meet and Greet event**. This gathering provided students with the opportunity to meet UMass Lowell's language tutors, learn about study abroad programs, learn about the River Hawk Experience Distinction (RHED) program and explore various student-led clubs related to languages and cultures. The event, held on October 30 at the Centers for Learning in O'Leary Library, offered a chance to connect with valuable resources that enhance both academic and cultural experiences on campus.



By the end of October, walking through the halls of O'Leary 5th floor, you might have caught the sweet scent of Mexican chocolate mingling with the fragrant smell of the *pan de muertos*. The department honored **Día de Muertos**, a vibrant celebration of life, death, and family rooted in the ancient Aztec tradition of honoring ancestors. This joyful occasion helps families remember and celebrate their loved ones. Families create *ofrendas* (offerings) in their homes that include photos of their loved ones and symbols of the four basic elements: water, wind, earth, and fire. A glass or pitcher of water is left on the *ofrenda* for family members to quench their thirst; *papel picado* (traditional colorful paper banners) represents the wind; food is placed on the *ofrenda* to share with loved ones, especially bread; and





candles are lit to signify fire. The ofrendas are also adorned with sugar skulls and *cempasúchitl* (the Aztec name for marigolds), believed to guide spirits with their strong scent. The flowers bloom abundantly in Mexico during this season, which is likely the reason they've become part of the tradition. Students in the advanced course WLSP 3940 (*Enhancing your Knowledge of Spanish*) created an impressive display for all to enjoy. This annual tradition continues to grow, so mark your calendars for next year!

The department also hosted a **Latin Film Festival screening on identity and LGBTQ+ experiences** at Luna theater, featuring five films, they delve into diverse narratives within the Latin LGBTQ+ community. The films brought important discussions that echoed through the Department long after the credits rolled. This event was generously sponsored by the Pragda Film Club Grant with additional support from the Provost's Office, the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Saab Center for Portuguese Studies, the River Hawk Scholars

Academy, the Department of Sociology, and the Latin American Studies and Film Studies minors.

November also brought a **week-long celebration of French language and culture** that transported visitors across the Francophone world. The aroma of Haitian cuisine filled the air during the French Club's meet and mingle, while *Poutinefest* founder Jim Beaulieu made an appearance, adding his own flavor to this global feast of culture and connections. Furthermore, the French Club set tables available for students, faculty, and staff alike to stop by and practice French conversation skills in O'Leary.

Also in November, a low-key coffee hour conversation was held with students who were returning to life at UML after a study abroad experience (**Study Abroad Homecoming**). They shared their experiences, feelings, perceptions and strategies from their study abroad while networking with their peers and faculty.

On November 20th, the Italian program wel-





comed Italian Nobel Prize nominee for literature **Dacia Maraini as a guest speaker.** Maraini presented to the public her work and her lifelong commitment to social justice, with a focus on her last book, *Vita mia* (2023), a memoir based on her childhood experiences as a prisoner in a Japanese internment camp during World War II.

From the marigolds of Mexico to the tastes of Haiti, from thought-provoking LGBTQ+ cinema to enriching conversations with Nobel Prize nominees, from poutine tastings to study abroad reflections, the Department of World Languages and Cultures continues to showcase the beautiful diversity that enriches our campus community. Through cultural celebrations, literary encounters, and shared experiences, they're building bridges that connect our students to the vibrant tapestry of global cultures that make UMass Lowell unique. Last but not least, the Department will host its inaugural **Holiday Bash** on December 11th, bringing together students, faculty, and staff to celebrate winter traditions from around the

world. The event will showcase holiday customs from Chinese, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish-speaking cultures. Attendees will learn about unique holiday traditions from each culture while enjoying hot chocolate. The celebration will feature festive music in different languages, creating a warm, multicultural atmosphere that embodies the spirit of global unity during the holiday season.

**The story doesn't end here – it continues to unfold with each new semester, each new celebration, each new connection made. Follow their journey on social media or reach out at [Department\\_WorldLanguages@uml.edu](mailto:Department_WorldLanguages@uml.edu) to become part of their ongoing narrative of cultural celebration and discovery of diversity at UMass Lowell.**

# GRANT-FUNDED SUMMER CAMP INITIATIVE: MIDDLE SCHOOLERS EXPLORE ROBOTICS + STEM



BY **MARU CABRERA**, Assistant Professor, the Richard A. Miner School of Computer and Information Sciences

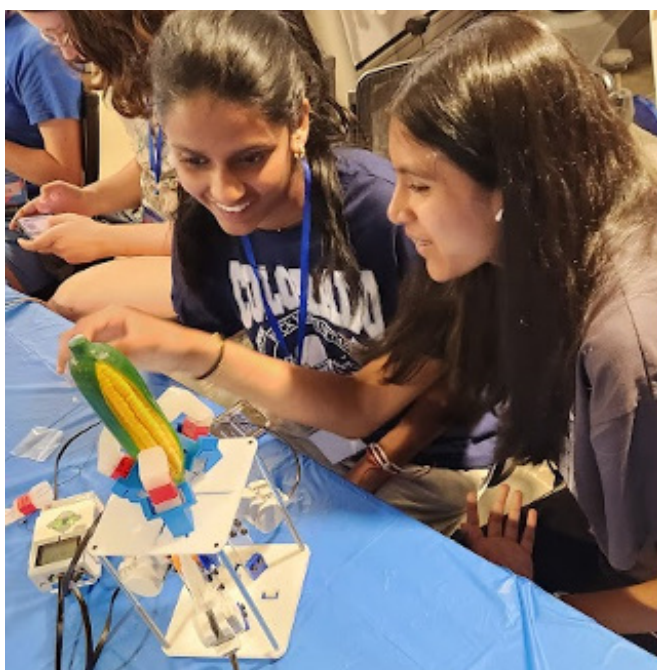
> A major challenge that occurs in middle school is the disillusionment of typically underrepresented students toward STEM fields. Furthermore, there is a broad misconception of the necessary qualities to pursue STEM.

With this RoboXploration Initiative, we aimed to engage middle school students in hands-on experiences that would instigate their interest in

robotics, and by extension STEM, by approaching interactive activities through a lens of iterative design, prototyping, and assessing performance, as well as creative problem-solving.

Funded by a \$50,000 Amazon Robotics grant from the Greater Boston Tech Initiative for Outreach program, with collaborators from both UMass Lowell and MassRobotics, the RoboXploration Initiative held two different one-week sessions throughout the summer, at the end of June and middle of July, for 20 students each. The focus was broadening community ties and





participation with schools in the Lowell Area and surrounding towns. We chose events and activities that could help demystify robotics and allow these students, at a critical point, to be inspired by the opportunities STEM provides; few fields, like robotics, provide the opportunity to combine a wide range of engineering skills with creative problem solving, communication, and teamwork. The participating students had a chance to work on several hands-on activities, covering aspects of engineering, computer science, and robotics including mechanical, electrical, and programming projects. They also had the opportunity to visit MassRobotics and have two hands-on experiences there, with soldering and robot programming, as well as visits to different industry partners, namely Boston Dynamics and Amazon Robotics for each of the sessions in June and July respectively, broadening participants' perspectives of the multiple facets of robotics career possibilities (academics, non-profits, and industry).

Professionals in STEM attribute their success in their chosen roles in part to many soft skills, including being open-minded, communicative, curious, creative, resilient, and collaborative. Among recent college graduates, there is a gap in some of these same attributes, effective communication, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, empathy, self-motivation, and effective teamwork. We also attempted to present a diverse team of roboticists, including faculty, postdocs, graduate and undergraduate students at UMass Lowell, and with our collaborators at MassRobotics. Each member of the team came up through the field of robotics in different ways: purely academic, experiencing internships or study abroad opportunities, having some community-college experience and then moving to a bachelor's degree, among others. The team attempted to convey that there is no single way to find your path towards robotics and STEM, hopefully inspiring these up and coming students to explore their options and consider a wider range of possibilities for themselves.



# OFFER DEIB AWARDS

## MUSIC DEPARTMENT (GOLD) + PLASTICS ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT (SILVER)



> In 2023, the ADVANCE Office for Faculty Equity and Resilience launched the Excellence in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Awards, and applications were through 9/25/24.

These awards recognize academic departments and colleges that demonstrate outstanding commitment, leadership, and innovation in advancing DEIB initiatives within our institution.

The awards celebrate exceptional efforts in areas such as recruitment and retention, cultural competency, community engagement, research and scholarship, curriculum development, and leadership and advocacy.

While many departments at UMass Lowell are devoted to enforcing DEIB, the departments of Music and Plastic Engineering received this year's gold and silver awards respectively. They have demonstrated extraordinary leadership and commitment to DEIB by going above and beyond to create inclusive, equitable, and supportive environments for students, faculty, and the community.

In the Music Department's application for the

award, Professor Janet Welby described the various DEIB initiatives the department had been administering, from recruitment and retention to leadership and advocacy. For instance, their recruitment efforts included subsidized music education programs for underserved communities, open-ended audition requirements, and partnerships with schools to promote access and representation. Retention strategies focused on advancing inclusivity through increasing participation of underrepresented groups in fields like sound recording technology.

In addition, Professor Welby detailed their commitment to cultural competency through diverse ensembles and a curriculum emphasizing cultural humility and the decentralization of the Euro-Western canon. She also described the department's dedication to community engagement with programs like the Latin Ensemble at cultural festivals and partnerships with groups like the Cambodian Angkor Dance Troupe. Finally, Professor Welby outlined various faculty research projects addressing social justice issues and leadership efforts championing diverse student voices, creating innovative programs, and promoting a collaborative, inclusive environment where all students can see themselves thriving in music careers.

Likewise, in the Plastic Engineering Department's application for the award, Professor Meg Sobkowicz Kline highlighted their dedication to DEIB, boasting the highest percentage of female faculty among engineering programs, with faculty representing diverse international backgrounds. Their recruitment efforts target underrepresented high school students and include hosting events like sustainability forums and middle school STEM fairs. Professor Sobkowicz Kline explained how faculty actively promote cultural competency through initiatives like Active Bystander training, service



equity tracking, and informal gatherings to build community.

Furthermore, research programs attract a globally diverse graduate student body, supported by collaborations and initiatives addressing water and material sustainability. The department ensures its curriculum integrates DEIB principles, with sustainability-focused modules and discussions on environmental justice and policy. Finally, leadership in the department emphasizes gender equity, with women holding key positions and the Department Equity Action Team driving initiatives for a supportive and inclusive environment, exemplifying how academia can lead in DEIB advocacy.

Congratulations to these departments for being the recipients of the first DEIB Awards and for their inspiring contributions to our shared mission of creating a more equitable and inclusive academic environment! Their achievements set a shining example for all of us. Professors Welby and Sobkowicz Kline collected their awards, which were presented by Chancellor Julie Chen and Provost Joe Hartman during the 2024 Faculty Symposium on November 21.



## ADVANCE OFER DIRECTORS



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ADVANCE OFER



**BRITA DEAN**  
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2025

# ADVANCE OFFER

## CONFERENCE

**Cultivating Equity:** Building an Inclusive  
UML Faculty Community

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**Tuesday May 13, 2025**  
9:00AM – 6:00PM

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**Moloney Hall, UC,**  
UMass Lowell