UMMS celebrates 35th Commencement
220 degrees awarded on June 1

The University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) awarded degrees to its largest graduating classes ever at its 35th Commencement exercises. Interim Chancellor Michael F. Collins, MD, presided over a ceremony in which 304 doctor of medicine degrees, including five MD/PhDs, 68 doctor of philosophy degrees, in nursing, 60 master of science degrees, two post-master’s certificates and three doctor of philosophy degrees, and three honorary degrees were granted.

The 217 graduates were reminded by keynote speaker and honorary degree recipient Anthony S. Fauci, MD, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, of the importance of remaining life-long students. “Being a perpetual student is a state of mind that can be invigorating and can serve as the catalyst to continually improve yourself, meet the challenges that await you and fulfill your enormous potential,” said Dr. Fauci, who oversees an extensive research portfolio of basic and applied research to prevent, diagnose and treat infectious diseases.

Fauci emphasized change as a constant in medicine, nursing and scientific research by recounting his own experience. Having entered the field of infectious disease to be almost immediately confronted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, bird flu and other pandemic threats (and which became central to his distinguished career), Fauci assured students that they too would be faced with the unpredictable. He closed by saying that what will remain constant in health care are the integrity, selflessness, perseverance and inquisitiveness—withstanding the patient as the focus and beneficiary—that are fundamental to the joy and beauty of the graduates’ chosen professions.

UMMS also awarded honorary degrees to the Honorable Margaret H. Marshall, JD, and Leonard J. Morse, MD, Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and the first female in this role. Marshall was born and raised in South Africa where she became an anti-apartheid activist after experiencing apartheid firsthand after experiencing apartheid firsthand. Her commitment to the freedom of all South Africans and the role of law in society has allowed her to serve as a United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights, senior fellow at the Harvard Law School, and on the board of directors of the New England Legal Foundation. She now serves as Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and the first female in this role.

Dr. Morse is a life-long resident of central Massachusetts who practiced medicine in Worcester for 40 years before serving as medical director of the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, where he serves as the City of Worcester’s Commissioner of Public Health.

Adding their own perspectives as new graduates were class speakers Kelly John Holland, School of Medicine; Christian Matranga, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences; and Rosemary A. Krousis, Graduate School of Nursing. To see photo highlights, turn to page 3.

Life sciences bill launches new era in research

Governor Deval L. Patrick last month signed the $1 billion life sciences bill, heralding a new era in life sciences research, discovery, development and education in the commonwealth. “We are tremendously pleased by the prominent position the University of Massachusetts Medical School has assumed in articulating the key role that life sciences research plays in Massachusetts,” said Michael F. Collins, MD, senior vice president for Medicine and provost and executive deputy chancellor. “Funds invested in our University will impact all regions of the commonwealth. In fact, there exists no single entity that is better positioned to realize the potential created by continuing investment in the life sciences and the economy of Massachusetts and the region. Our planning for the new campus facility already has begun and has been facilitated by the strategic planning effort that will allow us to move forward efficiently in capitalizing on this unique moment in history.”

The $449 million ATC, which is slated to open in 2012, will provide research space for more than 100 faculty in the life sciences. It will have three integrated research programs—the Gene Therapy Center, RNA interference (RNAi) Therapeutics Institute and the Center for Stem Cell Biology and Regenerative Medicine. The common thread among the three elements of the ATC is that they all function at the genetic level of biology and have different but complementary capabilities for targeting the underlying causes of disease. “Diseases often have complex roots, not just a single genetic mutation. With the Advanced Therapeutics Cluster, we will have the ability to mix and match these technologies and apply them as appropriate for a particular disease,” Flotte said.

Get in Focus
Have a story idea, a faculty, student or staff achievement, or a campus-wide event for the calendar? Send it to the Focus editor at focus@umassmed.edu

What’s Inside
July 2008
Brown appointed chair of neurology

Robert H. Brown Jr., MD, DPhil, an internationally known researcher and physician who has led the quest to cure neuromuscular diseases like amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), has accepted the appointment of chair of the Department of Neurology at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) and UMass Memorial Medical Center.

“This appointment has the potential to be truly transformational to our clinical and research missions and has broad institutional implications,” said Terence R. Flotte, MD, dean of the School of Medicine and executive deputy chancellor and provost. “Dr. Brown’s outstanding international stature and vision, which bridge translational research and clinical care, are emblematic of how our academic health sciences center is capitalizing on the life sciences moment in Massachusetts.”

Brown comes to UMMS and UMass Memorial from Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, where he has been professor of neurology and director of the Day Neuromuscular Laboratory and of the Muscular Dystrophy Association Clinic. Brown is renowned for his work on the inherited basis of neurodegenerative and neuromuscular diseases and has made significant discoveries in ALS and neuromuscular disorders, including some types of muscular dystrophy.

In 1993, Brown and colleagues defined mutations in a gene as one cause of familial ALS. He has already collaborated with Zuoshang Xu, MD, PhD, professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology, in his work to develop an RNA interference-based approach that may herald a treatment for certain neurodegenerative diseases.

“In addition to being a truly outstanding scientist who has made seminal discoveries relating to the genetics of neurodegenerative disease, Bob is one of the most dedicated physicians I have ever met,” said Craig C. Mello, PhD, Howard Hughes Medical Institute Investigator and the Blum University Chair in Molecular Medicine. “Having identified the genetic basis for familial ALS, he could simply wait for others to develop therapies based on his discoveries. But Bob knows that his patients don’t have the luxury of time. He comes here with one clear purpose in mind, to develop advanced therapies for ALS and other devastating diseases.”

Brown graduated from Amherst College, Harvard Medical School and Oxford University, where he received a doctorate in neurophysiology. He has received many honors for his extraordinary commitment to finding cures for neuromuscular diseases, including induction into the Institute of Medicine.

Donald Hodes is a ten-year cancer survivor and a ten-year participant in the Walk to Cure Cancer.

Celebrating 10 years of support for cancer research and care

This year, the Walk to Cure Cancer will not only mark its 10th anniversary, it will also celebrate the many advances made in cancer research and care as well as the individuals who still are walking for a cure.

“I have seen first-hand the advances that UMass Medical School and UMass Memorial Medical Center have made in cancer research and treatment over the last 10 years,” said Donald Hodes, a cancer survivor and Worcester resident. “Today, cancer does not have to be a fatal disease.”

A decade ago, Hodes underwent a year-long series of tests to determine the cause of his decline in health. His primary care physician diagnosed him with an early stage of multiple myeloma, a cancer of bone marrow plasma cells. Hodes received observational care for nearly two years before the first bone lesion appeared. In 2001, he was treated with radiation therapy for one month to remove the cancer. He now undergoes bone scans every six months to identify potential lesions, and receives an infusion every two months to strengthen his bones and to prevent future recurrences.

“In 1999, multiple myeloma was considered a terminal disease and life expectancy ranged from a few months to three years,” said Hodes. “Today, it is treatable with new therapies that are allowing patients like me to live productive and longer lives.”

Hodes, who is a member of the Hudson Hoagland Society, has participated in the Walk since its inception in 1999, following his diagnosis. The event has raised millions of dollars to support cancer research and care, and Hodes himself has raised nearly $70,000 alone during the last decade. “Cancer affects everyone—either you have suffered from it or you know someone who has,” said Hodes. “The Walk is a way for me to give back to my community, my neighbors and my friends.”

The 10th Annual Walk to Cure Cancer begins at 8:45 a.m. on Saturday, September 28, 2008, on the UMMS campus. Attend the Kebab Breakfast on Thursday, July 24, at the Lutheran Research Building from 8 to 9 a.m. For information, call 508-859-5512 or visit www.walktocurecancer.com.

achievements

Following are faculty who have joined UMMS as professors or associate professors or who have been promoted to those ranks, as documented by the Office of Faculty Administration:

- Sonia Chimienti, MD, appointed clinical associate professor of medicine
- Guangping Gan, PhD, appointed professor of molecular genetics & microbiology
- Stephanie Hartwell, PhD, appointed adjunct research associate professor of psychiatry
- Sarwat Hussain, MD, appointed professor of radiology
- Lawrence Madoff, MD, appointed professor of medicine
- George Silver, MD, appointed professor of medicine
- Joel Weisman, PhD, appointed professor of family medicine & community health

- Lucio H. Castilla, PhD, promoted to associate professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology and molecular medicine
- Job Dekker, PhD, promoted to associate professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology
- William J. DeMarco, DO, promoted to clinical associate professor of medicine
- Su Yang Han, MD, promoted to clinical associate professor of medicine
- Majaz Moonis, MD, promoted to professor of neurology and psychiatry
- Joëlle A. Savagou, MPH, promoted to research associate professor of family medicine & community health and pediatrics

Robert H. Brown, MD, DPhil

In 1993, Brown and colleagues defined mutations in a gene as one cause of familial ALS. He has already collaborated with Zuoshang Xu, MD, PhD, professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology, in his work to develop an RNA interference-based approach that may herald a treatment for certain neurodegenerative diseases.

Robert Brown, MD, DPhil
Glimpses of the 35th Annual UMMS

commencement exercises

June 1, 2008

1. SOM graduates (left to right) Trinh Tran, Adetokunbo Oluti and Carme Ogando

2. Student marshals Jennifer Songer, GSBS, and Johnny Isenberger, GSN '09, lead the procession of GSN and GSBS graduates.

3. Honorary degree recipient Leonard Morse, MD (left) and GSBS Dean Anthony Camillus enter the Great Hall at Mechanics Hall as the 35th Commencement exercises begin.

4. During the moment of reflection following the national anthem, SOM graduate Candice McElroy played the harp.

5. Dean Terry Flotte (left) and interim Chancellor Michael Collins hood the Honorable Margaret Marshall just prior to awarding her an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

6. Anthony Fauci, MD, gave the keynote address, in which he urged the graduates to prepare for the unexpected and to embrace lifelong learning.

7. MD/PhD graduates Kenneth Bishop and Jennifer Murzycki
Two new traditions for graduating students and their guests were introduced on campus this commencement season: a party the night before and a brunch the morning of the ceremony.
Franklin named Joy McCann Professor for Women in Medicine

Patricia D. Franklin, MD, MBA, MPH, associate professor of orthopedics & physical rehabilitation, has been named the Joy McCann Professor for Women in Medicine. Established at UMass Medical School in 2005 with an endowment from the independent Joy McCann Foundation, the professorship identifies and rewards women faculty leaders in medical education, research, patient care and community service who have mentored trainees and colleagues. Selected by their colleagues as our neighbors and to help them as they become part of the community, Franklin and other GSBS students intend to establish Habitat for Humanity as an annual event, much like their Thanksgiving Food Drive for the Worcester County Food Bank. Last year’s food drive, which was organized by Weismann and fifth-year student Jessica Rochelieu, netted more than 815 pounds of food as well as cash contributions by UMMS employees and students. “Although we contribute to scientific research on a daily basis, it takes weeks, months or even years until we see results,” said Weismann. “GSBS is an outlet for graduate students who want to be involved in the community. It is very gratifying to see a direct impact in the city and local towns and to know we’re helping our neighbors.”

GSBS CARES volunteers recently helped build a duplex with Habitat for Humanity for two Worcester families. They hope to make this an annual tradition. From left to right are Adonia Kim, Navene Kommajollya, Cara Weissman, Walter Kim and Gabriel Hendricks.

Lending a hand outside the lab

They work day and night in the labs at UMass Medical School (UMMS), but in the last two years, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (GSBS) students have also made a difference in the Worcester community.

As part of GSBS Cares, a sub-committee of the Graduate Student Body Committee (GSBC), GSBS students bring ideas for community involvement to the table and volunteer their time to local groups that serve Worcester area residents. While the Graduate School of Nursing and the School of Medicine curriculums include interaction with the greater Worcester community through clinics and other service projects, such is not the case for GSBS students. “GSBS CARES gives students the opportunity to become involved in the community,” said Cara Weissman, GSBS Cares chair and third-year student.

In previous years, GSBS Cares outreach focused on mentoring in area schools and serving as judges in local science fairs. Today, the committee is broadening its community activities, while its members continue to serve as mentors to high school, junior high and middle school students. In addition to direct service, GSBS CARES is a resource for UMMS students who want to become involved in a specific community service event or recruit volunteers for a particular project.

Most recently, GSBS students expressed an interest in participating in Habitat for Humanity projects, and Chistie Viosema-Magnussen, a third-year student, initiated the process. The committee raised $500 for the project during the GSBC’s annual Cinco de Mayo celebration, and in May, nearly 30 GSBS CARES volunteers gathered on Stowell Avenue to put their carpentry, electrical and painting skills to use in building a house that two Worcester families will call home. “This was a great project for the group,” said Weissman. “We had an opportunity to work with the families who will be living in the duplex, and it was fulfilling to get to know them as our neighbors and to help them as they become part of the community.”

Weismann and other GSBS students intend to establish Habitat for Humanity as an annual event, much like their Thanksgiving Food Drive for the Worcester County Food Bank. Last year’s food drive, which was organized by Weissman and fifth-year student Jessica Rochelieu, netted more than 815 pounds of food as well as cash contributions by UMMS employees and students.

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July Employee of Distinction Award

Vitals
Bing Li
Assistant Controller
Financial Services
Year started: 2004
Hometown: Shrewsbury

Professionally Speaking
“Focused,” “dedicated” and “consistently positive” are just a few words that describe Bing Li. As an assistant controller in Financial Services, Li oversees the General Accounting Department. Li and her staff are responsible for recharge entries, invoice payments in the state accounting system, endowment income accounts held by the UMass Foundation, payroll transactions with the clinical system for cross-funded employees and physicians, and other general ledger activities. She also provides financial reports and analyses to campus senior management, the UMass President’s Office and external auditors. Li recently assumed additional responsibilities related to the Worcester City Campus Corporation, which holds the institution’s real estate.

“Bing maintains a focused commitment to achieving daily objectives, takes personal accountability for delivering high-quality results and conducts herself with the utmost professionalism at all times,” said Financial Services Controller Michael Stanton, who nominated Li. “She demonstrates strong support for her direct reports and has established excellent working relationships throughout the organization.”

Points of Pride
To meet administrators’ needs for financial data, Li rebuilt the department’s processes to allow for monthly reporting and reduced the quarterly closing cycle by three days. By reducing the time needed to close the books, Li and her colleagues are now able to supply relevant financial information in a more timely manner.

Since joining UMMS, Li has volunteered her expertise to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Employee Charitable Campaign (COMECC), through which UMMS has become one of the top five state agencies to donate to charitable organizations. Utilizing her organizational skills, Li coordinates the recording and reporting of employee pledges and manages the appreciation raffle associated with COMECC.

“UMMS will continue to grow, and I’m excited to have the opportunity to grow with the institution as I encounter new challenges related to its finances,” said Li.
ID badge exchange wraps up
Old badges scolded on Oct. 1.
On Monday, July 7, the Office of Parking and Access Control will begin the final phase of the year-long ID badge exchange process. If you do not have the new Smart Card, which is vertical and has the picture in the center, you must visit the Parking Office in HA-31, open weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., and exchange your badge. You must bring your old ID and exchange it for your new one—you will not be allowed to keep both. If you do not have your old ID, you’ll be charged $10 for the new one.

You must exchange your badge by Tuesday, Sept. 30, on Wednesday, Oct. 1, the old badges will not allow you to access parking and other restricted areas.

If you have questions about the ID badge exchange, call the Parking and Access Control Office at 6-5934 or 6-8380 or send an e-mail to parking@umassmed.edu.

Richard A. Fenton, PhD, associate professor of physiology: Adenosine Transport in the Aged Heart, National Institute on Aging, one year, $66,625; recommended for one more year, $66,625
Laura L. Gibson, MD, assistant professor of pediatrics & medicine: Cytomegalovirus (CMV)-Specific Cell-mediated Immunity in Infants with Congenital CMV Infection, Thrasier Research Fund, three years, $327,463
Douglas T. Golenbock, MD, professor of medicine and molecular genetics & microbiology: Group B. Streptococci and Toll-like Receptors, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, $381,861; recommended for four more years, $9.1 million
Deborah Harmon Hines, PhD, professor of cell biology: NHK Summer Research Program to Increase Diversity Among Biomedical Researchers, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, one year, $165,888; recommended for four more years, $1.7 million
Melissa J. Jungreis, PhD, instructor in cell biology: Mechanism of the Sperm Acrosome Reaction, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, one year, $81,250; recommended for one more year, $81,250
Wenjie Li, PhD, research assistant professor of medicine: Neighborhood Risk Factors for Falls in the Elderly, National Institute on Aging, one year, $40,180; recommended for three more years, $1 million
C. Robert Matthews, PhD, the Arthur F. and Helen P. Nickerson Professor and chair of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology: Folding Mechanisms of TMI Barrel Proteins, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, one year, $365,625; recommended for three more years, $1 million
Stephen C. Miller, PhD, assistant professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology: Near-IR Bioluminescence Imaging, National Cancer Institute, one year, $182,813; recommended for one more year, $259,375
Kenneth L. Rock, MD, professor and chair of pathology: Immunobiology of MOH Restriction of T Cells, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, one year, $81,198
Alan Rothman, MD, professor of medicine: Flavivirus Infections: Pathogenesis and Prevention, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, one year, $2.2 million; recommended for four more years, $9.1 million
Sean Ryder, PhD, assistant professor of biochemistry & molecular pharmacology: RNA Recognition by Maternal Gene Silencers in Nematodes, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, one year, $308,750; recommended for four more years, $1.2 million
Lawrence J. Stern, PhD, professor of pathology and biochemistry & molecular pharmacology: Structure and Function of MHC Proteins, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, one year, $124,041; recommended for four more years, $1.6 million
Gayngs O. Saze, MD, PhD, professor of medicine: Alcohol and Monoamine Signaling, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, one year, $462,704; recommended for four more years, $1.8 million

The Greater Worcester Farmer’s Market is back, starting on Tuesday, July 8. Hosted by UMass and UMass Memorial Health Care and located on the plaza in front of the new Medical School Lobby, the market runs from 1 to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays through the end of October. Participating merchants will be selling fresh fruit, vegetables, flowers, honey, baked goods and gift certificates. For information about the farmer’s market, visit www.greaterworcesterfarmersmarket.com.

A Classic Car Show and Flea Market, presented by Cruizin’ Dreams, will be held on Sunday, July 20, at the Hebert’s Candy Mansion, 575 Hartford Pike (Route 20) in Shrewsbury. The afternoon event, which will feature a DJ, children’s activities, flea market, raffle and refreshments, benefits the Walk to Cure Cancer and other local charities. All classes of vehicles are welcome to register and compete in the car show, and specialty awards will be presented. Participants may pre-register through July 15 or register on the day of the event from 8 to 11 a.m. for $15. Admission is $5 ($2 for seniors, free for children 12 and under). For information or to register, call Dominic Massolo at 508-839-2592, Les Marrino at 508-789-4366 or Mike Merzigian at 774-696-5479.

The Vens from Here: Landscapes Paintings in Pastel, an exhibit of paintings, is the 12th installment of the Lamar Soutter Library’s Artist in Residence Series. It features the artwork of Nancy Von Home, administrator in the Department of Cell Biology, and will be on display on the first floor of the Lamar Soutter Library through Friday, July 18. For information, contact Nancy Harper at 6-5334 or via global e-mail.

The Walk to Cure Cancer Kick-off Breakfast will be held Thursday, July 24, at the Aaron Lazare Medical Research Building on the University Campus. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m.; continental breakfast and speaker’s program will follow from 8 to 9 a.m. The event is hosted by WCVB-TV Channel 5 news anchor Susan Wornick. Teams will receive all the materials they need for gathering pledges for the Sept. 28 event on the UMass Medical School campus. For information, contact Tamara Hampton at 6-5512 or via global e-mail or visit www.walktocancer.com.

The 16th Annual Tie-Up For Tots Golf Tournament will be held on Monday, August 4, at Pleasant Valley Country Club in Sutton. The registration fee is $350 per player and includes greens fees, golf cart, box lunch, hors d’oeuvres and dinner. Registration begins at 10 a.m., with a shot gun start at noon; reception at 5:30 p.m. and dinner and live auction at 8 p.m. The event benefits the Neosho OpenToro Care Unit at UMass Memorial Children’s Medical Center. For more information, call 6-5520 or send an e-mail to event@umassmed.edu. Volunteers are needed to work at this event; contact Barbara Gilmartin at 6-1299 or via global e-mail.