

MCLA

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

JUNE/16



NEW BEGINNINGS



DEAR ALUMNI:

It is an honor to write this “welcome” to you as the 12th President of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. Three months into my new role, I’ve now had the pleasure of presiding over my first MCLA Commencement.

On Monday, March 21, I had the opportunity to speak with *Boston Globe* columnist Derrick Z. Jackson about my arrival at MCLA and what it is about the College that intrigues me so (page 4). We also had an opportunity to discuss higher education in general, as well as the importance of educating students in the liberal arts tradition.

An article in this edition highlights some of the changes that have occurred in the College’s 122-year history, most notably in its name changes (page 6). However, like an extended family, we all are connected regardless of the institutional name listed on the diploma. From its beginnings as the Normal School, to State Teachers College of North Adams, to North Adams State College, to Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, the College has continued to adapt and evolve in response to the needs of the community and the world around us. We will continue on this path as we take care to advance this institution by building on our

history and continuing to recognize each important milestone along the way.

A crucial step forward is the recent launch of a new interdisciplinary studies program—a minor in entrepreneurship to provide students with the necessary skills to realize their entrepreneurial visions (page 10). This program may be completed in conjunction with virtually any major on campus and will provide a safe and challenging environment for students to take risks and discover how to become leaders and facilitators in their areas of interest.

As technology advances and our means of communication expand, writing will continue to remain a critical means of expressing our thoughts, sharing our knowledge, and connecting with one another. In that spirit, MCLA has placed renewed emphasis on writing with the creation of a new Writing Studio in Murdock Hall (page 8). The Writing Studio is more than a place for students who may be challenged with their writing;

On Saturday, May 14, MCLA conferred 404 diplomas on the Class of 2016 at the 117th Commencement ceremony. This year's keynote speaker, James C. Clemmer '86, received an honorary doctor of business. Clemmer is a veteran executive with more than 25 years of business experience. He served as interim president of MCLA from August 2015 until the arrival of the 12th president, Dr. James F. Birge.

Also receiving honorary degrees this year were state Senator Benjamin B. Downing (D-Pittsfield), with an honorary doctor of public service, and Yvonne Spicer, Ed.D., vice president of advocacy and educational partnerships for the National Center for Technological Literacy at the Museum of Science, Boston, with an honorary doctor of humanities. In recognition of their awards, the honorary degree recipients will have books placed in MCLA's Freel Library in their names.

it also provides a creative and nurturing environment for students at all levels of proficiency.

While our students are at the core of our day-to-day activities, we are mindful that our alumni are important to our ongoing achievements. I have met a number of active and engaged alumni at various board meetings, campus events, regional events, and in the local community. Regardless of your location, I encourage all of you to remain engaged with your alma mater. The success of our students will be made stronger by the depth of our alumni network. If you are interested in reconnecting but are not sure of how you might become involved, please reach out to me or one of our dedicated Advancement staff members.

As I toured campus my first day in the office, I was immediately struck by the energy and passion of those I met—students, faculty, and staff—and I felt immense pride at being selected to lead the state's public liberal arts college.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "James F. Birge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James F. Birge, Ph.D.
President

MCLA

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President Birge Shares Initial Impressions on MCLA and His New Role

Just weeks after arriving at MCLA, President James F. Birge sat down for an interview with Derrick Z. Jackson, Boston Globe columnist and parent of MCLA alumnus Tano Holmes '12, highlights of which are featured below:

What attracted you to MCLA?

I was really drawn by the emphasis that MCLA placed on the integration of liberal arts with professional studies. When you talk with employers, more often than not, they talk about employees that have a background in liberal arts, know how to work independently as well as in groups, write and speak well, all of those skills . . . We have to be responsive to employers. Society is asking us for graduates that know how to integrate general, broad, and deep knowledge with career paths, and it is our responsibility to respond.

How will your experience as former president of Franklin Pierce University be beneficial to MCLA?

We had quite a bit of success creating new academic majors that had a real draw for families, but at the same time, provided the kind of graduate that would be able to be employed and would be a really good thinker of systems. MCLA is on that path [and] has a much stronger foundation as a liberal arts institution. We're at the leading edge of offering that kind of an education. There's lots of opportunity for growth in enrollment, as well as in developing a much more visible resource.

What other qualities and experiences will help you in your role at MCLA?

I think one of them is, frankly, just a deep appreciation about the importance of the work that I do . . . Being able to see the outcome of that work is really inspiring and gratifying. It's also the case that I've had to make very difficult decisions and have confronted really difficult situations.

I don't fluster very easily. I'm good at managing chaos . . . having three daughters, I learned early on that you've got to manage chaos.

What's your favorite way to relate to students?

It's unfortunate that in many places, the president doesn't have as much contact with students. I see that as the reward for having to do all the difficult work. For example, at the end of today, I'm going to have pizza with students who are doing the Phonathon . . . That's the frosting on the cake, essentially, to be able to talk to students and find out how meaningful their experience has been, what we could be doing differently . . . That gives me a context for the work that I do and helps inform the decisions that I make. We're all here because of students, and they have an important voice.

Did you have any things that became your trademark at previous institutions?

There was one thing... but it really wasn't my idea, it was my wife's. On the first night of finals each semester, we would go door to door bringing cookies and milk to students to give them a little bit of a study break and talk to them. I don't know if we'll be doing that exactly, but we'll probably be doing something. My wife Lisa was also a student affairs professional, so she loves being around students.

As a native of Lee, Mass., what do you look forward to getting back to? What are your hobbies?

When I was a kid, the Housatonic River was in really rough shape in terms of water quality. It's dramatically different today, and I am an avid fly fisherman. Apparently the Housatonic River is a very popular river for fly-fishing. I'm looking forward to testing out that theory once the water warms up. I also really enjoy golf. I didn't as a kid, so I never golfed in the Berkshires, but there are a number of different golf courses around that I'm looking forward to getting out on.

When you eventually leave MCLA, what's your vision for how you'll leave it?

My hope is that when I leave, people will know just how strong an institution this is... *U.S. News & World Report* has identified MCLA as a top 10 public liberal arts institution. That's pretty impressive. When I've met with faculty... I'm really impressed by research they're doing, the emphasis they're placing on teaching, the energy. As I think about what kind of influence I can have, I think it's probably going to be in how I enhance our visibility so that people can see, truly, what we do here, because it is remarkable.

Boston Globe columnist
Derrick Z. Jackson is parent of
MCLA alumnus Tano Holmes '12.



The questions and answers in this interview have been edited for length and clarity.

WE ARE ONE

HERE

The world has changed significantly in 122 years and so, too, has the institution now known as MCLA. From its beginnings as a teacher training facility, it has evolved into the public liberal arts college for the Commonwealth, offering 19 major programs of study and so much more.

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This growth has prompted several name changes, from the Normal School, to the State Teachers College, to North Adams State College and, finally, to Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA). Students from throughout the College's history are represented by one united Alumni Association that celebrates their achievements, enables them to stay connected, and helps shape the future of their alma mater.



ANGELA CROWLEY '42

Growing up, Angela Crowley '42, a lifelong resident of North Adams, always knew that she would one day attend the State Teachers College. While there, she developed an extraordinary love of both teaching and learning that inspired her to achieve her master's degree, travel the world, and study abroad.

Crowley's career spanned nearly 37 years at the Mark Hopkins School of North Adams, where she strived to instill her love of learning within her students. Her tenure was very satisfying, and Crowley credits the State Teachers College for making it possible. She continues to enjoy periodic visits to campus and stays connected to the College, saying, "I thoroughly and enthusiastically approve of all the changes."

The College has flourished since its beginnings in 1894, as reflected by its changing identity. Whether one celebrated their school pride with a mascot named Stacey or as a gremlin, professor, Mohawk or Trailblazer, together they are all part of one united alumni association representing the different stages of the same remarkable institution.

Kevin McGrath '93, from Reading, Mass., couldn't agree more. He attended the institution as North Adams State College (NASC), which he describes as a "very vibrant place." McGrath earned his BS in business administration and has enjoyed much success as a business development health care consultant.

"I wouldn't be where I am now without NASC," reflects McGrath. He attributes his classes and involvement in extracurricular activities in helping him "develop the interpersonal and presentation skills" that have been paramount to his success.

McGrath is involved in the alumni association as agent for the Class of '93. His focus is to reconnect fellow alums with MCLA so that they, too, can witness all the exciting changes. "If you're not going to the events that MCLA hosts, both on campus and in Boston, you're really missing out," he says.



KEVIN MCGRATH '93



MONIQUE SYMES '11

Monique Symes '11, of Boston, is extremely appreciative of her experience at MCLA.

"I needed to be in a new atmosphere that would enable me to focus on my studies," she says. "It was away, but not too far, and I fell in love with the people there."

After earning her BA in English communications with a minor in political science, Symes completed her master's in education from Lesley University. Today, she teaches English language arts at a Greater Boston middle school, where she strives to emulate the caring, supportive faculty she encountered at MCLA. "My experience had a major impact on how I carry myself in my professional life. Helping to 'grow' the youth in my community is an important role, and I don't take my hat off 24/7. I wouldn't have the same outlook if it wasn't for MCLA."

Through her involvement in the alumni association, Symes hopes to one day partner with Career Services to provide networking opportunities for future graduates.

Symes will be MCLA's 2016 Convocation speaker.



A Renewed Emphasis on Writing

Regardless of why you write, whether it's your livelihood, a creative outlet, a way to organize your thoughts, or strictly a means of personal and professional communication, most of us will agree that writing is a fundamental skill. MCLA embraces the contributions of all writers, as well as the importance of writing as part of the liberal arts education, and has taken its commitment to a new level by establishing a Writing Studio in Murdock Hall.



Writing Studio associates, from left to right: Jackie Ordway '17, Alexandra Romano '17, Prof. Amber Engelson, Jade Tarris '17, and Natalie Carpentier '17. Photo compliments of *The Beacon*.

For more information, please visit the website at mcla.edu/writingstudio.



Monica Joslin, Ph.D.

According to Monica Joslin, Ph.D., dean of academic affairs, the new Writing Studio provides "a space for writers of all levels, from first-year students to faculty, to collaborate and create, and will contribute

to student success and persistence." She explains that this initiative grew out of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) committee, a multidisciplinary group of faculty members working to expand the conversation about writing at MCLA and improve the campus-wide writing structure. This committee laid the groundwork for the Writing Studio, as well as the hire of WAC specialist Amber Engelson, Ph.D., who also serves as an assistant professor of English/communications and co-director of the Writing Studio.



Amber Engelson, Ph.D.

"The designation of space for an official Writing Studio really legitimates that MCLA values writing," says Engelson. She describes the studio as a "beautiful, sunlit corner room with a warm, welcoming feel." The space is decorated with student artwork to further enhance the spirit of creativity.

At the Writing Studio, which opened in February 2016, trained writing associates specializing in various genres are available to consult with writers at any stage of the writing process. They serve as coaches and collaborators, helping writers organize their thoughts, identify strengths and weaknesses, diagnose writing problems, and develop writing strategies. Writers may benefit from working with a writing associate at the beginning of a project to

brainstorm ideas and gain perspective; at the end, for guidance on revising and polishing the final draft; or at any stage in between. While writing associates were previously available, consultations were generally held at the library.

Among the many students who have already benefited from the assistance of student writing associates is Sundra Lam '19, for whom English is a second language. During her first semester at MCLA, Lam found herself struggling with writing, especially for her history class. While she frequently met with writing associates at the library, she feels that the quiet, peaceful atmosphere of the new Writing Studio is more conducive to productivity.



Sundra Lam '19

Lam, a talented welder whose artwork is displayed in the Writing Studio, appreciates that the writing associates are fellow students. "Many of them have taken the same classes, so they understand what professors are looking for and where improvements can be made," she explains. "They are also easy to talk to, understanding, and supportive. They never make you feel bad or self-conscious about your writing."

Engelson emphasizes that the Writing Studio is not just for those struggling with writing. All members of the MCLA community, regardless of proficiency, can benefit. In addition, students and faculty are invited to utilize the vibrant new space to host writing groups or events when the space is available. Engelson also plans to offer faculty writing workshops at the Writing Studio in the near future.

New MCLA Minor to Benefit Students and Region

Entrepreneurs bring forth fresh ideas with the potential to make a difference and play an important role in creating jobs, new wealth, and a more prosperous society. In an effort to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit among students, MCLA created a new minor in entrepreneurship. This interdisciplinary study program encourages students to become problem solvers and empowers them with the vital skills necessary to start successful ventures.



Dr. David Eve

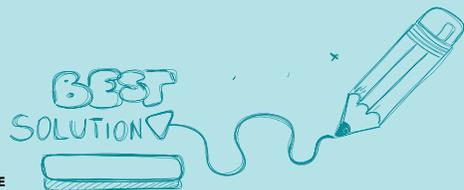
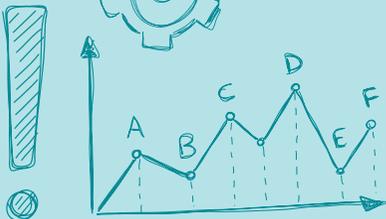
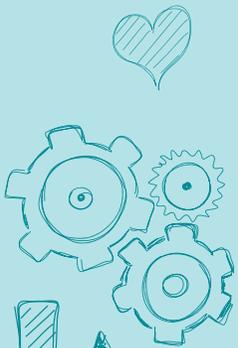
Dr. David Eve, associate professor of computer science, has played a key role in developing the minor. He says the goal is to “create a framework that allows students to gain firsthand entrepreneurial experience in a safe environment and teaches them to take risks in bringing their ideas forward.” He explains that the new minor will consist of “bookend” courses on entrepreneurship, with various electives in between to help students “build their toolboxes.” While the first course will examine both business and social entrepreneurship, including design thinking and lean startup methodologies, the last course will give students real-world experience in working collaboratively to develop their ideas.

The entrepreneurship minor pairs well with virtually any major offered at MCLA. “All students should have the opportunity to figure out how they can apply their skill set, not just a specific profile of student,” says Eve.



Katie Glaubitiz '16

Katie Glaubitiz '16, who recently achieved her interdisciplinary studies degree in arts and culture, took Eve's Tier III capstone course, “Entrepreneurship and Culture,” this past spring. “The course applied to the cultural concentration of my major, as we learned about entrepreneurs who work with a range of people—nationally and internationally,” she says. “It also applied to my arts focus, with the creative mentality that is necessary in design thinking.”



Glaubitz participated in a class project to address homelessness in North Adams. She enjoyed the hands-on approach to learning and found the opportunity to potentially make a difference in her community "rewarding and motivating."

The entrepreneurship minor has been funded, in large part, by a gift from John "Jack" Wadsworth, a successful venture capitalist and advisory director of Morgan Stanley. He and his wife, Susy, are ardent supporters of new ideas in education and programs that foster innovation. They are well-known for their philanthropic generosity.

Wadsworth is a leader in efforts focused on economic development in North Adams. His decision to support MCLA's entrepreneurship minor was inspired by his high regard for the College and its offerings and by the belief that economic growth and success is contingent upon building an "entrepreneurial cohort of people to create new jobs and ideas."

Since many MCLA students are from North Adams and the surrounding region, Wadsworth is optimistic that the minor will lead to new companies being launched locally. He hopes that their success will



Jack Wadsworth

create a "buzz" that will, in turn, attract additional companies to the area.

Having lived in various locations throughout the world, Wadsworth has a fondness for North Adams stemming back to his undergraduate years at nearby Williams College. "North Adams is a very interesting microcosm of small cities in America, many of which have lost their principle employer for one reason or another and need to be re-energized," he explains. "If we can apply this theory here and make it work, maybe others will follow suit."

Wadsworth credits the Feigenbaum MCLA Leads Initiative, funded by a gift from the Feigenbaum Foundation, for its role in supporting opportunities related to innovation and entrepreneurship and strengthening community partnerships for the overall benefit of the Berkshire region. Looking forward, he feels that the new entrepreneurship minor will be a key element in solidifying partnerships, including collaborations with Lever, Inc., a North Adams nonprofit focused on entrepreneurship and social innovation, as well as with Williams College. Wadsworth hopes that more companies, foundations, and investors will consider joining forces to help fund this effort, and resulting initiatives, in the future.



Levitt AMP North Adams

Thanks to your votes, the MCLA Berkshire Cultural Resource Center's Levitt AMP North Adams grant proposal landed in third place and has won up to \$25,000 in matching funds to present our own Levitt AMP North Adams Music Series, to take place in Colegrove Park in the summer of 2016.



MCLA Signs 3+3 Articulation Agreements with UMass and WNEU's Schools of Law

MCLA signed articulation agreements with the University of Massachusetts School of Law–Dartmouth on October 19, 2015 and with Western New England University (WNEU) School of Law on April 26, 2016, establishing joint programs leading to a bachelor's degree and a juris doctor degree. With these new agreements, qualified undergraduates at MCLA could substitute the first year at one of the law schools for their senior year at MCLA, thus earning their bachelor's degree and juris doctor degree in six years instead of the typical seven. For more information, go to www.mcla.edu.



Best Wishes, Retirees!

Marianne Drake, chief advancement officer and president of the MCLA Foundation, retired from MCLA at the end of 2015 after 12 years of service to the College.

Marianne began her career at the College in 2004 and was responsible for management of the MCLA Foundation and strategic planning for fundraising, alumni relations, and conference planning. Marianne led the College through its recent comprehensive capital campaign, raising more than \$30 million.

It is with appreciation that we thank Marianne for her many years of service, her deep and ongoing commitment to the College, and her many contributions to our community.

We would also like to recognize faculty and other staff who retired this past year. Three MCLA faculty members – Ben Jacques from English/communications, Douglas Jenkins from fine and performing arts, and Ronald Shrewcraft from biology and physical education – leave MCLA having educated our students for 86 years, collectively.



In addition, we bid farewell to retirees Peter Allmaker, Joe Charon, Diane Collins, John Greenbush, Norbert Miller, Theresa Miller, James Stakenas, and James Sweeney. Together, they have given 209 years of service to the College. Thanks to their efforts, we are a better, stronger institution. We know you will join us in wishing them the very best in this new chapter in their lives.



Diane Collins



James Stakenas



Douglas Jenkins



James Sweeney



Ronald Shrewcraft



John Greenbush



Peter Allmaker



Joe Charon



Theresa Miller



Ben Jacques



Norbert Miller

DC ALUMNI EVENT

Fellow NASC/MCLA alumni and other Massachusetts state university alumni gathered at a cocktail reception on March 15, 2016, at the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. This was a celebration of our state university campuses and for NASC/MCLA alumni in attendance, an opportunity to meet President Birge. The event was sponsored by the Presidents of the Massachusetts State University System.



From left to right, back row: Lisa Hall Blackmer '99, MCLA President Dr. James F. Birge, Alvera Wilson '89, Dan Carpenter '92, and Michael Stottle '85. Middle row: Ruth Koczela '42 and Mary Ellen Bergeron '67. Front row: Candice Crow '14, Corban Von Ouhl '13, and Alexandra Elwell '13.



SENIOR ALUMNI WELCOME

On May 9, we celebrated the Class of 2016 at Gallery 51 by officially welcoming our graduating students as the newest members of the MCLA Alumni Association. In addition, graduating students that participated in the student philanthropy program were recognized at this event when Alumni Association Board of Directors President Cheryl Starr Boillat '79, M.Ed. '97, Vice President Dan Summers '07, and board member Ben Lamb '07 presented them with their student philanthropy spirit cords.

14TH ANNUAL UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE

At the 2016 Undergraduate Research Conference (URC), Alexandra Romano '17 was presented with the third annual Pamela P. Dennis '82 Scholarship by Diane Sammer '81, supported by the Pamela P. Dennis '82 Achievement and Triumph Fund. Named in memory of a former psychology graduate and partner of Diane, the scholarship is awarded to students who demonstrate high potential, have overcome adversity in their lives, and participate in the URC.



From left to right: Diane Sammer '81, MCLA President Dr. James F. Birge, and Alexandra Romano '17 at the 2016 URC.

TACONIC SOCIETY DONOR RECOGNITION BRUNCH

MCLA honored members of the Taconic Society, Legacy Society, and Endowed Fund Contacts at an annual brunch held at The Williams Inn. Members contribute \$1,000 or more each year to support MCLA. Support from Taconic Society members significantly enhances the College's ability to provide students with a quality education.

For more information about how you can become a member of the Taconic Society, please contact Christine Naughton '99, director of alumni relations and development, at C.Naughton@mcla.edu or (413) 662-5074.



From left to right, above: Dr. Deb Foss and brunch keynote speaker Tanisha Drysdale '17.

From left to right, left: MCLA President Dr. James F. Birge, Dr. Harris Elder, Dr. Lea Newman, Stephen Leissing, and Natalie Leissing '71

**MASSACHUSETTS
COLLEGE OF
LIBERAL ARTS**

Alumni Office
375 Church Street
North Adams, MA 01247
(866) 677 MCLA
(413) 662 5260 fax
alumni@mcla.edu

**MCLA.EDU/
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SAVE THE DATES

September 19, 2016
MCLA Athletics Golf Classic

October 14, 15, 16, 2016
Reunion & Fall Family Weekend

Thank you

Every gift makes a difference in the lives of our students.

Thank you for supporting MCLA.

