

University of Massachusetts Lowell Department of Economics

Application for the 2023 AEA Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diversity and Inclusion

The Department of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Lowell (UMass Lowell) strives to promote diversity and inclusion in our classrooms, university, and the greater economic profession. Teaching 1,800 students across four colleges annually we have deliberately chosen to engage with the problem of underrepresentation of minorities within the economic profession and to operate with an increased awareness of the growing diversity of the students we serve. In 2021, we updated our department [mission](#) statement to reflect our commitment to be a leader in diversity and inclusion by stating “... we seek to foster an environment with diverse backgrounds and perspectives as well as the inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups in the discipline of Economics, all of which we believe are critical in generating a vibrant academic community.”

We are proud to live by our mission statement and have seen first-hand the benefits of having a vibrant and diverse student body. A [2020 study by the New York Fed](#) found our program to have one of the **highest** *Economic Education Inclusion Indexes* (128.9) in the country, placing us in the 99th percentile.

Table 1: Economic Education Inclusion Index

	Economic Education Inclusion Index (EEII)	
	Value	Pctl.
University of Massachusetts-Lowell	128.9	99
Reference groups		
All U.S institutions	54.1	50
Top 50 liberal arts colleges	47.9	43
Universities with top 40 economics Ph.D. programs	51.7	50
Other universities with Ph.D. programs in economics	58.9	57
All other colleges and universities	54.1	50
All public institutions	57.9	55
All private institutions	49.9	46

Source: <https://www.newyorkfed.org/data-and-statistics/data-visualization/diversity-in-economics#interactive/tables> as of 11/29/2023

Our department has experienced exceptional growth in enrollment. **Figure 1** displays that since 2014-15 our growth has more than doubled compared to overall enrollment at our public university. **Table 2** shows this growth is accompanied by remarkable changes in the ethnic composition of our students. Since 2014-15 the proportion of non-white students rose from 36 percent to 55 percent in 2022-23, a larger proportion compared to our university (47%). At the same time, the proportion of women in our program has only slightly increased over time and is currently stable around 21 percent. This is below the level of female identifying students represented across UMass Lowell (40% of [undergraduates](#)).

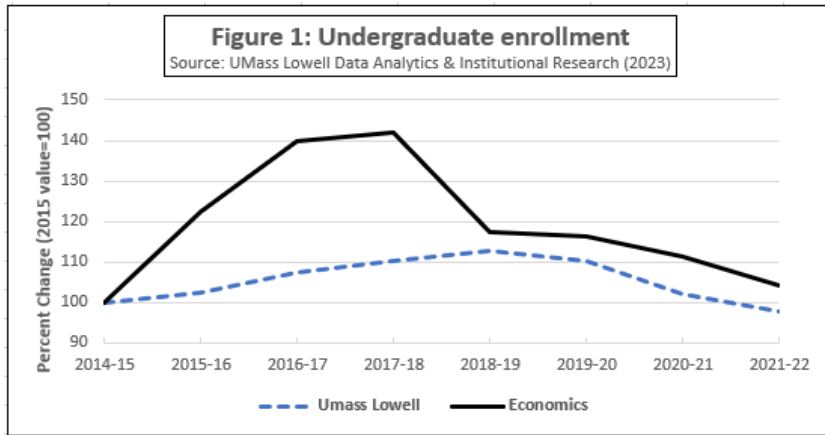


Table 2: UMass Lowell Economics Enrollment

Year	By Ethnicity							By Gender	
	Asian	Black/ African American	Hispanic/ Latino	Non- Resident Alien	Not Specified	Two or More Races	White	Female	Male
2014-15	9.0%	7%	8%	7%	3%	3%	64%	18%	82%
2015-16	9%	6%	12%	11%	1%	3%	59%	19%	81%
2016-17	10%	9%	16%	9%	2%	3%	52%	15%	85%
2017-18	11%	8%	13%	6%	3%	4%	56%	18%	82%
2018-19	11%	8%	14%	8%	2%	1%	56%	21%	79%
2019-20	13%	10%	16%	7%	3%	3%	49%	21%	79%
2020-21	13%	12%	13%	7%	3%	5%	48%	21%	79%
2021-22	15%	12%	13%	7%	3%	5%	47%	22%	78%
2022-23	16%	9%	14%	8%	3%	6%	45%	23%	77%

This data highlights both the accomplishments and challenges our department faces. We strive to create an inclusive community for both our faculty and students. We prioritize strong mentorship and building personal relationships with our majors. However, the enrollment of women into our major remains a big challenge within our program as across our profession. In what follows we describe the main processes and programs we have implemented to date, including testimonials from our students.

Our Work with Faculty.

We have prioritized minority candidates in our recent faculty searches. However, our success has been limited as we have salary constraints as a public university which prevents us from making highly competitive salary offers. That said, we have been more successful in recruiting minorities among our part-time instructors. **Table 3** provides details on our faculty composition by ethnicity and gender, respectively, for 2022-23. We employ ten full-time faculty and eight adjuncts.

Table 3: Faculty (2022-23)					
	By Ethnicity			By Gender	
	Asian	Black/African American	White	Female	Male
All faculty	19%	9.5%	71.5%	29%	71 %
By Rank					
Tenure Track and Tenured	25%	0%	75%	37.5%	62.5%
Research/Clinical Faculty (Lecturers & Instructors)	33%	0%	67%	33%	67%
Adjunct Faculty	12.5%	12.5%	75%	25%	75%
Senior Adjunct AY Faculty (Benefited)	0%	50%	50%	0%	100%

We know that it is not enough to recruit minority candidates, we need to retain them. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to develop a departmental climate of inclusion and respect. We take a point of pride in creating a very close-knit community **to mentor** our junior faculty. Junior faculty meet at least once per semester with the Chair to discuss their progress and address any concerns. Additionally, we acknowledge the importance of relying on external resources that can help us achieve such goals as a small department. When applicable, we strongly encouraged and financially supported our junior faculty to participate in the in the CSWEP mentoring program (CeMENT). We also pair them with senior faculty who are responsible for monitoring their overall experience. If the junior faculty expresses a preference, whenever possible, we choose mentors that share their minority status. At the same time, the department is sensitive to the need to promote the professional growth of all our associate professors as well. Again, we try to achieve this by, for instance, developing opportunities to discuss our research progress and goals, by inviting potential coauthors to visit the Department, by scheduling monthly seminars with external scholars, and by ensuring that teaching, advising, and other service responsibilities are evenly distributed.

We strive to shape our teaching to be responsive to students’ individual experiences and need for discussion. As an example, sixty percent of our full time faculty participated in a voluntary faculty [training](#) offered by UMass Lowell and funded through an NSF ADVANCE grant to address subtle biases and micro-aggressions and to promote an inclusive climate for all members of our community. Additionally, faculty were encouraged and financially supported to take advantage of professional development opportunities developed within the economics profession. For example, a faculty participated in the AEA [EDUCATE](#) workshops and another took part in the [AERE Scholars Leadership Workshop](#) to learn more inclusive teaching and research strategies.

We also believe in the importance of increasing **visibility** and creating **leadership** opportunities among our underrepresented faculty. We have encouraged faculty to mentor student affinity groups and to use their professional network connections to host women and minority economists on campus. Such effort has resulted in three campus wide events where our guests lectured or participated in panel.

Finally, working in a department that nurtures a culture of diversity and inclusion also affects the way faculty perceive their responsibility in addressing minority issues both in their **research** and in their **professional exchanges**. Recognizing this responsibility, faculty have mentored women and minority PhD students through initiatives organized by specific field associations (such as the AMIE, the IHEA, the ASHECON). Additionally, one of our faculty corresponded with the author of a well-known Principles textbook to inform them that some of our minority students had found one of the vignettes in the book offensive; another informed the JEL editorial board of the need to modify the label for one of the JEL codes to be more respectful of the terminology used by the disability community; another engaged with several other instructors of statistics across the country to discuss the incorporation of more data about minorities in classroom activities.

Our Work with Our Students.

We offer a BA in Economics and a BS in Quantitative Economics. We serve approximately 120 majors. Our effort with our underrepresented students has focused on achieving three main goals:

I: Develop a Sense of Belonging to the Profession

To develop a sense of belonging among majors and support women, traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities, first generation, and LGBTQ students we have taken multiple steps. First, we made the decision to first address the reality of underrepresentation as a topic of conversation for all our students. For example, we organized a symposium called “The Growing Role of Women, Minorities, and International Scholars in Economics and Career Opportunities.” This successful event brought underrepresented economists from academia and from the Federal Reserve to talk with students about their professional experiences. Second, to recruit more minority and female students into our major, we routinely have our underrepresented students volunteer to represent our major during the university open houses and to address our principles of economics classes about their experience as economics majors.

Finally, we rethought our curriculum to increase the instances when our underrepresented students may see their own life experience reflected in the topics we teach. We developed new classes such as Economics of Inequality or Sports Economics where students learn about racism and sexism in sports and how to measure and test for discrimination. We also revised existing courses to discuss different topics our minority students can relate to. Attending the AEA Educate workshop and sharing that experience within the department has made such rethinking much easier for some of our faculty. For example, in some of our statistics classes we have students elaborate on data about unemployment by race and gender using the [FRED website](#) or using BLS data to explore labor force participation by disability status. In Labor Economics we developed a sequence of classes to relate the theory of investment in human capital to the personal immigration experience of many of our students (according to the U.S. [Census](#) in Lowell, Massachusetts only 48% of the population is white alone and 28% is foreign born). In Health Economics we discuss the potential consequence of unrepresented minorities in health-related research. These serve as examples to demonstrate our attempts to make our underrepresented students feel that economics as a discipline is relevant to their life experiences. In addition, we try to involve students in the life of the department by offering them the chance to assist us in our research.

“When I was approached for this [research] opportunity, it was a heartwarming moment for me. This is because I was personally told by a professor conducting the research that they thought I would be a great candidate. The idea of now being in conversations for new opportunities was very powerful to me. I think this is because, for a long time, I felt like I was always just one more student. However, I quickly realized that to the econ department, I wasn’t. The inclusive nature of the econ department does not permit this. Instead, it focuses on letting everyone regardless of their background have access to new opportunities.” - Roydan Cruz (Class of 2022)

II: Increase Students’ Confidence and Leadership Skills

Literature has shown that female students are more likely to lack self-esteem and confidence in their economic skills. Therefore, we have focused on collaborating with our female identifying students to increase assurance and develop leadership skills. In 2019 we started a Women in Economics group the activities of which are open to all economics students but specifically support our female-identifying and non-binary majors. A female faculty supervises and mentors the group. Our Women in Economics group meets for social events and for discussion about potential job interviews, classroom interactions with the male classmates, and economic topics of interest. Additionally, every year another female faculty offers a three-hour long salary negotiation workshop that has been praised by students as one of the most empowering moments of their college career. Such focus on our female-identifying students has had a positive ripple effect across the department. For the last three years the President of the UMass Lowell student economic club have been female-identifying students. For the last five-year female-identifying students have been part of our competing College Fed Challenge teams. The Fall 2023 team was composed exclusively of female-identifying students.

“My first interactions with the Department were through virtual meetings of the Women in Economics club, which provided a platform for students to connect, share experiences, and support one another. In a traditionally male-dominated major, this forum was instrumental to my early sense of belonging in the Department. ... The mentorship I received from inspiring female faculty members in the Department played a pivotal role in shaping my professional trajectory.... There were moments when people in my life doubted my ability to succeed in the field. Several family members and a coworker commented that it would not be a good fit or that I didn’t seem like the economics “type.” ... the UML Economics Department helped me gain a sense of belonging, prove those doubts wrong, and eventually excel in my chosen career path.” – Emily Saylor (Class of 2022)

III: Increase Student Awareness about Professional Opportunities

To achieve this goal, we have encouraged all faculty and staff of the department to develop a strong personal relationship with all our students, and with our traditionally underrepresented students. At UMass Lowell 45% of first-year undergraduate students are First Generation and 30% are Pell Grants recipients. Many of our economics students cannot rely on a family network to guide them in their academic and professional choices. Therefore, our faculty provides guidance through both formal advising and through

personal interactions and initiatives that we designed to increase our traditionally underrepresented students' awareness of areas of studies and careers. We have collaborated with the university career services office to invite employers (from the Boston Fed, or from big consulting, research, or financial companies from the Boston area) to spend one full day on campus with our majors. We invited women or minority individuals as representatives of such companies.

Last year we joined our university professional [Co-op program](#) so that our economics majors can spend up to six months in a paid, full-time working experience with an industry partner. The results we observed in terms of these students' job placements have been extremely gratifying. Students expressed deep gratitude for the personal interest we put into fostering their interest and guiding them in their career choices.

“While previous generations in my family did not experience higher education, I faced the challenge of navigating this academic pathway and the subsequent career choices without their proper guidance.... I would constantly doubt my future, question my abilities The Economics Department at UMass fostered a nurturing and encouraging environment that allowed me to discover my own path and become comfortable with stepping out of my comfort zone while trusting myself... Through multiple face to face exchanges during office hours, they presented many opportunities to me such as the UML Co-op Program. ... The overwhelming support, guidance, and belief in me changed my life ... I will be graduating ...with a full time offer to work with a Fortune 500 company.” - Samuel Gervais (Class of 2024)

Finally, we have encouraged our most scholarly inclined female-identifying and minority students to participate in programs such as the MIT IDDEAS program or the AEA Summer Training Program to familiarize them with the world of PhD programs.

“These enriching experiences have paved the way for my academic and career goals. I must emphasize that visiting my professors during office hours allowed them to get to know me beyond the classroom, and after sharing my academic and career aspirations with them, they were able to provide me with the necessary advice which has played a pivotal role in my success story.... As a minority, and an African immigrant, I can proudly say that UML has provided a supportive learning environment for me ...an experience I cherish so much.” - Wonder Ahiatsi (Class of 2023)

Our Plans for Further Improvement.

We strive to continue to increase our understanding of the experience of traditionally underrepresented minorities in the economic profession and to further promote their success. Looking forward we plan to continue to promote diversity and inclusion by:

- Increase our exposure to the research conducted by traditionally underrepresented scholars by inviting new speakers found through connections and the [AEA Research Seminar Speaker Database for Marginalized Economists](#).

- Continue to provide professional development support to our faculty who are interested in participating to the CSWEP Cement workshop or the EDUCATE workshop.
- To further target minority students and bring them to the economics discipline we will work with the University Admissions Office to identify [high schools in Massachusetts](#) that report a larger percentage of minority students but have not been traditionally feeder into our Economics program. We will visit those schools and present our major. In addition, we will work with our [River Hawk Scholars Academy program](#), which supports first-generation students across campus, and we will make use of connections made possible by UMass Lowell's official designation as "[A Better Chance](#)" (ABC) School. (ABC is a national educational access non-profit organization that assists high-achieving students of color gain access to preparatory schools and colleges.)
- To correct the under representation of women among our majors, we will work with other departments that have a much larger portion of female and non-binary students to promote economics as a potential second major. We will discuss with faculty how to cover topics and bring examples in their curriculum that may resonate better with women. We will invite to campus our successful alumnae and invite them to talk about their educational and professional experiences in our large Principles of Economic classes.

The responsibility for all these activities will be allocated evenly among faculty. We are confident in their success because of our department's proven dedication to the creation of a more inclusive work and study environment.

Submitted on behalf of the Economics Department at UMass Lowell.

Monica Galizzi
Professor of Economics

November 30, 2023

Attachment: *Testimonials of Four Economics Students.*