Beyond The Badge: The Story of UMass Auxiliary Workers

Presented By:
Transforming Your World: Introduction to Community Engagement SustComm/PubPAdm 195c

In Partnership With:
UMass Labor/Management Workplace Education Program
Introduction

There are 28,635 students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1,170 professors, and hundreds of workers at UMass Amherst. Most students know their professors but do they know the names of the people taking care of them? The people who are feeding them? Or the people that clean up after them? Most students don’t know the numerous workers who stand by their side. We, the students of Transforming Your World: Introduction to Community Engagement, partnered with the UMass Labor/Management Workplace Education Program to learn about the incredible dining workers and maintainers who work extremely hard, day and night, to run and maintain the University of Massachusetts’ flagship campus. This opportunity, a series of meeting and interviews, allowed us the privilege to just begin to brush the surface on the Dining workers and maintainers of UMass. The UMass Dining workers and maintainers are essential to all of our lives on the UMass campus. These individuals make up a team who cook and clean for us. They care for us. They allow us to maintain healthy, happy living environments. As members of the UMass community, they deserve recognition for their dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm on campus.

These UMass Dining workers and maintainers are the chefs, the bakers, the people who serve us food, and the people who wash our dishes. They are the Housing Services Custodial Staff who are responsible for all public area cleaning in the residence halls, removing rubbish from the trash rooms and cleaning the bathrooms, lounges, stairwells, and corridors in all residence halls and they also clean the academic buildings/classrooms.

Workers have backgrounds that are important puzzle pieces to explain who they are and the role they play in our lives. Acknowledging dining workers’ and maintainers’ contributions to students, faculty, and the overall UMass campus’ well-being is an important element to our daily life. This project put forth efforts to overcome the lack of humanity on this campus, and in this world. This project aims to regain humanity by bringing back a human element into the workspace.
Under the direction of Anthropologist and Associate Professor of Regional Planning/ Public Policy and Administration, Dr. Ellen Pader, our class of undergraduate students with help from our community partners aimed to bridge the gap between dining workers and maintainers and students. The concern has always been that dining workers and maintainers are often underappreciated and misunderstood by the majority of the student body. Whether they are working behind the scenes in the kitchen, or in our dorm hallways cleaning up, there seems to be an invisible boundary between students and dining workers and maintainers. Our class, has sought ways to break down this barrier and replace it with a free flowing wave of communication and gratitude.

During our time in the classroom, we used the first half of the semester to learn about social divisions, the processes of socialization and liberation, cultural hegemony, and observation techniques. With this knowledge in hand we were then in a position to blend theory with practice, reflecting what we learned in class in the process of these interviews. By exploring the story telling techniques of Studs Terkel we were better able to hear the speaker’s message. Our intention has been to highlight individual workers, showcasing their life stories and interests to students throughout campus. With the tireless work done by each dining worker and maintainer and the activity going on around campus it is easy to understand how these life stories often get sidelined. Our hope is that these pictures and stories of individuals will shed some light on the subject. We hope you will see how dining workers and maintainers feel about their jobs and what their lives are like outside of work. We are happy to continue and add to an ongoing project that will illuminate a path towards an acceptance of, an understanding of, and thanks for these vibrant members of the UMass community.
Finding Serenity: Warren Douglas at UMass Amherst
Maintainer, Philosopher, Poet, Husband, Grandfather ...

“Parents don’t spell love l-o-v-e, they spell it p-r-o-u-d. They just want to be proud of you. They don’t need your love because it’s already a given. You can’t give them any more love, they can’t give you no more - but you can make them proud. That’s what makes parents glow. You are our future, understand? You are the future of my grandchildren.”

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I’m just a person, you could say, who cares about things. Warren always has the answers for everyone else. I’m good at thinking for other people. And that’s a talent that I don’t question. My name is Warren Douglas and I’m a worker here at UMass. I’m formerly from the Bronx. I’ve been up here – my wife and I, and my daughter – we’ve been up here for almost three years now. I’m a Maintainer 1, I work in Zone Two, and I’ve been here [at Bartlett] for thirteen months. I was elevated today to chief steward. We oversee things that go on that the shop stewards can’t. I’ll be going to meetings every month. I work on the third floor and I get along fine with most everybody.

It’s like a close-knit family here. I fall in love with all the students because I’m a people person, I care about things and I want to be a part of things. You know, I’m content. I wake up every morning and my goal is to make ten people smile. And I get to go to bed knowing I made hundreds of people smile. And a lot of that has to do with the fact that I’m around hundreds and hundreds of people. I have so many students’ numbers in my phone because they come and they talk to me for advice. I let them know I care about them.

A lot of the things that I say to people today are the same things my parents have said to me. Every decision I’ve made has to do with my parents. I grew up in Gunhill Projects, in the Bronx. We moved there in 1950, we moved out in 1969. I had to grow up before I realized that we were really poor, because we had great Thanksgivings, we had great Christmases, we had a nice pair of everything. I didn’t realize ‘til I became an adult how much my parents sacrificed to make it seem we were like everyone else. We were poor, but we were rich in everything else.

One of the things my mother always used to say, she’d sit me and all my brothers down on the couch and say, “I don’t care what y’all turn out to be, y’all can even be bums.” And then she would pause and she’d say, “But y’all better be the best damn bums on the block.”
One of the things that I have said the most here, I always ask the students “Do you love your parents?” and they say, “Yeah,” and I say “Well, do they love you?” They say, “Yeah.” I say, “Do you know that they cannot love you any more than they already?” Parents don’t spell love l-o-v-e, they spell it p-r-o-u-d. They just want to be proud of you. They don’t need your love because it’s already a given. You can’t give them any more love, they can’t give you no more - but you can make them proud. That’s what makes parents glow. You are our future, understand? You are the future of my grandchildren.

But you know what’s funny? I’ve yet to meet a bad student. And I’m from New York – we even tell the people we like to go away. I’ve never gotten to that point with the students. Everybody up here is so friendly. I’ve never really experienced something like this.

I’m here because I have a job. I get paid to be here. I could’ve stayed in New York, where I been all my life, making a lot of money, but I wouldn’t have the serenity and the peace of mind that I get here. My wife came up here one day to visit my stepson and the rest is history. I’m glad she made that decision. I do miss New York, but the serenity up here is beautiful, the people are beautiful. I’m happy. My wife is happy. I have a new grandchild. I’ve never been happier in my whole life in a place that I’ve only spent three years. I’m starting to become, so to speak, a part of the family. Part of the spread. I’m becoming a part of it because I understand more, and I like what I understand. And I know the future is only going to get better.

“Parents don’t spell love l-o-v-e, they spell it p-r-o-u-d. They just want to be proud of you. They don’t need your love because it’s already a given.”
Meet Steven Kuchyt: A Chef of Many Hats
Father, Husband, Head Chef

“*Our* time — it’s precious. I’ve been here (UMass) 13 years. There’s a lot that’s changed. I try to treat everybody the way I want to be treated. I’m Steve to everybody. From 2 to 10 at night I’m in charge of the Blue Wall and just recently got promoted permanently to this position. I work with the managers on duty and supervisors so we get everything top notch.”
Stephen Kuchyt: A Chef of Many Hats

Our time — it’s precious! I arrived at UMass 13½ years ago, because my former employer closed its doors. When the permanent position I was promised within 4 – 6 months did not come along, I started looking elsewhere, because I wanted a full-time, permanent job with a benefits package. What I discovered was that everybody was looking for somebody with a culinary degree or some other form of higher education. My boss at the time encouraged me to return to school, so I enrolled in Connecticut Culinary Institute. I went to school nights for two years and maintained a full-time position at UMass during the day. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I graduated in 2005 with honors and perfect attendance, something of which I am very proud.

I enjoy the creativity of cooking – you can take a bunch of ingredients and throw them together; you can try new things; or you can add a few different spices. You may or may not like what you’ve created!

Through the years, a lot has changed. The campus has a different culture now; the food service industry has changed drastically. Years ago when my brother and I catered, dinner consisted of meat with a sprig of parsley on top, potatoes, and vegetables. Now, because the current television shows have created this monstrosity of a plate, it has become the newest trend. The Director of Food Services is always looking for the newest ideas in cuisine. We’ve got cuisines that you wouldn’t find anywhere, even in some of the specialty restaurants. If someone has never had the opportunity to try that food, being on campus provides the opportunity to at least try it.

We’re trying to be more conscious of the environment and sustainability. For example, at The Deli in the Blue Wall, we used to bring in pre-packaged sandwich meats like those you’d find in your local grocery store. Now instead, we’re bringing in raw turkeys, raw loins of roast beef, raw pork, and raw chicken breasts without any antibodies, which are being cooked here, in house. We serve local ice cream from Hadley. You can’t get any closer. We’re on top of our game, or trying to be, with keeping our food as fresh and local as possible. For the
“Although I’m not a psychologist, I lend a listening ear and offer a suggestion.”

second year in a row that I’m aware of, Food Services at UMass has been named second in the country amongst all the colleges. This proves how special our Food Service employees actually are and continue to be.

I’m Steve to everyone. I try to treat everyone the way I want to be treated. From 2 pm to 10 pm, Sunday through Thursday, I’m in charge of the Blue Wall, a position to which I was recently promoted on a permanent basis. I work with the managers and supervisors, so we get everything top notch. Together, as a team, we keep a good camaraderie with all of our employees to the extent allowed without invading their privacy. When we hear of their aches and pains, pending marriages or broken relationships, or illness in their family, we show compassion and support to meet their personal and educational needs. If a student needs extra time to finish a paper, we encourage the student to miss an assigned shift, complete the paper, and strive for an “A”. As a result of this, through the years, many students have viewed me as a father figure, and have asked for my opinion when they have found themselves in a crisis or with an unresolved problem. Although I’m not a psychologist, I lend a listening ear and offer a suggestion.

My wife of thirty years and I have two children, a son and a daughter, with whom we are very close and always have been. Our son lives in Massachusetts with us; he is in the automotive industry. Prior to working at UMass, I owned a franchise through Western Mass Snacks Corporation, selling Wise and Borden products. On Saturdays, I’d take my son with me to pack out the grocery stores; we’d stop for lunch together, before returning home. When I changed careers and returned to cooking again, my son and I realized that we miss that special time together.
Our daughter recently married, and is a veterinarian in Ohio. Although we don’t see each other often, we keep in close contact. I had the privilege of walking her down the aisle to accept an amazing man, as her husband, and to dance to “Daddy’s Little Girl” with her. I was honored to arrange the flowers for her wedding in September 2015. We remain a close-knit family!

Although some people view UMass as a “party school”, the standards are fairly high and the majority of the students that have been our employees have gone on to get their degrees.

Life is a continuum of learning – there’s always something to learn from someone; people from different cultures and from different backgrounds all have something to offer. However, in today’s world, a high school diploma isn’t enough – post-secondary education with a minimum of a Certificate of Advanced Studies is required to obtain a decent job, such as one offered at UMass.
Ishora Adhihari: My Journey From Nepal to UMass
Wife, Mother, Maintainer...

“My boys have it better now, so I am happy. I’m happy for my boys because they can have a better life than me; they can go to college and get jobs that are better than mine, so I am happy now. They know English and they can read. There are no cars in Nepal and we lack things in my country, but here it is good.

One day, I plan to make a flower garden, make it beautiful, and just stay home relax, sometimes reading, sometimes playing outside.”

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From Nepal to UMass: Ishora’s Journey

I was born in Bhutan but moved to a refugee camp because my father and mother said people were crazy there, and so we have to go to Nepal from Bhutan. After 18 years in Nepal, someone came to visit the camp and told us, “if you want to exit the country and apply for everything, the applications and all that, we can bring you to America.” My son was only an 8 month year old boy and it was a long flight--hard for small baby--but here is better. In my country life is very hard. It is a very sad life in Nepal; we make fire with stones; there is no electricity, no water, no gas; you had to carry water to the house inside a big container. It is very hard to get status as refugees, but it’s okay now that we know everything. In America, it is a very good life.

But, it is not easy. When I arrived, for one year I could not work. I stayed home, and we had to walk everywhere, sometimes for one hour, because we had no car that time. It was very difficult and I’d cry, “Oh my god. Why did I come here? It is so hard. We don’t know English. We have to know English and we don’t know how to speak to other people.” We had to stay one year without work and after that my friend came to my house, and said, “you want to work?” Yes.

I began work in Agawam, and I remember thinking, “oh my god I’m cleaning a bathroom. If I stayed in Nepal I wouldn’t see anything like this.” But then I thought, “it is okay. A job is a job. We need money. Without work nothing is easy. Work is good for us. After one month, I got my first check and when I saw that money, I was so happy! I was so excited at that time.

After one year, I came to UMass and started at Berkshire Dining, serving food. I like it there, it’s very nice. I was surprised, for I had never seen such a thing--there were foods I’ve never seen, but I saw their names. As I was serving food, salmon, macaroni and cheese, I begin to learn everything, little by little. In one year, I knew everything. But then I applied here, housing.

Here there are benefits. There, there are no benefits. When I had an emergency, and needed to stay home, there was no money. Now, when there is an emergency and I stay home, there is. Housing gives me money and we have benefits and
sick time. We can pay house rent, we can buy food, and I like it here. It can
be lonely, working by myself, and I had lots of friends over at Berkshire--they
loved me. Here my students love me too. They say, “nice to see you, how are
you, long time no see, where were you or what happened?” They ask, “how was
Thanksgiving, everything good?” I tell them, “everything is good,” but we can’t
spend too much time talking, so sometimes I just say hi.

My job is hard cleaning toilets, but I stay here for my boys. I’m here for
them, not for me. I stay for my boys. I have two sons, one is eight and other
son is four. They are doing good, sometimes crazy, sometimes good, but that
is okay, boys are boys. I read to my boys, and tell Nepali stories, for I need my
culture and my boys need American culture, but I give my boys freedom, freely.
When they grow up, when they finish high school, maybe they’ll like to come
to UMass. Since I’m here, they get money off, and it’s easy to get loans. My
boys so great! They are very nice. Here is good for my boys, maybe for me and
my husband too. All my family’s here--my mom, father, brother, sister, uncle,
auntie, they all are here. We have a big family, and when I host a small party,
there are almost 35 people in my house. And lots of food. We love each other.

Even though it’s hard being a maintainer, vacuuming the hallway, and
cleaning the laundry room and bathroom, I am happy I came here. I could
never work in Nepal, for there are no working women and only men worked-
women stayed home. I can’t tell people in Nepal about the job--it is a big no
no--because in my country I would never do this since I am in the upper caste,
so I just tell them I am a maintainer. They ask me, “what is a maintainer?” but I
can’t explain. I tell my family here what I do. I don’t lie. When I’m working here
cleaning the toilet, they know. But I like this job. Inside my mind it is not good,
but outside the mind it is good, really.
My boys have it better now, so I am happy. I’m happy for my boys because they can have a better life than me; they can go to college and get jobs that are better than mine, so I am happy now. They know English and they can read. There are no cars in Nepal and we lack things in my country, but here it is good.

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