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# The UMass Boston Friday Report

Volume 2, Number 23  
May 14, 1993

News and information about and for the  
University Community from the Chancellor's Office

## **Biology Professor Awarded \$200,000 from USDA To Assist in Process of Breeding Disease-Resistant Plants**

Biology professor Richard Kesseli has received a grant for \$200,000 from the U. S. Department of Agriculture to conduct research on the genetic makeup of certain plants in the sunflower family. Kesseli is hoping to identify those genes that resist diseases and to create genetic maps that will make it easier for plant breeders to find them. Breeders could refer to such maps when trying to breed disease-resistant genes into other plants within the same family. Kesseli's research promises to provide for a better understanding of the processes involved in the evolution of these genes.

The sunflower group is the largest flowering plant family, and includes such edible vegetables as lettuce, endive, artichokes, safflower and chicory. According to Kesseli, breeding stronger plants would enable growers to move away from using pesticides, some of which, such as the banned substance DDT, have been found to have dangerous repercussions. "We put millions of tons of pesticides on our plants every year," he says. "It would be far better ecologically if we could cross-breed plants that were resistant to diseases. This would be a true example of genetic engineering."

Kesseli, a Worcester native, came to the University last year after receiving his Ph.D. in biology from the University of California (Davis). While in California he produced genetic maps for lettuce that proved valuable to companies that develop and sell plant seeds. "Crossbreeding plants through traditional methods is painstakingly slow," he notes. "But by using these genetic maps in conjunction with molecular technology, companies today can crossbreed plants very quickly. They're extremely interested in this type of research." Kesseli has also been awarded a \$3,000 Summer/Fall Faculty Research Grant to examine rare plant species in Massachusetts and to try to determine which are most seriously endangered and worthy of protection. He will focus this summer on basil mountain mint, which is common in the Blue Hills Reservation, and on a particular breed of violet that is restricted to the Bedford, Concord and Milton communities. The project is supported in part by the state's Natural Heritage Program.

## **Harvard's Gates Discusses Black-Jewish Friction And Race Relations in the U. S. at Harbor Campus Luncheon**

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., director of the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for the Study of African-American Culture at Harvard University, chairman of African American Studies and one of the nation's foremost black scholars, told representatives of the community and faculty and staff early this week that the tense relationship between blacks and Jews is hurting blacks in their quest for equality. "As a black intellectual," he stated, "one thing is clear to me: Anti-semitism is not going to help us in our community struggle against injustice, against poverty, against AIDS, against homophobia and against violence. So why make excuses for it?" Later, he said, "I would like to see racism and anti-semitism become unpopular and unfashionable among black and white Americans at all levels, especially those leadership elites that are sometimes more regressive than the population at large. That shouldn't be too much to ask, but it's also easier said than done. The fact is, I never know for sure how much good it does when you speak out. But I do know the dangers that

lie in wait when you do not."

The visit by Gates, one of seven women and men who will receive an honorary degree at the University's commencement exercises next month, drew more than 150 people to the University Club. He spoke for about 45 minutes and then answered questions from the audience on a range of topics. Gates said he supports affirmative action policies, but is opposed to measures that isolate blacks while purporting to improve their economic status. "We have to get black people out of the inner cities. You know, if you think those 'enterprise zones' are going to work, you're crazy. ... There is no way that they are going to work. They are going to lead to the creation of economic oases in Roxbury and Harlem and Crown Heights? Forget it. They can do some good if we can make the base supportable. If we can move some people to the job belts and then develop the inner cities, then I think the inner cities have a chance."

**Campus Notes** -- Beginning June 6 at 11:30 a.m. and continuing each Sunday, WUMB-FM (91.9) will air a 30-minute program featuring comments about books from **Robert Manning** and **Peter Wensberg**. Manning was an editor at *Atlantic Monthly* and *Time* magazines. Wensberg has worked for publishers Harcourt Brace Jovanovich and Little, Brown Company. According to the two men, emphasis will be placed on lively discussions rather than critical analysis. • The University's Division of Continuing Education (DCE) is sponsoring an essay contest for high school seniors that will award two winners a week-long journey to several New England ports aboard the sailboat *Sylvina W. Beal*, an 84-foot schooner. Contestants must complete an essay (250 words maximum) that begins, "As a member of an ocean-going research expedition, I would ..." Applications are available at the DCE offices on the second floor of Wheatley Hall. The expedition is part of a summer program in oceanography and marine issues developed by DCE, the Geography Department, and the Urban Harbors Institute. • **Sarah Thomas Sherman**, a student in the Graduate College of Education who is studying to be a counselor, has been selected for a career development grant by the American Association of University Women in Washington, D.C. Sherman will use the grant to research strategies for counseling married couples and families. Sixty women from across the country received grants out of some 400 applicants. • The Boston Network for Women in Politics and Government will discuss health care reform with **Loretta McLaughlin**, editor of *The Boston Globe's* editorial page, at 7:00 p.m., May 18, at the University Club. • **Governor William Weld's** International Trade Advisory Board, an association of business, education and government leaders, has published a blueprint for how the Commonwealth can succeed in the global economy. Chancellor **Sherry H. Penney** and **Albert Thomann**, president of the International Business Center of New England, co-chaired the task force on education. • McCormack Institute senior fellow **Joseph S. Slavet** has co-edited *The Fiscal Crisis in the States: Lessons from the Northeast*, a collection of papers originally presented at an April 1992 conference at the Federal Reserve Bank in Boston. The other co-editor is **Charles S. Colgan**, associate professor of public policy and management at the Edmund S. Muskie Institute of Public Policy and Management at the University of Southern Maine. Colgan and Slavet co-wrote an introduction to the book. • A delegation from the University of Istanbul visited the Harbor Campus from May 6 to 10 to participate in a series of seminars emphasizing an exchange of cultural ideas. The visit included a performance of Turkish Sufi music and a demonstration of Ebru, an old Turkish method of marbling paper. The visitors were led by Professor **Rahmi Oruç Güvenc**, director of the university's Ethnomusicology Research Center.