



EDUCATION
Fitchburg
State to
welcome 800
new students
Local News ■ A3

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BACK TO SCHOOL

FSU to welcome 800 new students next week

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » Fitchburg State University is prepared for the upcoming fall semester, welcoming new and returning undergraduate and graduate students. The academic year will feature the launch of new academic programs and a continued focus on supporting student success.

“It has been a busy summer on campus and we are thrilled to welcome students back for robust, in-person learning and extracurricular experiences this fall,” Fitchburg State President Richard Lapidus said. “The university strives to foster a student-ready environment where they are engaged and supported in their academic pursuits, and feel a sense of belonging in our shared community. We look forward to building this



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Fitchburg State University is preparing for the upcoming 2023–2024 school year.

environment from their first days on campus.”

Fitchburg State will welcome approximately 800 new first-year and undergraduate transfer students at the start of the semester, as well as hundreds of new graduate students. The incoming class includes students from 24 states, 20 countries and five continents.

Several new academic programs are launching

this fall, including an interdisciplinary minor in political journalism, serving students interested in journalism, political science, and the role of reporting in democratic societies.

This semester also marks the debut of a new course called “Podcasting the Past,” in which students will collaborate across the disciplines of history and communications to integrate

historical research and story development with audio production. Their work will be released through Perseverantia: the Fitchburg State Podcast Network, which can be found at fitchburgstate.edu/podcast.

The majority of new residential students will move in Monday, Sept. 4 (Labor Day), starting at 9 a.m. from the Wallace Civic Center. The northbound lanes of North Street will be closed to non-university traffic between Pearl and Ross Streets from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. on that date.

The majority of returning residential students will move in Wednesday, Sept. 6. There may be brief road closures around campus between 9 a.m.-5 p.m. that day.

Orientation activities for new students will take place from Sept. 4 to Sept. 6. Fall semester classes will begin Thursday, Sept. 7.

Highlights early in the academic year

The university will host Rock the Block, its 25th annual club and organization fair, at 3:30 p.m. on Sept. 12. One of the most popular student events of the year, Rock the Block connects students with the myriad extracurricular and job opportunities available on- and off-campus.

The sixth cohort of officers will graduate from Fitchburg State’s groundbreaking police program at 11 a.m. Sept. 15 at Weston Auditorium. The new officers, who will take their oaths at the ceremony, completed their bachelor’s degrees in criminal justice in May and are in the process of completing a 17-week academy of defensive skills, tactical training, and classroom work that started earlier in the summer. The academy includes credits to-

ward a master’s degrees for the students that intend to work toward one in the next academic year.

The university will observe Latinx Heritage Month from Sept. 15 through Oct. 15, and will also present programming in observation of LGBTQ History Month throughout the month of October. Additional details will be posted on the university website at fitchburgstate.edu.

The CenterStage arts and culture series welcomes Platinum-selling band Orleans to Weston Auditorium at 7 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 30. Tickets are available at fitchburgstate.edu/centerstage.

The university will celebrate the official Homecoming and Reunion Weekend event from Nov. 3 to Nov. 5. Details are posted at fitchburgstate.edu/homecoming.

To learn more about Fitchburg State and its programs, visit fitchburgstate.edu.

Fitchburg State University



Fitchburg State University, which has served the educational, cultural and workforce development needs of the region and beyond for nearly 130 years, starts its fall semester on Thursday, Sept. 7.

full potential,” University President Richard S. Lapidus said. “Our graduates are leaders in their disciplines and in their communities, in New England and beyond.”

Founded as a teacher-training institution in 1894, Fitchburg State today offers more than 30 undergraduate degrees and more than 20 master’s degree programs, serving 6,000 full- and part-time students with a blend of liberal arts and sciences and professional programs. Its offerings include storied programs in education and nursing, as well as groundbreaking degrees in game design (the first of its kind in a public institution in Massachusetts) and criminal justice, including a concentration that allows graduates to complete certification to work in municipal police departments across Massachusetts and neighboring states. Its global network of alumni now number 50,000.

The university is one of the region’s largest employers with an annual economic impact exceeding \$280 million. Its strategic plan codifies the university’s commitment to helping improve the quality of life in the city and region.

A major investment toward this goal was the university’s purchase and ongoing redevelopment of a long-dormant theater into a vibrant performing arts center, supporting a larger, collaborative vision for the city’s evolution as an arts and culture destination. Still in its early phases, the project has already catalyzed millions of dollars in adjacent public and private development.

“We’re now well into our second century, and we are committed to continuing innovation in our academic offerings as well as our institutional pledge to foster diversity and inclusiveness, and a campus climate where all students may reach their

“Working with the city and other community partners, we can feel the enthusiasm for this project and look forward to realizing the academic and cultural potential of this revitalized space,” President Lapidus said.

Learn more at fitchburgstate.edu.



WHERE WE LIVE

A guide to our local communities



AUGUST 2023

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FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

EDUCATION

FSU Adult Learning offers many courses this fall

Topics range from the Weimer Republic to the ukulele

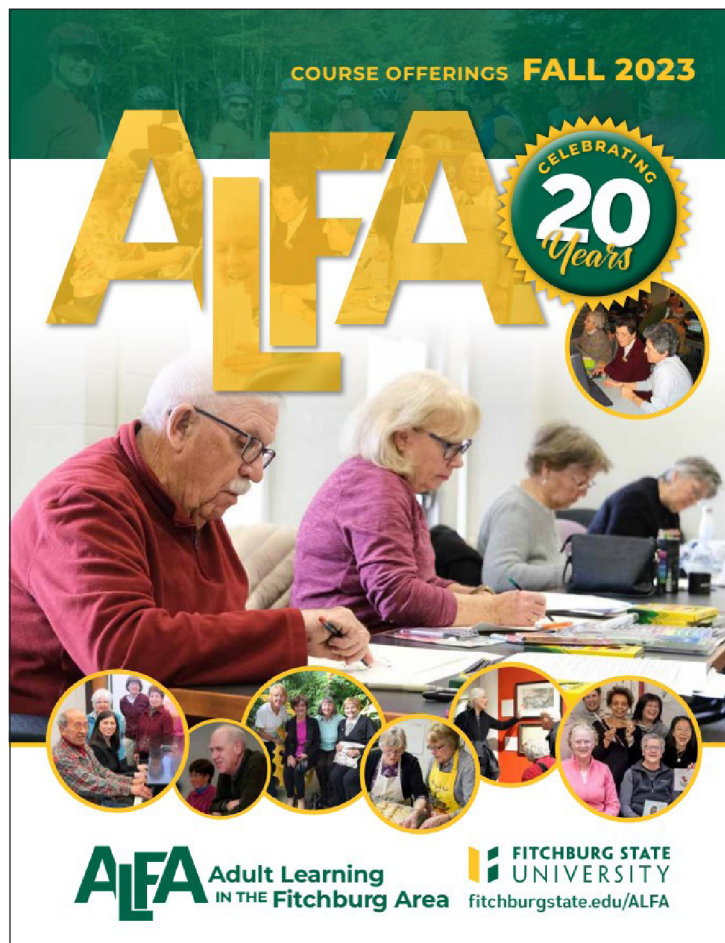
Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » Registration is now open for Fitchburg State University's Adult Learning in the Fitchburg Area (ALFA) fall courses, with offerings that will include a review of major US Supreme Court decisions from the last term as well as a course on the impact of technology on human thought and communication.

There's a book club on political and social issues and a course on how best to declutter and organize your digital photographs. Learn conversational Spanish for beginners or take your French skills to the next level. There are dozens of classes on the calendar, with the full program viewable online at fitchburgstate.edu/alfa.

ALFA is a lifelong learning institute that serves adult learners in Fitchburg and the surrounding communities. ALFA is sponsored by the School of Graduate, Online, and Continuing Education at Fitchburg State in collaboration with volunteer members of the community. It offers non-credit daytime classes, trips, special events, and a free speaker series.

ALFA students are encouraged to volunteer and participate in program leadership and development, as well as social and recreational activities. Most courses are \$45 (and free for students



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

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over age 90). A limited number of scholarships are available.

The fall courses include an introduction to community journalism, musical offerings including ukulele and harmonica

classes, fitness classes including yoga and barre stretch and tone, and a series of walkabouts on area hiking trails.

The season will also feature

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five-part online series on important historical topics including the Reconstruction following the Civil War, the Weimar Republic in German history, and the evolution of the public library in Massachusetts.

The participant-led ALFA salon also continues this fall, with Fitchburg State faculty and other guests leading discussions on topics ranging from local abolitionist history to the U.S. labor movement and the university's plans to redevelop the Main Street the-

ater into a performing arts center.

See the complete course listing and register online at marketplace.fitchburgstate.edu/alfa.

ALFA is always on the lookout for new instructors and new subject matter to share with its students. Anyone with a specialty that they think others would be interested in should contact the program directors at alfa@fitchburgstate.edu for details about becoming an ALFA instructor.

Direct any questions to the ALFA office at 978-665-3706, or email at alfa@fitchburgstate.edu. This release was provided by Fitchburg State University.

Updated: May 29, 2023

Level up: Fitchburg State's game design program puts it near forefront of \$57B industry



PHOTO | CHRISTINE PETERSON

The team of FSU students developing a networked VR movement shooter game called Worm Punk at the university's new downtown design lab.

By Timothy Doyle

On Thursday, May 11, on the second floor of a nearly 100-year-old, largely vacant theater building in downtown Fitchburg, a group of students wearing virtual reality headsets turned their heads and waved their arms around behind the glass walls of the school's new game design lab.

These Fitchburg State University students are testing a game called Worm Punk, a networked VR movement shooter, wherein the player flies around an arena trying to kill opponents before being killed themselves. Students and faculty say it is the first game of its kind.



The students developed the game from scratch as part of their capstone projects for their bachelor's degree in game design. Students in the game design program must complete either an internship or game studio, a 40-hour-a-week class where students develop a video game with their classmates.

“We’ve been able to do some really great stuff because it’s an environment where our careers aren’t reliant on us selling it. It’s reliant on us having a good and interesting product,” said Christian Hotte, a senior in the program who was the lead on the Worm Punk project. “That’s what I’m here for, to be able to do kind of radically experimental things.”

FSU’s program was the first game design major offered by a public university in New England and is still one of the few. It was first offered in 2014 after former executive vice president and provost Robin Bowen approached the Communications Media Department head Jeffrey Warmouth and Professor Samuel Tobin in 2012 with the idea. They got to work figuring out what would be needed for such a program, securing the facilities and personnel.



PHOTO | CHRISTINE PETERSON

Christian Hotte

The program is still going strong with graduates going on to work with large companies like North Carolina-based Epic Games, which is behind the video game phenomenon Fortnite, starting their own game studios, or taking the skills they learn to other industries like online retail, robotics, and defense. The university invested in a new game design studio in the Fitchburg theater building, which it is redeveloping, to house its entrepreneurial-style video game design capstone class.

Fitchburg State’s program is not the only game design program in Central Massachusetts. Clark University in Worcester and Worcester Polytechnic Institute both took on parts of Becker College’s celebrated program after the Worcester school dissolved in 2021.

Video games are big business. Overall total consumer spending on video games in the U.S. totaled \$56.6 billion in 2022, according to a Jan. 17 press release from the Entertainment Software Association. However, 2022 video game sales saw a 5% drop from 2021 COVID-influenced highs. In comparison, Gower Street Analytics of London said global box office sales for the movie industry was \$25.9 billion, and it projects sales of \$32 billion in 2023.

Not playing games

None of the people WBJ spoke with for this story identify as a hard-core gamer. Students who enter the Fitchburg program expecting to just play video games may transfer out of the program, as it requires an academic approach and a maker's mentality, said Tobin.

The program is nested in the Communications Media Department among majors like graphic design, film and video production, and public relations, social media, and advertising production. It is separate from the computer science department, though there is some crossover of skills.

“Game technology is another kind of storytelling, an artistic medium,” said FSU Associate Professor Jonathan Amakawa, who is the coordinator of the video game design major.

Amakawa, who has a fine arts background, sees uses for gaming technology that go beyond passing the time with Call of Duty or playing Candy Crush on the subway.

Amakawa works with augmented reality to enhance visitors' experiences at historical sites. He has worked with the U.S. National Park Service on the Abraham Lincoln Home in Illinois. He created an AR app allowing visitors to Springfield, Missouri, to see what happened during the 1908 race riot, which led to the creation of the NAACP. He created an AR app to show what the Japanese-American internment camp looked like at Heart Mountain, Wyoming.



Jonathan Amakawa, FSU
associate professor in
game design

In addition to bringing history to life, Amakawa said gaming technology, particularly AR and VR, are used to create training experiences for nursing students, improve online shopping experiences for retailers, and create experiences for psychological studies.

Students from the FSU program have used their knowledge to improve how robots move and have brought their skills into the defense industry.

The final level

At the capstone project's post-mortem event, a presentation of the students' final projects from the game studio class, the focus was decidedly on games. The presentation took place in a lecture hall on the main campus on May 16, before an enthusiastic crowd of students, faculty, and parents.

At the start of the semester, students pitched ideas for projects. Three games won out: Worm Punk; The Plaything, a puzzle horror game where a paper doll explores a creepy doll house; and Lobber, a manic 3D hack-and-slash game where the protagonist is pitted against a horde of skeletons and sorcerers.

The students in the studio divide into teams to work on the games. Throughout the semester, they combine their skills and learn project management as they develop a fully working game.

All of the games are available for download at itch.io, and the teams hope to get their games onto Steam, a popular video gaming platform. One of the appealing things about the program for Hotte is the teams maintain intellectual property rights to their projects.

“The big thing about going here that I really appreciate and I think every program should do is we own our games. We keep our IP,” said Hotte. “The professors are not really dictating the actual content of the products that we’re making.”

During each of the presentations, the students discussed what they had learned from the experience, which included project management, how to keep the scale of a project realistic, managing time and resources, and how to self-regulate so as not to burn out.

Because students are often so passionate about what they do, they can be subject to burnout, Hotte said, and this passion is sometimes weaponized by companies seeking to capitalize on it.

The students who presented skewed noticeably male, which Hotte said he noticed in the program. There are no women professors in game design, something he hopes the school will remedy as it hires a new professor.

The gaming industry does have a gender imbalance according to data from job site Zippia, with 86.7% of game designers being male. The data does not account for nonbinary designers.

Video game designer: job statistics nationally

Average annual salary	\$95,185
Average age	43.8

Demographics

Male	87%
Female	13%
White.....	68%
Asian	12%
Hispanic or Latino.....	9%
Black.....	6%
Unknown.....	5%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1%

Source: Zippia

CHART | MITCHELL HAYES

Video game designer: job statistics nationally

Moving on

Students who graduate from the program and enter the gaming industry can expect to find themselves in a highly-competitive environment, possibly subject to long hours and low entry-level pay, said Hotte.

Layoffs can be part of the industry as large projects end and the personnel who worked on a game may be cut loose to look for another project at another company. Even successful game designers find themselves moving from company to company, said Amakawa.

The cyclical nature of hiring has been tempered by the rise of live-service games, like Fortnite, said Denzel Witherspoon, who graduated from Fitchburg State in 2019 and now works for Epic Games. Live-service games constantly add new levels or features to an existing game rather than releasing entirely new retail products.

Witherspoon has helped connect FSU graduates with Epic since joining the company. Students specifically from the Fitchburg State gaming program have an advantage as they get access to a lot of aspects of game design and not funneled into a specialty, he said.

“Students need to take advantage of the software that they have access to while in school,” said Witherspoon. And after school, he advises students to not be discouraged if they don’t land a job immediately.

“Keep learning, keep busy,” he said.

In what is ostensibly his spare time, Witherspoon runs a game studio called Dannel Cake, which he started in 2017. He finished his first game, *Obsolete Souls*, in 2018.



PHOTO | COURTESY OF DENZEL WITHERSPOON

FSU grad Denzel Witherspoon works for Epic Games and founded a game design studio Dannel Cake.

Making games is very much a passion for the students. Hotte has a job lined up in technology manufacturing after graduation, but he intends to continue building games.

FLASH POLL

College major is only part of the factor in the hiring process

Fitchburg State University offers a bachelor's degree in game design, which meshes numerous areas of study including animation, computer programming, and creative writing into one major. When polled online, nearly 70% of WBJ readers say a job candidate's specific major in college is only part of the equation in the hiring process.

How much does a job candidate's college major impact your hiring decisions?

An applicant's college major is not a factor in our hiring process.

12%

We only hire candidates with specific majors.

19%

We look at relevant skills more than the specific major.

34%

We look at work experience more than educational background.

35%

COMMENTS:

"We look at the major and the skills and experience. How can this be just an either/or situation?"

Fitchburg State signs transfer agreement with German sister-city university



PHOTO | COURTESY OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

From left: Professor Paul Weizer, chairman of the Economics, History and Political Science Department; President Richard S. Lapidus; and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Patricia Marshall

By Timothy Doyle

Students at Fitchburg State University will soon be able to complete a bachelor of arts in international business at Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kleve, Germany.

Under the new agreement, students at Rhein-Waal University will also be able to complete a bachelor of science in economics with a concentration in international business and economics at Fitchburg State, according to a Monday press release from FSU.

“Fitchburg State has enjoyed a long and mutually beneficial relationship with Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences, in which our students and faculty have taken part in meaningful interactions, both in-person and in virtual space,” Fitchburg State President Richard Lapidus said in the press release. “This new agreement outlines clear pathways for students from both countries to pursue powerful academic credentials, and creates tremendous opportunities for our future graduates.

The degree program is not the first collaboration between the universities. This past spring students traveled to Kleve for The Heart of Europe, a course on major themes in contemporary European history, politics and economics. The class will next be offered in Spring 2025.

“The cities of Fitchburg and Kleve have been sister cities for more than 30 years and thus maintain friendly relations between the Lower Rhine and Massachusetts,” said Rhein-Waal University President Oliver Locker-Grütjen in the press release. “I am pleased that we are now taking a step further in the cooperation between the two educational institutions to deepen ties and exchanges.”



HIGHER LEARNING

FSU, German counterpart expand partnership

Pact grows educational cooperation

By **Kyle Lockwood**

Correspondent

FITCHBURG » Three decades of partnership has taken a new step for the city and Kleve, Germany.

Fitchburg State University has a longstanding partnership with Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences; both institutions have signed on a new agreement in an effort to expand their relationship.

The agreement spells out clear transfer opportunities between the institutions, enabling students from both countries to complete baccalaureate degrees. Under terms of the pact, German students may complete Fitchburg State's bachelor of science in economics with a concentration in international business and economics, while American students may complete a bachelor of arts in international business administration through Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences (HSRW).

"Fitchburg State has enjoyed a long and mutually beneficial re-

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PHOTO COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Officials from Fitchburg State University and Rhein-Waal University of Applied Sciences in Kleve, Germany, recently held a virtual signing ceremony to formalize a new transfer agreement between the institutions. At FSU, signers included Professor Paul Weizer, chairman of the Economics, History and Political Science Department; President Richard S. Lapidus; and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Patricia Marshall.

FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Artist's drawings reflect war in Ukraine

Hammond Hall Art Gallery exhibit opens Sept. 5

Submitted Article

FITCHBURG » Powerful drawings inspired by the war in Ukraine are on display this fall at Fitchburg State University's Hammond Hall Art Gallery in artist Hanna Melnyczuk's exhibit "Don't Close Your Eyes."

Melnyczuk began creating these drawings upon Russia's invasion of Ukraine in an attempt to show her personal attempts to process what is happening to the country her parents left in 1944. Influenced by her work on children's books, the images in this collection show her struggle to understand the unfathomable acts of war that fill her mind.

"Don't Close Your Eyes: Reactions to the War in Ukraine" will be on display in the Hammond Hall Art Gallery from Tuesday, Sept. 5 through Sunday, Oct. 15. There will be a reception with the artist at 3:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 21 at the gallery, located in Hammond Hall at 160 Pearl St. Admission is free and open to the public.

Learn more about Fitchburg State's cultural offerings at fitchburgstate.edu/centerstage.

About The Exhibit

When the Ukrainian people plead, "Close the sky!" her work obliges by sewing it shut with needle and thread, as imagination succeeds where reality fails. Collapsing buildings and shattered bricks reveal the bodies beneath

EXHIBIT » PAGE 8



COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

"She Saw Only Red" by artist Hanna Melnyczuk.

Exhibit

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the rubble. Here, children hope and families grieve in a landscape which at times remains preternaturally serene. These drawings bring to the fore the death and horror of war through the filter of time and distance, expressing the emotions of someone viewing events from afar, depicting what can only be seen in the mind's eye.

About the Artist

Hanna Melnyczuk received an MFA from Mass College of Art. Her work has appeared at Art Space in Maynard, UMass Lowell Mahoney Gallery, The Gallery at the Piano Factory, the Danforth Museum, Tufts Gallery, Brush Gallery, Fountain Street Gallery, New Art Center, and more. She has curated two art exhibits: Agni Magazine of Emerging Artists (published by Agni Press as Agni 37: Standing on the Verge: Emerging Poets & Artists alongside poetry curated by Joseph Lease and Thomas Sayers Ellis); the other, a traveling exhibit of Ukrainian artists' works, "Don't Close Your Eyes," responding to the current war. Hanna teaches drawing and 2D design at UMass Lowell.

COURTESY FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

"Close the Sky" by artist Hanna Melnyczuk.

