

## Supporting Public Education as the Great Equalizer



Paige Cram '06 was raised in an environment that put high value on public education. Both of her parents were public school teachers, and she was fortunate to attend high quality public schools in her New Jersey town. UMass Amherst interested her because it was in a different state and when she learned about Commonwealth Honors College, she decided that is where she wanted to be. "I had applied to many highly competitive schools, and when I learned about the Honors College and that it was a small community on a larger campus, that was the deciding factor," she recalls. The enrichment Cram received as an honors student at UMass Amherst was the catalyst for her financial support of CHC.

Some of Cram's best experiences as a student were associated with Commonwealth Honors College. She lived her first year in Orchard Hill on a floor with other Honors students, and participated in the International Scholars Program (ISP), studying abroad in Italy her junior year. Through both of these experiences she formed life-long friendships. Her honors thesis was another important point of connection for Cram. She took a capstone course in creative writing, which she describes as a "great bonding experience with other students. We accomplished the task of completing a senior thesis without feeling isolated."

Cram's giving began a few years after graduation, when she received an email solicitation. "I always knew I was going to give to UMass Amherst," she says. Cram is grateful for public higher education, which she describes as the "great equalizer" of our society, especially after the great recession. It is important to her to support access to the high quality education that UMass Amherst provides, saying "If state schools like UMass Amherst were not available, college would be out of reach for so many people." She follows the latest news from the UMass Magazine, email newsletters and other publications and was pleased when she learned that the campus was building the Commonwealth Honors College Residential Community. "The project was needed and it was encouraging to see that the University leadership was listening to alumni supporters like me."

Young alumni have a unique set of financial challenges, which sometimes can create barriers to giving. Cram advises those young alumni who want to give back to their alma mater to "start whenever and wherever you can. Giving is a habit, not unlike training for a marathon. It might be your second or third year out, and it might be 10 to 15 dollars, and that's okay. I think we've seen in crowdfunding and political campaigns that giving in all amounts makes a difference. When you can give more, you will."