NORTH ADAMS, MASS. — Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) will celebrate its 116th Commencement exercises on Saturday, May 16, beginning at 11 a.m., in the Amsler Campus Center Gymnasium.

This year’s keynote speaker will be Derrick Z. Jackson, an award-winning Boston Globe columnist since 1988 and a 2001 Pulitzer Prize finalist. He will receive an honorary Doctor of Journalism.

Also receiving honorary degrees this year will be Jack and Susy Wadsworth, dedicated supporters of educational and cultural activities in the Berkshires, and throughout the world. Jack Wadsworth will receive an honorary Doctor of Business and Susy Wadsworth will receive an honorary Doctor of Public Service. In addition, Jani Maselli Wood ’85, assistant public defender for the Harris County Public Defender’s Office, will receive an honorary Doctor of Laws.

In recognition of their awards, the honorary degree recipients will have books placed in MCLA’s Freel Library in their names.

Interim President Cynthia Brown said she is pleased to recognize the accomplishments of these outstanding individuals, all of whom enthusiastically look forward to being part of this year’s celebration.

“We look forward to hearing from Derrick Jackson, who has led a successful career as a syndicated columnist, award-winning journalist and talented photographer. We are honored to have him with us, along with Jack and Susy Wadsworth, and Jani Maselli Wood,” Brown said. “The achievements and many contributions of these remarkable individuals reflect the accomplishments, creativity, and commitment to community engagement and service that are reflective of the members of the Class of 2015.”

MCLA Board of Trustees Chair Tyler Fairbank also commended those who will be honored.

“Derrick Jackson’s dedication to excellence in journalism and his distinguished community service make him a wonderful choice as this year’s keynote speaker,” Fairbank said. “As a philanthropist dedicated to the success of this region, Jack Wadsworth has worked to build up the economy of the Berkshires through multiple innovative practices as he inspires others to invest their time and talents here. Through her work as CEO of W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, Susy Wadsworth supports education for public schools and in museums. Her work with numerous educational organizations has led many to finish high school and attend college. In addition, we are proud to call Jani Maselli Wood an alumna of the College, as she works tirelessly to ensure the rights of people within the court system.”

Jackson is a nine-time winner and 25-time finalist of awards from the National Association of Black Journalists and a two-time winner and four-time finalist for commentary awards from the National Education Writers Association. He is a 2012 commentary finalist for the National Society of Newspaper Columnists and a 2000 commentary finalist from the Scripps-Howard
National Journalism Awards. In all, Jackson has been a finalist or winner in journalism contests 23 of his 26 full years at the Globe.

Jackson also is a photographer whose presidential campaign images of Barack Obama were exhibited in 2010 by Boston's Museum of African American History. His images of Obama, wildlife and landscapes were exhibited in 2013 at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. He also was a 2013 and 2012 finalist in Outdoor Photographer magazine’s The American Landscape Contest.

Prior to the Globe, Jackson won several awards at Newsday, including a share of the 1985 Columbia University Meyer Berger Award for coverage of New York City and the 1979 award for feature writing from the Professional Basketball Writers Association.

Jackson, a native of Milwaukee, Wis., is a 1976 graduate of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. He was a Nieman Fellow in journalism at Harvard University in 1984. He holds honorary degrees from the Episcopal Divinity School and Salem State College, and was honored with Curry College’s Human Rights Award. He also was honored with a 2013 UW-Milwaukee Distinguished Alumni Community Service award for his volunteer work with the Boy Scouts of America and with Big Brothers.

Jack Wadsworth is an advisory director of Morgan Stanley, where he spent most of his career. He began his career at First Boston, and rose through the ranks. By 1978 he was an executive vice president, a member of the board of directors, and co-head of First Boston’s investment banking group. Soon after, he joined Morgan Stanley as the first partner to join the firm from a competitor.

In 1986, he was asked to activate Morgan Stanley’s seat on the Tokyo Stock Exchange and to build Morgan Stanley’s business in Japan from the ground up. During his five years in Tokyo, he grew the firm in Japan to more than 500 people with profits. In 1991, he moved to Hong Kong as chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, and proceeded to expand Morgan Stanley’s business across the region.

When he retired in 2001, the firm had more than 2,000 people, 11 offices, joint ventures in China and India, and over $1 billion in revenue in Asia. He since has developed an active venture capital business, Ceyuan Ventures, making early stage technology investments in China. He is honorary chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia and sits on numerous boards.

Jack Wadsworth is a trustee emeritus of Williams College, having served on their board for 15 years. He also is an emeritus trustee of the Guggenheim Museum and the Asia Society. He serves on the boards of the California College of Art and the Asian Art Archive in Hong Kong, and is founding Director of Lever in North Adams.

Jack Wadsworth is a graduate of Williams College and the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business. The W.L.S. Spencer Studio Art Building on the Williams College campus is named for Susy and Jack’s extended family.

For the past 19 years, Susy Wadsworth has served as chief executive officer of W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, which focuses on education programs both inside public schools and in museums that encourage cross-cultural understanding. The Foundation supports organizations such as
Teach for America, Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Teach for China, College Spring, Generation Citizens and Reading Partners, which help children finish school and attend college.

She serves on the board of MASS MoCA in North Adams and the Renaissance Society International Board in Chicago, Ill. She recently retired from the boards of Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in New York, the Breakthrough Collaborative in San Francisco, Calif., and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Calif.

While living in Hong Kong, she worked at the International Institute of Education, Summerbridge, and the Asia Cultural Council in Hong Kong. Previously, she taught high school history in Brooklyn, N.Y., volunteered in the New York City Mayor's Office, and worked at the League of Women Voters.

Susy Wadsworth attended public schools and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Master’s of Arts degree from New York University in New York City.

Wood is a graduate of the former North Adams State College, now MCLA, and is an assistant public defender for the Harris County Public Defender’s Office (PDO). Prior to joining the PDO, Wood was an attorney in private practice for 13 years, specializing in state and federal appeals and post-conviction matters.

In 2007, Wood was contacted by Sister Helen Prejean, author of Dead Man Walking, asking her to represent an inmate on Texas Death Row, pro bono. Embarking on an almost six-year journey, Wood, along with the civil law firm of Morgan Lewis and Bockius, L.L.P., convinced the courts to grant the defendant a new trial. For that work, Wood was awarded the 2013 Harris County Criminal Lawyer of the Year award and the Texas Criminal Defense Pro Bono Lawyer of the Year award.

In 2014, Wood’s work on challenging court costs garnered her another award from Texas Lawyer, which honored 20 women lawyers in the state for their achievements. As a result of her challenges, one statute was found to be unconstitutional. She continues to fight onerous and burdensome court costs.

Wood is a native of North Adams. After graduating from the College in 1985, she received her master’s degree in English from SUNY-Albany. In 1994 she graduated from the University of Houston Law Center in Houston, Texas, where she is an adjunct professor.

For more information, go to www.mcla.edu/commencement