

Spring 2021

UMBC

MAGAZINE

SCIENCE SUPERSTAR

By leading the team behind the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, Kizzmekia Corbett '08 has already changed the world. By inspiring a diverse generation of emerging researchers, she is also helping change the future. — page 22



A full-page photograph serves as the background. On the left, a young woman with blonde hair in a bun and bangs stands with her hands raised, palms facing forward. She is wearing a black and white patterned blazer over a black crop top and matching patterned pants. On the right, a young man with glasses and a mustache is crouching, looking at the camera. He is wearing a black t-shirt and light blue jeans. Behind them is a large glass door or window. To the right of the man is a large, white, bowl-shaped planter filled with various green plants, including a peace lily. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting daytime.

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Musical Roots

Andy Stack '10 and fellow Retriever Jenn Wasner are better known as Wye Oak, an indie rock/dream pop duo founded at UMBC whose name pays homage to Maryland's state tree.

By Imani Spence '16

Photo courtesy of Lissa Gotwals.

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From her earliest days, the teachers and supporters in Kizzmekia Corbett's '08 life knew she was special. Now she's sharing her talents with the world.

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Mutual Flourishing

How are different disciplines training up social justice-minded students to do no harm to the communities they work in? With one thriving relationship at a time.

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Arrested for his role in a failed terrorist plot as a teenager, Mohammed Khalid '21 now surrounds himself with mentors as he works to expose the lure of extremism.

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Break out the popcorn and hear about how UMBC alumni in Hollywood have kept our entertainment-hungry selves satisfied during the pandemic.

By Jenny O'Grady



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ON THE COVER

UMBC Magazine photographer **Marlayna Demond '11** was thrilled to catch science superstar **Kizzmekia Corbett '08** in UMBC's Interdisciplinary Life Sciences Building this spring.

Visit *UMBC Magazine* online year-round at magazine.umbc.edu for plenty of web extras! Thoughts, complaints, or suggestions about *UMBC Magazine*? Get in touch at magazine@umbc.edu.

TO YOU



Dear Retrievers,

It's hard to believe where we were just a year ago. There's no other way to say it—we have weathered a once-in-a-lifetime challenge, and we have lost dear friends and family, but through it, we also managed to stick together and cheer each other up in a way I've never experienced quite so acutely before.

Case in point—**Connie Krach Pierson '90, M.A. '92**, and her #blackandgoldfriday marathon (page 5). In the before times, many of us would parade our UMBC colors around campus on

Fridays to celebrate Retriever spirit. As soon as the pandemic began, Connie started doing it virtually, counting the weeks and wearing her best Retriever gear each time. When we hit week 52, we all knew she'd be there. And she's kept it going ever since—a sweet sort of appreciation for all that we are and what we miss about each other.

Little things like this count for so much these days—and so does the appreciation itself. So, if you don't mind, I'm going to jump in with a few shout-outs to folks who made my pandemic, so to speak. Like our editorial intern, **Morgan Casey '22**, who balanced a full academic plate, her news editor position with the *Retriever* newspaper, and training and competing for track and field—all while eagerly taking on any task we asked of her. And our entire magazine team—99 percent of whom do many other jobs besides—who absolutely knocked it out of the park this year, winning the gold award from the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education for both our fall 2019 and spring 2020 issues. It is so important to celebrate these moments.

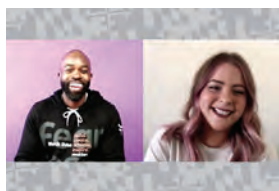
Some things may seem small, but they really do mean the world. Imagine what the last year would have been like without the entertainment provided by many of our alums in Hollywood (page 42)? Imagine how much meaningful research wouldn't have happened if some of our professors and students hadn't taken the small, human steps of reaching out to their neighbors first (page 30)? Imagine if we couldn't forgive each other and help others learn from our mistakes, as student **Mohammed Khalid '21** has (page 36)? And maybe I'm stretching this metaphor a bit too far, but think of what alumna **Kizzmekia Corbett '08** has done for this country—and the world—starting at the cellular level (page 22).

All of it matters, no matter how many headlines it grabs, or doesn't grab. This is a time to appreciate each other and to find hope in the special ways we all contribute and care. Because it all adds up.

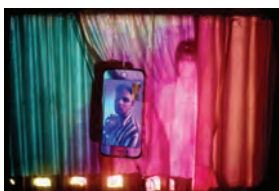
—Jenny O'Grady
Editor, UMBC Magazine

WEB FEATURES

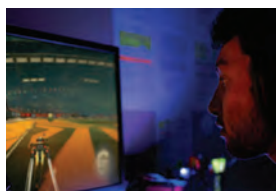
See web-only videos, interviews, and more all year long at magazine.umbc.edu.



Alums work to build software that empowers the community



An artist creates pandemic portraits of friends and strangers



Driving UMBC's eSports reputation one win at a time

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For more information on the Alumni Association, visit alumni.umbc.edu. To learn about giving, visit giving.umbc.edu.

UP ON THE ROOF



Although we may still be limited in terms of opportunities to physically visit campus, there are many ways UMBC alumni can engage with the community. In a recent chat with UMBC President Freeman Hrabowski, Alumni Association President Brian Frazee '11, political science, M.P.P. '12, public policy, the vice president of government affairs for the Maryland Hospital Association, shares why it's so important to stay connected. And no, you don't have to live next door to do it.

Frazee: You know, from the very beginning, I was so fortunate to have a great experience at UMBC. When people talk about UMBC, they say that you get individualized attention, that people care about you, it's a community. I felt that way right away. I was a Sondheim Public Affairs Scholar, and I did the B.A./M.P.P. program and I went straight through, stayed for five years to finish my master's in public policy. And then I actually bought a house right next to UMBC. I did, I lived right next to the campus. I thought, now there's really no excuse for me not to give back to this university. So I participated in every opportunity I could—alumni events, Homecoming, mentoring students, and staying connected with my professors.

A few years went by doing that, and then **Dr. Art Johnson**, the former provost and director of the Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program, said, "You should think about joining the Alumni Association board of directors." Long story short, I applied, he nominated me, and I got on the board and the rest is history, and now I feel that my role is really twofold. Number one is to keep my fellow alumni engaged with UMBC. And two, is encouraging my fellow alumni to give back to the university, whether that's financially and/or through their time of volunteering.

Hrabowski: That's wonderful. UMBC is all about stories, and I love hearing about those experiences and the memories of connecting to UMBC and the Sondheim program. And Brian, you reflect the significance of that program as we think about producing leaders in our state...and thinking about the whole picture, who are we as a campus, as a university, and how do alumni connect to the rest of campus and to the larger society. Your story is a great example of alumni engagement and the reasons for becoming engaged, and giving back in so many ways, is so important. It's inspiring to me.

Frazee: The past year has been incredibly challenging for obvious reasons, but it has also presented us incredible opportunities to learn from what we have been through. I think one of the greatest ways we can do that is through

the virtual opportunities that we now have learned work very well. Retrievers Connect is one example of that. It is a new platform where folks can make those virtual connections from alumni to alumni, to current students, to faculty, or to any member of the UMBC community. It's been very active...and it's been interesting to connect with old friends and old professors in this new way.

Our alumni are busy like everyone else, and they are all over the world, which is a great thing. So the ability for us to really expand our network of alumni beyond just the folks that happen to live in this area has been huge. We now have alumni board members who live in Atlanta. We have another one coming from Chicago; before, that just wouldn't have been possible. It's wonderful. Nothing replaces the in-person networking opportunities, but at same time, how can we leverage the virtual environment to connect more people? And how do we find that right balance when things go back to "normal?"

There are other ways, too. There are so many alumni chapters that are very active, depending on your interest area. You can reach directly out to a board member as a first step to engagement. You can connect with any member of the alumni engagement staff. Many alumni may not know that there is an entire staff that is dedicated to alumni relations and they are incredible. And when we are able, be sure to come to events, or connect with your favorite professor or your old department. There are a multitude of ways to stay involved. You just have to figure out what's right for you.

Hrabowski: And we'll look forward to seeing you when you do. You know, we always remember how people feel and how universities make us feel. We really do. And either the university tells students in so many ways that they're special and they will be fine and to be their best selves or they don't. We are determined to do that. Thank you, Brian, for all you do. We're so proud of you.

Learn more about Retriever Connect and other ways of engaging with Retriever alums at alumni.umbc.edu.

DAWG'S EYE VIEW

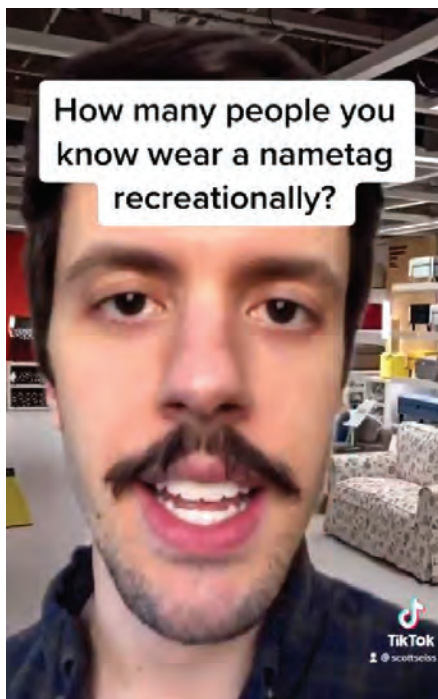


GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE

Steve Chu '12 and **Ephrem Abebe '13**, owners of everyone's favorite bao bun paradise Ekiben, went the literal extra mile to grant a dying woman's wish for her favorite meal. The restaurateurs drove to Vermont to make a socially distant meal for a fan too sick to travel.



@ekibenbaltimore (photo by @mattrothphoto)



BAD CUSTOMER SERVICE

Scott Seiss '16 didn't realize his day job as a customer service rep for IKEA would catapult him to his actual career goal—comedian. Seiss, who no longer works for the furniture monopoly, is blowing up on TikTok for his hilariously deadpanned takes of how he *wished* he could have replied to disgruntled customers. Patton Oswalt's paying attention, and so are we.



@pattonoswalt



A RARE, IF CREEPY, HONOR

What is the coolest thing named after you? Our very own **Mercedes Burns** now has a Trapdoor spider, native to southern Arizona and New Mexico, named in her honor—*ummidia mercedesburnsae*. In a new publication, the authors write, "The specific epithet is a patronym in honor of Dr. Mercedes Burns, the first female African American arachnologist (to our knowledge)."



@umbcbio



NOT UP FOR DEBATE

To say we're a little proud of our Mock Trial team is quite the understatement. After an undefeated regional season, UMBC Mock Trial defeated Yale to win our first national championship. The only thing that could make the win sweeter is a giant trophy. Oh wait, we got that, too. Read more on page 6.



@bengarmoe



A FAMILY AFFAIR

Retrievers that study together, stay together, says our impromptu poll on National Siblings Day.



Photo #1 (l-r): Daniel '25; Lauren '25; Tom '18 and M.P.P. '19. Photo #2 (l-r): Kara '18; Zach '12 and M.S. '15. Photo #3 (l-r): Poushali '23; Poulomi '16 and M.P.P. '21. Photo #4 (l-r): Jacob '19 and Alyssa '25



CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

UMBC offered graduating Retrievers the opportunity to come on campus for a free photo op. **Jessica Ma, mechanical engineering**, and some other lucky soon-to-be-alums got to celebrate their accomplishments with their biggest fan—Officer Chip!



BACK-TO-BACK CHAMPS

The UMBC Softball team successfully defended its 2019 America East title with a 1-0 win over Stony Brook in the 2021 America East Championship, making their way to the NCAA Tournament for the 4th time in program history.



[BLACK &] GOLD WINNER

For more than 52 weeks, **Connie Pierson '90, M.A. '92**, has been holding down the fort, sporting her #blackandgoldfriday gear, never missing a week. Usually a casual on-campus tradition, Pierson has gone above and beyond at home to raise all our spirits virtually.



WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?



Share your Retriever perspective on social media using the hashtag #dawgseyeview, and your image could be included in a future issue of *UMBC Magazine*!

THE NEWS

We Are the Champions



Looking out her window at the blue sky on the morning of Sunday, April 18, UMBC Mock Trial President **Sydney Gaskins '21, political science**, remembers thinking, “What a beautiful day to win a national championship.” But she didn’t quite realize exactly what becoming a champion would feel like. Now, she knows.

Later that evening, UMBC defeated Yale University to win the American Mock Trial Association (AMTA) National Championship for the first time in program history.

The final round was a nail-biter for Retriever fans tuning in online. Five of the 11 judges voted for UMBC, five went for Yale, and the final judge stated it was a tie. To determine the winner, the judges tallied the scores from all their final round ballots, which put UMBC ahead of Yale, 1,360 to 1,355.

The five-point margin was the second-closest winning margin in AMTA National Championship history.

Gaskins has been widely recognized as one of the top mock trial competitors in the country. With her (over Zoom) was UMBC’s well-rounded, practiced team, whose combined efforts made the victory possible. Team members included **Thomas Azari '22, political science; Natalie Murray '22, biological sciences; Maria Kutishcheva '24, political science and Russian; Zinedine Partipilo Cornielles '23, political science and financial economics; and Thomas Kiley '21, political science.**

They were assisted by three team members who provided technical support: **Sunnah Brooks '23, political science; Brinda De Tchappi '23, political science; and Poushali Banerjee '23, health administration and policy.**

“I’m always confident in my team’s ability,” says Azari. “But I was on the edge of my seat.”

The last time UMBC faced Yale was in the fourth round of the National Championship in 2019. UMBC narrowly lost, with the teams splitting the round’s ballots 2-2. Since Yale had more ballots going into the round, they moved on to the National Championship final that year.

UMBC’s win comes after an undefeated regional season and 8.5 wins at the Opening Round Championship Series (ORCS). “It was one-hundred percent the right time and our time,” says Gaskins, about their win.

Mock Trial coach **Ben Garmoe '13, political science**, says the team’s national championship title is a dream come true, reflecting hundreds of hours of hard work. UMBC Mock Trial has made it to the national championship competition in three out of the past four seasons. Even knowing they would be competing with 650 teams this year, and that they’d have to rework their approach for a Zoom environment, they had their eye set on the final from the very beginning.

“The team has given up so much to get to this level,” says Garmoe. “It is a testament to their individual character that they’ve decided that they want to be great at this activity and that they’re willing to commit so much time, dedication, and energy to it.”

Their sacrifices paid off by earning the team not just the national title but also individual honors. Every team member earned all-American titles for competing in the final round of Nationals. Gaskins also earned a double-sided All-American Attorney award for both defense and plaintiff. Azari earned an All-American Attorney award, and Murray won an All-American Witness award.

These awards come after Gaskins earned a double-sided All-National Attorney award and Kiley earned an All-National Witness award at ORCS, the semifinal level competition. The four total All-American titles set a UMBC Mock Trial record for the number of All-American awards earned.

UMBC Mock Trial also earned the Spirit of American Mock Trial Association Award, honoring their commitment to the principles of civility, justice, and fair play.

— Morgan Casey '22

The team visits Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. Photo courtesy of the Executive Office of the Governor.



Partnership Gives Event Center a New Name



The UMBC Event Center has become synonymous with high-level athletic play, premier entertainment, and university milestones since opening in 2018. This spring, UMBC has officially announced the beginning of a new chapter for the Event Center—a new name.

The Chesapeake Employers Insurance Arena, a new partnership between UMBC and Chesapeake Employers Insurance, will open doors for both the university and the facility.

“The partnership between UMBC and Chesapeake Employers Insurance represents not only an investment in our campus but also in the region. This is an opportunity to elevate our facility, our university, and our local economy,” says President **Freeman Hrabowski**.

In addition to naming rights, this partnership establishes a platform for UMBC and Chesapeake Employers Insurance to engage in additional collaborations, including

opportunities for student internships and hiring, and applied research projects.

“We at Chesapeake Employers Insurance are honored to partner with a premier University System of Maryland institution such as UMBC,” says Tom Phelan, CEO of Chesapeake Employers Insurance. “This partnership bridges our corporation with UMBC students, staff, and alumni to form a symbiotic relationship with shared values and a commitment to excellence relevant to education and business.”

“We are building a program where we can celebrate community while we help welcome new students and prepare them for meaningful careers and welcome alumni home,” says **Brian Barrio**, director of athletics. “This building, Chesapeake Employers Insurance Arena, is a central part of that vision. And great visions require great partners.”

— Steve Levy '85 and Kait McCaffrey

UMBC Welcomes New Men's Basketball Head Coach



The UMBC community is excited to welcome **Jim Ferry** as the Retrievers' new head coach of men's basketball. Ferry is the 10th head coach in UMBC's history, taking the place of Ryan Odom, who transitioned to Utah State University in April.

Talking about the interview process, Ferry says, “The sincerity and the love for this place, it just came through. This is one of the fastest-growing universities in the country, and I'm excited to be a part of this family and such an outstanding basketball program.”

As the assistant coach at Penn State (PSU) in 2017 – 18, Ferry was an integral part of the offensive resurgence for the Nittany Lions. Ferry joins the Retrievers after most recently serving as PSU's interim head coach for the 2020 – 21 season. In his most recent season, Ferry led the Nittany Lions to an 11-4 season and a 7-12 Big Ten record.

“I have a national network of basketball people I talk to and I've never heard such unanimously positive thoughts about somebody's character. And at UMBC, that really matters to us,” says **Brian Barrio**, director of Athletics. “At the end of the day, winning matters too, and this is a gentleman who has 30 years of winning across college basketball.”

Before his time at PSU, Ferry was the bench boss at Duquesne University. And prior to his five years at Duquesne, Ferry spent ten seasons as head coach at Long Island University Brooklyn, guiding that program to unprecedented levels of success.

Ferry will now lead a team that was on track to clinch the America East Championship again this year after taking their share of the regular season title before falling just shy of their opportunity to advance.

After meeting his new players for the first time, Ferry says, “These guys seem to be really unselfish. They play basketball the right way. You can tell they like each other and they're a bunch of talented guys.”

The resounding sentiment from those involved in the recruitment of Ferry is that he's a natural fit for the UMBC community and Retriever Nation can't wait to see him in action.

— Steve Levy '85 and Kait McCaffrey

THE NEWS

Welcome Home, Retrievers

UMBC plans to reopen campus for the fall 2021 semester by providing most courses and campus services face-to-face or in a hybrid format.

"I cannot wait to walk across campus and to again see it busy with students, faculty, and staff," said President **Freeman Hrabowski**. "It will be very special to reclaim the vibrant campus community life that we have all missed."

He and Provost **Philip Rous** have cited ongoing progress in COVID-19 vaccine access and updated public health guidance as key factors in the university's planning.

After a year when most teaching and learning, community building, research, and other operations were moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many feel relief about the return to campus. "We know that our students really miss seeing their friends on campus. And they miss being able to go to in-person events and connect with their professors face-to-face," says **Nancy Young**, vice president for Student Affairs.

"We've discovered innovative ways to help Retrievers find community and stay connected online during the pandemic," she shares. "At the same time, we know how meaningful it will be for returning students to connect in person once again and for incoming students to have opportunities for in-person experiences."

The COVID-19 Planning Coordinating Committee has been working with faculty, staff, and student leaders across the university to plan for a fall that offers opportunities to live, learn, and work on campus, with appropriate safety measures in place. Plans also take into account the diverse needs and individual health concerns of UMBC community members.

Most courses will be offered in person or in a hybrid format, and UMBC is preparing to reopen residence halls at up to 95 percent occupancy. The university is also planning a full fall 2021 calendar of on-campus events open to both residential and off-campus students. "We are excited to be able to return to offering a fully immersive on-campus experience this fall," says **Yvette Mozie-Ross '88, health science and policy**, vice provost for enrollment management and planning.

"These experiences help to enrich the academic and social life at UMBC for many of our students," says Mozie-Ross. "We are also excited to carry forward all that we learned during the pandemic about ways that online learning, support, and community-building resources can complement on-campus courses and services."

New campus developments will welcome students back. The Retriever Activities Center has been fully renovated and a brand-new student well-being facility is under construction next to Erickson Field.

"We look forward to a much more active on-campus community this fall," says President Hrabowski. "At the same time, we know the pandemic is not over. We must continue to be as flexible as possible."

UMBC will continue to rigorously follow local, state, and federal public health guidance. This includes safety measures regarding testing, symptom tracking, mandatory mask wearing, hygiene, ventilation, physical distancing, and space occupancy, as required.

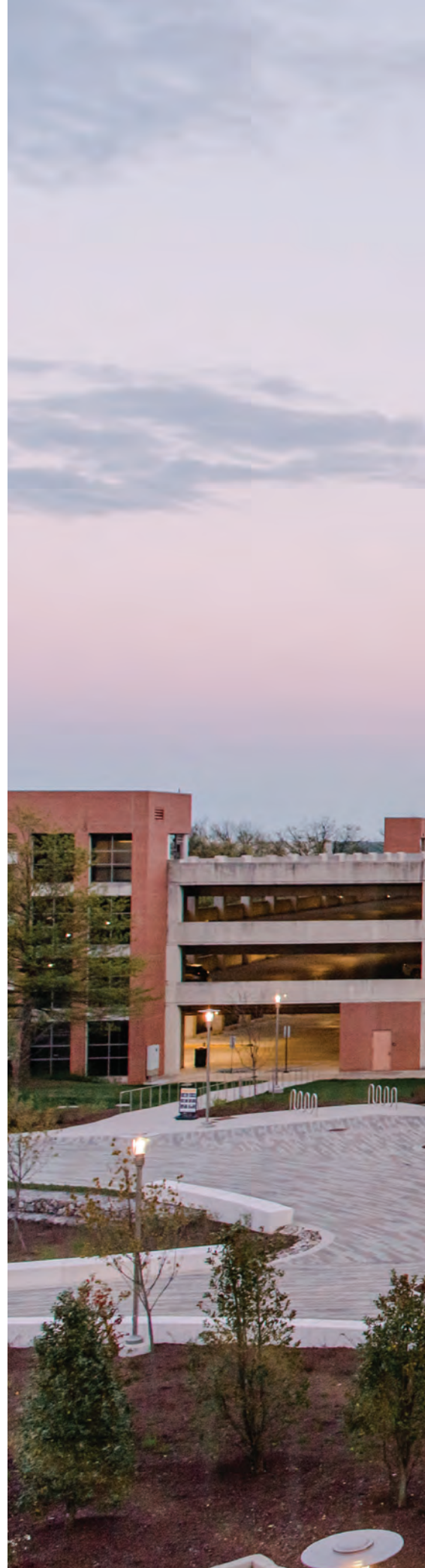
The university has strongly encouraged all students, faculty, and staff to seek vaccination for COVID-19 once they are eligible. Campus leaders note that current public health guidance indicates increased vaccination will enable more expansion of in-person activities.

"We are constantly following the science and public health guidance," says Young, "and the science says that the more vaccinated our community becomes, the more open we can be."

"We have been thrilled to hear about expanding access to highly effective COVID-19 vaccines," she shares. "It's really been a game-changer for us, to be able to look ahead with optimism for seeing each other again soon, on campus."

Community members with questions about COVID-19 and the fall 2021 semester can contact covid19@umbc.edu.

— *Dinab Winnick*





AT PLAY

Musical Roots



As children, **Andy Stack** and his older brother Dan listened to Miles Davis as they fell asleep each night in their Catonsville home. His brother had an affinity for *Sketches of Spain* on repeat, and Stack '10, music, listened with the hopes of being a great jazz composer like Davis. He started to play any available instrument—steel drums, saxophone, guitar, piano—each one telling a different story; that's what Stack loved.

The musical layering that fascinated Stack at such a young age found ground to flourish in “the old Fine Arts building,” says Stack, who after a brief time at the Berklee College of Music shifted away from jazz composition and returned to Catonsville to finish his degree in music technology at UMBC. “The recording program at UMBC proved to be a really powerful tool to develop my interest and springboard my career.”

At UMBC in 2007, Stack began collaborating with high school friend and fellow Retriever **Jenn Wasner** to form Wye Oak, an indie rock/dream pop duo whose name pays homage to Maryland's state tree. The duo found praise and a national

audience early on. Reviewing their first album, *If Children*—produced at UMBC—*Pitchfork* lauded the 2007 debut, “Vocals trade between Wasner and Stack; her voice bears more sweetness, but the light variety is a palette cleanser. Their total defiance of novelty is almost minimalistic; it's a reminder that someone who understands food can make a good dish with three or four ingredients.”

“Wye Oak is really a recording project,” Stack says. Using foundational theory he learned at Berklee and the music technology skills from UMBC, Stack and Wasner find a lot of their excitement in the recording process and on-stage experimentation. During their 2010 NPR Tiny Desk Concert, Wasner opens with the title song from *Civilian*, their third album, and says that it came up in the studio with all the tools at their fingertips. “We just figured out how to do it live,” Stack says of the result.

Since the days in Fine Arts, the band has played around the world. They've also collaborated with groups like the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Future Islands, and Wasner has been touring with Bon Iver. Their

music has been used in films and TV shows like *Gossip Girl* and *The Walking Dead*.

Stack and Wasner recorded their first two albums (*If Children* and *The Knot*) using student resources available to them on campus. Keeping connected to his Retriever lineage, *The Knot*, which served as Stack's senior thesis project, featured a cover image that Stack's father had taken as a photography student at UMBC in the 1970s.

Rooted is the word that begins to describe Stack's connection with UMBC. Every member of the immediate Stack family attended UMBC, including his brother, **Dan Stack '10, visual arts**, his sister-in-law, and more than several cousins. Stack credits a lot of his success to his parents, **William Stewart Stack '78, interdisciplinary studies**, and **Anne Brant Stack '72, English**, for their support and involvement in the Baltimore film community—the family runs Serious Grip & Electric, a local user friendly grip and lighting rental house.

While still at UMBC, Wye Oak's work found its record label home in Merge Records. This didn't change a lot of things for Wasner and Stack, but it did mean more tours in places like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Stack says his professors in the music department were supportive of the touring and worked with him to make sure he was able to finish coursework.

Both members have solo projects of their own that add strength to their collaboration. Alongside Wye Oak, Stack tours with bands around the world, and in 2019, he released solo work under the name Joyero.

In a recent song, “AEIOU,” Wye Oak collaborated with the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. In the song the chorus is at the forefront with quiet, small voices beatboxing or scatting A-E-I-O-U throughout. The song is majestic and sprawling, using musical tools and techniques to evoke emotion and story, building on what Stack had begun to explore listening to *Sketches of Spain* to fall asleep.

— Imani Spence '16

Photo courtesy of Kendall Atwater

Passing the Baton



When conductor **Robert Gerle** raised his arms and gave the downbeat to the overture to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* by Richard Wagner on December 11, 1972, he might not have predicted that the orchestra in front of him—now known as the UMBC Symphony—would become such an important part of UMBC’s culture. The program, which was presented in what then was known as Gymnasium One, continued with Bartók’s *The Miraculous Mandarin* and Beethoven’s *Piano Concerto No. 1*.

Gerle, a noted violinist who had taught at Ohio State and Peabody, had been enticed to UMBC—in an era when the nascent department of music didn’t even offer a degree—by the opportunity of starting a string program and building an orchestra. To get enough players on the stage, Gerle’s solution was to engage community members and UMBC students, and so the UMBC Community Orchestra, as it was then known, came into existence.

“In addition to all of these wonderful musical journeys in the orchestra, it was a place to make lasting friendships,” recalls **Ronald Mutchnik ’80, music**. “Years later, I came back to visit and there was Gerle rehearsing Dvořák’s *New World Symphony* with many of the same people—such was the loyalty he and the symphony engendered.”

When trumpeter **Wayne Cameron**, who was then conducting UMBC’s wind ensemble as well as the Frederick Symphony, heard of Gerle’s retirement, he approached the department to ask about taking on the orchestra. Time passed, and Cameron, hearing nothing, assumed he had been passed over. Shortly before the start of the fall semester, he asked the department chair who had been selected. The chair replied incredulously, “Didn’t you hear? We picked you!”

Cameron renamed the UMBC Symphony and increased the number of players from about 55 to about 70. He also broadened the scope of repertoire, introducing more American,

contemporary, and lesser-known works. “Conducting the UMBC Symphony was a distinct privilege,” he recalls. “To work with so many talented students and community members was a special delight.”

When Cameron stepped down in 2001, UMBC’s overall enrollment had more than doubled from Gerle’s era, and the symphony’s new conductor, clarinetist, and faculty member **E. Michael Richards** opened up more opportunities for student participation. As a result, the number of community players decreased.

Richard Sigwald ’03, music—who played trumpet with the symphony during Richards’ entire tenure of two decades—says, “He challenged students and community members to work together to create an extremely rewarding performance experience. He was extremely passionate when conducting as it was the only time I ever heard him raise his voice. If the brass weren’t at the volume he desired, he would storm off the podium and tell us that he could ‘play louder than all of us on his clarinet.’ Once we performed more to his liking, he would return to the podium and quip my favorite line of his, ‘I’m not angry, I’m excited!’”

Violinist **Michelle Ko ’10, music**, echoes many of Sigwald’s thoughts. “Maestro Richards is so knowledgeable and passionate about the compositions, and it was magical to watch him lead the orchestra.” Ko continues, “Richards had an invaluable impact on my artistic growth and career success.”

A highlight of Richards’ years came in 2016, when the symphony performed Stravinsky’s *Firebird* suite during UMBC’s 50th Anniversary celebrations, with fireworks going off overhead. Richards jokes that he thought his back was getting singed from the fireballs going off near the stage.

Although retired, Richards looks forward to continuing being part of the university community. In the meantime, the Department of Music has opened a search for a visiting lecturer in orchestral studies to ensure the leadership of the Symphony transitions to experienced and capable hands.

— Tom Moore

“He was extremely passionate when conducting as it was the only time I ever heard him raise his voice.”

AT PLAY

An Unprecedented Season

Each week of the winter portion of the 2020 athletic season, Retriever athletes, coaches, and fans held their breath to see what games would be cleared to play. After making it through 2020 with men's and women's basketball holding down the proverbial fort, 2021 marked a new year and new development for UMBC sports—all unplayed fall and spring sports would return to action in spring 2021.

Though there was no shortage of challenges when it came to playing in a pandemic (diligent symptom monitoring, regular testing, periods of isolation), student-athletes rose to the occasion and added several new chapters to UMBC record books this year.

For the first time in program history, UMBC women's volleyball earned a share of the America East regular season title, splitting the honor with University at Albany. Then, on April 2, the team traveled to Albany to take on the Great Danes for the America East Championship, and they delivered, winning their first America East Championship in program history.

"The first day we met UMBC's then-new athletics director, **Brian Barrio**, in 2020, he showed us an empty photo frame on his wall," says **Anouk Van Noord '21, psychology**, a right side hitter. "He told us that he was saving it for when we win the America East championship. I am so proud to graduate from UMBC in May with that spot filled on his wall."

The Retrievers competed in the first round of NCAA tournament play and ultimately fell to Pepperdine, but they're just getting started. "My goal when I took over this program was to establish this program as a perennial America East championship contender and that is what we are building here," says head coach **Cristina Robertson**.

For the first time since 2007 – 2008, UMBC men's basketball nabbed the America East Regular Season Title, sharing it with the University of Vermont. UMBC finished the regular season with a 10-4 conference record. Several players were named to All-Conference teams, and **Keondre Kennedy '23, media and communication studies**, was named Sixth Man of the Year, the first awardee in program history. Kennedy's contributions

coming off the bench, playing in all 19 games but starting just two, landed him this honor.

Coach **Pete Caringi Jr.** has been a force at the helm of UMBC men's soccer for 30 seasons and to mark such an impressive tenure, his players decided to give him a very appropriate gift—his 300th win. In a double-overtime win against George Washington University in February, Caringi improved his overall mark to 300-186-75, a winning percentage of better than 60 percent.

"He is one of the most respected coaches in Maryland, and there's a reason for that," says goalkeeper **Quantrell Jones '22, sociology**, who was named to the America East Conference Men's Soccer Second Team in 2021.

Though they fell just short of defending their America East Title, UMBC men's swimming and diving performed impressively at this year's competition. **Niklas Weigelt '23, economics**, was named Most Outstanding Swimmer of the Meet, and **Kai Wisner '21, mechanical engineering**, earned the David Alexander Coaches' Award for accruing the most points over the course of the four America East Championship meets.

Women's swimming and diving also captured second at this year's America East tournament. Like Wisner, **Natalija Marin '21, mechanical engineering**, also earned the David Alexander Coaches' Award.

Senior captains **Vanessa Esposito '21, psychology**, and **Abbey Farmer '21, health administration and policy**, share, "this year has thrown so many challenges our team's way. To climb all the way up to finish second overall is truly a testament to our women's team."

The Retriever swimmers and divers also welcomed new head coach **Matt Donovan**, former head coach at Long Island University, this spring.

"Matt brings the experience, work ethic, and integrity that this program will need to continue its growth into national prominence," says Barrio. "He is a great fit for our UMBC community, and I'm excited to connect a leader like Matt with the superb student-athletes we have at UMBC."

— Kait McCaffrey

Photo courtesy of America East





DISCOVERY

Bedrock to Treetops—\$4.8M Awarded to UMBC-Led Study



There is an essential resource constantly flowing beneath our feet: groundwater. Urban denizens may not think about it often, or at all, because they don't rely on wells, "but it's still there," says hydrologist **Claire Welty**, and it's critical to understanding the health of urban ecosystems.

Welty is director of UMBC's Center for Urban Environmental Research and Education (CUERE) and a professor of chemical, biochemical, and environmental engineering. Groundwater is just one piece of a complicated puzzle that she and her team will work to put together over the next five years. A \$4.8 million Critical Zone Collaborative Network grant from the National Science Foundation will make the large-scale project possible and support researchers at UMBC and eight other institutions that are part of the UMBC-led Urban Critical Zone Cluster.

Welty's team will explore Earth's critical zone, which extends from the tops of trees to the base of weathered bedrock, in urban centers along the Eastern Seaboard. In particular, they're interested in how natural, geological processes occurring below the Earth's surface and human-driven processes interact. Human influences include road-salt application, polluted stormwater runoff, and soil-disturbing construction. These factors can all significantly influence urban water quality, water chemistry, and weathering processes.

Most Critical Zone grants are for work in more pristine wilderness areas because the

added effects of urban processes make the research more complicated. But, Welty says, "that's the most interesting part."

The research will take place in four East Coast cities: Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Raleigh. The researchers strategically selected these urban centers because they align in a north-to-south corridor along what geologists call the "Fall Zone." The Fall Zone exists at the transition from the Piedmont to the Coastal Plain and is an area of intense interest for geologists.

"We think of this landscape as ancient, but recent research has led to a different understanding about how the Fall Zone in our region has evolved," says geomorphologist **Andrew Miller**, professor of geography and environmental systems and a collaborator on the new grant. "Glaciers to the region's north played a role, and 'human activity has also caused profound changes,' Miller says. "All of this forms the background for the work we are planning to do on this project."

The Fall Zone's unique topography made it a natural place for some of the first American cities to emerge. Dramatic elevation changes characterize the Fall Zone, "so that's where waterfalls formed, providing hydropower, so mills were set up," Welty explains. Population centers grew up around the mills. Elevation changes at the Fall Zone boundary also limited water transport further inland, making it the natural place to build port cities. Today's I-95 corridor links these urban centers.

Baltimore, in particular, is well-suited to host this research because scientists have collected environmental data on the region for over twenty years through the Baltimore Ecosystem Study Long-Term Ecological Research Project (BES). The BES team has installed scientific instruments all over the region. Students, faculty, and sensors have been recording data consistently for decades, painting a picture of Baltimore's watershed, ecology, and social issues related to the environment.

However, "the subsurface has for the most part been ignored," Welty says. With funding from other sources, she and her field assistants have drilled 35 monitoring wells—but there's more to be learned.

"We've got all this incredible science that's been going on for 20 years of the BES," Welty says. With the Critical Zone grant, "now we want to look at the subsurface to complement all the data and information and instrumentation—you name it, we have it," Welty says. "We think it's really important to marry these two together."

Urban groundwater processes fascinate Welty. She's driven by a fundamental desire to better understand what's going on underneath cities in the Fall Zone. And there are practical reasons why this work is important, too.

"At UMBC, we're always interested in informing policy with the scientific projects we do," she says. "We have strong relationships with partners in Baltimore, and folks in the other cities do as well. They pay attention to what we do."

Those relationships work in both directions. Sometimes the research informs new policies around development, water treatment, or salt use. Other times, questions from regional leaders inspire additional research, including student projects.

Some public concerns have involved hazards to the urban drinking water supply and salinization of streams, which could be detrimental to wildlife. "We're making connections and providing a foundation of knowledge," Welty says, so policymakers can make decisions grounded in science.

— Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15

Photo courtesy of Victor Fulda.

Highest Accolades for Pulse Laser Innovator, Mentor

Anthony Johnson, a professor of both physics and computer science and electrical engineering at UMBC, has spent 40 years investigating uses for ultrashort pulse lasers. Shrinking cancerous tumors, optimizing long-distance communications, preventing viruses in seafood from causing food-borne illness, developing new nanoscale materials—he seems to have done it all while also mentoring students for decades.

In April 2021, he received the prestigious honor of election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Academy, founded during the American Revolution, “honors excellence and convenes leaders from every field of human endeavor to examine new ideas [and] address issues of importance to the nation and the world...” Being elected as a member is one of the highest honors a scholar can receive.

Johnson joins a select number of Academy members, including UMBC President **Freeman Hrabowski**. In addition to being an accomplished researcher, Johnson has successfully mentored dozens of students from all backgrounds as they pursued advanced degrees, maintaining contact and continuing to offer support long after graduation.

The Optical Society also recognized Johnson’s long-term commitment to his field this year, honoring him with the Stephen D. Fantone Distinguished Service Award. Ever humble, Johnson recalls, “when I saw this email about this award, my initial thought was, ‘Ok, they want me to be on the committee to select the awardee.’ It never occurred to me that it was for me. It was quite surprising, and it’s quite an honor.”

Beyond his work within the Optical Society, Johnson was also recently named to the

Committee on Diversity and Inclusion on the Technical Advisory Board of the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Johnson says there hasn’t been nearly enough change in the number of non-white and women physicists and engineers since he started in the 1970s, and he has made supporting inclusion in physics and engineering a cornerstone of his career.

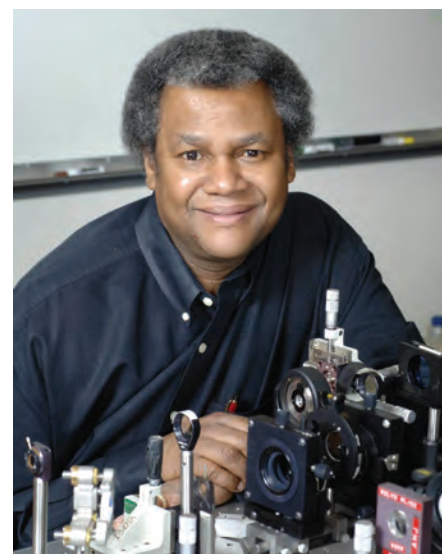
“There’s still a lot to be done in our professional societies to build up and attract both women and minorities,” Johnson says. “We still have work to do to expand the opportunities to a broader set of people and bring in new ideas.”

Closer to home, Johnson works hard to create an inclusive environment in his own research group. “I like to think of us as a family,” he says.

When working with students of all backgrounds, Johnson’s “kindness comes through,” says Stephen Fantone, after whom the award is named. He shares, “Anthony understands the role of nurturing students, helping them to find their inner spring and to fulfill their potential and their own personal dreams.”

Students are not the only beneficiaries of Johnson’s support. “I gained many nuggets from his advice and leadership in the American Physical Society on graduate education and diversity, long before I made it to UMBC,” shares **Belay Demoz**, professor of physics and director of the Joint Center for Earth Systems Technology. “As another Black physicist at UMBC, he is my go-to guy for advice on how to handle delicate things; he is generous with his time and has a calming effect on me.”

Johnson got his start in optics as an undergraduate at Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute (now the NYU Tandon School of



Engineering) in the 1970s. A physics instructor encouraged him to pursue an internship at Bell Labs through the company’s Summer Research Program for Women and Minorities. The experience set Johnson’s entire career in motion.

He earned his Ph.D. in physics from City College of New York, completing his doctoral research at Bell Labs. After his Ph.D., Johnson continued to work at Bell Labs for nearly 15 years, when the lab was in its heyday. “During my doctoral research at Bell Labs, I learned just how many celebrities in physics were there. I could walk down the hall and talk to people we put on pedestals,” Johnson remembers.

At Bell Labs, Johnson also had the opportunity to mentor interns coming through the same program that had gotten him started. His physics instructor’s impact on his trajectory was not lost on Johnson, and he made a concerted effort to pay it forward with his interns.

Eventually Johnson made the move to academia. After eight years as a department chair at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, he joined UMBC in 2003. Today, Johnson serves as the director of UMBC’s Center for Advanced Studies in Photonics Research. “I’m cherishing being in academia and working with faculty and students and, in particular, having graduating students pursuing advanced degrees,” Johnson says. “It’s really a satisfying process and enterprise, so that has been quite enjoyable.”

— Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15

“There’s still a lot to be done in our professional societies to build up and attract both women and minorities,” Johnson says. “We still have work to do to expand the opportunities to a broader set of people and bring in new ideas.”

DISCOVERY

Q&A: View From the End of the Road

When the pandemic first hit, many of us found ourselves looking closely at what surrounded us and what confined us. For Brea Souders '01, visual arts, however, the circumstances drove her to look outward through the screen of her upstate New York window and to wonder deeply about the lives happening beyond her driveway. End of the Road, one of the Albin O. Kuhn Library Gallery's spring online exhibits, paired Souders' images with the poetry of UMBC writer-in-residence Lia Purpura to create tender appreciations of the details that connect us all, even when we're apart.

UMBC Magazine: So, Brea, how did the idea for this series come about for you?

Brea Souders: In late March 2020, I moved from New York City to rural upstate New York. This was the beginning of the pandemic when contact with the outside world was abruptly cut off for many people and would be for the foreseeable future. The house is situated just before the gravel cul-de-sac of a country road, and I began to observe people through my window as they wandered back and forth to the end of the road.

So it started in a space of stillness and solitude, which led to focused daily observation. I began to wonder about the people I saw, what brought them to the end of the road and what their stories were. As a photographer, it's second nature to pick up a camera and photograph something that has captured and sustained my attention, especially if it mystifies me in some way, if there is something hidden or unknowable in what I see. Even if it's an illusion, the camera draws a line connecting you and your subject and shortens the distance between you.

UMBC Magazine: What was your mindset at that time, making the photos, versus where you are now?

Souders: There is solid evidence now that the world will begin to open back up and there are already some signs of that happening, but we're still very much in this emotional and physical space of isolation and stillness. I've been making these pictures for a year now, and the trees are beginning to bud again just the way they did when this all started. It's reassuring to witness some things just carrying on as they do.

UMBC Magazine: And Lia, you were brought into this exhibit by curator Beth Saunders. What did you feel when you saw Brea's images for the first time? What was your first impression?

Lia Purpura: When I saw Brea's photos, immediately they seemed like micro-dramas, these brief moments that enacted a form of inward reflection that's also a part of the way many people are experiencing COVID times. Artists are able to find the under-seen, under-noticed ways of being, and Brea's work does that. I love the way Brea sees and the different postures of these photos. And by "postures" I mean the place from which the eye is seeing. Postures of discovery. The intimacy, the solitude of the space, the stillness the viewer inhabits. That quiet felt inhabited by a presence, a curious eye.

UMBC Magazine: What was it like to collaborate in this way, pairing Brea's new images with Lia's poems from her 2015 book, *It Shouldn't Have Been Beautiful*?

Souders: I love the way Lia thinks. She categorized the initial list of poems for our collaboration according to the photographer's point of view, the subject's point of view, the seasons, the feeling of walking, and sense of place. That approach deepened the connection between the poems and pictures and informed the selection and sequencing of both.

It was Beth's idea to organize the images loosely by seasons. As you scroll through, you have a general sense of the seasons, although the

window screen and distance impart a greyness to the images and you have the feeling of *Where am I? What day is it?* Which of course is the way many people would describe this past year. The human condition and the seasons are so finely articulated in Lia's poems. I love her exquisite attention to detail and the quiet observation felt in her work. In some of her poems, it feels as if she is looking through a small window just the way that I am.

UMBC Magazine: There's a lot of trust involved in the process, I'm sure.

Purpura: Yes, absolutely! We didn't know each other at all. I mean, I think Brea had read some of my work, but at the outset is the decision to trust in many things. A person's aesthetic, their sense of good will, their collaborative ego—with this relationship in place, you can launch all kinds of thoughts and know the other will receive it in open ways.

Souders: Definitely. I felt it immediately, too. Kindred art souls.

UMBC Magazine: Brea, I understand you have a book coming out in June from Saint Lucy Books, and there are even more UMBC connections there (designer Guenet Abraham and publisher/editor Mark Alice Durant, both visual arts professors). What does it mean to see your work embraced so strongly within the UMBC community?

Souders: I'm floored by all the support. It's a wonderful thing to be able to collaborate with a network of kind people doing exciting, interesting work in their fields. I'm truly honored to be a part of that.

—Jenny O'Grady

*Right: Brea Souders, End of the Road 5, 2020.
Bottom: Brea Souders, End of the Road 7, 2020.
Courtesy of the artist.*



Hope

To feel the slightest
breeze come on
but not expect it
to last, though
it *is* a lifting,
relief
that's been scarce —
you can't help
noting
the drop in degrees,
but it might not
be a real change
in weather,
you might overheat it,
or scare it
by speaking its name, so
hold back, learn to say
not just yet,
I won't rush it
and no, I'm not dying
for a very small sip of
whatever that was
in the trees.

— *Lia Purpura*

IMPACT

Access for All



Many Retrievers aspire to create a community that treats each member as a whole person deserving of respect, no matter their age or identity. Two past recipients of the UMBC Alumni Association's Rising Star award are using their positions to do just that—and uplift the dignity of elderly, cognitively impaired, and low-income individuals. **Galina Madjaroff Reitz '08, psychology, M.A. '11, aging studies, Ph.D. '18, human-centered computing**, is using tech to assist older folks. And **Aaron Merki '05, political science**, is creating accessible communities through a different path—philanthropy.

After teaching at UMBC for 12 years, Reitz is now the faculty program director of the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies and also an affiliate faculty at the Trace Center, which develops communication technologies for people with disabilities.

Growing up in an intergenerational household helped focus Reitz's research, she says. Although at the time, she says, her family functioned without a lot of technology. "It was a lot of talking to my grandparents, hearing their perspective on life, and getting a lot of advice, solicited or unsolicited," Reitz laughs.

Now, Reitz is pioneering assistive voice technology for older, cognitively impaired adults, consulting for Google and Amazon on their Echo and Alexa products. "We've been

really focused on building this ecosystem of tech that can support somebody to stay in their home as long as possible, feel like themselves, and continue to focus on their personhood versus just disease management."

Merki, who was a Sondheim Public Affairs Scholar at UMBC, tries to carry the values of the program's namesake and his mentor—the late **Walter Sondheim**—into his own work. "Everything about him as a leader went contrary to what you might envision," says Merki. "He was such a humble, gentle man, and everybody trusted him, which enabled him to get so much done."

Now, as managing director of programs and grants at The Weinberg Foundation—the largest grant maker in the older adults and aging space in the U.S.—Merki oversees approximately \$130 million a year in grant distributions from the foundation, all focused on meeting the basic human needs of people experiencing poverty.

Twenty years after meeting Sondheim, Merki says, "He is still a guiding force in my life, and I try to live up to his example. Walter's life of service was focused on bettering the lives of other people, largely disadvantaged and vulnerable populations throughout Baltimore. He was just so fundamentally concerned with everyone else and the community at large, more than himself."

—Randianne Leyshon '09

Read more at magazine.umbc.edu/access-for-all

Retrievers Behind the Scenes



It is so important to engage students in learning activities beyond the classroom.

Courtney C. Hobson, M.A. '14, historical studies, program coordinator for the Drescher Center for the Humanities, helps make these special moments happen.

What is your favorite thing about your work?

My favorite part is helping to plan and coordinate the Humanities Forum, our free public lecture series. I essentially have a wish list of different artists, professors, writers, etc. who I would love to hear from or meet—through the Humanities Forum, sometimes that gets to happen! But mostly, I get to constantly learn new ideas and hear from different perspectives, which has been an enriching experience.

Tell us something people don't really know about your job.

Coordinating events or programs requires so much multitasking, juggling. It requires the ability to think about both the smaller and bigger picture and prepare for contingencies. You also have to be aware of the various people or groups that you interact with and anticipate their potential needs. Doing all of this and making the experience appear to be seamless is also a skill.

Is there someone at UMBC who has been particularly supportive?

I can't really pick out one person in particular because I have so many wonderful friends and colleagues at the university. As an alumna of the university, it's a unique experience to transition from student-professor relationship to colleague or even friend with some of the professors in the history department; they were my cheerleaders when I was a student and continue to be so now.

Investing in Early Childhood Literacy



Louise Goodrich Izat '70 and Donna Helm '70 met their first week of classes in 1966. As French majors, they enjoyed many classes together with **May Roswell**, a professor of French and German and a founder of UMBC's modern languages department. They remember Roswell as a dedicated and inspiring teacher. Now, more than half a century later, the two friends, who share a love of words, have come together to create the Childhood Literacy Scholarship Endowment in honor of Roswell.

Izat has been a volunteer at a reading camp in her community for six years. Her experience has made her aware of how many children need additional reading support to move beyond decoding to comprehension and develop a lifelong love of reading. Helm has always been proud that she comes from a family of avid readers and has seen the positive impact strong reading skills can have on a career. After learning what work UMBC faculty and students are doing in the work of childhood literacy, Izat and Helm decided to combine their love of the written word to support early literacy work.

The scholarship is awarded through the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities (the Sherman Center). "With this Childhood Literacy Scholarship, our goal is to provide financial aid to promising undergraduate students committed to early childhood literacy development," says Izat. Izat and Helm's \$25,000 endowment will support a different UMBC student each year with a scholarship of \$1,000 or more for educational and research expenses.

By focusing on childhood literacy, Helm and Izat's endowment will help a burgeoning education professional continue to focus on their research and community-engaged work.

Ayodélé La Veau '21, psychology and theatre, the first recipient of the scholarship, has been an active volunteer in the Sherman Center's Literacy Fellows Program at Bay Brook Elementary/Middle School in Baltimore City. The program pairs college students with a Baltimore City elementary school. Fellows visit a classroom and work with a teacher throughout the semester, helping students develop reading and writing skills.

La Veau was able to be a part of a transition period with Baybrook Elementary/Middle School when they opened their new building. She saw how the combination of entering into a new building and having a more equipped teacher in



Ayodélé La Veau '21, psychology and theatre

their new learning environment made students more willing to learn and excited to improve their literacy skills. "I believe in the impact of showing children the possibility and importance of their growth and development," shares La Veau. "Not only through verbal affirmation but through proper guidance and access to resources."

In 2020, La Veau earned a UMBC Undergraduate Research Award to study the use of the creative process as a means to teach and explore social-emotional learning using data from public secondary schools and creative arts programs within Baltimore City. The pandemic did not permit her to begin the research.

Instead, she shifted her attention to supporting local communities digitally.

In addition to the academic and mental health needs of young people, La Veau is equally adamant about food equity and its impact on both. She currently serves as the vice president of the board of directors for the Plantation Park Heights Urban Farm, which grows healthy food to help feed people facing food insecurity in Baltimore.

"My work allows me to witness the effects of investing in children's lives through healthy and safe learning environments," shares La Veau. "The Childhood Literacy Scholarship is so wonderful and has been a major blessing for me."

Izat and Helm are excited that the scholarship will help La Veau continue her work with young children and her research. "We want to support students who will become part of the solution to the childhood literacy problem in our country," share the two donors. "We are delighted that Ayodélé La Veau is our first recipient. She has a lot of energy, is an amazing young woman, and her work will have a positive impact on the lives of children."

Izat and Helm's endowment supports the mission of the Sherman Center "to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning among young children in Baltimore City and develop best early childhood education practices for urban schools." Now in its third year, the Sherman Center has become the hub of early childhood education, research, and practices, not only for Baltimore City but also for Maryland.

"There is something special about UMBC students, past and present, and it is great when they meet around shared commitments," says **Mavis Sanders**, professor of education and the inaugural director of the Sherman Center. "I am grateful to be a part of the Childhood Literacy Scholarship and assist alumni, like Louise Izat and Donna Helm, to support Retrievers who share their passion for helping children discover the joy and power of reading."

— *Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque*

Headshot courtesy of Ayodélé La Veau '21, first recipient of the Childhood Literacy Scholarship Endowment.

IMPACT

Essential Giving

Black and Gold Rush—UMBC's annual giving marathon—like most things, looked a little different in 2021. But UMBC's community spirit showed up to exceed expectations, yet again. The 36-hour virtual fundraising event in February showed that even in the midst of challenging times, Retrievers will find a way to support each other.

A record number of donors—2,782 alumni, students, and friends—made Black and Gold Rush 2021 a resounding success. In addition to exceeding the initial goal of 1,966 donors, challenge gifts were unlocked to funds for baseball, education abroad, the Meyerhoff Scholars Program, softball, the Women's Center, Retriever Essentials, and others.

Retriever Nation rallied to raise a record \$335,447 to support a variety of programs such as The Fund for UMBC, which helps aid the areas of the university that most need assistance, and Retriever Essentials—an on-campus pantry that tackles food scarcity by providing increased access to food and toiletries for students who may need it.

To make a gift to Retriever Essentials or other areas of UMBC, go to giving.umbc.edu/mygift.

—Eddie Jenkins

Image: Nyla Howell '24 and Thérèse Madeleine Ghakou Tankam '24 share a volunteer shift at Retriever Essentials, located in 205 Sherman Hall.

Campaign Corner

To date, UMBC's Grit & Greatness Campaign has raised more than **95% of the total goal*** to Make Big Breakthroughs, Forge True Partnerships, and Transform Lives.

Raised through April: **\$142.5 million**

Total goal: **\$150 million**

Learn more at giving.umbc.edu

**As of April 30, 2021*





Her Science Is The World's

by Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15







Everyone who's ever met **Kizzmekia Corbett '08, M16,** biological sciences and sociology, gets it.

Sue Florence, one of the few Black teachers in the Hillsborough, North Carolina, school district where Corbett went to elementary and middle school, got it. Rhonda Brooks, Corbett's mother, remembers Florence saying, when Corbett was in third grade, "She's got a gift. You'd better seek into it."

Florence's comments pushed Brooks to make sure expectations were high for Corbett in school and to encourage—no, require—15-year-old "Kizzy" to find a scholarly internship rather than a position in retail when she wanted a summer job in high school.

So, at her mother's behest, Corbett got involved in Project SEED, a program that offers research experiences to talented high school students from underrepresented groups in STEM. Her first program mentor was James Morken, who was

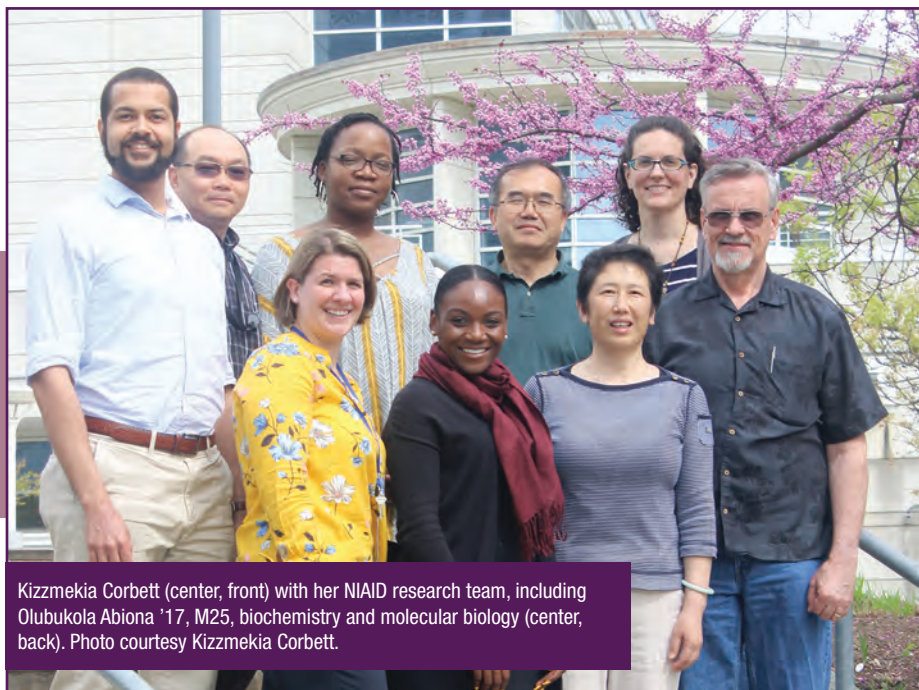
on the chemistry faculty at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill at the time.

He got it, too.

"When Kizzy started in my laboratory, she didn't have much hands-on research experience, but she had loads of curiosity, a drive to learn what she didn't know, and a very strong work ethic," Morken says. "It was abundantly clear she would be successful in whatever she chose to do."

Today, Corbett is an assistant professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health after leading the team behind the successful effort to create a vaccine for COVID-19 at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Now, we get it, too.



Kizzmekia Corbett (center, front) with her NIAID research team, including Olubukola Abiona '17, M25, biochemistry and molecular biology (center, back). Photo courtesy Kizzmekia Corbett.

“SHE CAN DO ANYTHING”

As a Meyerhoff Scholar and NIH Scholar at UMBC, Corbett worked in Barney Graham’s lab at the Vaccine Research Center at the NIH. He later became her boss.

“Kizzmekia’s spirit was noticeable even from a young age,” Graham says. “New people who come into the lab have always quickly realized that she was a person who had bigger things in her future.”

Corbett met **Jessica Kelley**, a UMBC assistant professor of sociology at the time, when Corbett took her Introduction to Sociology course. “She was a standout in that large lecture class from the beginning,” Kelley recalls. Later, Corbett took Kelley’s course on applied community research and conducted research with Kelley as part of a National Institute on Aging study on healthy aging in diverse neighborhoods.

The work with Kelley inspired Corbett’s double major and her approach to all of her future work. Corbett even became the only undergraduate enrolled in one of Kelley’s graduate-level courses. “She kept the graduate students on their toes,” Kelley says.

“When she’s got her mind set on something, it’s set,” Brooks says. “She can do anything.”

A LEADING ROLE

Today, Corbett has proven them all right. As the scientific lead of the Vaccine Research Center’s coronavirus team at the NIH, she developed a new technology for the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and others, and as a result, she has played a leading role in one of the most important measures to end the pandemic. She has also become the first Black woman in the world to create a vaccine.

Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) and one of the most trusted voices about the pandemic, described Corbett as “widely recognized in the immunology community as a rising star” when he nominated her for *Time* magazine’s TIME100 Next list. Based on her leadership of COVID-19 vaccine development at NIAID, he added, “Her work will have a substantial impact on ending the worst respiratory-disease pandemic in more than 100 years.”

PEOPLE DRIVE THE RESEARCH

Perhaps just as important as her scientific accomplishments, Corbett has burst onto the public stage as the face of a diverse and rising generation of talented scientists who

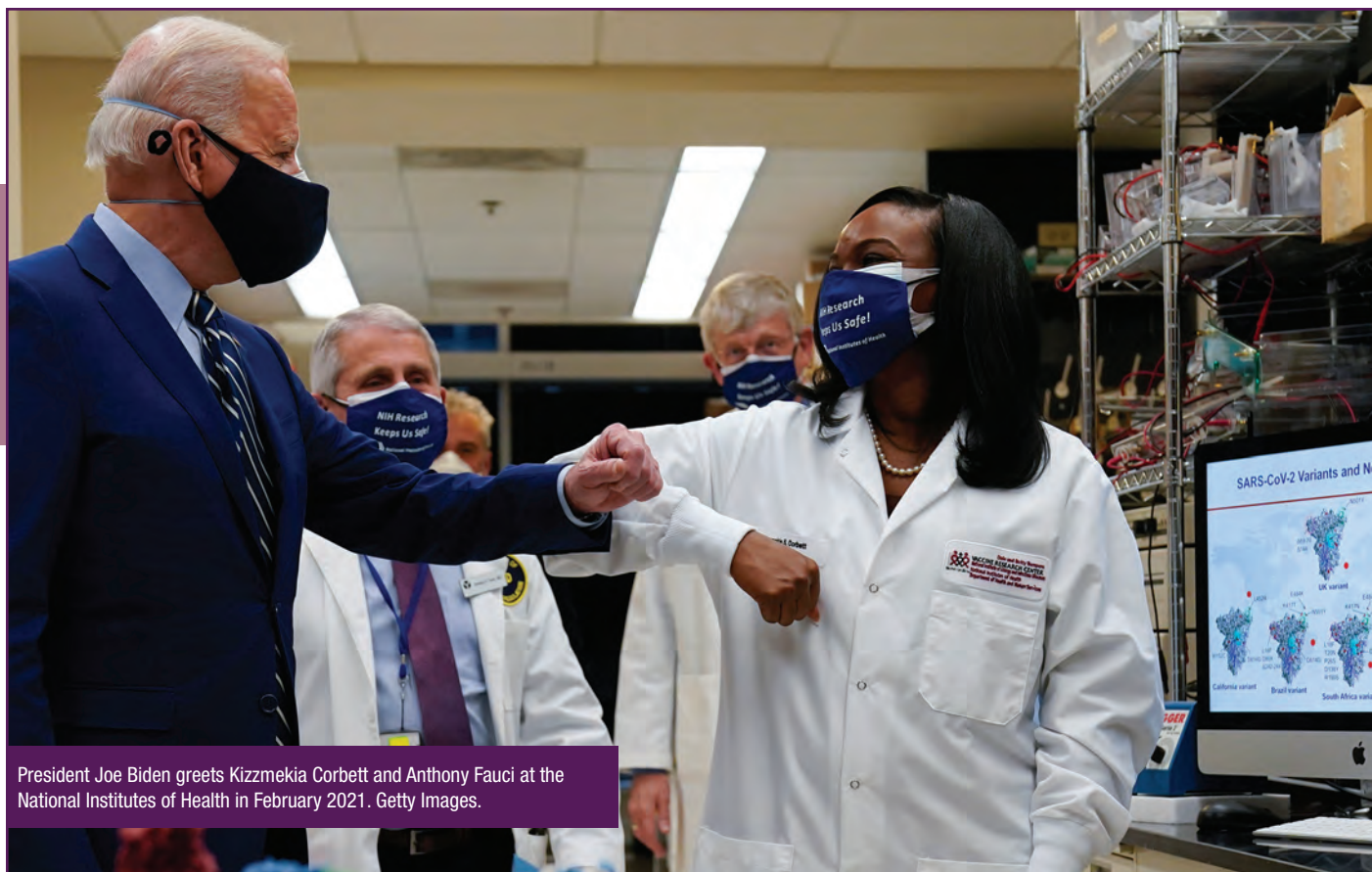
will transform the world. She is a stellar science communicator, explaining the vaccine and the virus in highly accessible ways to media outlets, her family, two U.S. presidents, and more. She is an inspiration to children who may now imagine becoming scientists.

“Dr. Corbett’s voice has been particularly important this year,” Graham says, “and going forward, her ability to inspire and to educate and motivate young people to see science as something feasible and even to see science as something fun will be part of her legacy.”

And yet, amid her newfound celebrity status and her vast scientific acumen, somehow she has managed to remain unabashedly human.

“I am still Kizzy. I’m still the little girl you met when I was 17 and being recruited into the Meyerhoff program,” she told UMBC President **Freeman Hrabowski** during a conversation in February 2021, when they were both being recognized at the Kaiser Permanente and Reginald F. Lewis Museum 2nd Annual African American Health Care Awards.

“Actually, before a scientist, I’m a Christian, and I’m sassy, and I’m bright, and I’m fashionable...” she says, “and I’m Southern, and I’m empathetic, and I’m all of these things that make me into this person, that make me a better scientist. I think that is the most important part of the story—that *people* drive the research.”



President Joe Biden greets Kizzmekia Corbett and Anthony Fauci at the National Institutes of Health in February 2021. Getty Images.

THE GENUINE THING

First there was Sue Florence. Then there was James Morken and others with the SEED Project. All through her childhood, there was her mother, Rhonda Brooks, cheering her on. Combine that support structure with Corbett's own deep-seated determination to succeed, and by the time she was looking at colleges, Corbett had lots of options. But when she, her parents, and her grandmother visited UMBC, it felt like home. The first reason? The grain silo along UMBC Boulevard.

"It reminded me of being back at home in the country," Brooks remembers. When they began touring campus, Brooks thought, "Oh man, this is really her," but, "I needed her to see it was her. So I didn't even say anything." There was no need. By the end of Meyerhoff Selection Weekend in 2004, Kizzy was glowing.

Beyond the welcoming silo were all the welcoming faces. "Everybody was so friendly," Brooks says. "You think when

you go visit campuses that people have to be this way because they're trying to get students to come, but as a person who's been in the education field for so long, I can weed out who's genuine and who isn't." And, Brooks says, despite the emphasis on Meyerhoff cohort numbers, of which Kizzy belonged to M16, "it just felt like she would be not just a number."

EQUALING THE PLAYING FIELD

In the February conversation with Hrabowski, Corbett recalls her father telling her that she should "go where she would be loved." UMBC became that place.

Asked to describe the value of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program, she said, "It is simply one word: resources. It is equaling the playing field for people who have generally been under-resourced, and those are communities of color and people from underrepresented minority groups. And the Meyerhoff Program does that."

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program, founded in 1989, is considered the gold standard of programs designed to support students from underrepresented groups in STEM. Hundreds of alumni have gone on to standout careers, including U.S. surgeon general, Baltimore City health commissioner, and professorships at the nation's top-tier universities.

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program "is a place where every single person was special and would be loved. The goal is not to fail you out but to lift you up," Corbett says. And for underrepresented students in STEM, living in a world that too often still doesn't expect people who look like them to excel as researchers, the Meyerhoff Program "provided a niche for us to just be, to be comfortable, and to just thrive."

A MOTHER'S TOUCH

It wasn't always easy, though. Brooks remembers when Kizzy received her first C. "Being on the phone with her just didn't help," Brooks remembers. "So I got in my



car, and I drove all the way to Maryland. I was trying to tell her it was going to be alright, but it was just heartbreaking because she never had that C. I told her, it's gonna be tough—you might get more than one C."

Even world-class, world-saving scientists sometimes get Cs and need their moms.

And even now, Brooks is ready to support Corbett as she navigates this new chapter in her life. "If she needs me now, if she's feeling stressed," Brooks says, "if she picks up the phone, I don't care what time of night it is, I pick it up."

On Corbett's college bedside also sat a Bible—another lasting connection to her family and her faith, which Corbett brings up often in her interviews. Brooks gave each of her children a Bible as they left for college. "I say take this Bible with you. Even if you don't look at it, keep it next to your bed. I don't care if you don't open it. But if you touch it, it will make you feel a whole lot better."

Corbett and her mother, though apart during the pandemic, have stayed connected by attending online services from the same church in Texas. Their first travel plans post-pandemic? A trip to attend the service in person.

LIFTING OTHERS UP

Whether it's her faith, an innate empathy, 35 years of experience as a Black woman in the U.S., or other factors, Corbett's dedication to lifting people up goes far beyond her work in the laboratory. Her commitment to equity has demanded that she speak out to address vaccine hesitancy, especially in communities hit hardest by the virus, and champion the participation of minorities in science and research, both as scientists and as participants in clinical trials.

"She has always, even as a young student, brought an energy and curiosity and love of science that made our lab a better place," Graham says. "She has also always been very devoted to making things better for people around her, particularly younger people coming behind her."

Brooks says that Corbett has always had a selfless nature. One day she brought home a classmate who had no place to go after school and asked if she could stay with the family. Brooks was uncertain at first, "but we did it," she says. "And we've been taking kids in ever since."

Corbett at a Rally for Medical Research event in Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Corbett.



FIGHTING FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Corbett's study of sociology at UMBC enhanced and sharpened her innate desires to help people and promote fairness into a commitment to consider social factors throughout her scientific career. For example, when the Moderna vaccine was in clinical trials, Corbett pushed hard to make sure that there were more people of color among the study population.

"You have to start things equitably to finish them that way," she told Hrabowski at the February event. "We slowed down the phase three clinical trial until we got to a point where we felt the numbers were respectable. We wanted 13 percent, to represent the proportion of Black people in the country," she said, but they didn't quite make it. Still, she says, "I have other vaccines heading into trials, so we will take care of it then."

Kelley, her sociology instructor and research mentor at UMBC, reflects on how Corbett has developed over time. "Kizzmekia's training in both biology and sociology has helped her become both a scientist working at the cutting-edge of vaccine development to provide a universal public good *and* a humanist who understands that historically and structurally not all groups have had access to these public goods," she says.

e Meyerhoff



Corbett visited UMBC in April 2021 for a TV spot dispelling myths about the vaccine. Photo by Marlayna Demond '11.

RIISING ABOVE

Corbett has faced her own challenges throughout her career, some of which have predictably intensified since she became more of a public figure.

Kizzmekia, whose name is a combination of “Kizzy” from the character in Alex Haley’s *Roots* and “mekia” from Brooks’s own imagination, has been teased since childhood and continues to be harassed

about her name. When Kizzy showed her mother a particularly hurtful social media post, “I told her, tell them to call your mama,” Brooks recalls, “because your mama chose your name for a reason, because you’re a gift from God to me.”

As a child, even Kizzy’s strong interest in academic success was sometimes looked down upon by her peers, but “she just went beyond,” Brooks says.

Corbett has also experienced sexism and racism as a scientist. Brooks says sometimes men have skipped over Corbett and instead approached her boss, but “that’s why I like her boss, [Barney Graham] so much because he always been behind her back,” she says—pointing people right back to Corbett.

FINDING YOUR CHAMPIONS

Corbett has taken her mother’s message to heart. “You just have to believe in yourself and believe in your work,” she says. Important, too, is having your own champions. “I always had someone in the space who was looking out for me,” she said—people like Sue Florence, Freeman Hrabowski, and Barney Graham. “Find those people and seek them out. You want someone to be as invested in you as you are in you.”

High expectations and support from all those people who “got it,” cheering for her and setting the bar high from elementary school onward, combined with Corbett’s inner determination—and a dash of spunk—have fueled her success. If you had met a childhood Kizzy, she would have said, “Hi, I’m Kizzmekia Corbett, and I’m going to be the first Black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Medicine.”

Verbalizing one’s goals is a risk because people will know if you fail. But it’s also a critical step toward turning them into reality. Little Kizzy knew it as a kid. “It speaks to putting yourself where you want to be and really speaking the words to the universe,” she told Hrabowski. Even if she hasn’t reached her childhood goal yet, she’s happy with what she’s been able to accomplish so far.

“I haven’t won a Nobel prize, and I don’t know if I will,” she says, “but I think helping to ‘save the world,’ so to speak, is good enough.”

For now.

Vaccine — — Victories

UMBC students and staff have shown their resilience in myriad ways during the pandemic, but maybe nothing showcases the Retriever spirit more than the volunteer hours put in to assist in the region-wide vaccination challenge.

Vaccine hunters **Jen Dress**, associate director of Campus Life, and **Candace Martinez-Doane**, assistant director of Leadership and Government, started their journeys by finding appointments for people within their immediate circles. As more

people became eligible for vaccines, those circles widened to include more than 600 people they've helped register.

Part of their efforts focused on frontline UMBC community members, including over 30 ABM staff, who help maintain and clean UMBC facilities and residential buildings. Dress and Martinez-Doane partnered with UMBC Transit to organize UMBC coach buses to transport the ABM workers to and from their vaccine appointments. Next up on their list is helping 60 Chartwells dining staff members be successfully vaccinated to prepare for fall 2021 operations on campus.



UMBC students are also going above and beyond to volunteer their time. Of students in the University System of Maryland, Retrievers led the way attending 30 volunteer shifts at the M&T Bank Stadium mass vaccination site, giving approximately 175 hours of their time. According to Chris Bankert of the State of Maryland's COVID-19 response team, "UMBC has been doing fantastic work at M&T Bank Stadium, and I have been hearing great feedback from the management staff on-site."

In mid-April, UMBC leveraged its long-term partnership with the Lakeland community in south Baltimore to co-sponsor a pop-up vaccine event to serve 100 members of the community. "With deep community connections and strong partners like Casa de Maryland, we were



ready to bring health resources to the community," says **Joshua Michael '10, political science**, director of the Baltimore School Partnerships and the Sherman Scholars Program.

In other ways, Michael notes, Retrievers have adapted to meet the opportunity of the moment. In summer 2020, 15 Sherman Scholars taught math online to 150 Lakeland students. And this fall, 30 UMBC students will provide additional support in mathematics through evening tutoring. "At UMBC," says Michael, "our humanity has guided us to meet this moment."

— Morgan Casey '22 and Randianne Leyshon '09

A version of this story was originally published by The Retriever.





Mutual Flourishing

In music, science, and theatre classes, in research labs, in conservation efforts, and almost every corner of academia, there's a growing awareness and dedication to community-engaged scholarship. How are different disciplines training up social justice-minded students to do no harm to the communities they work in? With one thriving relationship at a time.

BY RANDIANNE LEYSHON '09 | ILLUSTRATIONS BY REBECCA BRADLEY

A tree grows in Baltimore. Its roots push against the surface, its newly budding canopy blocks some of the dreary rain on this last day in March. The aphorism promises flowers soon, but the daffodils are already here, lush and golden against the wet grass. Rooted in this environment, the tree struggles to absorb water in a heavily-paved area. It faces possible invasive species, the whims of developers, a strike of lightning or disease.

These outside influences affect the flourishing of this tree, and the flourishing of the neighborhood it's rooted in is just as interconnected. A tension, a balance, a system of reciprocity.

In Franklin Square Park, on a parcel of land donated by developers to the southwest Baltimore neighborhood in

1839, this tree and 96 others were recently surveyed by UMBC students at the request of the Franklin Square Neighborhood Association. They wanted a catalog of their natural resources but also a record of what they've lost—only seven of the original 149 trees on a 1916 map of the park remain.

Working with members of the neighborhood, **Mariya Shcheglovitova, Ph.D. '20, geography and environmental systems**, and **Bee Brown '21, environmental science**, and other UMBC student researchers began their work. Their project would rapidly expand from an arboreal park survey to a community-focused project that invited local kids to participate in a scavenger hunt and other activities to build on the students' existing connection to the park. As Shcheglovitova

and Brown discovered, "understanding park quality is dynamic and can only be partially captured in a survey of the park features. Historic accounts and a focus on what happens in a park can enrich our understanding of park quality."

What began in Franklin Square as an effort to catalog trees—separate trunks with roots and canopies equally intermingling—broadened to encompass the community who interacts with the park the most. Acknowledging this interconnectedness in research of all types at UMBC is not new to academia but is becoming a more prominent approach to research as different disciplines wrestle with ways to train up social justice-minded students and do no harm to the communities they work in.

BRIDGING CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY

Community-engaged research gives a name to this method. At UMBC, most service-learning and community engagement experiences are facilitated through The Shriver Center, which was founded nearly 30 years ago. Director **Michele Wolff** explains that in the early days, the Center emphasized “that higher ed institutions shouldn’t tell communities what they need. The partnership should be one of mutuality and reciprocity. So our focus should be listening to community partners, hearing where their gaps are, and then being a resource to work with them to fill the gaps.”

This is still the Center’s primary mission, and in January 2020, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching honored UMBC with its distinguished Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, acknowledging UMBC faculty, staff, students, and partners for their deep commitment to strengthening the bonds between campus and community.

As part of the application process, more than 120 campus partners and dozens of community partners underwent a rigorous self-study. Along the way, they found that in music, science, and theatre classes; in research labs; in conservation efforts; and in almost every corner of academia, there’s a growing awareness and dedication to community-engaged scholarship. Wolff sees this movement come alongside “an increased appreciation of disparities, racial inequities, and other social justice issues. At the same time, people have been working on increasing appreciation and inclusion of community members as experts or thinking about what counts as scholarly work.”

Some departments are working on ways to adopt these methods, and others have this ethos baked into their core. American studies, one of the original majors at UMBC, calls community-based research and engagement one of the “signatures” of

the major. With its joint focus on “coupled natural and human systems,” geography and environmental systems (GES) is another department that recognizes the necessity and power of community-engaged scholarship.

SLOW SCHOLARSHIP

“In the field of environmental justice, it’s absolutely assumed and expected that you’re going to do community-engaged research,” says **Dawn Biehler**, a GES professor who first became aware of the concept as a graduate student. “More and more people are realizing that this is important and a good way of doing research, but to do it really well takes so much time and you have to be brave, in a way.”

As an academic, says Biehler, you have to honestly assess if your career—the timing of publications and tenure-track expectations—will suffer from this process. “It takes time to build genuine relationships with the community,” she continues. After engagement and research, then you still need to publish, and all of this takes more time than many instructors have allotted in their balance of research and teaching. “The other thing you have to recognize is that the

people in the community you’re working with, they’re exposed to risks all the time, just a different set of risks,” says Biehler.

Institutionally, UMBC is changing to reflect community-engaged research as a priority. In May 2019, the Faculty Senate successfully proposed new language to include evaluation of community-engaged scholarship in the promotion and tenure policy for all departments, says **Donald Snyder**, chair of the committee that spearheaded the policy change and a lecturer in media and communications studies.

Still, even with the university’s acknowledgment of this methodology, why would professors or students voluntarily choose the inherently riskier, if not just slower, approach to research?

Wolff highlights two affective or social-emotional competencies she hopes students take from their time in community work—perspective taking and shared humanness. “What better place to develop and grow (those competencies) than in experiences where you have the opportunity to work with others who are different from yourself and in contexts that are different from the ones you’re used to?” asks Wolff.



INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH

As a doctoral student, Shcheglovitova was known as “the person who cared about trees and social justice in the city,” so she wasn’t surprised when undergraduate student Bee Brown approached her to collaborate on a research project that interwove those topics.

Biehler’s multi-year connection with the Franklin Square community, says Shcheglovitova, gave neighborhood folks someone to approach who was willing to listen and respond about local environmental issues and allowed her and Brown to more easily gain the trust of the people involved.

Scott Kashnow, vice president of the Franklin Square Neighborhood Association, wanted an updated survey of the park’s trees that could inform future plantings in the park. Looking at historical photos and a 1916 map of the park, it’s clear a lot has changed in the past 100 years. Park features have disappeared or degraded—

the once bubbling fountain is planted over, the park bathroom is boarded shut, and many of the area’s ash trees were decimated by an invasive insect species.

After the survey was completed, Kashnow came up with the idea to invite students from a local school to celebrate the work and take part in the ongoing research. Shcheglovitova, Brown, and Biehler took the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding into community relationships with the park space.

“This is a way research can actually be helpful to the community,” says Kashnow, a Franklin Square resident for 14 years. “Through various organizations, we’ve been studied so much and oftentimes the studies don’t make any tangible difference in people’s lives. And people are still very happy to participate, you know, everybody has opinions, they love to talk about them. But does the research actually translate to some difference in people’s lives?”

ORCHESTRATING SOCIAL CHANGE

Regardless of the discipline, successful community-engaged scholarship depends on sustained relationships over time.

Brian Kaufman, associate professor of music, sees grade school music teachers as great examples of this practice. Unlike other academic subjects in grade school where students have new instructors each year, music teachers interact with the same student musicians year after year. So it naturally follows for Kaufman that his music education students at UMBC should commit to a school for longer than a semester.

Through the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra initiative OrchKids (and with the support of The Shriver Center), UMBC students work with Kaufman at Booker T. Washington Middle School in West Baltimore for two years at a time. “It’s unusual for student teachers to spend four semesters at the same school, but to really build relationships with students, to see them develop, this is necessary,” Kaufman says, not just for the middle school students but his UMBC students as well.

Pre-COVID-19, (although they have continued the program virtually), this would mean seven to 10 site visits to the school per semester. UMBC students spend the first half of the visit observing the teacher or engaging with the class and the last hour spent in guided reflection.

“To me,” shares Kaufman, “that’s where the juicy part comes in.” Before heading back to campus in a Shriver Center van, Kaufman says, “we sit down and talk about what we learned. And we really try to unpack our experience and make connections to some bigger issues—issues of equity and these larger discussions about teaching in the field and service-learning in the city and how these things tie together. That’s where the real richness comes in for the students.”



SCIENCE ON THE STAGE

If music education lends itself naturally to following a community-engaged process, what about cross-disciplinary initiatives like **Erin Lavik** and **Lynn Watson's** project Theatre Arts and Communicating Science? Lavik, professor in the Department of Chemical, Biochemical, and Environmental Engineering, and Watson, a theatre professor, collaborated with Arbutus Middle School science teachers to use theatre skills—playwriting, improvisation, and voice/speech—to help their young students tell stories about their capstone science projects.

Lavik had personally experienced the powerful interplay between STEM and theatre in her own studies, she says, “so I wanted to create a program that helped college students tell the story of their science and let them engage with students in middle school who were vulnerable to losing their passion in science.” When she approached Watson about the idea, the theatre professor was thrilled. “We shared an understanding of the power of theatrical storytelling that can bring communities of people together,” says Watson.

Prior to the program, the UMBC undergraduate and graduate engineering and theatre students spent a preparatory weekend workshoping with science teachers at Arbutus Middle School. Lavik and Watson saw the Retrievers' confidence and community-building efforts gain steam over the weekend, which led to a more successful outcome when they worked with the middle schoolers.

The students ultimately used a playwriting exercise to understand the plight of endangered species and improv scenarios to demonstrate the real-world effects of Newton's Laws of Motion—all of this performed with joy, says Watson. She noticed that the experience also “had a tremendous impact on the UMBC students in terms of confidence in their abilities



as leaders and their ability to take action in contributing to the wider community, including outside the university.”

Before their joint project in January 2020, Lavik and Watson were both interested in the concept of community-engaged programming, but they attribute the successful launch of their vision to the Shriver Center. After the fact, Lavik observed that community-engaged scholarship can increase student retention—the stipends attached to the program, made possible by a Charlesmead Initiative for Arts Education grant, afforded students the time to participate. “I hope that over time, we will be able to show that programs that integrate arts and science can help students thrive at UMBC, and bringing these programs to our communities can increase the number of students, particularly from underrepresented populations, who can begin to see themselves as scientists and engineers with joy.”

“Higher ed institutions shouldn’t tell communities what they need. The partnership should be one of mutuality and reciprocity. So our focus should be listening to community partners, hearing where their gaps are, and then being a resource to work with them to fill the gaps.”

—MICHELE WOLFF

CHANGING UNIVERSITY CULTURE

UMBC's Center for Democracy and Civic Life has been instrumental in creating a campus culture of an engaged community—promoting equitable off-campus partnerships while emphasizing the importance of starting that process within the communities at UMBC. The Center's Director **David Hoffman, Ph.D. '13, language, literacy, and culture**, and Assistant Director **Romy Hübler '09, MLL, M.A. '11, intercultural communications, Ph.D. '15, language, literacy, and culture**, say that an initiative that precedes the formalization of the Center is the BreakingGround grant program.

The origins of BreakingGround came from an effort to organize a UMBC Civic Year in 2012, says Hoffman, when “we discovered all of these people who were doing amazing things.” **Greg Simmons, M.P.P. '04**, vice president of institutional advancement, challenged the group to think bigger, remembers Hoffman. “He said, ‘you know, you’re talking about this as a year, but this really is about UMBC’s identity. This is a place where we come together because we want to change the world and we want to change it in particular ways that align with values like inclusive excellence.’”

Hoffman, along with Wolff and others, recognized that community-engaged work was happening in classrooms, at service-learning sites, and in other campus settings, but there wasn’t a unifying structure for like-minded people to find each other easily. Through a sustaining grant from the provost’s office, BreakingGround has offered grants to 80 applicants to infuse courses and programs with opportunities for students to develop civic agency and to shape their experiences so that they’re not “just a one-off community service project, but an opportunity for lasting community engagement,” says Hoffman.

Hübler joined the BreakingGround working group in 2012 as the community liaison for the Graduate Student Association and, as a result of her involvement, changed the topic of her dissertation. “I noticed among graduate students from all these different disciplines that many of us were drawn to our topics of study because we either had personal experience with them or we lived in communities where we would observe the effects of bad policy on people and centuries of oppression and marginalization.”

In 2013, UMBC began sending delegations to the Imagining America conference, which, according to the group’s mission, brings together people in higher education, nonprofit organizations, and activists to “imagine, study, and enact a more just and liberatory ‘America’ and world.” Imagining America’s leaders were struck by the holistic vision described by UMBC participants. “They saw how we were changing the university’s culture,” says Hübler. “Like this was not just one faculty member doing this in this discipline and another one over here and they’re not communicating, but they could see that this was an organized effort.”

As a result, UMBC was asked to bring the 2015 conference to Baltimore. Hübler and others began to reach out to partners to co-organize workshops around the city. “What is the story that we want to tell of Baltimore?” Hübler would ask. “We didn’t want it to be UMBC saying, ‘this is the story,’ right? But we came up with the story together.” In between planning the conference and the actualization of the work, Freddie Gray died in police custody in April 2015. Uprisings shook the city and caused UMBC to conduct a campus-wide inventory of Baltimore-based engagement, and that accounting ultimately strengthened the intentionality to focus community-based activities on

racial equity. One of the most significant outcomes of that reckoning would come in 2017, with the establishment of the Truth, Racial Healing, & Transformation Campus Center at UMBC, which works to break down racial hierarchies with a focus on the university’s service-learning and community-engagement partnerships in Baltimore City.

Importantly, Hübler notes that UMBC is, in fact, its own community and should apply the same community-engaged best practices internally. “There are challenges we have,” she says, “and UMBC can be better. We are constantly making and co-creating UMBC. Students are not just customers floating through to get a degree, but we all have responsibility for our own community. And if we want to co-create our space, there are skills, knowledge, and dispositions that we need that are pretty much the same as what we need when we work with communities elsewhere.”

“This is a place where we come together because we want to change the world and we want to change it in particular ways that align with values like inclusive excellence.”

—DAVID HOFFMAN, PH.D. '13



"If we keep getting engagement from the same people from the same walks of life, we're going to miss things," says Yancy. "And we really can't afford to miss anything. Climate change is now and the environment is struggling. And I think that, especially with COVID-19, we're seeing more clearly the intricate connection between environmental health and public health."

MOVING TOWARD THE IDEAL

What does it mean to engage in relationships that encourage mutual flourishing? How can the roots and the canopy both benefit and nourish the good of the one tree? This is a question the Shriver Center and their partners at UMBC have been asking themselves and the thousands of students who use the Center's service-learning structure to engage with the surrounding Baltimore County and City communities for the past 30 years.

Wolff sees community-engaged scholarship as a step away from transactional partnerships to transformational ones. The ideal, she says, should be to include the community from start to finish so that everyone benefits.

"We're recognizing community members as experts and moving forward with a goal of reciprocity and mutuality in our work," says Wolff. "Part of the ideal is having community members be a part of every aspect of the activity. That's where we want to get to. I think we're moving toward that ideal."

GOOD STEWARDSHIP

Alumna **Briana Yancy** always envisioned herself following a typical research path—as she thought of it, a scientist in a lab. So she was surprised when she found herself on her third trip to the Bahamas as a part of biological sciences Professor **Kevin Omland's** lab studying the Bahama Oriole. Yancy and the other students working with Omland partnered with the Bahamas National Trust, and she says the local community was always excited to talk about their orioles, showing the students nests and asking insightful questions.

"I started to see how important this community connection is," says Yancy, now the diversity work group staffer at the Chesapeake Bay Program, a collective of organizations whose shared mission is to protect the Chesapeake Bay. "It's important that scientists and researchers learn how to work with local communities and how to talk about the things that they're working on, especially for the environmental field,

because it impacts everybody. If you can't articulate that, people aren't going to care and they're not going to try to make a difference or get involved."

Yancy '19, M27, environmental science, says Omland set an example in the Bahamas that she's tried to emulate since in her own work. "He always made sure to invite people along, to take the time to explain things to people, and also stop to get their insight," says Yancy. As an intern at the National Aquarium checking water quality in the harbor, Yancy remembers, "people would always come up to me and be like, 'Oh, what are you doing?' And I would take the time to explain to them, 'I'm doing this. This is what this machine is called. And this is how I do it, the numbers I'm looking for, and why it's important.'"

In her current position, Yancy sees an increased attention toward community-engaged research as organizations like the Chesapeake Bay Program ask themselves how they can reach a more diverse audience.

A portrait of a man with dark hair, a beard, and black-rimmed glasses, wearing a pink button-down shirt. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is a warm, out-of-focus interior with vertical light streaks.

By Saving One Life, You Have Saved All Humankind

By Randianne Leyshon '09

Arrested for his role in a failed terrorist plot as a teenager, Mohammed Khalid found freedom from his radicalization after prison officials showed him kindness and empathy. Freed in 2017 and now a newly-minted UMBC graduate, Khalid has surrounded himself with mentors as he researches how to help others see through the lure of extremism.

As an incoming transfer student to UMBC, Mohammed Khalid needed to be excused from some of the mandatory McNair Scholars Program orientation sessions to give a presentation at TEDxJHU. The title of his talk? “Reconciling Humanity: Struggles of a Former Teenage Terrorist.”

As McNair Program Director Michael Hunt listened to the information systems major tell his story over the phone, he could hear Khalid gaining more confidence as he went through the details. At the end, Hunt asked if Khalid would like to practice giving his presentation to his fellow McNair scholars before the real thing.

This is not how Khalid normally introduces himself at first meetings, but he doesn’t shy away from it either. “What I told him,” says Hunt, ’06, M13, mathematics, “is that you’re part of us now. You’re one of us. So just know that your story is now our story. Right? I really wanted him to understand that.”

Before Khalid immigrated to America at age 13, his perspective of the West was shaped through literary fantasy like the *Harry Potter* books and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Once arrived in a land less magical than he hoped, Khalid would come to be enmeshed in his own struggle of good versus evil, envisioning the world in a false dichotomy

of strict black and white, pitting his perceived brothers and sisters versus the world.

Born in the United Arab Emirates and raised in Pakistan, Khalid and his family joined his father in 2007 in Howard County, Maryland. Certain memories stand out from that first day, he says. An overly brusque immigration officer at the airport in New York, his father in the car emphasizing that this is their new home—they will go to school, work, live, and die here one day, he said—and the loneliness of arriving at their townhouse late at night.

One thing that excited Khalid was starting school in his new country. He already knew English well after being brought up in a British education system and was excited to find a group of friends. But when he introduced himself in class, his new classmates snickered, he remembers.

“Mohammed is a terrorist’s name,” they told him.

Sharing His Journey

Khalid ’21, information systems—a Cyber Scholar, an Honors College student, and a UMBC McNair Scholar—has shared these painful memories very publicly—in a Vice news segment, in panels around the country, and recently in a national magazine. He presents them not as an excuse for what followed in his teenage years but as an open way of grappling with the decisions he made, with the goal that he might possibly help someone else avoid the descent into extremist circles.

Mohammed Khalid was the youngest person to be convicted of terrorism in the U.S. He was arrested at 17 in July 2011 and released from criminal custody in December 2015, although he was immediately detained by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement until May 2017. He won his U.S. citizenship in 2018. After his deradicalization in prison, Khalid has dedicated his life to helping other young people not fall under the sway of extremists like he did.

Hunt explains that the McNair program does more than prepare students for graduate education in all disciplines through research, mentoring, and other scholarly activities—it also focuses heavily on community-building. It places an emphasis on providing a space where students can cultivate productive interactions and speak honestly and critically from their own experience with the goal of mutual learning.

Khalid took Hunt up on the offer to practice his talk in front of the McNair peers he had only just met. “There was a real emotional connection,” remembers Hunt, “and an understanding of his vulnerability. I know that for the community, it really shaped their understanding of the dynamics of the group. So it wasn’t just about him. It was about how this allows you to connect with a group of people who are going to be sharing your journey.”

Who Are Your Brothers And Sisters?

Connecting with people in real life was not going well for Khalid in high school. The terrorist comments didn't abate, and neither did digs at his religion and origins. These insults were completely out of context for Khalid, so he turned to a common source for answers—Google. He then found a home on YouTube where he met people he considered friends—his true brothers and sisters in the faith, he thought at the time—watching and translating into English videos explaining his religion. Soon, the website algorithm changed the videos promoted to Khalid; he was watching suicide bombings and communicating with people tied to

Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. He was embraced by people online who called him a brother and welcomed him into their extremist community.

“Calling someone your brother and sister in Islam is the biggest modicum of respect that you can give them,” explains Khalid. “I think that it's an innate human need to be heard and to be listened to. And these people online who

On his way to discovering more about his religion, Khalid mistook extremism for fervor, recognizing now that “extremists had actually hijacked the philosophy and the ideology of Islam, which I call Islamism; the political side of it obviously, not the religious side, which is different.”

In parsing how his thinking worked at the time, Khalid says he thought along these

“What I told him is that you're part of us now. You're one of us.
So just know that your story is now our story. Right?
I really wanted him to understand that.”

– Michael Hunt '06, M13, McNair Scholars Program Director

I was calling my brothers and sisters, I would talk to them online and then come to find out they were actually listening to me and they would reflect my feedback. That's something, I think, very necessary to camaraderie.”

lines: “Well, my classmates are calling me a terrorist because of what's happening in other countries and at the same time they [Americans] are hurting 'my people.' So who does my allegiance lie with? Is it with people

TEACHING ETHICS IN STEM

Researchers like **Mohammed Khalid** are keeping the social impact of their work front and center and there's a reason for that. Interdisciplinary teams at UMBC are rigorously incorporating ethical considerations in STEM coursework.

In the past five years, more than 14,000 students in the College of Engineering and Information Technology (COEIT) took courses in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS), home to many courses that cultivate socially responsible thinking (SRT). At the same time, faculty in COEIT were also incorporating SRT concepts in their classes. This overlap was identified as an opportunity to collaborate, leveraging strengths of both colleges to imbue the STEM curriculum with an SRT approach.

HELENA MENTIS



“We want computing and engineering students to have a deeper understanding of the social impact of their work and how they are integrating SRT into their learning,”

explains **Helena Mentis**,

professor of information systems. Mentis is the lead investigator in the joint research project between COEIT and the Center for Social Science Scholarship (CS3) titled Identifying an Interdisciplinary Path to Social Responsibility Education Across the COEIT Curriculum.

Felipe Filomeno, associate professor of political science and global studies and CS3 associate director and a co-principle investigator,

says that the first step of the project is listening to faculty. “We are not imposing a preconceived approach to how social responsibility should be integrated into a STEM education.”

Mentis also emphasizes the importance of alumni in this process—their practical experience can provide students with insights into how industry leaders are implementing SRT.

Kara Seidel '18, psychology, now a language, literacy, and culture doctoral student, is a research assistant on the project. “This project is a great way to get my feet wet in all the fields at once,” shares Seidel. “I'm here to learn and help bring all the pieces together so that the team can craft and integrate the

FELIPE FILOMENO



who are part of my faith or with people whom I've just encountered in this new country who are actually demonstrating this antagonism against me?"

Khalid says he was spending 40 hours a week on YouTube chats with like-minded individuals, all the while pulling away from his real family. His involvement eventually broadened beyond the virtual, and in 2011, he was arrested in connection with an unsuccessful international plot to murder a Swedish cartoonist. He attempted to recruit people and solicit funds for an American woman known as "Jihad Jane" who was behind the conspiracy.

In his TEDx talk, Khalid goes into detail about his arrest and how surreal the situation seemed in the moment. An FBI officer had to remind the then-17-year-old to say goodbye to his parents. After his arrest, Khalid was diagnosed

with Asperger's Syndrome, a type of autism, which has helped explain to him those feelings of detachment during the harrowing moments of his arrest and also when thinking back on how hard it was to make friends in school.

It was in prison, of all places, that Khalid says he began to see the shared humanity with fellow prisoners and guards alike. "All that the prisoners and prison officials wanted to do was understand, and all I ever wanted in my life was to be understood," says Khalid. The correctional officers took time to share their own experiences with Khalid, which over time broke down the barriers Khalid had erected. One officer in a juvenile facility even challenged him, "Have you actually read the Qur'an from front to back?" When Khalid said no, he was given a copy.

"And I read it at that point," Khalid says. "That's when the ideological farce that I was believing in came breaking down. I think one of the verses that really resonated with me was how saving one life means that you're saving humanity, and how killing one life, it's like you're killing all of humanity. I think that's just one of the many beautiful principles in the Qur'an, that it is completely divorced from extremism."

Detecting Online Radicalization Ethically

At UMBC, Khalid has jumped head first into his information systems major with a focus on cybersecurity. His drive to help other young people not fall sway to extremism online is apparent, says

research in a way that will be most beneficial in the long run."

UMBC faculty are also working on addressing the negative social impact of existing technologies, such as the ethics in machine learning and data science.

Jordan Troutman '21, M29, computer science and mathematics—and a valedictorian for the class of 2021—researches how to eliminate bias in algorithms. Troutman won the 2018 Rutgers RISE 5MP for his research, "Fairness in Machine Learning," about how the COMPAS algorithm, which is used in the U.S. court system for recidivism prediction, is twice as likely to falsely classify Black men as more likely to reoffend compared to white men.

**JORDAN
TROUTMAN
'21, M29**



Troutman notes that people inherently give power to computers when they start to depend on them to make very complex human decisions. He wants computer scientists "to understand the impact of how our program—discriminatory or not—can affect the world we live in."

Troutman works with **James Foulds**, assistant professor of information systems, on identifying biases in machine learning technologies. Foulds received the National Science Foundation (NSF) CAREER Award in 2021 to develop technical solutions to resolve practical limitations of fair artificial intelligence techniques.

Foulds also approaches ethical thinking from the data science perspective with his colleague

**JAMES
FOULDS**



**VANDANA
JANEJA**



Vandana Janeja, information systems professor and chair. "Ethics cannot be tacked onto one part of the data life cycle," says Janeja.

"It has to be integrated across the data life cycle and infused into each step of the process of discovering patterns in the data and in context of the data being considered."

The goal of all this work, Mentis explains, is "to develop the next generation of technologists who have the framework and vocabulary to address the relationships between STEM and society."

—Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque



Khalid with Hunt before leaving to give his talk at TEDxJHU.

“We provide a space where affirmation comes first,” says Hunt. “Before any of the work... we’re dealing first with their humanity. In our McNair community, we have been intentional about scholars, staff, and mentors being able to show up as fully themselves.”

Vandana Janeja, professor and chair of Information Systems. “Mohammed has tapped into all the right resources for him to advance,” says Janeja. “He’s a real good example for other students—he showcases the best of what we have to offer at UMBC.”

Khalid transferred to UMBC in winter 2019. He quickly reached out to Janeja and **Anupam Joshi**, professor and chair of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering and the director of the UMBC Center for Cybersecurity, for help with formulating methodology for his research project assessing indicators of online radicalization.

“Frankly, if I’m being very honest,” says Joshi, “if someone from any background other than Mohammed’s had approached me and said, ‘I want to do this work,’ I would have probably not agreed to do it. In some areas, you can’t bring a certain amount of necessary empathy to your research unless you’ve been in that situation.”

And what Khalid was interested in researching—how to detect signs of Islamist radicalization from online discourse—is extremely complex, adds Joshi. “It sounds deceptively simple, but it’s very hard to do that. Because you’re trying to judge the mental state of a person based purely on what they’re saying in public-facing platforms.”

Both Joshi and Janeja pushed Khalid to study the ethics of data analysis. “In speaking to him about his research, I encouraged him to look at various perspectives to data analytics,” shares Janeja. “In our department, we frequently have conversations around ethics with students. ‘Keep in mind, as you are making choices in your algorithm, that you’re using this threshold to cut off these participants from analysis or using this threshold that impacts people in a certain way.’” Joshi adds that researchers’ biases can also easily enter their algorithms without careful consideration.

“What I told Mohammed,” says Joshi, “was that for his project, I am happy if he just ends up getting exposed to these ideas and how the technology can be applied to detect radicalization. He’ll have the rest of his graduate career or research career if he wants to continue to improve things because this is a particularly hard problem.”

Holistic Mentorship

Khalid is in the distinct position of knowing personally how people can influence you to pursue good or evil. He has become more discerning about the type of mentors he allows into his life, but more than ever he understands the need for trust and vulnerability and has surrounded himself with teachers who can address all facets of his mental, physical, spiritual, financial, and academic life.

When Khalid was released from prison in 2017 after his five-year sentence, he quickly sought to make up for lost time. Prior to being arrested, he had received early acceptance to Johns Hopkins University, but now he had to start his educational journey from scratch. “Rejection is the word I associate the most with that period,” Khalid says candidly. He eventually found his footing at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC).

“Mohammed is the type of student that takes every opportunity that comes before him—every opportunity to grow, to learn, and to serve,” says Natasha Cole-Leonard, associate professor of English and director of the honors program at CCBC, who got to know Khalid when he was a leader in the Honors Program and on the Student Honors Council.

At some time early in their relationship, Cole-Leonard says Khalid asked for a one-on-one meeting. “In reflection, I appreciated the fact that he trusted me to hear his story before it was a situation where he felt compelled to or because it was breaking news. It was just out of his own desire to be honest about his background.”

Khalid has continued to open up to advisors and mentors at UMBC and through the McNair program has been mentoring other students as well. It’s a role he’s taken to heart. “One of the things that I really emphasize is empathy. We can all sympathize with anyone, but empathizing is where it becomes difficult because you’re really putting yourself in the other person’s shoes and looking through their eyes, which is super hard,” says Khalid. “It’s exciting and interesting to coach others, providing them with words of affirmation and giving them encouragement and support. I’m letting them know that I’m there for them, no matter what happens.”

McNair Program Director Hunt is developing his dissertation for the language, literacy, and culture Ph.D. program at UMBC on holistic critical mentoring, which he also practices with his McNair scholars. Some of the tenets Hunt mentions are reciprocity between mentee and mentor, in which both parties are asked to collectively bring their culture and lived experiences to the relationship.

"We provide a space where affirmation comes first," says Hunt. "Before any of the work, before we get to the deadlines, before we get to anything we're dealing

first with their humanity. In our McNair community, we have been intentional about scholars, staff, and mentors being able to show up as fully themselves."

"Having someone who always believes in you is super important. And that's something I've actually personally experienced at UMBC," says Khalid. "All these people who I count as my mentors, Dr. Joshi, Dr. Janeja, Cindy Greenwood of the Cyber Scholars program, and Mr. Hunt...all these people actually believed in me when the whole world said I couldn't do this, and here we are and I'm still a mentee."

The Power of Being Heard

Khalid's cautionary tale against the temptations of extremism seems especially necessary in American culture currently. As the country wrestles with conspiracy theories that have torn at the fabric of the nation, what can we learn from the mistakes of teenager Khalid? "People tend to find ideology that already fits in with their perfect narrative...whatever reinforces what they want to believe in, no matter the regard for the facts out there," says Khalid.

As hard as it might be, Khalid says, we need to work on pinpointing our commonalities.

"Emphasize the humanity of the other person and things will get better. I know that sounds like just a perfect world, but I've found that people who feel heard—if you listen to their story—that's a way to start the conversation of what's bothering them." He returns to his own period of deradicalization.

"I started to change after I was able to look at these correctional officers in a new light. This led me to come out of that us-versus-them mindset and believe, 'Well, these people, their humanity is no different than mine,'" he says. "And that was the first crack in the ice, that kind of led to the shattering of the philosophy and the ideology that I was believing in."

Khalid acknowledges that everyone loves "a classical prison story of redemption" but knows that he will continue to face questions about the sincerity of his deradicalization. "To that," he adds, "only time will tell, and time has been telling so far."



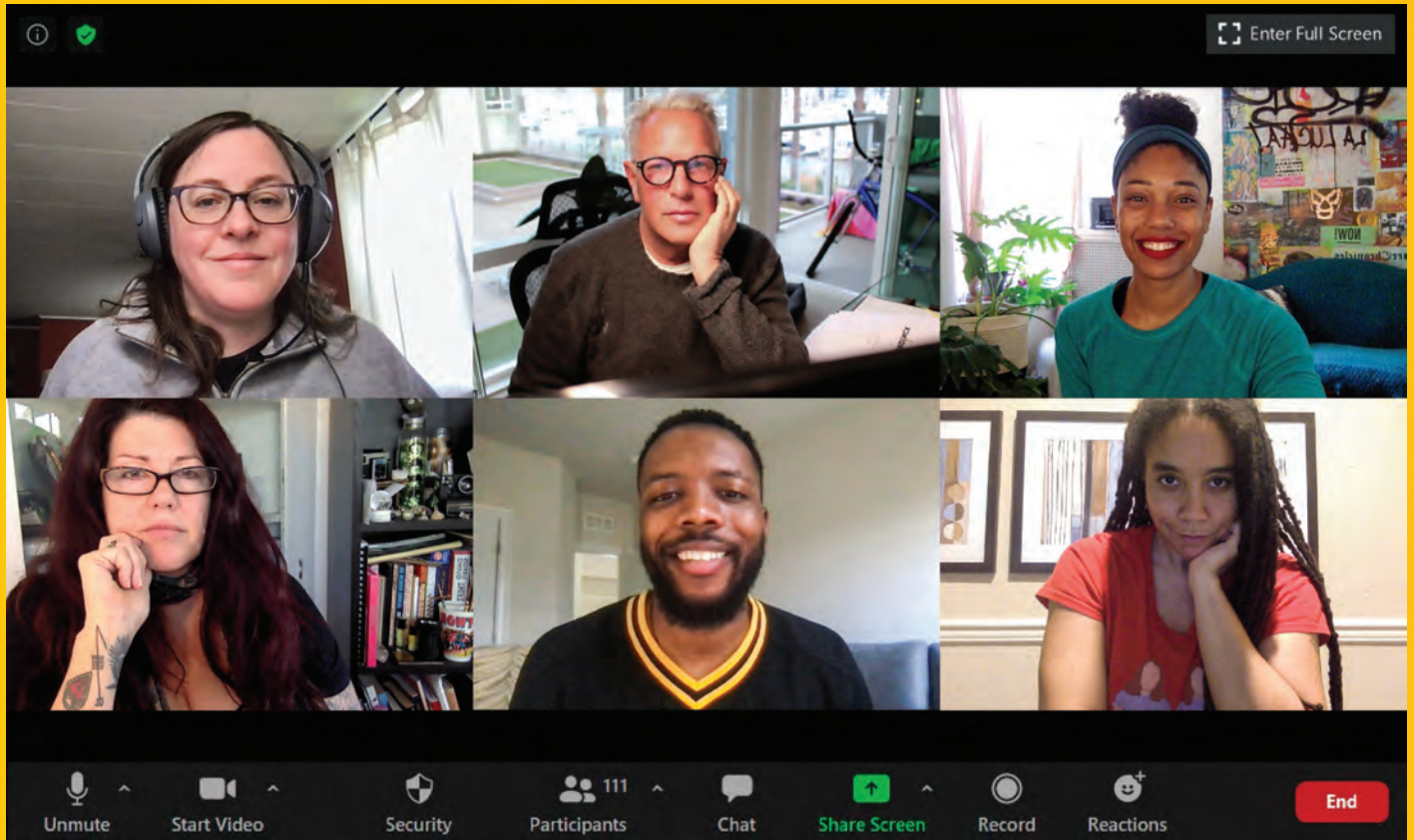
Thanks in part to mentors like Anupam Joshi, left, and Natasha Cole-Leonard, right, Khalid recently co-wrote a chapter on deradicalization and rehabilitation in the Oxford University Press book, *Terrorism, Violent Radicalisation, and Mental Health*.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON



Dimmed lights, Twizzlers, and a big bowl of popcorn. Most of us may not have had the traditional movie theatre experience this year, but in living rooms across the country, many have found much-needed solace through television and movies. Behind the scenes, Retrievers working in Hollywood as writers, producers, and directors have embraced the challenges of the moment—and remained ever-thankful for their audiences and creative roots. *UMBC Magazine* editor **Jenny O’Grady** sat down with five alumni working in entertainment to hear more about how they got their start, and what has kept them going creatively during this unusual time.





WOOD



KARA CORTHON '99, THEATRE

Job: Author, playwright, and TV writer

About: Author of *The Truth of Right Now* and *Daughters of Jubilation*. Plays include *What Are You Worth?*, *Welcome to Fear City*, *AliceGraceAnon*, and *Holly Down in Heaven*. Writes for the TV drama-thrillers *You* (Netflix), *The Flight Attendant* (HBO-Max), and M. Night Shyamalan's *Servant* (Apple TV+). A multiyear MacDowell Fellow and resident playwright at New Dramatists.

Where do you turn for inspiration? Toni Morrison, Shirley Jackson, and Octavia Butler. Korean horror films.

Your favorite creative spot at UMBC? AOK Library's "colorful Alice in Wonderland chairs"

Fave pandemic entertainment? *Search Party*, *Schitt's Creek*, *Gilmore Girls*

UMBC Magazine: *What has it been like to continue working during the pandemic in order to keep up with demand for entertainment? What does that look like?*

Kara Corthron: Well, I'll just say, I feel really fortunate that I've been able to work, because 40 percent of our country is experiencing food insecurity. But, the biggest shift for me in TV writing was that everything became Zoom meetings...and I still am not in love with it. We've found a way to make it work and be productive, but I still would much rather be with humans, and I miss that a lot.

Brandon Spells: On the network side, making that transition from our office on Sunset Boulevard, to taking pitches on Zoom, it's just a different energy when you're in the room with talent, and taking pitches and getting excited about things... it's just different. Initially we stopped all productions, so that was tough. Once we got the green light, we first started productions in countries overseas, and then slowly, during the summer, we started picking up back in America. Last fall we were going nonstop, trying to catch up, because there was a gap from when we stopped. This year, you're probably going to see that things kind of slow down, as far as the launch cadence. But maybe that's not a bad thing, because we come out with something every week, and maybe we don't need to launch a million things in one weekend.

Brian Dannelly: For me, when the virus came on, we were writing all the scripts, prepping everything, trying to figure out the COVID situation and trying to be ahead of it, so that when we were able to get back on set we'd be ready to go. We had no idea when we were going back, and so during that time period I had a physical, and my doctor didn't want me flying, so I

had to give up the show (*In the Dark*), which was terrible and sad...and really scary, too. I went into the pandemic with the hopes of coming out a better person, a better creator. We're so lucky because there are so many people who are really struggling, so you're trying to balance that with how you can use this time for good. And so I helped *In the Dark* transition to the third season, and then I just started writing like a crazy person. I became a whole food plant-based vegan, I learned how to cook. I'm adopted, so I found all my brothers and sisters—there's nine of them. And I just really tried to kind of reconnect with who I was when I started the business, who I was when I was at UMBC, and what got me into the business, and I feel like so far I've come out in a place that's really good.

Cat Mihos: For me, it's been fascinating watching the budgets balloon for COVID compliance. We have two shows in pre-production for Amazon right now that are going to be filmed in Scotland, so we were trying to share things, like catering, so we have one bubble, also trying to make new workarounds so we use the same COVID compliance officers—we're trying to work smarter. It's been a year. Brandon, I get it, Netflix has definitely been our biggest supporter, and we love working with them. It comes down to Zoom meetings, our writer rooms are all remote, so if there's any technical glitch... where you're just frozen on a screen, ugh. It's learning to cope, that's the best skill on any set that you can have. I did work on Brian's first couple films when he was in AFI (American Film Institute), so we have quite an old friendship. We're old. But it's lovely to have that support just right down the street.

UMBC Magazine: *Is there anyone who particularly influenced you, or some other takeaway from your time at UMBC, that you still look to now in your careers?*

Dannelly: You know, I was a little broken when I got there, which is interesting because UMBC really put me back together again. My first college was Morgan State University, so it was there I made my first film at a satellite program that they had in Towson. I went from being vice president of my class to failing out because I was so freaked out about making this film. And so I struggled for like two years. It didn't make sense that I could do this, because at the time we didn't have internet, and we weren't connected all over the world. It was like, I'm in this small town, how do I go from here to Hollywood?

I knew that John Waters edited his early films at UMBC, and I knew they had a lot of film equipment. I went to a meeting there, I was so scared. And so UMBC said come on in, come do this. And I had teachers like **Kathy O'Dell**, **Holly Rubenstein**, **Jill Johnson**—these women carried me. In fact, I was so broken when I went there, when it came to applying for a master's degree, I applied to all of the film schools that I thought I could get into, and Kathy O'Dell sat me down and said, "You apply to the best schools." And I applied to AFI (the American Film Institute) literally running to the train station in Washington, D.C., to put my application in the mail, because I was late and it had to be in by that night. And I never thought in a million years that I would get into that school. So, not only did they help me tap into my creativity and be who I am, but they helped put me back together again.

McKenzie Chinn: For me, part of my identity as a creative person is working in multiple spaces, in multiple disciplines. I'm still an actor, but I've forged more space for my own projects, my own writing. I have a poetry collective. And all of these things I do in equal measure. When I was at UMBC, I was an actor, in a very conservatory-like program. And I think the thing that I learned the most, was a level of discipline that allowed me to succeed as much as I have thus far, and that work ethic was reinforced by all my instructors in the Theatre Department. But I think it has been applying that discipline to carving out space for my own ideas and my own stories, and taking my own agency as an artist, especially as a Black person and a woman in this world, that have really benefited me as an artist and advanced my career beyond what I imagined it could be. And it has been that rebellion, frankly, that I think has allowed me to be able to pivot in the ways that I have during the pandemic. Theater is on pause right now, and so we're all finding ways to do what we do in a different space.

Corthron: In my senior year, I was part of a group that just started writing, and were kind of performing our own works and listening. And we're like it would be really cool to have a playwriting class, but we don't have one. So we went to the department head who was **Wendy Salkind** at that time, who is lovely. We told her we were really interested in writing, and she created a class for us. She found a teacher, and they added it to the curriculum. It was really cool. I feel like she saw that what we were getting wasn't quite enough, so she thought let's try and figure out a way to make it enough.

I've never thought of myself as one thing, either, which is hard, because people really want you to do your one thing, stay in your lane. And eventually I realized I'm a writer, so I write. But whether that's



**BRIAN DANNELLY '97,
VISUAL ARTS**

Job: Writer, director, and producer

About: Executive producer and the producing director on The CW's sleeper hit, *In the Dark*. Directed shows for Netflix, Hulu, Showtime, MTV, ABC, and CBS, including *Scream*, *Sweet Vicious*, *Haters Back Off*, *Pushing Daisies*, *United States of Tara*, and *Weeds*. Co-wrote and directed the cult teen film *Saved* and directed *Struck by Lightning*. Currently co-creating an animated series called *Humperdinck*.

Where do you turn for inspiration? Whatever personal crisis I'm going through at the moment.

Your favorite creative spot at UMBC? Kathy O'Dell's office.

Fave pandemic entertainment? *GENERA+ION* on HBO Max



BRANDON SPELLS '14, MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

Job: Creative assistant at Netflix, unscripted content

About: Worked on BET's "106 & Park" in New York City and on productions with National Geographic, Sirens Media, and E! In L.A., produced shows like *The Doctors*, *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, and *The Bachelor*. Today, develops and produces impactful global content for Netflix.

Where do you turn for inspiration? My mom! She is the reason I never gave up on my goals.

Your favorite creative spot at UMBC? Professor Kimberly Moffitt's "Baltimore in Film" classroom

Fave pandemic entertainment? My favorite reality show *The Real World*

"I feel like I need space. I need literal time and space in the world, and also in my head and my heart, to realize what it is that I have to say."

MCKENZIE CHINN '06



playwriting, whether that's novels—I write young adult fiction—or it's TV or film, I finally got to a place that's taken a long time, to realize I can do all of it, it's my choice if I want to be exhausted. It's really up to me. So I think that some of that was instilled in me at UMBC.

Spells: So my freshman year, I was a graphic design major, and I was supposed to do this portfolio, but of course being a freshman, I procrastinated and I threw something together and submitted it to the program. And I didn't get in. I wanted to be a cartoonist, graphic design—that was always what I was going to do. And so when I didn't get into the program, it was a crossroads moment. What other things do I like to do? What are my other passions?

And I remembered me and my friends would shoot and edit YouTube videos and stuff, and so I was like I kind of like entertainment, but I don't know anyone who is in the entertainment industry. I don't even know how you get into making films, or any of that stuff. Nobody in my family ever did that. And so I started going into media communications. And the first class that I took was Baltimore Film with **Kimberly Moffitt**. I enjoyed it, but I just wasn't looking at film or television

in a very analytical way. Professor Moffitt, she broke things down in such a creative way, it really helped me see things I hadn't thought of before. And I literally use those techniques today. Giving notes on a cut, and kind of using the analytical eye to look at things creatively, I use that everyday. And I honestly think it started with that class, because watching *The Wire*, watching *Crybaby*, she was breaking each scene down and why this led to this, and I'm like how? I would never have thought of something like that. And so it was really a full circle moment for me.

Mihos: I was a photography major. I worked in the darkroom at UMBC, and **Alan Rutberg** was one of my teachers, and I was very sad to hear we lost him two years ago. When I was 12; I built a darkroom with my dad. So it was always about analog film, and poor Alan, really I put him through the paces. I was adamant, why do I have to learn digital, there's still going to be film. He said nope, and he pulled me into the digital age. He was great, he was challenging. **Chris Peregoy**, as well, was excellent. Very different teachers, but they both contributed important parts of my photographic life, which I do still use. I've done photo shows, I need to return to that.

Digital is still not my true love. I had sort of two dads telling me digital is the future, get with it, forget complaining about it, just go. And Peregoy was like no, keep your analog film love, because it is still there, it's just almost gone.

UMBC Magazine: *Why do you think entertainment has been such a unifying force during the pandemic, and what are you hearing from people that keeps you going creatively?*

Spells: I feel like some of our stuff has definitely provided people with escapism, because everyone's cooped up in their house, they're not traveling, not experiencing things. And so being able to just get out of your little box and put yourself somewhere else for a little bit is always helpful. *Love is Blind*, for instance, people loved that show. And I feel like people were unified in people's misery, craziness, misfortune. They're like this is so crazy, this is so wild. But having that connectivity with people, especially when you feel so far away from them, is always nice.

Corthron: Yeah, I totally agree, I think we'd all love a little bit of a vacation from what's going on. These shows have helped a lot. I also think not only is it giving us something to connect about, because of the past year, it was giving people a reason to connect over something that wasn't politics. I feel like there was so much going on that was painful, that it was a way not to have to, at least for like a moment, to have a conversation that wasn't about how stressed we should be. It was a stressful year.

Chinn: I agree with both of you, Brandon and Kara, the world is a lot right now. Even now, if I just think too hard about it, I get really overwhelmed. And I think as creative people we have sensitivity, where we are deeply impacted by things going on around

us, and the suffering of others. But in order to be able to show up for ourselves and our families, we need to be able to dispel some of that anxiety, some of that sorrow, some of that tension, because it is so strong.

And so having these various forms of entertainment from prestige television to the trashiest of the trash, has been, I think, for me, been a lifesaver.... I've had this really amazing experience over the last year, where my movie, *Olympia*, got distributed and hit streaming platforms in 2019. And then everything stopped, and so people were watching more media than they ever had. And so I think smaller indie films that maybe would not have gotten as much attention were suddenly being watched by a lot of people, mine included. And my movie is mostly Black people and people of color, and it's a comedy. It's got some heavier moments, some heartfelt moments, but it is a lighter movie.... I remember thinking, does anybody need this movie right now? Little did I know, that was exactly what people would need during this time. And I got an experience I'm so grateful for, where I've had just so many Black people, specifically Black women sliding in my DMs just to thank me for the movie, from all over. And every time it happens, I'm just beside myself with gratitude.

Dannelly: One thing I don't think people realize is that people making film and TV, they work 16 hours a day. Everyone works so hard, they're away from their families.... The other thing I always say to people, is that Hollywood is just a bunch of people from small towns and cities. It's not like a bunch of people from L.A. Cat and I came from a little small town, and we didn't go there as Hollywood people, and I'm sure you guys have the same experience—you go there because that's where you go to make films and TV.



CAT MIHOS '00, VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS (PHOTOGRAPHY)

Job: Producer/writer, photographer, former roadie

About: Met author Neil Gaiman while on tour with Tori Amos in 2002. Toured full time with bands like Tool, Mötley Crüe, Soundgarden, and Gaga until 2016 when she set up Gaiman's production company, which she currently manages on the Jim Henson Studio lot. Worked on *American Gods*, *Good Omens*, and managed several book tours. Authored *Comic Book Tattoo Tales Inspired by Tori Amos*. Writing a graphic novel for Z2 Comics about Vikings titled *Lore of the Havamal*.

Where do you turn for inspiration?
I flip through old comics.

Your favorite creative spot while at UMBC? Fells Point, where I opened my little shop 9th Life.

Fave pandemic entertainment?
The Wire, *X Files*, *30 Rock*.



MCKENZIE CHINN '06, THEATRE

Job: Filmmaker, actor, and poet

About: Writer, producer, and lead actor of *Olympia*. Acted in the FOX pilot *The Big Leap*, *Empire*, CBS's *The Red Line*, and onstage with Goodman and Steppenwolf Theatres, The Second City, and others. Part of Growing Concerns Poetry Collective whose releases include two albums—*Big Dark Bright Futures* and *We Here: Thank You For Noticing*.

Where do you turn for inspiration? Currently, ideas around Afrofuturism.

Your favorite creative spot while at UMBC? Room 318 of the theatre building, which acting students shared with the Registrar.

Fave pandemic entertainment? I've been very drawn to cult documentaries.

“We have the ability to change culture by inclusiveness, by who we choose to hire. So it's like this sort of weird external thing, where we entertain people on many different levels, and it's also this very active, internal mechanism for change, which I love.”

BRIAN DANNELLY '97



Mihos: Well, I wanted to add on that note, my dad came from Greece, he came over when he was 16. I went home to see him recently with great concern, because I thought I don't want to get him sick, he's 90, and he's like, please come home. I asked him, “Dad, should I be doing this? Should I be doing this with my life?” He said, “You know what, we need to laugh, we need entertainment!” His 90-year-old wisdom just kind of turned my brain around, because I was thinking, what really is this? Is this going to matter in the big picture? Shouldn't I be out there fighting for people, healing people, doing something more important? I really appreciated that from my dad, because you never know what you're giving back to the world.

Dannelly: This is what I love about our business. Yes, we entertain people, that's part of our job. I think hopefully we're doing it for good, even if it's a laugh. But also, we have the ability to affect every single person we work with. We have the ability to change culture by inclusiveness, by who we choose to hire. So it's like

this sort of weird external thing, where we entertain people on many different levels, and it's also this very active, internal mechanism for change, which I love. I'm always going into a project with an agenda, always, always.

UMBC Magazine: *So, what advice would you give a student or recent grad who's trying to get into this business?*

Mihos: I think what's really important in life is you come up with your people. The other assistants, the people working with you on the ground. It's important to keep checking in with people, even if you have nothing to say, no news, just be like, “how are you doing?” I do so many little mentorships, because I didn't have much of that, and I didn't know how to find it. There's no rule book, and I think the younger kids, they do seem to be fine with asking. I just never thought you were supposed to ask. So please, be generous with your time.

Dannelly: While you're there at school, understand who you are and what kind of stories you want to tell. Really connect with why you're at UMBC. Take a lot of different classes outside of the arts department, because no one wants to make projects with people who only have a theater degree. Whatever other interests you have, spend time doing that. Create as much content as you can. Short films, Tik Toks, YouTube. I can't tell you how many people I discover on Tik Tok and I'm like, that person is interesting, I wonder what they would be like in a film or show.

And then the other thing that's hugely important, and I think McKenzie and Kara, you touched on this so well, is write. The fastest way to have a career is to have something that you've written that somebody wants. You don't have to do anything but have this thing that you've written that you want to direct. And I guess the final thing I would say is don't sell yourself short, like I did.

Chinn: This year, what I come back to is what a wonderful opportunity this was to enrich yourself as an artist, as a creative person. Before things got surprisingly busy again, I was just like, oh my gosh, I'm going to read so many books. I'm going to watch so many movies that have been on my list. I'm going to grow things in my apartment. I was actually quite excited for the opportunity to connect with the other parts of myself that feed my artistry, that give me something to even talk about, that give me a perspective to have in the world

that I bring with me when I sit down at my laptop, or when I walk onto a set. I feel like I need space. I need literal time and space in the world, and also in my head and my heart, to realize what it is that I have to say. And I think if there's an opportunity like one the pandemic has presented for some people to have that time and space. Or, rest, right? We don't always have to be productive. We don't always have to be in making mode. We can also just take a nap, that's also important work.

Corthron: I'm just going to go with what everybody said, particularly Brian. Write, and write scripts that cannot be ignored.

Mihos: And a P.S. on that, hold onto your intellectual property. Don't give it away, be careful with that. Starting out, especially. I see it happen so often.

Spells: And like Cat said, relationships are just so important, not only in this industry, but obviously in every industry. A lot of it is about what you can do, but it's also about who you are and how you connect with the people around you and work with the people around you. And then networking, it's also not bad to ask for help. When I was just graduating, I quickly found out that no one has made it on their own. And the moment I started connecting with other people, and asking for help, is the moment that they saw how genuine I was, and I saw how genuine they were, and we made those connections. And I was able to help them along the way, and they helped me. And so it's all a collaborative effort.

WATCH LIST

Add these other alumni creators to your must-watch queue!



Kimberly Patrick '08, music technology – Sound designer for recent Marvel hit *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*.



Keilyn Jones '11, acting – Actor who appeared in a recent episode of *The Equalizer* with Queen Latifah.



Mallorie Ortega '13, theatre and visual arts – Director of *The Girl Who Left Home*, a live-action musical feature film about an Asian American

working-class family who must face the past in order to face their futures.

HOW TO PAINT A MURAL

With Zaynub Siddiqui '21, psychology



Last November, Zaynub Siddiqui '21, psychology, set out to paint the town red—and yellow, green, pink, and black. Jumping at the chance to contribute creatively to OCA Mocha—the community-centered UMBC-affiliated coffee shop in neighboring Arbutus—the UMBC senior took a drab wall and transformed it over the course of her 20th birthday weekend. So, how exactly does one tackle a 150-square-foot blank space? For Siddiqui, it took vision, daring, and multiple iced matchas. But in the end she left local coffee lovers a floral feast for the eyes.

Tools of the Trade

1. A projector, a scaffold, and no fear of heights—To translate a design from the page to the side of a building, it helps to use an Epson 4K projector.
2. Shoe coverings—“Paint gets everywhere,” says Siddiqui.
3. A passion for the subject matter—“I love plants, I have a whole bunch. I love gardening,” she says.
4. A favorite coffee shop drink—“I really love an iced matcha,” says Siddiqui.
5. Advil—because that’s a LOT of standing.

Step 1: FIND A WALL

In Siddiqui’s case, the wall found her. The people behind OCA Mocha put out a call for artists to decorate the wall adjacent to their outdoor patio and parking lot. Even though she is a psychology major (with a sociology minor), the notice caught her eye. “I’ve always wanted to be a part of UMBC’s art scene,” she says. “I would see their art building and their exhibit areas and think, I want to do that.”

As such, armed with a love of arts and crafts and her experience helping out with collective murals at the college she attended briefly before transferring to UMBC, Siddiqui submitted her ideas for consideration and was excited to be chosen.

Step 2: CREATE A DESIGN AND A PLAN

Siddiqui’s vision started with the idea of a steaming cup of coffee and adding her own spin with lots of florals. “Nature really inspires my artwork,” she says. She also wanted to create a space where people could easily snap fun photos of themselves. After a series of meetings and emails with OCA Mocha staff, they settled on a design.

Siddiqui was excited that the timing of the mural aligned with her senior year. “Since this is my last year at UMBC, I’d sort of leave off with a bang,” she says. Siddiqui also appreciated being able to paint it on her birthday, showing growth artistically and personally. “Entering my 20s by doing this was something really exciting for me,” she says.





Step 3:

SCALE UP YOUR ART SUPPLIES

Got paint brushes? Get bigger ones. Siddiqui also ditched regular art trays for mixing in favor of big foil trays usually used for food. For paint, you'll need something a lot more durable than the stuff in your everyday art kit. Buy exterior primer for the base and exterior flat finish for the design.

And, don't forget about clean-up. With a mural, paint splashes up, down, and all around, so Siddiqui suggests being prepared to cover up and wash up. "You think you're not going to touch something...and then you'll find it," she says. "I had paint on myself a week and a half after. I'd say, 'I thought I scrubbed my arms!'"

Step 4:

BE PREPARED TO GROW YOUR ART

When the time came to start painting, the huge wall size came as something of a surprise to Siddiqui once it was right in front of her. Undeterred, she painted flowers and more flowers and then added more until the space was full. The end result? A burst of color (and coffee) that explodes into an otherwise humdrum parking lot.

Florals often find their way into Siddiqui's work. As such, she packed it with some of her favorites, including a peony and roses. She also made sure to include flora and fauna that are special to the area. There is a monarch butterfly, native to the region, as well as plenty of Maryland's state flower, the Black-Eyed Susan. Siddiqui even included a White Oak leaf in an homage to the famous Arbutus White Oak that fell in 2019.

Step 5:

GO AND DREAM BIGGER DREAMS

The mural may be done, but Siddiqui's work is far from over. She plans to pursue a master's degree in psychology and possibly mix her love of art with her love of how the mind works.

"They both provide different insights to people and how they think and their emotions," she says. Eventually she'd like to possibly get into art therapy—but the scaffold still sitting in her house proves that murals will stay in her life. "I would love to have a mural in New York City or Los Angeles or Amsterdam...something that people would be able to take pictures of and remind them of nature." Ultimately, she thinks that "just to put a smile on someone's face would be really fun."

— Karen Stysley

ALUMNI ESSAY

Building a Better Baltimore—Together

As a first-generation college student from southeast Baltimore, Sondheim Scholar Stefanie Mavronis '12, political science and media & communication studies, was initially hesitant to talk openly about her past. As she made a home—and a name for herself as an organizer—on campus, Mavronis realized that she could bring her whole self to UMBC. Now deputy director of communication for Baltimore City Mayor Brandon Scott, Mavronis channels her hometown pride and Retriever confidence to tackle connecting with constituents during a pandemic and what feels like an all-time low of public trust in government.

In 2000, all eyes were on the presidential election—mine included—except I was fixated on winning the highest office of fifth grade.

My teacher must have seen something in me, and she encouraged me to run for class president and generally explore things that I didn't know were possible. It turns out that I naturally gravitate to these opportunities, whenever I'm in a new space or a new school or a new class—I end up organizing the people around me and working to make change.

Despite that, it wasn't until my senior year at UMBC that I would explicitly share with people that I was from Dundalk. When people heard that about me first, there were stereotypes and assumptions about what I was capable of achieving and who I was.

Learning local history through my coursework at UMBC, reading books like *Not in My Neighborhood*, and having opportunities to explore and embed myself in the Baltimore community, where I was from, became something that I wasn't ashamed of. I wasn't ashamed to be a first-generation college student—I was proud of it, and I started to see some of the

unique leadership skills and insights that I brought as someone who came from that experience in Baltimore. UMBC was a safe and supportive space for my development as a young person and ultimately brought me to the position in the Mayor's Office I have today.

Actively creating culture

At UMBC, I was always bursting at the seams with ideas and motivated to change the culture on campus. I have gratitude for my professors and mentors, who not only made time for me but helped point me in new directions. In a big way, they were my support system. **Delana Gregg, M.S. '04, instructional development systems, Ph.D. '19, language, literacy, and culture**, who co-led the Sondheim Scholars program; **Jodi Kelber-Kaye** and **Simon Stacey** in the Honors College; **Lisa Akchin** in Institutional Advancement; **Jason Loviglio** in media and communication studies—I'm sure in his office alone, I probably spent tens of hours.

When I came to campus at UMBC, I fully intended to be part of the Student Government Association (SGA) but



instead got involved with another student leadership organization in my first semester: the student events board (seb). When it came to the people on campus who I saw actively shaping and creating campus culture—taking the reputation that the school had at that time as a “commuter school”—I was really interested in being one of the students making campus culture more inclusive and just and helping incoming students find their place.

As I got close to graduation, I realized one of the reasons why UMBC people stick together. We are collectively coming out of an institution that has gone to great lengths to not cushion us but help us find our individual paths, forge our unique lanes, and identify our strengths in a way that was very supportive.

The shift into the “real world” can be challenging. For me, it felt like I was being asked to fit myself into a box after being embraced for my whole, multifaceted self. I'm so grateful for my mentors and friends

who sent me the message that they didn't want me to change, who supported me in finding ways to communicate my strengths to the outside world.

Supporting a homegrown leader

In my last year of college, I applied for a mayoral fellowship, which I ultimately did not get. Brandon Scott, a councilmember at the time, was part of my interview panel. I developed a proposal for how to address Baltimore's vacant housing crisis over a summer, leveraging public-private partnerships in a different kind of community-based way. It was a wild plan, but Brandon recognized my passion, big ideas, and hometown pride.

Brandon was a frequent guest on the Marc Steiner Show on WEEA 88.9-FM, where I worked as a producer for several years. Even back then Brandon often spoke about the need for local control of our police force and holistic strategies to combat gun violence. When I left to attend Princeton for graduate school, one of the ways I stayed connected to Baltimore was working with Brandon on the development of his strategy as the public safety chair of the City Council. After getting my master's, I returned to Baltimore and landed a job at City Hall in Councilmember Zeke Cohen's office.

After Brandon won his bid for council president in 2019, I was tapped to serve as his communication director. I was energized to work for a homegrown leader, someone who has a keen sense of what Baltimore needs and unconditional love for the people of the city in a way that I have not always seen or felt from leaders in the past.

Calling all visionaries

If you don't like the way that things are, play an active role in changing them. There's a lot of people who have made me feel like that's possible throughout history and in my own life, from my successful bid for fifth grade class president to running a more competitive race in high school to represent southeast Baltimore County at a county-wide level in student government.

I never expected to work in local government but am so glad I landed here. And now being here, I often wish there were even more people in this space with visionary ideas who aren't deterred by boundaries, willing to try new things. Confronting the legacy of redlining and inequitable systems is not overnight work—but I now see how it takes people

finding new ways to work together inside and outside of government to make transformative change and rebuild the trust that's eroded over time.

I'm excited to be tasked with the opportunity and responsibility to be part of shaping this administration and bringing more people into this project of building a stronger Baltimore City, one that's more equitable and accountable and that works better for people.

Stefanie Mavronis shares more about her journey to City Hall at magazine.umbc.edu/baltimore-together.

Below: Mavronis, in yellow coat, accompanies Mayor Brandon Scott to a UMBC co-sponsored vaccination event for the Lakeland community in southeast Baltimore. Photo by Marlayna Demond '11.



“UMBC has gone to great lengths to help us find our individual paths, forge our unique lanes, and identify our strengths.”

CLASS NOTES

UMBC Class Notes is compiled by *UMBC Magazine* staff from items submitted online and by mail by alumni as well as from news articles and press releases received by the university. This edition of Class Notes contains information processed by April 26, 2021.

How to Submit Class Notes

The deadline for submitting Class Notes for the next print issue of *UMBC Magazine* is October 21, 2021. Notes and photos may be submitted online at umbc.edu/magazine or by email to magazine@umbc.edu.

Photo Guidelines

Digital photos should be taken on the highest quality setting. They should be 4 x 6 inches or larger and 300 ppi. Save the attachment as a TIFF or JPEG. Questions? Please email magazine@umbc.edu.



Emily Kranking '16, media and communication studies, made her movie debut in the musical *Best Summer Ever*, which won the Final Draft Screenwriters Award at SXSW Film Festival.

1973

Diane Bell-McKoy, sociology, was featured in *The Daily Record's* "Power 100" 2021 list for her leadership in Maryland.

1976

Maryland House Speaker **Adrienne A. Jones, psychology**, was included in a list of 30 women leaders who are shaping Baltimore City. Jones was also recognized for her leadership across Maryland in *The Daily Record's* "Power 100" 2021 list.

1979

Sabina Kelly, economics, is among 100 people recognized for exceptional leadership across Maryland by *The Daily Record*. She recently retired from her position as president of Bank of America Greater Maryland after 41 years there.

Mary K. Tilghman, English, published her fourth novel, *The Last Gift*. The book tells the story of a Baltimore workaholic who joins her sister on a cruise in the Adriatic.

1981

Howard Siskind, M.S. '85 psychology, released "Orion," his 11th professional recording.

1986

Stephanie C. Hill, economics and computer science, was included on a list of Baltimore-area trailblazers. As the vice president and general manager of Lockheed Martin's Ship & Aviation Systems business and executive leader at one of the world's biggest defense contractors, Hill is among the only 3.2 percent of Black executives who lead large companies in the U.S.

1987

Nathaniel Jones, mechanical engineering, Ph.D. '02, health policy, was named president of the College of Alameda, a community college in California.

1989

Teresa A. Hanyok, biochemistry and molecular biology, joined Mercy Health Services, part of the Manchester Family Medicine practice. Board certified in family medicine, Hanyok provides primary care services for all ages.

1990

Jennifer Walsmith, computer science, is the newly appointed chair of the Washington Executive Intelligence Council for 2020 – 2021.

1992

Chitrananda Abeygunawardana, Ph.D., chemistry, was named vice president of regulatory affairs at Venatorx Pharmaceuticals. In his new role, Abeygunawardana will develop regulatory practices for Venatorx's antibacterial and antiviral programs.

Kent Malwitz, information systems, accepted a position at Red Hat as their senior director of North America Training after 17 years at UMBC Training Centers.

1994

Karen "Chaya" Friedman, political science, is the first Orthodox Jewish woman to serve as an associate judge on the 8th Judicial Circuit for Baltimore City in Maryland. Friedman is also the youngest inductee to the Baltimore Jewish Hall of Fame.

Ruby Lu, economics, is one of a few women investors who have risen to the forefront of China's venture capital world. In 2019, Lu started her own firm, Atypical Ventures, to train China's next generation of tech entrepreneurs using finance from U.S. institutional investors.

Oliver Myers, M.S. '96, Ph.D. '07, M1, mechanical engineering, was named a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers. He is working to replicate tenets of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at Clemson University. He was also awarded the Dr. Eugene DeLoatch Legacy Award at the BEYA STEM Global Competitiveness Conference for his work in supporting underrepresented populations in STEM fields.

1995

Edward Steven Prevosto, English, published his first novel, *The Defending Guns*.

Crystal Watkins-Johansson, M3, biological sciences, was named to *Cell Mentor's* list of 1,000 inspiring Black scientists.

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE STUDENT

Tamara L. Lewis '92, psychology



"To me, UMBC opened up the world," says **Tamara L. Lewis '92, psychology**. As a student, that meant joining Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., (AKA) for instance, holding multiple jobs all around campus, and ultimately re-envisioning her career path.

Lewis began her studies focusing on industrial and organizational psychology. However, it was her many on-campus jobs—conference assistant, desk staffer, and student worker in the admissions office—that allowed her to realize that she was actually drawn to counseling. Working across campus let Lewis see how a university can support student success, so she began to explore how she could work with students.

Thirty years later, Lewis still feels a sense of real connection to the campus and actively works to help other alumni engage with students and the institution. And her career pathway has allowed her to continue to support students in the manner she first observed at UMBC.

Academic support has defined many aspects of Lewis's career and philanthropic life. After UMBC, Lewis received her master's degree in counseling

from Hampton University—UMBC President **Freeman Hrabowski's** alma mater. She then began her career in the counseling center at Baltimore City Community College.

"Being in the academic realm got me thinking more about college student experiences," she shares, and she started thinking about what structures exist to help young people succeed. She drew on lessons learned at UMBC that helped her understand the value of community and support in educating the whole student.

Lewis continued exploring the topic of academic success in her dissertation for her doctorate from Morgan State University. After earning both her graduate degrees from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Lewis understood the advantages of students feeling a sense of belonging while at school. Her own experience, along with research and alumni work, has shown her the importance of making students feel important and valuable within their community.

Creating a space for Black and Latine/x alumni to come together came organically through events and outreach supported by UMBC's Office of Alumni Engagement, says Lewis. What started as a UMBC-hosted evening for Black and Latine/x alumni at Baltimore's Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American History would result in the creation of the Chapter of Black and Latine/x Alumni (CBLA) at UMBC in 2006.

"Tamara was instrumental in creating the CBLA and leading events and initiatives that would speak to and acknowledge the unique experiences of our Black and Latine/x graduates," says **Stanyell Odom**, director of Alumni Engagement. "Her love for UMBC is evident in the way she gives back her time, talent, and resources through the CBLA, the Alumni Board, and her beloved sorority."

In 1991, Lewis became a member of AKA, one of the first historically Black sororities on campus. She remembers how important it felt to build community among Black students on campus. Through her student work in AKA, as well as her residential life involvement, she saw the value of supporting Black students to do their very best at UMBC, a vision that was shared through the administration, she says.

Now, nearly 30 years after joining her sorority, she continues to connect with members to support UMBC. In 2011, Lewis helped plan the first AKA Homecoming reunion. **Anita Jackson '80, health science and policy**, then a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors, and the Office of Alumni Engagement leveraged connections to the alumni community to make the event a success. AKA members have gathered at Homecoming every year since. The event also fundraises for the UMBC Second Generation Scholarship, which is dedicated to students who show a commitment to the advancement of minorities. In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the sorority sisters came together virtually in honor of the charter anniversary of their chapter.

"It's important that people give what they can, even if it's not money but time," Lewis says, emphasizing the value of expanding the ways alumni can support the UMBC community.

Now, as the state test security officer and the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) state coordinator for the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Lewis continues to ensure students have everything they need to succeed on standardized testing. The Assessment Branch of MSDE works to create uniform and accessible testing standards so that students, educators, and community members can best support students and address any gaps in education. Working in Baltimore City, Lewis understands the value of equitable testing practices so that students can use every support available. Her continued curiosity about addressing gaps and building community has made her an integral part of the UMBC alumni community.

As a student, Lewis realized that being an active member of the UMBC community was the best way to get the most of her education. Now, she wants to help current students—who she sees as future alumni—realize how important it is to give back to UMBC when they do graduate. "When I tell people I went to UMBC, they're impressed," she says, which just inspires her to give back even more.

— Imani Spence '16



CLASS NOTES

1996

Christina Horchar, American studies, was named partner at SFG Wealth Management in Towson. Horchar joined SFG in 2013 as a client service associate. Last year, she was named chief operating officer overseeing SFG's daily operations.

1997

Gwendolyn Roberts Francavillo, sociology, received tenure and promotion to associate professor at Marymount University in May 2018 and was promoted to chair of the Department of Health and Human Performance in August 2020. She has been active as a public health expert during COVID-19, leading nationwide mental health de-stress sessions for the American Public Health Association (APHA) and was recently elected as a governing councilor for APHA.

1998

Mary K. Laurents, M.A. history, Ph.D. '18, language, literacy, and culture, published *British Identity in World War I: The Lost Boys*. The book analyzes the development of the Lost Generation narrative following the First World War, the fracture of upper-class identity, and the effects of the First World War on British society, culture, and politics.

1999

Lola Eniola-Adefeso, M7, chemical engineering, was among 1,000 Black scientists named to *Cell Mentor's* inspiring Black scientists list.

Adrienne McFadden, M7, interdisciplinary studies, was recognized in The Biotechnology Innovation Organization's "BIO Celebrates Black History Month" spotlight as a physician who fights for health equity.



Alicia Williams '05 started Humanity in HR to support more positive work environments.

2001

Kafui Dzirasa, M8, chemical engineering, earned the Duke University 2021 Ruth and A. Morris Williams Jr. Faculty Research Prize for his contributions in basic science research. Dzirasa was also featured on *Cell Mentor's* list of 1,000 inspiring Black scientists.

Amina Saeed Shams, information systems, started BLOOM Charity, a nonprofit that supports the mental health and early childhood development needs of children living in Moroccan orphanages. She was inspired to start the charity after adopting her son and seeing firsthand the catastrophic effects of institutionalization on a child's development.

Sandra Uter, mathematics and economics, a senior web developer for the Boeing Company, was honored at the 2021 BEYA STEM Conference as a Modern Day Technology Leader.

2002

Mina Cheon, M.F.A., intermedia and digital arts, exhibited her Diamonds Light Installation, created in collaboration with Gabriel Kroiz, at Waterfall Mansion and Gallery in New York. Cheon was also named one of 36 winners of the 2021 Baker Artist Awards, and her son, **Gerson Kroiz**, a junior math major at UMBC, was recently named a Goldwater Scholar.

Tina Williams-Koroma, computer science, CyDeploy CEO, received a grant from the Maryland Industrial Partnerships to further CyDeploy's creation of a cloud-based replica of their company's systems by using artificial

intelligence and machine learning. Williams-Koroma is working with **Anupam Joshi**, a professor and the chair of computer science and electrical engineering at UMBC, to bring the novel cybersecurity tool to life.

2003

Erik Atas, history, was named a circuit court judge for Baltimore County by Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan.

2004

Brandon Dudley, English, won the Maine Chapbook Series, a contest highlighting emerging writers and poets. His contest-winning book *Hazards of Nature: Stories* will be published in 2021.

John Foster, computer engineering, was named to the *Baltimore Business Journal's* "40 Under 40" list for his work as chief operating officer of Fearless, a Baltimore-based digital services firm.

Alicia Wilson, political science, was included in *Baltimore Magazine's* list of 30 women leaders shaping Baltimore's future. Wilson currently leads John Hopkins' Office of Economic Development, which works to develop and bolster Baltimore neighborhoods.

2005

Brian Arnold, English, co-founder of Nepenthe Brewing Co., was named to the *Baltimore Business Journal's* "40 Under 40" list.

Kenneth Gibbs, Jr., M13, biochemistry and molecular biology, became chief of the Undergraduate and Predoctoral Cross-Disciplinary Training Branch in the Division of Training, Workforce Development, and Diversity for the National Institute of General Medical Sciences. Gibbs now oversees the Institute's diversity training programs and the institutional components of the National Institutes of Health Diversity Program Consortium.

Matthew D. Jacobson, political science, was promoted to partner at Reed Smith LLP in the firm's Washington, D.C., office after previously being a counsel. Jacobson is a litigator in the firm's

Life Sciences Health Industry Group and handles product liability disputes involving medical device companies.

Avery Posey, M13, bioinformatics, was highlighted in *Cell Mentor's* list of 1,000 inspiring Black scientists in America. He also received the inaugural Lustgarten Foundation-AACR Award for Pancreatic Cancer Research in honor of John Robert Lewis and Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Alicia Williams, psychology, started Humanity in HR, a practice that shows organizations how to preventively deal with employee relation matters and form policies that create positive work environments.

2006

McKenzie Chinn, theatre, was selected as the inaugural recipient of the Geena Davis' Bentonville Film Foundation NBCUniversal Grant, which provides \$25,000 to support production of her short film, *A Real One*.

Stephen Johnson, sociology, was promoted to commander at the Maryland State Police Frederick Barrack after being a sergeant.

2007

Sarah Butts, social work, was elected to the board of directors of the Mental Health Liaison Group.

Kristen Moorby, American studies, was named Middle Township High School's new boys' swim coach in New Jersey. Moorby swam for UMBC before graduating.

Adjoa Smalls-Mantey, M15, biochemistry and molecular biology, completed her residency at Mt. Sinai and a Public Psychiatry Fellowship at Columbia. Currently, she is working as an emergency room psychiatrist in New York City hospitals. She also wrote an article for ABC News about who is eligible for the various COVID-19 vaccines and the considerations specific groups need to make before receiving the vaccine.

AN INTERRUPTED EDUCATION, COMPLETED

Elinora Bolton '70, French, and Bob Bolton '70, mathematics



Born into Baltimore society in the elegant townhouse that is now the Brewer's Art restaurant, Elinora Bowdoin moved to France at age 7 with her mother and sister after her parents' divorce, according to Steve Bolton, her son and family historian. At 18, Elinora was presented in a flowing white dress to King George VI, Steve says. She studied at the Sorbonne in Paris for 18 months, but the onset of World War II and her mother's death interrupted her education.

Elinora and her sister returned to Baltimore in 1939. "Feeling foreign" and a bit at sea, Steve says. The sisters kept themselves busy with becoming nationally ranked as tennis doubles champions and attending balls at elegant locations, such as the Alcazar Hotel (now the Baltimore School for the Arts), where Elinora met her future husband in 1940.

Robert Harrison Bolton was a pilot in the Army Air Corps and married Elinora on a three-day pass. Their first child was born in 1944, and for more than 20 years, Elinora stayed home to raise her children. The family remembers her as an energetic mother, an indifferent cook, and an avid reader.

"She did have the life of the mind," Steve says.

The same year her tenth and final child entered kindergarten, Elinora started at UMBC. Her records from the Sorbonne were lost in the war, so she began again at the beginning. Almost tripped up by having to kill and dissect a frog in a biology course, Elinora persevered for four years while her "well-trained" children looked after one another when she was on campus, Bob says.

After her graduation from UMBC, she remained close friends with **May Roswell**, a UMBC founder who established the modern languages department. Elinora went on to earn her master's degree in French literature at the University of Maryland, College Park, and teach for decades at UMBC, College Park, and Catholic University. She died in 2012 at the age of 92.

Following mother and son's trailblazing graduation, the family has established a legacy at UMBC. In 1975, **Chris**, another of Elinora's sons graduated with a degree in sociology, and in 1986 her two youngest, **Andy** and **Jim**, graduated together with degrees in music and sociology, respectively. Her granddaughter **Erin Bolton, geography**, graduated from UMBC in 1999.

Education is a family tradition. At their childhood home, complete with a family goat and all those siblings, the brothers remember their mother's books and papers spread out on the dining room table, evidence of her life of the mind. But mostly Elinora studied outside her house. It was quieter.

— Susan Thornton Hobby

In the late 1960s, **Bob Bolton '70, mathematics**, caught glimpses of his mother around UMBC's new relatively small campus. While he was heading to or from class, he'd spot her in the French Department, where **Elinora Bolton '70, French**, was getting her undergraduate degree, or in the library, studying.

"It was quieter than at home," Bolton says, laughing. He had nine brothers and sisters, and most of them still lived in their Elkridge home at the time.

In spring of 1970, Bob in his cap and gown followed his 52-year-old mother, in her own commencement regalia, across the stage. Mother and son were awarded their undergraduate degrees in the same first graduating class of UMBC.

"I was so proud of her," said Bolton, the second son in the family and now the CEO of an actuarial firm. "I didn't really appreciate then how hard it was for her."

In 2018, Bolton wanted to honor his mother, and all his family. So he endowed the Bolton Family Scholarship, to support two students annually in UMBC's Individualized Studies Program (INDS), with stipends of \$1,000 a semester. "Education was the most important thing" to his parents, Bolton says, though they were agnostic about their fields of study. "They gave us no particular direction, they just made sure we were well educated."

Bolton explains that he chose to give the scholarship to INDS majors to reflect the breadth of interests of the Bolton family members who attended UMBC, studying everything from math and music to French, sociology, and geography.

"The INDS program is grateful for the generosity of the Bolton family," says **Carrie Sauter '96, psychology**, INDS assistant director. "Their commitment to support the INDS student community offers a wonderful family tribute of hard work and success."

CLASS NOTES

2008

Michael Biskach, engineering, had his second child, a daughter named Charlotte, on December 6, 2020.

Kizzmekia Corbett, M16, biological sciences and sociology, was named to the 2021 “TIME100 Next” list for her groundbreaking contributions to science, with a profile written by Anthony Fauci. The town of Hillsborough, North Carolina, declared the date January 12, 2021, in her name in honor of her work developing the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Corbett also appeared on *Cell Mentor’s* list of inspiring Black scientists.

Bonnie Crawford, M.F.A., intermedia and digital arts, explained why she transformed her shed into a COVID-19-safe space for viewing and showing art at BmoreArt.com, saying she was inspired by what was missing in the world.

Colles Price, M.S. ’10, biological sciences, was featured on *Cell Mentor’s* 1,000 inspiring Black scientists list.

Marquis Walker, Ph.D., biological sciences, a Meyerhoff Graduate Fellow, was named to *Cell Mentor’s* list of 1,000 inspiring Black scientists.

2009

Kristina Gaddy, history, wrote a book, *Flowers in the Gutter: The True Story of the Edelweiss Pirates, Teenagers Who Resisted the Nazis*, which was included on the *School Library Journal’s* 2020 list of Best Nonfiction Books.

Colleen Walter Puterbaugh, ancient studies, M.A. ’11, historical studies, was featured in an MPT documentary *Mr. Besley’s Forest* and an episode of the *Holzer Files* on the Travel Channel for her work as a collection manager at Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Karsonya “Kaye” Whitehead, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, launched the Karson Institute at the Loyola University of Maryland in Baltimore, where she is an associate professor of communication and African and African American studies. The Karson Institute will provide a space for Loyola students, faculty, staff, and activists to discuss issues affecting America.

2010

Amara Bukhari, sociology, opened her own chiropractic clinic, Crescent Chiropractic.

Erin O’Keefe, M.S., Ph.D. ’20, public policy, won the Loyola University Maryland’s Outstanding Leadership Award for her community and social justice work.

Allison Seyler, history and modern languages and linguistics, M.A. ’12, history, program manager of Hopkins Retrospective at Johns Hopkins University, completed research revealing that Johns Hopkins held enslaved people in his home during the mid-1800s.

Tim Trumbauer, environmental science, became the senior watershed manager at the Midcoast Conservancy in Maine, where he will work to protect and improve water resources within the Midcoast Conservancy service area.

2011

Lydia Grmai, M19, biological sciences, was named in *Cell Mentor’s* “1,000 inspiring Black scientists” list.

Kaitlyn Sadtler, biological sciences, an immunologist at the National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, was featured in the book *Wonder Women of Science*.

2013

Emily Foxen-Craft, M.S., psychology, and Ph.D. ’16, psychology, was named to *The Jewish News’* “36 Under 36” list. Foxen-Craft currently works as a psychologist at CS Mott Children’s Hospital and serves on the Pain Task Force of the Michigan Psychological Association.

Milovan Kapor, economics, re-signed with Atlético Ottawa to continue his soccer career in the Canadian Premier League’s 2021 season.

Arsh Raziuddin, visual arts, joined the *New York Times* as an art director on the Opinion Desk.

2015

Chris Adams, economics, SharpRank co-founder, was featured on Jim Cramer’s “The Street.” In an interview, Adams discussed the importance of transparency in the sports betting market, the state of the NFL playoffs, SharpRank’s process and algorithm, and the surge in market adoption of the platform.

Stephen Brouillette, music, co-created one of six winning video PSAs awarded by the University System of Maryland for their effort to help curb the spread of COVID-19 and avoid pandemic fatigue.

Jermaine Ellerbe, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, received a 2020 - 2021 Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Fellowship.

Bria Hamlet, health administration and policy, was featured in *Oprah Magazine*, *Glamour*, and *PopSugar* for her work as a public health educator and a registered yoga teacher. Her company, JustBriFree Yoga & Wellness, teaches yoga with emphasis on communities of color and LGBTQIA+ persons. She is also the Spring 2021 Educator-In-Residence for the Women’s Resource Center at Cornell University.

2016

Chang Chen, computer science, was accepted in Duke University’s Fuqua MBA Class of 2023.

Justin Glaze, business technology administration, will be a contestant on season 17 of *The Bachelorette*.

Kevin Heffner, M.A., aging studies, the CEO of the LifeSpan Network, was featured in the news for the organization’s work to supply personal protective equipment to hundreds of seniors housing during the pandemic shortages.

Emily Kranking, media and communication studies, made her movie debut in the inclusive musical *Best Summer Ever* as the bubbly cheerleader Nancy. *Best Summer Ever* premiered at SXSW Film Festival, where it won the Final Draft Screenwriters Award. Kranking is a current student at The Theatre Lab’s Honors Acting Conservatory.

BUILDING BACK BALTIMORE

Robbin Lee '13, visual arts and media and communications studies



"Baltimore has so much amazing energy and people in it, doing good for it," says **Robbin Lee '13, visual arts and media and communications studies**. "It's a shame that people don't know more about that side of it."

As executive director of Baltimore Homecoming, Lee gives back to the city that shaped her college years and has come to be her community. Launched in 2017 as an "alumni network" for Baltimore City, the organization brings back former Baltimoreans to spark connections with people currently doing work to better the city. The nonprofit has connected alumni like Food Network chef (and *Retriever*) **Duff Goldman '97, history**, and WNBA All-star Angel McCoughtry with community leaders like Pastor Heber Brown of the Black Church Food Security Network and Founder and Executive Director of ¡Adelante Latina! Leonor Blum.

As a student at UMBC, Lee didn't foresee herself helping direct a nonprofit organization. Focusing on her passion for graphic design and art history, Lee expected to work in galleries and museums. So she began her career as the executive assistant for Maryland Art Place (MAP) after graduating.

However, after a cut to city arts funding forced MAP to let her go and she was struck by a car while riding her bike to her second job, Lee says she hit rock bottom. She turned to UMBC Associate Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences **Preminda Jacob** for guidance on how to pick herself back up. Jacob gave Lee advice she still lives by today: Keep moving forward, whatever moving forward means to you at that moment.

"I vividly recall Robbin's keen focus, her bright mind, and her unswerving determination to work hard and succeed," says Jacob, associate professor of art history and museum studies.

Jacob and **Jason Loviglio**, founding chair and associate professor of media and communication studies, emphasized Lee's work ethic and success at UMBC in a 2019 recommendation letter. The pair called Lee "one of the most impressive and tireless advocates for the city of Baltimore and for UMBC that we have had the honor to know" and wrote that she "epitomizes the very best of what a UMBC education means."

It was Lee's UMBC experience that led her to her community-centered work at Baltimore Homecoming. After her experience at a small town high school in Montgomery County, Maryland, UMBC was the first time Lee experienced a diverse community with different perspectives

"That's when I actually started to care about my own Asian identity," says Lee, a board member of UMBC's Alumni Association. "So, I took that into how I build community around myself now."

Lee further strengthened her ties to her identity through her senior capstone project on contemporary Chinese art produced by Millennial Chinese artists. This research won Lee an Undergraduate Research Award and allowed her to further her research studying abroad in Nanjing, China.

Besides strengthening her own identity, Lee's time at UMBC fostered her connection with Baltimore City. While captaining and playing on the UMBC women's volleyball team, Lee picked up shifts at the Inner Harbor's Cheesecake Factory, where her relationship with Baltimore started.

Following Jacob's advice to keep moving forward, in 2014 Lee took on the position of event director for Emporium, a food market that features local chefs, artisans, and more in D.C. and Baltimore. Then, she joined Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District (BID), one of only two BIDs in D.C. to manage festival grounds within its jurisdiction.

Lee enjoyed her work but felt like it was becoming unsustainable—in 2017 alone, she planned and ran around 300 events. During this time, the co-founders of Baltimore Homecoming launched the nonprofit and asked Lee to join as deputy director. Lee jumped at the opportunity to return to Baltimore full time.

"I took it as a homecoming for myself," says Lee. "I wanted to give back to the city that shaped me."

Returning to Baltimore in 2017, Lee searched for a community of her peers like the ones she fostered at UMBC, both in the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community and Black and brown communities. This search led her to become an advisor to the Baltimore Legacy Builders Collective, a Thread volunteer, and an organizing member of the Chinatown Collective. The collective holds events like the Charm City Night Market that highlight Baltimore's AAPI's voices through art, food, and education programs. Lee also became a founding member of the Baltimore Chapter of the National Association of Asian American Professionals, a nonprofit that uplifts and empowers Baltimore's AAPI communities.

She sees this work as only increasing in importance with the rise in hate speech and hate crimes directed towards the AAPI community in the U.S.

"It's really strengthened my resolve to do the things I do both in work and outside of work," says Lee. "People constantly tell me to take a break or to take a nap and I say 'No!' because I'm busy doing the things I want to be doing."

— Morgan Casey '22

Headshot by Perri Brierley-Bowers.

Below: Robbin Lee with Academy Award-winning director Barry Levinson. Photo by Brian O'Doherty.



CLASS NOTES

Markus Proctor, interdisciplinary studies, created Innovators of Progress, a \$30,000 scholarship program that supports students as they pursue entrepreneurial ideas.

Mark Valderas, Spanish, attained status as a Certified Spanish Medical Interpreter from the National Board of Certified Medical Interpreters, aiding his work as a medical interpreter for Johns Hopkins.

2017

Parker Damm, environmental science and theater, earned his first movie speaking credit in *Wonder Woman 1984*.

Alejandra Diaz, M.S. '18, computer science, received an Infosec Accelerate Scholarship based on her record of professional accomplishments and mentorship. Diaz is currently a cyber software engineer lead and cybersecurity intelligence analyst at Northrop Grumman.

Emily Escobedo, psychology, discussed her swimming career and her hopes to be on the 2021 USA Olympic Swim Team with *The Journal News*.

Jessica Floyd, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, explains the history of sea chanteys and their resurgence as an internet trend in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic in *The Conversation*. Floyd explained that chanteys are releases for loneliness, fear, and oppression, all issues many are dealing with during the pandemic.

IMDA graduates Mollye Bendell, M.F.A. '18, Jeffery Gangwisch, M.F.A. '18, and Christopher Kojzar, M.F.A. '18, make up the art collective strikeWare.



Samantha Furman, M25, mathematics, was awarded a fellowship from the National Cancer Institute to support her research studying the biology of tumors.

Adam Leah Harvey, M.S., a current Ph.D. candidate in physics, shared new research in *Science Daily* and other outlets about where jets coming from black holes release their energy.

Johnny Olszewski, Ph.D., public policy, is developing an innovative eviction prevention program as Baltimore County executive.

2018

Mai-Han Trinh, statistics, was accepted into the Population Health Sciences Department at Harvard for her Ph.D. with a full assistantship.

Mollye Bendell, M.F.A., imaging and digital arts (IMDA); Jeffery Gangwisch, M.F.A., IMDA; and Christopher Kojzar, M.F.A., IMDA, members of art collective strikeWare, earned one of 36 Baker Artist Awards for 2021.

2019

Mamadou Diallo, mechanical engineering, launched the Engineers Hub Podcast to provide resources and industry insight for other engineering students and professionals. The podcast will feature professional engineers, academics, and industry leaders from various engineering backgrounds.

Shannon Clancy, mechanical engineering, discussed her capstone project on NPR. Through her capstone, she designed a device to help a woman living with rheumatoid arthritis reach her face so that she could brush her teeth, put on makeup, etc.

2020

Anirban Basu, Ph.D., public policy, was among 100 people recognized by *The Daily Record* for exceptional leadership across Maryland.

Courtney Culp, visual arts, was recruited to the Savannah College of Art and Design women's soccer team while pursuing an M.F.A. in themed entertainment design.

Olivia Hardy, health administration policy, became the special assistant to Baltimore City Commissioner of Health **Letitia Dzirasa '03, M11, biological sciences**. Hardy is responsible for high-level project coordination and administrative functions for the commissioner.

Friends We Will Miss

Michael (Mike) Bradley, emeritus professor of economics, passed away on December 17, 2020. Bradley joined the UMBC faculty in 1971 and was promoted to professor in 1989. While at UMBC, Bradley taught introductory and graduate-level courses. He was known as a caring, enthusiastic, albeit demanding instructor. He was awarded instructor of the year numerous times and served as chair of the economics department between 2011 and 2014. Bradley retired in 2014 after 43 years of service.

Philip Cooper, Jr., died February 22, 2021, at age 95 with his children by his side. A retired English professor, he taught at UMBC from 1970 to 1986. Cooper was the author of *The Autobiographical Myth of Robert Lowell*.

Retired UMBC Swimming and Diving Coach **Chad Cradock '97, psychology**, passed away on March 7, 2021. Cradock came to UMBC as a student athlete in 1993. After his graduation, he became an assistant swimming and diving coach and was appointed head coach in 2001. The Retriever swimming and diving teams dominated America East Conference competition during their time in the league under Cradock's leadership. The women's squad captured four of the past six titles, including a resounding victory in 2019. The men's team has earned 12 of the 13 America East Championships overall and three in a row since the conference reinstituted men's swimming and diving as a championship sport in the winter of 2018.

Miriam DeCosta-Willis, a retired professor of Africana studies, died on January 7, 2021. A pioneer in the struggle for racial and gender equality, DeCosta-Willis organized a student protest in high school, participated in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and was jailed during the Civil Rights Movement.

Robert Fayer, a former employee, passed away on April 18, 2021. For about a decade, Fayer worked in The Commons and in the Department of Information Technology.

A MAGICAL ACT

Raymond Isaac Ford, III, '91, sociology, passed away on January 19, 2021. At UMBC, Ford was an All-American soccer player and still holds the record for most goals scored, with 51 goals and 124 points. He helped the 1977 team to a 15-2 record and UMBC's first trip to the NCAA Tournament. He was inducted into the Maryland Soccer Hall of Fame in 2016.

Bryna McFarland '19, modern languages and linguistics, passed away on March 6, 2021. Prior to her death, McFarland worked in special education in Kansas.

On December 28, 2020, **Alex Rittle** passed away unexpectedly. Rittle was the president of the Graduate Student Association (GSA) and a Ph.D. candidate in geography and environmental systems (GES). His involvement with GSA began as representative of the GES Graduate Student Organization from 2016 to 2018. At the time of his passing, he was serving his second term as president of the GSA and was active in UMBC shared governance, serving on the University Steering Committee. Rittle will be remembered for his kindness and his commitment to helping his fellow graduate students succeed at UMBC.

Tom Roth, emeritus faculty member in biological sciences, passed away on April 18, 2021. Roth leaves a legacy of mentorship for dozens of graduate students and postdocs. Later in his career, he became very interested in information technology and, before his retirement in 1998, he served as associate vice president for academic affairs at UMBC.

William Rothstein, founding faculty member at UMBC, passed away on December 5, 2020. Rothstein was an emeritus professor of sociology at UMBC who devoted his career to his students. After earning his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1965, he joined the UMBC faculty in 1966. He was promoted to associate professor in 1969 and to professor in 1988. He continued to teach as an adjunct faculty member following his retirement, and he was a strong advocate for adjunct faculty during his career. He touched the lives of countless students through the courses he taught, as the director of the master's program in applied sociology and in other ways, including mentoring.

Michael Shear, M.A.'78, psychology, passed away on April 5, 2021. Shear was a physician who specialized in physical rehab and diagnostic testing. From the 1980s until 2011, Shear made numerous presentations on physical examination of the spine, prevention of low-back pain in the workplace, and alternative approaches to treatment of spinal pathology.

Peter Wood '06, theatre



If **Peter Wood** is doing his job well, you'll never notice what he's doing. It should look effortless and natural, smooth and, well, magical.

As a magician with 20 years of experience, Wood '06, theatre, has learned that a successful way to fool a willing audience is to have the magical moment occur in a participant's hands. Earlier this year, he was given the chance to attempt to deceive the premier magical duo—Penn & Teller—on their hit show *Fool Us*.

The common aim of the magicians featured on the show, now on its seventh season, is simple: Can you trick the kings of tricksters?

As his magician persona, "Collector of the Impossible," Wood creates storied backgrounds for all his tricks, fantastical fictions to reel the audience into his alternative, magical reality. What's behind the scenes is a skilled craftsman with a well-stocked workshop who references century-old tomes to inform his magical practice.

For his act on *Fool Us*, Wood designed his own scene-setting table—with Southwest Airlines luggage guidelines as his starting point. The slender, cross-legged varnished table with brass fixtures and a drawer fit the bill and succeeded in helping Wood, in addition to his magic trick, earn his favorite compliment to date—Penn told him that his trick could have fit into magic shows from a hundred years ago.

Wood, who started performing at age 10, became adept at magic skills before he even knew the meaning of stage fright. He built on his young talent by working in various magic shops, honing his abilities during downtime in the stores and later in informal sessions with fellow performers.

"The typical magician that you think of is either telling you that they're doing trickery or they are playing the part of a person who has magical powers," says Wood. "In my career, I want to explore the second one, but I don't have magical powers. I just have things that I've collected that can do amazing impossible feats."

Unfortunately, Wood's magic holds no sway over a global pandemic, so like many other entrepreneurs, he's had to improvise a few new

tricks to pivot to an online format. "Usually, at my shows, the magic happens in someone else's hands and now that's gone. Because if the trick happens in my hands and you're watching it on a screen, then you're going to assume that I'm just controlling it," shares Wood.

But even online, Wood faces the same conundrum he has while in person—making intricate tricks appear effortless through practice and repetition. "Magicians are infatuated with secrets," says Wood. "And unlike a juggler who you can see juggling five balls and appreciate the skill they put into learning that, I have to work so hard to hide that skill, to make it look like I'm not doing anything at all."

Wood cites UMBC's theatre's production manager and technical director **Gregg Schraven '97, theatre**, as his guide to knowing when and what to discard—not necessarily his tricks—but even more foundational but difficult professional knowledge. How much wood is useful to keep on hand? How many different light fixtures are actually necessary for taking apart and repurposing? This hands-on knowledge is invaluable, Woods says.

UMBC also led Wood to develop his AutoCAD skills to design and craft specific and unique items. In his theatre tech role as a student, he was tasked with creating parts and props for other students' visions, allowing Wood to work outside his more steampunk aesthetic and widening his creative comfort zone.

Another UMBC connection Wood owes quite a lot to? His brother, **Matt Wood '13, financial economics, M.P.P. '15**, and a maintenance manager in Residential Life. As the younger Wood, Matt has been the stagehand and assistant for many shows, including long-standing gigs, says Wood, like their past 20 years of performing at the Howard County Fair.

In his act on *Fool Us*, Wood presents a portrait painting to Alyson Hannigan, the show's host. The portrait's subject is missing its eyes, but whoever is looking through the parchment is gifted X-ray vision, Wood shares, building the story arc like he built the table and the other props. Through Wood's magic, Hannigan is able to make out the color of four pieces of cloth inside four different little coin envelopes.

The act is emblematic of Wood's repertoire. "Here's what I do," he sets the scene. "I collect items like this, and they don't just work for me. Let me demonstrate."

Ultimately on *Fool Us*, Wood was complimented on what he hopes his everyday audiences never notice at all. "Penn & Teller could see the sort of process that I went through to create the method, to create the secret, and they appreciated the work."

—Randianne Leyshon '09

Read more at magazine.umbc.edu/building-the-magic.



UMBC

NEWS

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First Dance - See pg. 2
Faculty Spotlight - See Pg. 3
Campus Compass - See Pg. 4

Vol. 1 No. 1

February 17, 1998

September 19, 1966

DR. KUHN GREET'S STUDENTS



by Dr. Albin O. Kuhn

The start of a college year is always a time of excitement for the students, the faculty and the staff. Entering the freshman year has special significance that is not quite recaptured in succeeding college years. Opening a completely new campus is an experience that few have known previously. This first year of the operation of the newest campus of the University of Maryland can be expected to be a rewarding experience for all concerned.

You are a different student body from any previously assembled. In working with the faculty and with the staff of UMBC, make the most of this opportunity to help create a center of learning in which those who give their best in the classroom, in the laboratory and on the playing field develop a brilliance that is the mark of their efforts and the UMBC environment.

during the past year, assembled a faculty for our new University who come from many outstanding institutions of higher learning in this country. On the occasion of the opening, it is a pleasure to welcome these faculty members to the exciting challenges of developing this new campus.

REVIEWING PLANS - for the opening of the Baltimore County Campus at Catonsville is Dr. Albin O. Kuhn, vice-president of the University of Maryland.

126-Year History Of UMBC Site Recalled

by Martin Schlesinger

In this issue and succeeding ones, the newspaper will run an account covering the history of UMBC and the campus. The article below concerns the exchange of the hands of the land of the college.

The property was later added to the Spring Grove State Hospital. This institution continued operation of a farm on the land until the late 1960's. In 1968, the property was transferred to the University of Maryland.

Decade In The Making

A little more than a decade of planning by the President of the University, Dr. Elkins, and by the members of the Board of Regents has gone into the development of this new campus so that it might open in September, 1968. Collectively, these leaders of the city have...

State Firms Involved

The buildings we will be using during the first year are the result of appropriations from the State; the planning of the Maryland architectural firm of Rogers, Talliaferro, Kostitsky and Lamb; the guidance of the State Planning Department; the Department of Public...



THE RETRIEVER

WEEKLY

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, BALTIMORE COUNTY'S STUDENT NEWSPAPER

03.25.08 | VOLUME 42 ISSUE 22 | retrieverweekly.com

BASKETBALL BIG DANCING

No shame in loss, basketball shows it has true grit

Alexander Pyles
EDITORIAL STAFF

RALEIGH, N.C.—It's rare in sports when the game itself is more important than its outcome.

The America East champion UMBC men's basketball team traveled to Raleigh, N.C. for the NCAA Tournament Midwest region first round and met a Georgetown team that was bigger, stronger, faster, and more experienced than the Retrievers. ESPN.com's SportsNation poll confirmed what most in southwest Baltimore expected: 98.7 percent of fans nationwide were predicting a win for the Hoyas.

Those of us with clear and thoughtful minds realized toppling a team that had made the Final Four in 2007 was improbable. But an estimated 1,000 fans still made the five-hour drive from Baltimore to the RBC Center to see their Retrievers compete in the national spotlight for the first time in school history.

Georgetown's size and athleticism ended up being too much for UMBC, and the Hoyas shrugged off a first half when the Retrievers kept nipping at their ankles. Yet, even down 19 points with under a minute remaining in the game, there was no quitting on a UMBC squad that now finishes their season the most successful team in school history with a 24-9 record.



ASHLEY BENITEZ—TRW

> Cavell Johnson and Ray Barbosa, pictured here celebrating the win over Hartford in America East Championship game, were key parts of UMBC's run to the NCAA Tournament.

Prove It! winner to be announced Wednesday

Anne Verghese
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

After many weeks of hard work, dedication and commitment, the Prove It! campaign that began during the fall semester has finally reached its final stage. The Prove It! committee will be revealing the winning proposal on Wednesday, March 26 at noon in the University Center plaza.

"During the fall semester, UMBC's Student Government Association (SGA) presented students with a \$50,000 challenge—to 'Prove It!' that students have the creativity and skill to develop meaningful contributions to the campus community," SGA Vice President Elani Odeyale said.

The selection committee received 22 submissions, from which the committee narrowed down the proposals to five based upon feasibility, originality and how beneficial the proposal would be to the campus.

"These five proposals have been published for student comment and evaluated by the selection committee, which is comprised of students, faculty, and staff," Odeyale said.

Many students have taken the time to view the posted videos and have left valuable comments that have helped the selection committee in their final decision.

"On Wednesday, March 26, we [the SGA] invite you to share in the

Letters to the Editor
Best of the Decade
Retriever Comics
Mastheads 1988-1989

Somebody who...
Ever wonder why everyone...
Is your roommate a homicidal...
Comedian? Never fear, this...
A madcap of Retrievers comics...
\$10

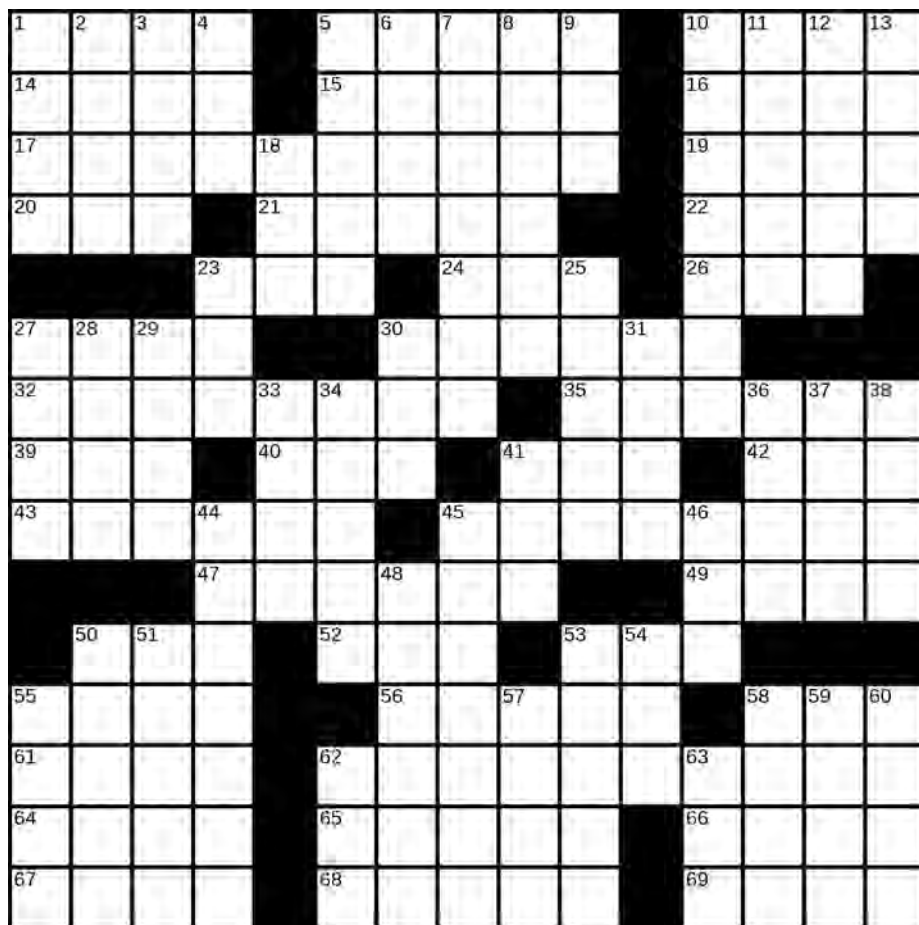
Retriever
The University of Maryland Baltimore County
Monday, February 18, 1974

WILD CARD

Crossword Puzzle Genius (14 letters**)

When **Andrew Beck '21, individualized studies**, was a kid playing his first Game Boy Advance puzzle-platform game, Mario vs. Donkey Kong, he didn't know that video game design was a career option. After his freshman year living with the Individualized Studies Living and Learning Community, Beck caught a glimpse of a future he could look forward to—creating immersive game experiences. Although Beck is drawing on computerized games for his capstone project, his affinity for sudoku and crossword puzzles has grown as his trivia knowledge has flourished at UMBC. Get out your pencil—or pen, if you're really feeling confident—and give his latest game a go.

**A New York Times-worthy 14-letter word for “crossword puzzle genius” is “cruciverbalist.” Find the answers to this special puzzle at magazine.umbc.edu/spring-2021-crossword.*



Across

1. Energy provider
5. Minoan land
10. Mexican peninsula
14. Italian river in Florence
15. Chamomile genus
16. “This is so heavy, it must weigh ___!”
17. Dog breed and team name
19. Trip over words
20. Cow speak
21. In the open
22. A few thousand feet
23. To regret
24. Fuel, or excrement

Down

26. Highest or lowest card
27. Hopping device
30. Slow dance
32. Dining hall and mascot
35. Being from beyond the grave
39. Quote collection
40. Half a volcano
41. Greek letter X
42. Zeus’ mountain
43. Roman general, Caesar rival
45. Hall, field, and school
47. Emphasis
49. Snake-like fishes
50. Emotional punk music

52. WWII supply base for Japan
53. Give money
55. Finger click
56. Drizzle
58. Relating to the Sun
61. Substantial continent
62. Residence hall and bay
64. Clay baker
65. Eight kings
66. Energy field
67. Philosophical essence
68. Daisy type
69. Admiral Ackbar finding

Down

1. Animal and crop home
2. Milk’s favorite
3. Get on
4. Buzzing bug
5. One’s house, for some
6. Move without purpose
7. Czech jazz fusion band
8. Scots’ design
9. Feminine ending
10. Long grain Indian rice
11. Upper storage
12. Energy measurement
13. Place a bet
18. Debt agreement
23. Inner fish eggs
25. Japanese cuisine
27. Slang for UMBC bldg.
28. “Is that a yes ___”
29. U.S. Territory
30. Whereabouts unknown
31. Homer’s poems
33. Joy and excitement
34. The highest nobility
36. Proving dough causes this
37. Adored one
38. Takes in the rays
41. Shout out
44. Grill requirement
45. Periodic table unit
46. Essential
48. Eye hair, real or otherwise
50. Old and wise
51. Sends in postage
53. Speak with a god, shorter
54. French artist Jean
55. Hot rice alcohol
57. River in southeast France
58. Jurassic suffix
59. Podded veggie
60. Spring up
62. Half of a dance
63. Consume



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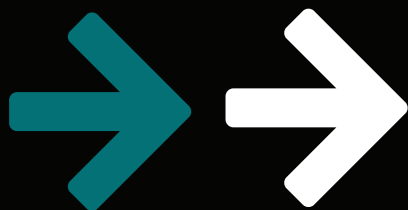


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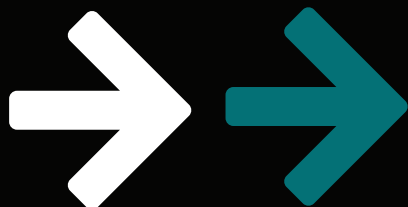
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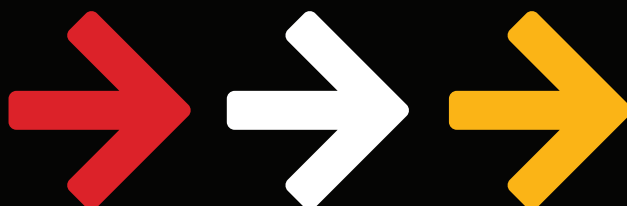
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The Office of Alumni Engagement team is working on a number of programs and initiatives to keep you connected.

- We're planning to safely welcome Retrievers back to campus for **Homecoming** in early October. Visit homecoming.umbc.edu for more information.
- The **32nd Alumni Awards** will return on October 20 to celebrate alumni and a faculty member for their achievements and impact.
- Check out alumni.umbc.edu in early fall for the debut of our new website.

Have you joined our new platform—Retrievers Connect—which lets alumni network with each other and current students? More than 1,000 users are already on the platform, sharing professional advice, expertise, and guidance and taking part in our industry networking groups at retrieversconnect.umbc.edu.

Please visit alumni.umbc.edu for engagement opportunities and to stay connected.



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