Summer 2022

UMBC MAGAZINE

SEE THE CHALLENGE, BE THE CHANGE

Preparing students to collaborate across disciplines and address real world issues takes big thinking and personal commitment.
– page 28

16

A Pause for Celebration

Tassles turn, and a new class of Retrievers – and their longtime leader – take a moment to appreciate what lies ahead.

By Kait McCaffrey and Bobby Lubaszewski '10

TABLE OF **CONTENTS**

DEPARTMENTS

ON THE COVER

UMBC's Grand Challenges Scholars program invites students to think big. Illustration by Kimberly Salt.

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TO **YOU**

Dear Retrievers,

After so many months of planning Dr. Hrabowski's celebration of more than 30 years of leadership, I shouldn't have been all that surprised to see so many Retriever colleagues and alums cutting loose to an R&B cover band. But there I was, on an early June evening, feeling slightly overwhelmed by the joy of hundreds of black-and-gold-garbed folks meeting and greeting and dancing.

It was a surreal moment, to be sure—one I had both looked forward to and slightly dreaded a few months earlier. But, hang on...let me rewind a bit.

Like everyone else, I had been waiting for months and months anticipating the announcement of UMBC's next president. When the search process began, I'm sure I'm not the only one who thought, "But, who could replace Freeman?" (Admit it.)

As we waited, our community readied ourselves for change. We learned to sit with uncertainty, we learned to take care of each other. (We already had plenty of practice from the pandemic.) And we, the empowered university that we are, reflected on our values and prepared to share them with our next leader.

In early April, when the news broke of the search committee's choice, Dr. Valerie Sheares Ashby made a semi-surprise trip to campus to show her gratitude to Dr. Hrabowski. I had the chance to meet her and was immediately drawn in by her energy. Here was someone who loves and lives our values, someone who literally bounces with excitement when talking about our vision statement. (In fact, I'm pretty sure she knows it by heart.)

In short, I felt a huge wave of relief...and a growing excitement.

In many ways, the news felt like a reward for just being us; the right person was drawn to our community. We were coming to the end of an incredible era, yes, but we are also about to start a new chapter with someone just as amazing as Dr. Hrabowski in her own unique ways.

So, when the chance came to dance at Dr. Hrabowski's big celebration, our Retrievers took it. And the joy I witnessed that night proved that not only are we RetriEVER Grateful for our past; we're also empowered and excited for what's to come.

—Jenny O'Grady
Editor, UMBC Magazine

WEB **FEATURES**

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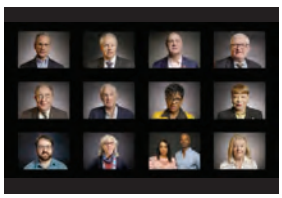

Thoughts, Words, Actions: A Tribute

A Season of Change for CADVC

UMBC on The College Tour

OUR **STAFF**

Editor
Jenny O'Grady

Design Director
Jim Lord '99

Assistant Editor
Randianne Leyshon '09

News Editor
Dinah Winnick

Photographer
Marlayna Demond '11

Video Producer
Corey Jennings '10

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Sadaf Rehman '19

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Marlayna Demond '11
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Bobby Lubaszewski '10
Stanyell Odom
Jenny O'Grady
Dinah Winnick

Contributors
Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque
Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15
Bobby Lubaszewski '10
Megan Hanks Mastrola
Kait McCaffrey
Kimberly Salt

Editorial Interns
Anna Lee '22

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UP ON THE **ROOF**

At many universities, a presidential transition means one leader leaving, and another arriving, with very little overlap between. Not so at UMBC, where incoming president Valerie Sheares Ashby has spent time with outgoing president Freeman Hrabowski throughout the spring getting to know the place and its people. UMBC Magazine *was fortunate to talk with them together and bask in the glow that two like-minded leaders create when they think about the bright future ahead for their beloved UMBC.*

Freeman Hrabowski: The passing of the torch, the passing of the torch. I appreciate that phrase, and it reminds me of my inaugural address 30 years ago, which included this quote from George Bernard Shaw: " Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have... for [only] a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to... future generations." And when we all heard that Dr. Sheares Ashby was coming to UMBC, I got two responses from people. One was, "Oh wow, how fortunate we are." Number two was, "Well done to the search committee," because they had the good sense, quite frankly, to choose the best.

UMBC Magazine: *And you, Dr. Sheares Ashby, came right up to Baltimore on announcement day. What was that like?*

Valerie Sheares Ashby: I wanted to be there on day one because it was the least I could do to try and honor Freeman. There's no way to fully recognize all that he has done, but I wanted everyone to know that part of why I am so attracted to this university is because of all of his extraordinary work and the principles and values that he embodies. When somebody leaves you a gift like this, the least you can do is to be present to say "thank you" on day one. So, I was hoping it was going to be a surprise. Then I discovered that nobody surprises Freeman.

UMBC Magazine: *Dr. Hrabowski, can you share what it was like when you first came into the role of president?*

Hrabowski: This is what I would say. I was, at the time of becoming president, aware of the campus and also aware that there were people of all races who were wondering whether a Black president would succeed there. That was very real. The good news was that most people on our campus were believing in us, people of all races. It was people from off campus who were talking that way...but it was the community of UMBC people who said, we are in this together. And any success we have had, we have had together.

UMBC Magazine: *Dr. Sheares Ashby, what's going on in your mind as you prepare to start your tenure here in August?*

Sheares Ashby: UMBC is not like any other place in the country, and it is distinct in ways that matter a great deal to me. It starts with the principle that people matter, right? Relationships matter and trust matters and care matters. None of that happens at the expense of excellence. So, with that combination, nowhere else in the country has really put their stake in the ground to say, "We're going to be excellent through inclusion of all types of people. And we're going to treat them well, by the way, at the same time." Everybody wants to be able to say it and everybody can say that it's their aspiration, but nobody else has pulled it off.

In this moment, I am feeling pure joy. Every job that I've ever had has been my favorite job at the time. That's a privileged life. I know that does not happen for every job, and that's not to say that every day is perfect. But, the joy comes from being mission-driven and feeling like, no matter how hard it is, the people whose lives are going to be impacted are worth every single second of the work. That impact happens one person at a time sometimes. Sometimes it happens in big groups. But that opportunity to change lives still gives me great joy. As I walked across campus, I felt that.

Stay in the loop about all things presidential transition by visiting president.umbc.edu.

DAWG'S EYE **VIEW**

ROCKING THE BLACK & GOLD

To say #RetrieverNation was thrilled to see former first lady Michelle Obama wearing UMBC gear on national College Signing Day this spring is the understatement of the century. UMBC fans near and far tweeted their delight, creating a warm welcome to the next generation of Retrievers.

@MichelleObama

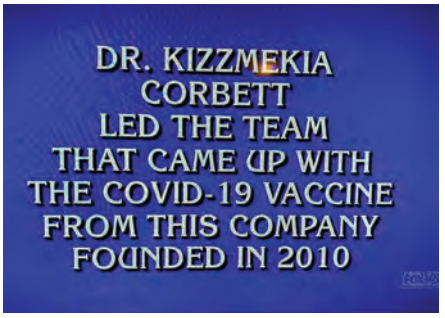
THAT'S A LOT OF GAVELS!

Nearly 20 Maryland alumni judges gathered this spring to visit campus and sentence Dr. Hrabowski to many years of happy retirement from UMBC.

STARS IN OUR EYES

There was nothing quite like dressing up and walking the gold carpet to watch UMBC's episode of "The College Tour" on the big screen. The episode is still up on Amazon and other streaming services, so pop some popcorn and dig in!

@umbclife



WHAT IS…MODERNA?

"I grew up watching this show with my grandma…I'm completely in my feels right now."
– Kizzmekia Corbett '08, M16

@KizzyPhD

WE'RE RETRIEVER GRATEFUL

All spring, folks celebrated the legacy of Dr. Hrabowski's leadership, from the eight-city RetriEVER Grateful Tour to the Wisdom Institute's annual luncheon with retired faculty and staff, the big campus celebration on June 4, and so many other special moments. He's going to need a big scrapbook!

@umbcalumni

LOOPED IN ON BROADWAY

Remember when assistant professor of theatre and intimacy choreography expert **Chelsea Pace** made her Broadway debut in a little show called *A Strange Loop* back in March? And remember when that show garnered 11 Tony nominations and two big wins? Yeah, so do we.

@professorcpace

SEEING DOUBLE

You're not imagining things. The flash that is rising sophomore talent **Caitlyn Bobb**, who recently placed 17th in the 400-meter dash at the NCAAs, is in fact the daughter of track and field coach **David Bobb '02**, who still holds records in six events himself. Talk about passing the baton!

@umbcalumni

FOLLOWING HER DREAM

Jackie Kim '22, theatre, shared a behind-the-scenes look at the UMBC production of "She Kills Monsters" – and a peek into her personal journey to becoming an actor – in EdSurge this spring.

@umbclife

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

Sheares Ashby Named UMBC President

The University System of Maryland (USM) Board of Regents has appointed **Valerie Sheares Ashby** as the next president of UMBC. She will become UMBC's sixth chief executive on August 1, 2022, following current UMBC President **Freeman A. Hrabowski's** retirement from UMBC. She will be the first woman to serve in this role.

Sheares Ashby will join UMBC from her current position as dean of Duke University's Trinity College of Arts & Sciences, where she has served since 2015. She received her B.A. and Ph.D. degrees in chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) and completed postdoctoral research at Universitat Mainz in Germany. She came to Duke from UNC, where she served on the faculty since 2003 and chaired the chemistry department from 2012 to 2015.

"There is no ceiling on what we can achieve from here."

— Dr. Sheares Ashby

While at UNC, Sheares Ashby served on the university's Arts & Sciences Foundation Board of Directors and Research Advisory Council, and chaired the College of Arts & Sciences Faculty Diversity Task Force. She also directed UNC's National Science Foundation Alliance for Graduate Education and the Professoriate, working to increase the number of underrepresented students completing doctoral degrees and becoming professors in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and social, behavioral, and economic sciences.

"It is an incredible honor to be asked to lead a university that has excelled in so many ways that are essential both nationally and to me personally—particularly in regards to foregrounding inclusive excellence," Sheares Ashby says.

Sheares Ashby was selected as UMBC's next president through an intensive national search chaired by USM Regent **Michelle Gourdine**. The USM Board of Regents conducted the search, and a diverse group of UMBC faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members served on the search committee.

"Dr. Sheares Ashby is clearly the impressive scholar and dynamic leader we need to build on the strong foundation of inclusive excellence at UMBC," says USM Board Chair **Linda R. Gooden**. "UMBC is a jewel—nationally and internationally recognized for its innovative teaching and path-breaking research. All of this success is due to the dedication and hard work of President Hrabowski and his outstanding team. The Board of Regents knows this legacy will be in good hands with Dr. Sheares Ashby."

"I'm excited to see how Dr. Sheares Ashby's vision will shape the next chapter for UMBC," says USM Chancellor **Jay A. Perman**. "Without question, she has the experience and the attributes needed to grow UMBC's academic and research prominence, and she's steeped in the culture of inclusive excellence that has made the university a national exemplar of access, equity, and achievement. It's hard to imagine finding a better fit for a school whose future is as bright as UMBC's."

On the day news rolled out about the appointment, Sheares Ashby made a surprise visit to campus to honor Hrabowski in person. Later in the spring, she visited again to take in RetriEVER Empowered, a campus-wide celebration of student success, research, and community.

"To follow President Freeman Hrabowski is a distinct privilege, as he has been a role model for so many in higher education over the last 30 years, including myself," Sheares Ashby says. "His extraordinary leadership and dedication to UMBC ensures that I am arriving at a university that is already performing at a very high level. There is no ceiling on what we can achieve from here."

— Dinah Winnick

THE NEWS

UMBC Ascends to the Nation's Highest Level as a Research University

UMBC has officially reached the nation's highest level of research performance. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education this spring announced that UMBC has been placed into the category of doctoral universities with very high research activity, popularly known as Research 1 (or R1). UMBC is now ranked as one of only 146 R1 institutions nationally, including 107 public and 39 private universities.

"This is an amazing accomplishment by faculty, staff, and administrative leaders who have built a research culture that nurtures undergraduate and graduate students," says President **Freeman Hrabowski**. "This milestone reflects our commitment to excellence across the disciplines, from the humanities to the sciences."

Carnegie's research activity index is based on many factors, including productivity in research and creative achievement, graduate education, and research expenditures across a broad range of fields. The university's classification as an R1 university with comprehensive doctoral programs reflects the strength and diversity of UMBC's research portfolio.

UMBC's research enterprise has grown steadily over the course of decades, ascending to new heights in recent years. Faculty secured more than $200 million in new research awards in 2021 alone.

"This historic moment for our campus is an outcome of long-term strategic priorities and investments in the research and creative achievement community at UMBC—people, facilities, and programs," says **Karl Steiner**, vice president for research. "It is essential to recognize that this reflects the work of our entire campus community, including engineering, natural sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities. UMBC faculty from all fields successfully compete for research funding and national recognition at the highest level."

This new classification reflects UMBC's reputation as a leader both in research and education. While these two areas are regarded by some universities as separate or even competing components of their institutional mission, at UMBC they are inextricably linked. Both graduate and undergraduate research contribute to the campus's overall research endeavor, and UMBC sees the research experience as a critical component of undergraduate and graduate education.

Janet C. Rutledge, vice provost and dean of the Graduate School, firmly believes that intellectual breadth has been key to UMBC's success. "The strength of our Ph.D. programs across all disciplines contributed both to our R1 classification and our graduate program portfolio being recognized as comprehensive," she says.

Provost **Philip Rous** shares that the R1 designation "recognizes our commitment to our shared values, strategic priorities, and our mission as a public research university. This includes advancing research and creative achievement across disciplines and inter-disciplines, community-engaged scholarship, high-quality graduate education, and the authentic engagement of our undergraduate students in advancing knowledge."

This research designation comes on the heels of UMBC's joining the University Innovation Alliance, a consortium of public research universities focused on student success, and receiving the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in recognition of a deep commitment to strengthening the bonds between campus and community. UMBC's *U.S. News* rankings also recognize the university for national leadership in both innovation and teaching.

Maryland is fortunate also to be home to R1 universities The University of Maryland, College Park and Johns Hopkins University, as well as the specialized research powerhouse, the University of Maryland, Baltimore. The Carnegie Classification also recognizes both the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, and Morgan State University as high research activity (R2) institutions. UMBC has established partnerships with each of these universities, as well as numerous others nationwide.

Shares President Hrabowski, "Now that we have reached this milestone, I encourage our community to pause and savor this moment. I look forward to seeing what UMBC achieves in the next chapter."

— Dinah Winnick

Moffitt Named Dean of CAHSS

Kimberly R. Moffitt is the new dean of UMBC's College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS). Moffitt, a professor of language, literacy, and culture (LLC) and affiliate professor of Africana studies, served as interim dean since August 2020, leading CAHSS through the challenges of COVID-19 while achieving several notable milestones.

As Provost **Philip Rous** shared in his announcement to the university community, "Moffitt has served with distinction as interim dean of the College by providing outstanding leadership during one of the most challenging times for our entire campus community."

Dean Moffitt earned a Ph.D. in mass communication/media studies from Howard University and holds an M.A. in mass communication from Boston University and B.A. in political science from University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Moffitt began her career at UMBC in 2006 as an assistant professor of American studies and she became director of the LLC program in 2018. She is UMBC's first Black dean of a college. She brings an exceptional record of leadership in shared governance, having previously served as president and vice president of UMBC's Faculty Senate, among other key leadership roles.

"The campus is delighted by the appointment of Dr. Moffitt as dean—in many ways, she represents the best of UMBC," shares President **Freeman Hrabowski**. "Most importantly, she will be a strong voice for the arts, humanities, and social sciences, both on and off campus."

— Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque

In Brief

HHMI launches $1.5B Hrabowski Scholars program to support diversity, innovation in biomedical research

This May, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) launched the Freeman Hrabowski Scholars Program to help build a scientific workforce that more fully reflects our increasingly diverse country. The $1.5 billion program honors UMBC President **Freeman A. Hrabowski, III**, for his decades of leadership in growing and diversifying the pipeline of Ph.D.-level researchers, most prominently through UMBC's Meyerhoff Scholars Program. UMBC is now the nation's #1 producer of Black bachelor's degree recipients who go on to earn a Ph.D. in the natural sciences and engineering, and this program builds on that legacy.

Pictured: Prof. Michael Summers, HHMI investigator at UMBC; Freeman Hrabowski; and Leslie Vosshall, vice president for research at HHMI

Musgrove named Carnegie Fellow, examines black political movements

UMBC's **George Derek Musgrove '97, history**, has been named a 2022 Andrew Carnegie Fellow. Musgrove, an associate professor of history, is one of 28 scholars across the U.S. to receive the prestigious award this year, from nearly 300 nominations. The fellowship, from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, provides recipients with $200,000 to further their research in the humanities and the social sciences. The goal: to support the publication of a book or a study that tackles today's most challenging problems. Musgrove's forthcoming book will focus on the Black political mobilizations that rose in opposition to the economic recession of the early 1980s and the resulting rise in conservative politics—what he calls the "Black Power resurgence."

Spring Grove property transferred to UMBC

Pictured: (L-R) Candace Dodson-Reed '96, Freeman Hrabowski, Christina Kawata '16, and Maryland Governor Larry Hogan gather for the transfer of Spring Grove property.

Maryland Governor Larry Hogan and other local leaders visited UMBC on Wednesday, May 18, for a ceremony marking the transfer of the Spring Grove Hospital Center campus to UMBC to support the university's long-term development.

In the coming years, the Maryland Department of Health will continue to operate the hospital, while the campus continues to engage with state, county, community leaders, and other partners during its regular master facilities planning process to envision a future for the 175-acre Spring Grove property that supports the university's long-term development and enhances both economic development and quality of life in the Baltimore region and Maryland.

Rising senior Adekoya named Truman Scholar

Following a series of rigorous interviews, the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation announced **Haleemat Adekoya '23, political science**, as one of just 58 students nationwide to receive the award. Adekoya is UMBC's fifth student to receive the renowned national scholarship focused on public service.

"I am incredibly proud of Haleemat. Her authenticity, sincerity, and humility permeate everything she does," says **Carolyn Forestiere**, professor of political science.

Says Adekoya: "I look forward to continuing to engage in my commitment to cultivate transformative learning spaces and elevating the voices of Black children and celebrating their brilliance."

Read more at umbc.edu/news.

AT **PLAY**

Can You Say Three-Peat?

For the third consecutive season, UMBC softball reigned as America East champions.

Sweeping all three tournament games, the Retrievers held their opponents scoreless, becoming the first team in America East history to achieve this milestone. After defeating Binghamton in the first round of the tournament on May 12, the Retrievers went on to defeat UAlbany in the final two games.

"It never gets old," said head coach Chris Kuhlmeyer of the title. "A three-peat is an insanely hard thing to do. Just the accomplishments that these ladies have achieved this year, the team ball they played, it means everything to me and the coaching staff and I couldn't be prouder of them." Leading by example, Kuhlmeyer was named Coach of the Year for the second year.

With titles in 2019, 2021, and 2022, UMBC is the first team to win three consecutive crowns since UAlbany in 2006 – 08. (No championship was held in 2020, due to COVID-19.) The team concluded the 2022 season with a 6-3 loss in the Durham Regional of the NCAA Tournament.

Courtney Coppersmith '22, biochemistry and molecular biology, has been shattering records since she started her athletic career at UMBC. Coppersmith earned victories in all three tournament games, allowing just two hits in 16 innings. Keeping with the three-peat theme, Coppersmith was named America East Pitcher of the Year for the third consecutive year. She's just the second player in conference history to snag the award three times.

"Every time you come out on the field, you never know when it's going to be your last time," said Coppersmith of the team's mindset. "So let's go out, have some fun, [and] play the game that we know how to play."

Coppersmith was recently named America East Woman of the Year, putting her in the running for the national award. She is the first UMBC athlete to receive this honor. Coppersmith was also named to the 2021-22 Academic All-District® Softball Team, selected by College Sports Information Directors of America. In addition, she earned her second tournament Most Outstanding Player Award, repeating her 2019 accolade. She is the fifth player in America East history to win multiple M.O.P. honors. She will continue her academic career at UMBC, working toward a Ph.D. with a focus in organic chemistry.

Karly Keating '22, media and communication studies, earned All-Tournament Team honors, alongside teammates **Logan Hawker '22, mechanical engineering**, and **Ashley Della Guardia '24, undergraduate studies**.

"It's super exciting to be able to travel and compete in the NCAA tournament," said Keating. "Winning is an amazing feeling, especially a three-peat. We're a talented team and we deserve it."

Read more about UMBC Athletics at umbcretrievers.com.

— Kait McCaffrey and UMBC Athletics

Image courtesy of America East.

"Every time you come out on the field, you never know when it's going to be your last time. So let's go out, have some fun, [and] play the game that we know how to play."

— Courtney Coppersmith '22


Retrievers
15

DISCOVERY

Jules Rosskam's *Desire Lines* awarded a Creative Capital prize

Filmmaker **Jules Rosskam**, assistant professor in the Department of Visual Arts at UMBC, was awarded a prestigious Creative Capital Award in to support production of his new feature film, *Desire Lines*.

One of the most sought-after prizes in the art world, each year, Creative Capital distributes awards to artists to fuel significant projects. Creative Capital recipients are a who's-who of the art world, including artists like Wu Tsang, Cassils, Barbara Hammer, and Meredith Monk, each receiving up to $50,000 to fund new works. In 2021, 42 artists and 35 projects spanning all disciplines were awarded Creative Capital awards.

Building on Rosskam's body of work devoted to examining liminal spaces—the margins inhabited by trans people and artists blurring boundaries in genre and method—*Desire Lines* explores the ways that trans men emerge into gay sexual attraction during transition and the ways that these narratives have historically been suppressed.

"Trans people, people of color, queer people, we are so often written out of history, and [struggle] through those silences, and institutions not feeling like our lives are worth documenting," Rosskam says.

According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 23% of trans people identify as exclusively gay/lesbian, with 48% identifying as queer or bisexual. Only 23% of trans people define themselves as heterosexual—meaning that trans men attracted to other men is a common experience, even though the histories of this phenomenon have been hidden.

"The impetus is that for the last 20 years I've been watching the trans community and seeing when folks come out as trans men and develop an attraction for other men. It's felt like no one was having, like, a meaningful dialogue about it, and I, honestly, for the last 10 years have been waiting for someone else to make the film about this," says Rosskam. "Finally, I said, okay, I've been thinking about this for 20 years, I think I have to make a film about it."

Desire Lines centers its narrative on a gay-identified trans man seeking information on these hidden histories and begins the search by delving into researching archives.

"I think many trans and queer people can relate to searching for evidence of their own existence," says Rosskam. "We go with him into this archive and engage a lot of different material about trans masculinity and queer culture and bathhouses—and find people like Lou Sullivan, who, to the best of our knowledge, was the first gay-identified trans man in North America."

Indeed, Lou Sullivan is a significant historical transgender figure. Sullivan, who died in 1991 from AIDS-related complications, left behind 30 years of diaries detailing his transitional journey, and these diaries were published to great fanfare in 2019. A pair of recent short films have helped elevate greater awareness of Sullivan's life.

While Rosskam brings Sullivan into the picture, *Desire Lines* resists the urge to become a traditional documentary.

"I typically describe my work as experimental nonfiction. I am almost always working in a hybrid space between fiction and nonfiction, because that to me feels very trans, and I think it's important in the work to unsettle that line. People think the line between fiction and reality is so clear—when in fact, it's not," Rosskam says, indicating that speculative fiction methods play into the film's narrative.

The bathhouse also looms as a sort of archive in Rosskam's perspective, providing communication of intergenerational experience.

"As queer and trans people, our histories are generally passed from person to person, and there's a lot of emphasis on intergenerational relationships, and so younger people really are learning how to be themselves through close contact with people who are older than them. As a trans masculine person. I know a lot of young trans people, but I personally know [only] two transmasculine people who are over the age of 60. I don't feel like I ever got that mentorship from older trans people."

Desire Lines is currently in production, with documentary footage being shot in Chicago last winter and an expected release date of early 2024.

– Rahne Alexander, M.F.A. '21

Omi Ford as Keiran in Desire Lines. *Photo by Emilia Aghamirzai.*

Pathway to Precision Medicine

A new study published in *Genes* may eventually give doctors the ability to make better-informed decisions about which medications to prescribe for older adults. The research, led by **Mariann Gabrawy, Ph.D. '18, biological sciences**, in the lab of UMBC professor **Jeff Leips**, found associations between particular genes and individuals' responses to a common blood pressure medication, Lisinopril. The drug also sometimes improves mobility and physical performance in older adults—but sometimes it makes things worse.

Better understanding the relationship between genetics and drug responses would help doctors prescribe drugs they know are likely to help, rather than relying on trial and error. Moving forward, researchers could employ the same experimental process Gabrawy used for other drugs.

"Our genetics matters," says Gabrawy, who completed the research at UMBC as part of her Ph.D. dissertation as a Meyerhoff Graduate Fellow, with a UMBC – Johns Hopkins research team. "Humans don't all react the same to various prescription medications. So it's really important to be able to look at an individual patient and figure out if some particular medication is going to work for them or not."

Gabrawy's study tested the effects of Lisinopril on more than 10,000 individuals' ability to walk and climb. What made a study of such massive scale possible? The individuals were fruit flies. Gabrawy and a team of UMBC undergraduates used a unique experimental technique to test each individual fly's walking and climbing ability multiple times. Gabrawy developed the technique and debuted it in a previous paper.

Why is it useful to study drug responses in fruit flies? Humans and fruit flies share about 75 percent of the genes involved in disease, Gabrawy says. And the genes that she and colleagues identified as relevant to the drug response all have parallel genes in humans.

However, of course, "you can't just jump from a fly study to a human study," Gabrawy says. The likely next step for studying the relationships between Lisinopril and different genes would be a mouse study, to eventually be followed by human studies. But by looking at so many flies, and identifying important gene candidates, this study "lays down a necessary foundation," Gabrawy says.

The project also deepened ties between UMBC and Johns Hopkins University. Gabrawy was co-advised by Leips at UMBC and Peter Abadir, associate professor of geriatric medicine at Johns Hopkins, during her Ph.D. Both are authors on the new paper.

"Research now is never one person or one research group working in a silo," Abadir says. "I love how this research allowed us to break down the silos between UMBC and Hopkins and see the great things that each of us is doing on our campuses and what we can learn from each other."

Abadir was also impressed by the strength of the undergraduate researchers at UMBC, several of whom are authors on the new paper. Leips has supported undergraduates in his research group for decades.

"Kudos to them for not just doing the day-to-day work but also contributing intellectually to the research," Leips says. "That's one of the strengths of UMBC and the student population here—they really engage with the research and become real researchers."

Gabrawy trained all 17 undergraduates who supported the work herself. Because of their efforts, collecting data took only one year, when it otherwise would have taken at least three. She still keeps in touch with them; a few even followed her to Johns Hopkins as volunteer research assistants when she completed a postdoctoral fellowship there. Today, most are pursuing medical or graduate school.

"It's a beautiful thing to see that they have also found their own successes within and beyond UMBC and to know that I've been a part of that in some small way," says Gabrawy, who now lectures at Saint Paul College in Minnesota. "Mentoring has always been very important to me."

— Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

"That's one of the strengths of UMBC and the student population here—they really engage with the research and become real researchers."

DISCOVERY

Can You Catch a Deepfake?

Vandana Janeja and **Christine Mallinson** received a two-year, $300,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study deepfakes – images, videos, and sounds developed using artificial intelligence (AI) technology but designed to appear as authentic, real-life recordings. They can be highly deceiving for audiences, impacting public opinion and behavior.

Through their NSF Early-Concept Grant for Exploratory Research (EAGER) award, Janeja and Mallinson will study and evaluate listener perceptions of audio deepfakes that have been created with varying degrees of linguistic complexity.

UMBC was engaging in multi-disciplinary work between computing and the social sciences when NSF started this initiative. "We can't solve big societal issues with an AI algorithm alone," explains Janeja, professor and chair of information systems. She notes that collaboration between researchers in computing and sociolinguistics is essential to address complex, real-world problems that involve both technology and communication.

Deepfakes can contribute to the rapid spread of misinformation. The threat of deepfakes on social media has received visibility, but they can appear in other contexts, including recent accounts of people using deepfakes to disguise their voices.

With this type of scenario in mind, researchers will develop training sessions to help listeners improve their ability to recognize audio deepfakes with varying degrees of linguistic complexity, says Janeja, principal investigator (PI) on the grant. They will then evaluate the efficacy of those training sessions to help the listeners protect themselves against deception by audio deepfakes. Using linguistic features, the research team will also create data science algorithms to augment the information that a listener is presented with.

The resulting tools will empower listeners to evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of information they see online, explains Mallinson, professor of language, literacy, and culture (LLC), director of UMBC's Center for Social Science Scholarship, and co-PI on the award. Participants will receive sociolinguistic training to help them develop a more finely-tuned ear for distinguishing linguistic details, and they will draw upon that information as they evaluate deepfakes.

Mallinson's work focuses on language as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon. She explains that the linguistic complexity of audio deepfakes makes it challenging for listeners to distinguish them from natural speech and identify them as inauthentic misinformation. At the same time, linguistic training and tools can help address these challenges. By working together, experts in computing and linguistics can disentangle this complexity.

The EAGER grant is "high risk, high reward," she says. It involves approaching a challenging phenomenon in an entirely new way and building bridges across disciplines. Students studying both data science and the social sciences will develop the skills to identify audio deepfakes, which is uncommon, Mallinson explains. Success would mean helping people protect themselves against deception by deepfakes and increasing the equitability of AI technology.

Janeja and Mallinson's project team will include UMBC data science scholars as well as **Sara Khanjani, Ph.D. '24, information systems**, and **Lavon Davis**, incoming LLC Ph.D. student. Khanjani also completed initial research informing the grant, along with **Gabrielle Watson '21, information systems**. That work explored college students' audio deepfake perceptions.

Khanjani looks forward to creating tutorials that can better prepare people to spot deepfakes. The team's series of online educational modules will be openly accessible to the public to help them improve their critical listening and discernment skills.

Ultimately, Mallinson says, this interdisciplinary research in sociolinguistics and data science will better prepare people to navigate emerging communication issues in today's technologically complex world.

Mallinson and Janeja hope that in establishing an innovative pathway for collaborative research that fully integrates sociolinguistics, human-centered analytics, and data science, the study will also lay the groundwork for future analyses of deepfakes in ways that are broadly relevant to all of these fields.

— Megan Hanks Mastrola

Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

Barriers to the "American Dream"

The notion of the "American dream"—that hard work can lead to social and economic mobility—has existed in the U.S. for centuries, and it has been disputed for almost as long. **Pamela Bennett's** new book, *Parenting in Privilege or Peril: How Social Inequality Enables or Derails the American Dream* (Teachers College Press, 2021), takes on this idea. Bennett, associate professor of public policy, explores some of the social, educational, and economic factors that impact the decisions that middle- and working-class parents make in hopes that their children can attain the "American dream."

Bennett co-authored the book with Amy Lutz, associate professor of sociology at Syracuse University, and Lakshmi Jayaram, founder of the Inquiry Research Group LLC and research associate with the University of Central Florida.

"We designed a research project to investigate the role that culture and social inequality play in the educationally relevant parenting strategies of working- and middle-class parents," explains Bennett.

After interviewing 50 parents from two public schools in a northern U.S. city, they found that middle- and working-class parents generally engaged in two types of parenting: defensive and strategic parenting.

Beyond the parent interviews, family survey data, census data, local police data, school climate data, and social network data provided further details about the economic resources parents had access to and the social conditions that impacted their wellbeing.

These two parenting approaches emerged when the researchers explored parents' "values, orientations, and expectations" for their children's educational journey as a pathway to achieve the American dream. Parents shared their lived experiences within their neighborhoods and schools as well as work, social, and educational networks.

The data show both middle- and working-class parents share a goal of having college-educated children. However, the resources accessible to each group vary widely, as do the social conditions in which they live, which ultimately influence how the parents approach this goal.

Middle-class families with large social networks and economic resources were more likely to practice "strategic parenting" by making key decisions leading to their child's academic improvement, new skill development, and variety of extracurricular activities. Their decisions were influenced by access to many choices and to safe neighborhoods and schools that helped parents nurture their children. This social context encourages adolescent independence and the personal growth needed to attend college.

On the other hand, working-class parents in the study had more limited access to financial, social, and enrichment resources. They also had to consider how their child would engage in a world where neighborhoods and schools contain serious safety concerns. These safety concerns lead some parents to heavily monitor their teenagers' interactions with peers and other adults and to shield them against actions that might limit their opportunities.

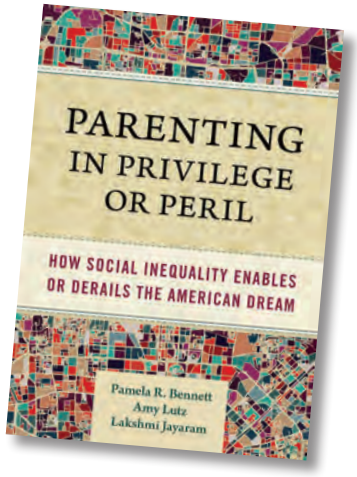
In this way, working-class parents generally practiced "defensive parenting," making decisions that protected their children from harm while also working toward their social mobility.

The researchers hope this study can inform education policy designed to close the gap between working- and middle-class families' access to the American dream. One key way to achieve this, Bennett suggests, is increasing neighborhood safety and access to academic enrichment activities.

Bennett's work on social inequality in higher education and racial residential segregation spans two decades. This new book comes on the heels of several recent articles she has co-authored on topics related to affirmative action and collegiate outcomes, college entrance exams and academic performance, and talent loss among Black people and Latinos following affirmative action bans. She and Amy Lutz will soon publish a new article, in *Harvard Educational Review*, on whether state bans differently affect the willingness of Black, White, Latinx, and Asian Americans to apply to selective colleges.

Recently, Bennett spoke about college access and affordability on *Marketplace*, a public radio show heard by more than 14 million listeners each week. She recommended hotlines for students and their families to ask questions about financial aid and direct support with completing FAFSA applications, particularly for first-generation college students. "The stakes are talent loss, frankly, for the country," Bennett said.

— Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque



IMPACT

A Pause for Celebration

Nearly 1,800 students walked across the stage at Chesapeake Employers Insurance Arena during UMBC's 78th graduate and undergraduate commencement ceremonies. After pausing to receive their congratulatory elbow bumps from President **Freeman Hrabowski** and other leaders, they could breathe a sigh of relief, knowing their hard work and perseverance paid off.

The ceremonies were bittersweet—an important moment of transition for both the graduates and President Hrabowski. Sharing in the moment were six alumni from across disciplines chosen to receive honorary degrees. Now in their own established careers, they've continued the UMBC tradition of paying it forward as mentors.

"These honorary degree recipients are wonderful examples of the best of UMBC," said **Greg Simmons, M.P.P., '04**, vice president for institutional advancement. "They are brilliant individuals at the top of their fields, who care deeply about making the world a better place, each in their own way."

Encouraging graduates to build upon the lessons they learned at UMBC, honorary degree recipient **Judge Ricardo Zwaig '77, Spanish**, said, "Whatever your calling, the elevation of humanity should be your primary goal regardless of boundaries."

Kafui Dzirasa '01, M8, chemical engineering, mentioned what an impactful mentor President Hrabowski has been to him. "Every time I tripped and fell, when the world saturated me with adversity and tribulation, he would gently reach back his hand and pull me forward with a word of encouragement."

Kizzmekia Corbett '08, M16, biological sciences and sociology, delivered her remarks by video, as she was at a meeting with Nobel Laureates at the time of commencement. She has often commented on the profound role President Hrabowski and other mentors have had on her life and career, and has carried that forward through mentoring emerging scientists. She recently established the Kizzmekia S. Corbett Endowed Scholarship to support students in the Meyerhoff Scholars Program who are emerging leaders at UMBC or in the community.

Focusing on what people can achieve when they have support and a belief in themselves, she shared, "I hope you dare to dream so big that no one else can imagine the possibility. I hope that you take this degree and you make this world a better place. I hope for you scientists out there, that you take this degree and you cure cancer. I hope for you humanitarians that you stop world hunger. And I hope that you live and I hope that you love."

Co-valedictorian **Shahreen Zannat '22, biological sciences**, also spotlighted the greatness that students and communities can achieve with the right support.

"Our journey at UMBC was not one we took alone—advisors came to our rescue during moments of panic, professors connected us with their networks for employment opportunities, and all of the support staff ensured our safety and well-being on campus," said Zannat. "This support has helped shape leaders, resulting in international recognition of UMBC's innovative research, creative teaching methods, and its cultural and ethnic diversity."

Kaitlyn Sadtler '11, biological sciences, recognized that support can also come from unlikely places saying, "You will meet people that will bring out the best and worst in you. Learn from both because if you don't get lost, you will never find your way."

While many speakers touched on the idea of mutual support and "paying it forward," others recognized the need to couple that with taking care of oneself.

Co-valedictorian **Viola Lis '21, psychology**, reminded her classmates that, "To make a difference once we leave UMBC, we have to be doing the things that bring us joy, the things we find fulfilling and meaningful. Otherwise, our imprint will be faint. In order to show up for others, you have to show up for yourself first."

Echoing these statements, honorary degree recipient **Mark Doms '86, economics and mathematics**, admitted that the road would be hard for graduates but implored them to listen to themselves and their abilities.

"You will hit roadblocks; setbacks will blindside you," he said. "But please, don't surrender to self-doubt. Instead, persevere. You are extremely gifted and, please, don't deprive us of your gifts."

Tiffany Holmes, M.F.A. '99, imaging and digital arts, was once a student who thought she had her life figured out. But as she shared in her address, the "key message to you today is to have a plan that is endlessly adaptable. Work hard at something that brings you joy, and your path will lead you somewhere fascinating that is just right for you."

Presiding over his final commencement exercises ahead of his July 2022 retirement from UMBC, Hrabowski looked upon the audience a final time. Keeping his final message simple, he said, "Be confident knowing that we are so proud of you, knowing you must never let anyone else define who you are. You define who you are."

— Kait McCaffrey and Bobby Lubaszewski '10

Below, alumna Kaitlyn Sadtler '11, addresses the crowd. Top right, newly minted grads celebrate. Bottom right, Freeman Hrabowski takes in his final commencement.


Chesapeake Arena


ACADEMIC
AFFAIRS
UMBC

Turning the Tides

By Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque

For Christopher Tong, discovering clues hidden in texts documenting history's most devastating floods isn't just about the promise of making social, cultural, and political change. It's also a personal journey inspired by generations of his own family.

In July of 2021, the city of Zhengzhou, China, had more than seven inches of rain in one hour, flooding subway train cars filled with commuters and forcing hundreds of thousands to evacuate.

Around this time **Christopher K. Tong**, an assistant professor of modern languages, linguistics, and intercultural communication, was surrounded by materials he had collected during his trip to the People's Republic of China at the Hubei Provincial Archive in Wuhan and from the No. 2 Historical Archive in Nanjing, the national repository for Republican-era government documents. He was translating and analyzing historical, government, and personal documents regarding two major environmental disasters in China during the 1930s: the Yangzi River and Yellow River floods.

Nearly a century ago, the communities surrounding the third- and sixth-longest

Above, a scene from the Yangzi River in China. Photo by Dong Zhang on Unsplash (2017). All other photos shared by Tong.

river systems in the world experienced the most severe flooding in modern China's history, inundating thousands of miles of land, killing millions of people, and leading to extensive disease and famine.

Witnessing the coverage of the Zhengzhou flood, and watching the past and present intersect, was an extraordinary moment for Tong. Live, minute-by-minute social media posts gave insight into the catastrophic experience. By contrast, the floods from the 1930s did not have such personal coverage. First-person accounts tended to be handwritten letters and only some reached audiences beyond their villages, allowing for a select few, in cities far away from the areas most impacted, to understand what was happening on the ground

"The Zhengzhou floods confirmed for me how important environmental humanities research is and how this scholarship sheds light on society and politics," says Tong, who compares the impact of the floods to the impact the Dust Bowl of America's Great Depression had on American society and politics. This deep research into the political—and personal—nature of environmental disasters like these has won Tong recognition among humanities scholars, social scientists, and policy analysts alike.

The Henry Luce Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies recently awarded Tong one of 11 prestigious Early Career Fellowships in China Studies, providing funding for an academic year of research, writing, and curriculum development to help meet the needs of China studies in the 21st century. Tong will use this time and rich material to write his book on ecological consciousness and political representation in modern China.

"One of the goals of my book is to offer readers resources to 'think with China' on shared concerns such as ecological crises, human rights, and animal advocacy," says Tong. "I see my work as contributing to cultural diplomacy and what people in the policy world call 'China literacy.'"

Silent All These Years

Historical and literary narratives of the Yangzi River and Yellow River floods tend to shift between focusing on facts and offering a political party's explanation. The events are inevitably understood within the larger framework of building a national identity, especially the revolutionary history of the People's Republic of China.

"Official narratives generally serve to build national unity, but there are always gaps and discrepancies in these narratives. It's about whose voices are missing in the official narratives and why," says Tong. "Unfortunately, people forget these voices over time, and my project is to recover them.

Wanting to delve into the archives on the floods to see what histories emerged, Tong first had to secure access to the archives. With access granted and the assistance of a Fulbright grant and Nanjing University, between 2018 and 2019 Tong spent 10 months in China analyzing thousands of documents written in classical and modern Chinese. In the archives, amongst letters written by survivors, correspondence between county officials and provincial and central governments lists of survivors at refugee camps, maps, logistical documents, and

photos never before studied, was one of many untold stories:

"There are those who try to rescue their parents, but die in the water... There are those who hold their wives and children by the hand, but end up drowning together...[and] families that manage to escape on a single raft, but sink in the middle of the current."

This excerpt of a rare petition letter written by a village representative was in the archives and mirrored accounts throughout the archives that spoke of death and survival. These voices, silent for decades, were not a story of revolutionary action as many histories of modern China would imply. What Tong unearthed bears witness to the lived experience of rural communities focused on repairing and managing loss. They sought help from government officials, relief workers, each other, and were more civically engaged than previously thought.

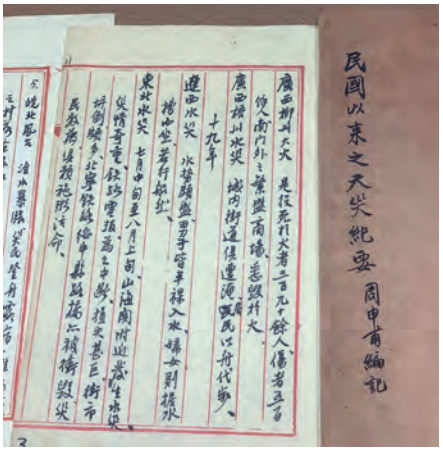
"Sometimes these efforts are not given enough consideration in disaster narratives and national histories," says Tong. "But I believe them to be important as building blocks of proto-democratic practices." He hopes it will inspire the reconceptualization of Chinese literature and history in the early 20th century.

Kirk Denton, professor emeritus of Chinese literature at the Ohio State University and a mentor to Tong through UMBC's Eminent Scholar Mentoring Program, gave Tong important feedback based on his own research on the representation of historical memory in Chinese and Taiwanese museums. Over the years, Denton has witnessed the evolution of Tong's work.

"I was heartened to see a young man mature into such an accomplished scholar," says Denton, who notes that Tong's work "is at the forefront of the environmental humanities."

Jessica Berman, professor of English and director of UMBC's Dresher Center for the Humanities, says that as a scholar of comparative literature, "Christopher uses the core methods of textual analysis, critical theory, and intellectual history to bring out the ramifications of cross-cultural environmental thinking between China and the U.S. in the early 20th century."

"The climate crisis is often portrayed as something serious that happens over time, like global warming," says Tong. "However, with the Dust Bowl in the U.S. and floods in China, these disasters were fast and extreme and often contributed to immediate shifts in public sentiment and the government's capacity to govern."



民國以來之天災紀要

Top and bottom left: In September 2021, Tong spent two days examining, scanning, and taking notes on a number of Asian translations at the Thoreau Institute. Bottom right: An archival document listing major environmental disasters in Republican China.

> **I'm proud that my research not only broadens scholarship in the humanities, but it is also a way to maintain my connection to my family history and imagine what it was like for them to live through those periods.**

Tong stands in front of Nanjing University's auditorium at the downtown campus, which features the fusion of traditional Chinese architectural elements and modern Western construction methods.

Windows to the Past

For Tong, the interconnectedness of his work is both personal and professional. His interest in 20th-century China and Hong Kong stems from his maternal grandmother's stories about her life in mainland China in the early 20th century.

"My maternal grandmother and her sibling were artists. She went to an art academy in China briefly during WWII and was the director of a clothing company in Hong Kong after the war. One of her sisters was a film star in Hong Kong who acted opposite a young Bruce Lee in the film *Thunderstorm* in 1957," he says.

He remembers learning about his great-great-grandfather, Jiang Kongyin, a government official and well-respected member of the gentry during the Qing dynasty, the last imperial dynasty in China. Jiang helped with the transition from the Qing dynasty to the Republic of China (ROC). Tong's maternal grandfather learned English early because he was from one of the founding families whose fortune was tied to British Hong Kong. This was especially useful during WWII when he worked for Allied forces in southwestern China with Chinese aviators and the Flying Tigers, U.S. volunteer aviators who fought against Japan.

Tong also listened to the stories of his paternal grandfather who worked for an American company in Hong Kong after WWII. His paternal grandmother came from a peasant family and joined her siblings in the U.S. Her siblings ran a Chinese restaurant in Bakersfield, California. This side of Tong's family eventually moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where his uncles would later work for the U.S. military. California has been home to most of Tong's family since the late 1960s.

"I'm proud that my research not only broadens scholarship in the humanities," shares Tong, "but it is also a way to maintain my connection to my family history and imagine what it was like for them to live through those periods."

Tong visited Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Mausoleum on Nanjing's Purple Mountain and wore his Fulbright shirt as a way to commemorate the US-China connection and his Fulbright experience in China. The Fulbright program in China (pictured below) was cut short in 2020 by the pandemic and subsequently canceled, making Tong's visit the last full year of Fulbright exchange in the People's Republic of China.

Mirrors

Tong's work also holds space for voices missing in the humanities and the environmental movement. "Ecological thought draws heavily on European and North American traditions. Non-Western cultures are often viewed as derivative or marginal," explains Tong. "Women, people of color, and disabled people are also underrepresented as contributors to environmentalism and animal advocacy."

He remembers how his family often didn't feel comfortable using green space, and when they did, people often assumed they were tourists. "Before COVID, I was visiting my grandmother and went for a hike in Muir Woods," north of San Francisco, says Tong. "People asked me where I was from and were surprised to hear I grew up in the Bay Area." The times when they did feel comfortable, when they enjoyed spending time outdoors, those experiences were memorable and inspired his career path.

Tong hopes to spur more inclusion and representation in the humanities. The STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) have benefited from the talents and scholarship of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, he says, but the humanities have not had equal representation. As an Asian American with Hong Kong roots, Tong has often been the sole person of color or Asian American in classes and conferences. Often, he is mistaken as the "tech-person" or assumed to be in a STEM field, he explains.

Tamara Bhalla, an associate professor of American studies and affiliate faculty in the Asian Studies program, works with Tong on the board of the UMBC Asian and Asian American Faculty and Staff Council (AAAFSC). She says, "Chris has been a tremendous leader...He has brought his expansive intellect and global knowledge to bear in his approach to leadership in AAAFSC."

Part of this work means going beyond the classroom. Tong participated in a series of talks at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco on the theme of "After Hope." His project helped raise awareness of Chinese-language literature in the context of Asian American history and addressed the pandemic, immigration policies, and what wellbeing means. He includes poetry found on Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay where Chinese immigrants were detained in the early 20th century because of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

"We're an important part of the conversation on culture, politics, and history in American society," he says. He wants to be one of the people that students can look to and think, "I can also pursue this path and have a career in academia in a humanistic field."

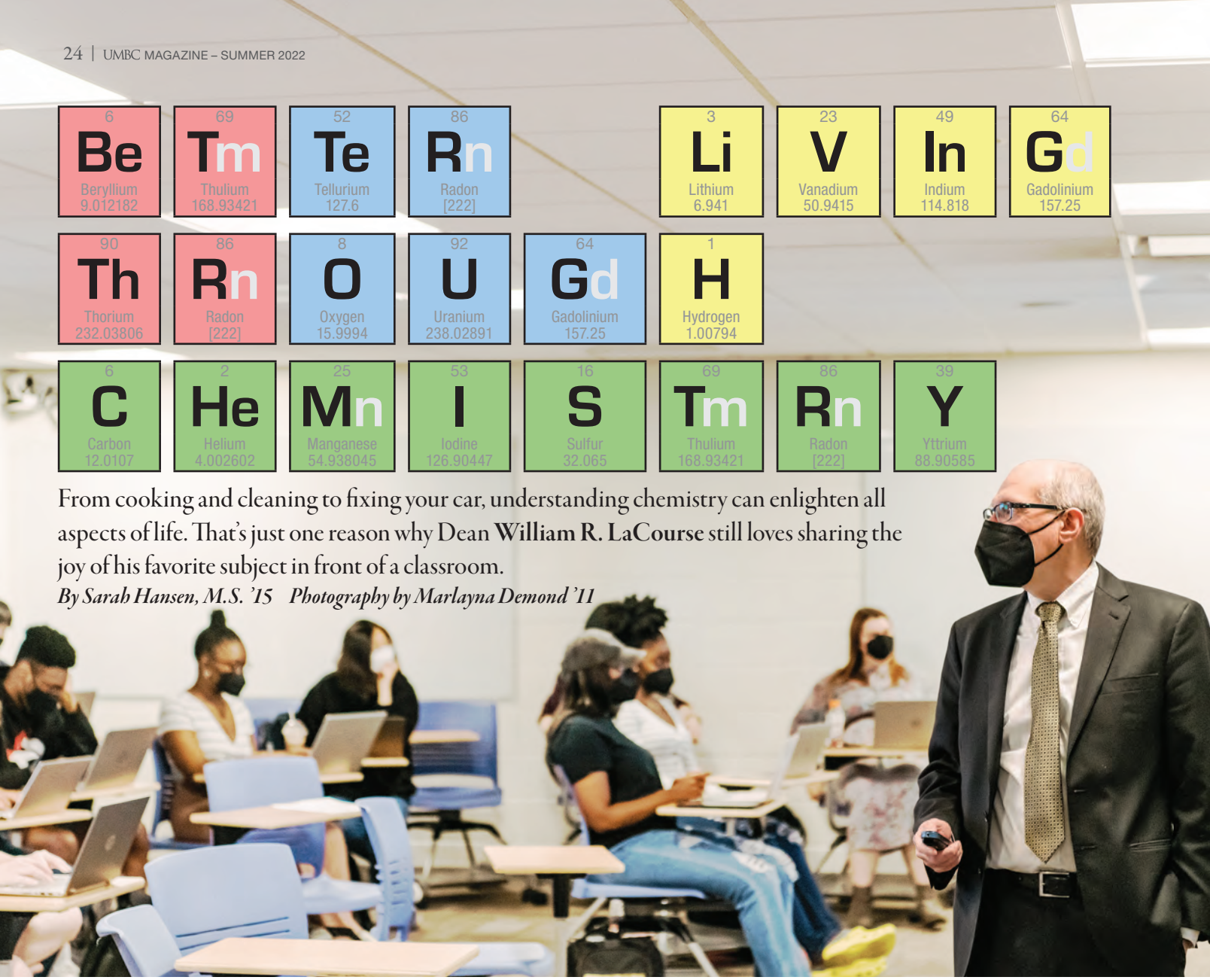
Last year's flood in Zhengzhou was one of many extreme weather events in China that summer. Many cities and villages in various provinces were bombarded by the floods, killing hundreds and displacing millions.

The *New York Times* reported on the different accounts given by government officials, meteorologists, and on social media, including those trapped in the flooded subway, wading in the water, leaving their homes, and taking care of the dead while also dealing with COVID-19.

In the meantime, Tong has documents that remain to be analyzed in hopes they will unveil more voices and bring further clarity to China's environmental history and its future.

"The climate crisis affects everyone everywhere in some way. It's the most important issue of our generation," says Tong. "It affects every domain of knowledge production."

Top: Tong stands below two plaques on the side of the former Hankow Customs House in Wuhan, China. The plaques are placed at the high-water marks of the 1931 floods (lower) and 1954 floods (higher). Bottom left: At Nanjing University's main library at the new campus in the Xianlin district. Bottom right: At The No. 2 Historical Archive, the national repository for Republican-era government documents, in Nanjing.



From cooking and cleaning to fixing your car, understanding chemistry can enlighten all aspects of life. That's just one reason why Dean **William R. LaCourse** still loves sharing the joy of his favorite subject in front of a classroom.

By Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15 Photography by Marlayna Demond '11

It's not every institution where you can take a class taught by the dean—especially a 100-level course. It's even less likely to find that dean sprinkling his weekly lectures with silly chemistry jokes and cultural references. But **William R. LaCourse**, dean of the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences (CNMS) since 2011, does exactly that, co-teaching CHEM 100: The Chemical World to non-chemistry majors with **Caitlin Kowalewski**, assistant director of undergraduate initiatives in CNMS. Every Tuesday afternoon this spring, LaCourse taught his students how chemistry influences their lives.

The jokes and digressions are designed to keep a complex topic like chemistry light and relatable—even fun. After all, LaCourse tells his students one day in March, "This is not a course that's supposed to stress you out. It's an empowering course. At the end, you're gonna know so much more about chemistry."

Throughout the class LaCourse affectionately refers to as "the egg lecture," for example, he teaches the students how best to make hard- and soft-boiled, fried, and baked eggs and exactly why based on the chemistry involved, with the occasional digression. The Lilliputians from *Gulliver's Travels*, for example, make an appearance—apparently they went to war over which end of a soft-boiled egg to open. He also takes a moment to share a favorite recipe his wife makes—showing the students he's more than a university administrator.

After the short lecture, the students answer discussion questions in groups, coming up with a list of compounds important for cooking, such as baking powder and gelatin, and their roles.

"CHEM 100 is all about empowerment," LaCourse says. "Understanding how the chemical world affects you gives you more control over your life." For example, you can avoid trendy health hacks that are actually bad for you, he explains. Understanding chemistry can even help you be more self-sufficient. You may be able to "fix your car, cook better meals, or take stains out of your clothing," LaCourse says.

Students in the course appreciate that LaCourse makes the content relatable. "I don't think I've ever had a science class before that connects to our daily lives

in a way I can understand it," says **Keli Amoako '25 political science**. "He makes you aware of the chemistry in everyday life. I think everybody should have to take a class like this," adds **Moroti Oyeyemi '25, information systems**. There is something for everyone. "I have a great love of baking," says **Meghan Seerey '23, visual arts**, "and he connects the class to the culinary arts."

For their final projects, students had complete freedom to demonstrate how chemistry affects their lives. Some created "day-in-the-life" presentations, explaining the chemistry in activities like brushing their teeth or doing laundry. Others focused on a particular interest, like skin care, fashion, or scuba diving. One student filmed a baking video, and another designed a brochure explaining how to improve one's garden through soil chemistry. There were podcasts, poems, and even a musical composition in the key of C sharp. (The musical notation for C sharp, C#, looks like CH, representing carbon and hydrogen, two key elements for life.)

CONNECTED TO HIS ROOTS

For LaCourse, teaching CHEM 100 follows naturally from his values. Even with the added responsibilities of a dean, after also serving as chair of the chemistry and biochemistry department for four years, and a member of the department for 15 years before that, "I still have graduate students and I still teach, because that's the reason I came here in the first place," LaCourse says. "I think if you move too far away from those roots that you'll lose the ability to understand and to be empathetic with those who teach, with those who do research, and the issues that they encounter."

Never has this been truer than over the last two years, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced administrators to make decisions about whether to shift classes online and other changes to the education experience. In Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, LaCourse and Kowalewski taught CHEM 100 fully online, in part to be in solidarity with the rest of the college's faculty. "All the challenges with technology, grading, and keeping people's interest...I could understand what the faculty were going through," LaCourse remembers.

A NON-TRADITIONAL PATH

In addition to staying connected with the needs of faculty, LaCourse calls on his own experience to explain why he pursued the deanship and why he works so hard to make sure the college is serving all UMBC students well. He starts to talk about when he became department chair, then pauses.

"Actually, I'm gonna go back even faaather," he says, revealing the Boston accent that still shows up now and then, despite living in the Baltimore area for decades. "I took a very non-traditional pathway to get where I am."

He goes on to describe a series of experiences—starting out at a technical college, then pursuing a four-year degree at multiple institutions while working full-time, and a graduate education full of "naïve decisions" due in large part to a lack of guidance and support.

All that is what drove him to pursue leadership. It's one thing to teach a course that shows students from all backgrounds why chemistry matters—and hopefully improve their lives in the process. It's another to make changes at the department level, and yet another to be able to lead the college. LaCourse says his motto is "There's always a better way," similar to one of President **Freeman Hrabowski**'s sayings that has been adopted by many on campus: "Success is never final."

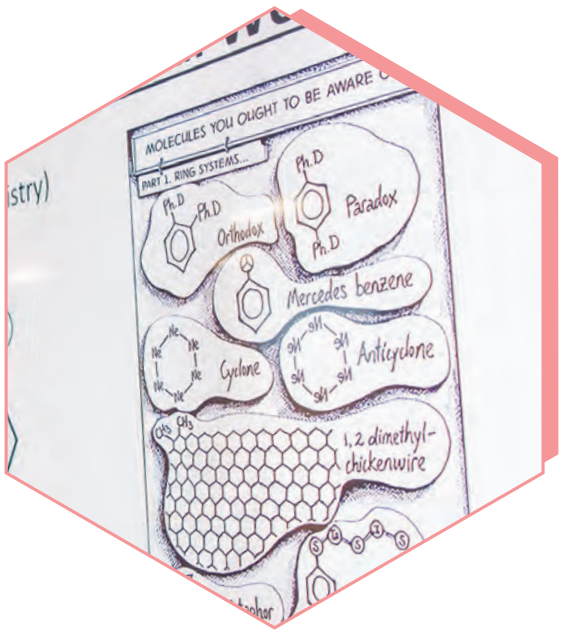
"The world changes," LaCourse says, "and most things will have to evolve to keep up."

DISCOVERY LEARNING

When LaCourse started as chair, he felt as if there were too many students failing introductory chemistry courses. He believed there was a better way—that the introductory chemistry curriculum needed to evolve. As a result, after a collaborative pilot program, introductory chemistry courses added a weekly, team-based, problem-solving session to the lecture component in 2005. These sessions are still a cornerstone of the chemistry curriculum today. The magic happens in the Chemistry Discovery Center (CDC), and LaCourse calls the technique "discovery learning."

"Chem Discovery was a different way to do it. The vision was to bring students from a passive to an engaged format, to give them the opportunity to discover," he says. "People love to discover things, to plant new flags."

Research faculty get to experience that on a regular basis, LaCourse notes.



"Why don't we give our students the opportunity to discover knowledge?" he says. "Because when you discover it, you own it—and we know that ownership is important for learning."

After the Chemistry Discovery Center's introduction, the fail rate in intro to chemistry dropped by half. The CDC plus a shift among UMBC faculty away from the concept of "weed out" courses has led to continued success, including increased retention and attendance.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

Chemistry Discovery was just the beginning. LaCourse has spent nearly two decades working with colleagues across the college and at community colleges in the region to create more opportunities for students through a number of initiatives that supply the support and structure students need to succeed.

UMBC has proven again and again that relatively small, cohort-based scholars programs that generate a sense of community and offer intensive advising can significantly increase student persistence and success rates in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). LaCourse isn't satisfied with that, though—he wants to see more students get that high-touch experience.

> "I still have graduate students and I still teach, because that's the reason I came here in the first place," LaCourse says. "I think if you move too far away from those roots, that you'll lose the ability to understand and to be empathetic with those who teach, with those who do research, and the issues that they encounter."

"The whole purpose is to give opportunity and a unique education experience to every student that UMBC lets in," LaCourse says. "The focus is on what we need to do to make that possible."

SCALING UP

The most comprehensive manifestation of this goal is STEM BUILD, a 10-year, National Institutes of Health-funded initiative at 10 universities to diversify the biomedical sciences workforce. At UMBC, the initiative's motto is, "500, not 50." That's 500 students. "Can we do 500, not 50? Can we make things scalable?" LaCourse asks. "Can we take the pieces of community and intensive advising, and make it so many more people benefit from it?"

The goal of STEM BUILD at UMBC is to identify the most effective practices that support student success and find ways to implement them at scale. Perhaps most important, the college is working hard to weave the most effective elements into regular operations so that when the grant funding sunsets in 2023, students will continue to benefit.

STEM BUILD programming includes group research experiences, a summer bridge that teaches laboratory skills and experimental design, and training in communications and research ethics. Advising, community meetings and socials, living on campus in the STEM Living Learning Community, and a rich culture of staff and faculty support are key community-building elements.

STEM BUILD also spawned an Active Learning, Inquiry Teaching (ALIT) certificate through UMBC's Faculty Development Center. ALIT has helped faculty transition their courses to more engaged formats, such as team-based problem-solving, rather than lectures. Spaces like the CNMS Active Science Teaching and Learning Environment, opened in 2010, facilitate this transition. CASTLE has round tables rather than desks, and since fall 2019, the new Interdisciplinary Life Sciences Building has offered similar classroom environments, plus features like mobile whiteboards. Originally, ALIT was intended only for faculty directly involved in STEM BUILD activities, but has since been expanded to any interested faculty—an example of the ripple effect of initiatives such as STEM BUILD.

LEADING THE CHANGE

LaCourse has also led efforts to capitalize on UMBC's location in one of the top biotech clusters in the country. After hiring **Annica Wayman '99, M6, mechanical engineering**, as associate dean of Shady Grove affairs in CNMS, degree options for UMBC STEM students at the Universities at Shady Grove have grown. "She has a passion for students and helping them be successful," LaCourse says.

Wayman came back to UMBC from a successful career in international development at USAID specifically to lead the new Translational Life Science Technology (TLST) bachelor's degree program, which prepares students for immediate, in-demand careers in biotech. "The relevance, innovative nature, and health-related impact of the TLST program is what attracted me back to UMBC as associate dean, and the many students who come into the program," she says.

LaCourse's leadership, in conjunction with community college partners, was crucial to bringing it to life, Wayman adds. "Bill's educational start in community college and work in the private sector before coming to academia made him the perfect visionary for developing a new bachelor's degree in biotechnology at UMBC."

And it's working. TLST grads like **Titina Sirak '20** and **Charmaine Hipolito '20** are already finding success in the regional biotech market, leaving the program with several job offers for biotech positions in hand.

LaCourse also knows that for students to succeed, faculty need to feel supported and be representative of the student body. The ADVANCE program, for example, has increased the number of women faculty in STEM by 180% since 2003. And now, the Pre-professoriate Fellowship program encourages faculty members committed to supporting diversity and inclusion to apply. The goal is for participants to convert to assistant professors at UMBC.

While persistence and success in STEM majors has significantly increased over the last two decades, "How many more successful students could there be if they could see more people like themselves, who they can relate to better?" LaCourse asks.

DOING RIGHT BY STUDENTS

Given his own challenges navigating higher education, supporting success for all students, enabling discovery, and encouraging ownership of their education is deeply embedded in LaCourse's psyche.

One of his current graduate students in chemistry and biochemistry, Amanda Belunis, confirms this. "Dr. LaCourse always says that he is just a guide, and he wants us to be actively engaged in our own education and learn lessons. He pushes us all to reach our full potential and consistently offers constructive feedback and encouragement, usually paired with a funny anecdote or joke," she says. "I feel confident that when I finish, I will be leaving the program as an independent critical thinker ready to tackle any problem, and I owe a lot of that to him."

While some students may be likely to succeed regardless of the support available or not, for others, the right environment can make all the difference.

"When people come in, if you give them the feeling that they belong, and that they can do it, and you give them the help that they need, many, many more will succeed," LaCourse says. This sentiment applies to faculty, too. Both students and faculty "put their future in the hands of the institution, that we'll do right by them," LaCourse says.

NOWHERE LIKE UMBC

Through his work with individual students in his laboratory, teaching undergraduates, and securing funding for projects that affect many more students, he's doing his best to make sure the institution deserves its community members' trust by creating opportunities and offering support.

"Opportunities are what life is all about," LaCourse says. "It's up to an individual to take advantage of them, but we have to put those opportunities in front of people and make people believe that they can take advantage of them." Through programs like STEM BUILD, TLST, transfer student support programs, and more, "that's what we train our students to believe—that they belong, that they could do the job, that that opportunity is theirs as much as anybody else's," no matter their background.

As a non-traditional candidate for a leadership role in academia, LaCourse also appreciates the opportunities he's been given to make a difference at UMBC—the chances people took on him and his ideas, which sometimes involved creative new methods. Another pause. And then, "Of course I can't know—as a scientist, I understand there's no control group for my life," he says. "But I don't think I'd be where I am at any other place than UMBC."

He's taken it as his mission to pass on those opportunities to UMBC students—they're why he's here, after all. As a leader first in chemistry, and now in CNMS as a whole, he's worked to "break down silos, and work under umbrellas," as he says, to make changes that do the greatest good.

"You need to understand what everybody's going through, and what they're up against," he says. "That way you can work together better in the long run—and again, we're all working for the same purpose."

VISION OF WHAT COULD BE

The significant, positive change that has occurred on his watch is already impressive, and the trajectory is still going in the right direction. More students are succeeding in STEM at UMBC. Students who demonstrate high potential, but may not be at the top of their class or have much experience when they arrive at UMBC, are getting the resources they need and finding their way. Faculty and staff are committed to supporting all of them.

Although he's not retiring yet, LaCourse has decades of experience at UMBC to reflect on. When asked about what a normal day might look like, after mentioning writing grant proposals, dealing with crises, attending leadership meetings, and, of course, teaching CHEM 100, he pauses again, waxing philosophical.

"A day in the life..." he ponders. "It's really a lifetime, guided by principles and experiences from my own life. So every decision, every action, draws upon everything in the past, and the vision of what could be."

Who knows what may come next.

See the Challenge, Be the Change

UMBC's Grand Challenge Scholars Program prepares students to collaborate across disciplines and address real-world issues.

By Megan Hanks Mastrola

Illustrations by Kimberly Salt

Tackling Societal Challenges

Modeled after a national program, UMBC's GCSP was established in the College of Engineering and Information Technology (COEIT) in Fall 2016. Over the past six years, the program has expanded, drawing together students from various disciplines to address major challenges that the world is facing. Ranging from engineering better medicines and securing cyberspace, to providing access to clean water and advancing personalized learning, the challenges were identified by a group of leaders across academia, policy, and industry that the National Academy of Engineering convened in 2007.

Maria Sanchez, GCSP director since 2018 and a professor of the practice in COEIT, explains that an important part of the program is helping students develop skills that they can apply to their classes and take with them into careers or graduate school. Students are eligible to enter the program during their junior year and participate for two years, building their ideas over time.

Because big challenges require cross-disciplinary thinking, the GCSP brings students from diverse backgrounds together for meaningful conversations and to discuss topics that require multidisciplinary solutions and perspectives. Students in the program connect with organizations on and off campus to put their skills and knowledge to work. For example, a student interested in learning how to improve the quality of water for communities might work with the UMBC chapter of Engineers Without Borders to design a water filtration system in another country in

When **Chelsea Okeh '22, M30, biological sciences**, first came to UMBC, she was excited to put her passions to work in a way that might help her community. She already knew she wanted to address health disparities, so she put herself on a course to learn and do all she could.

When a friend in the Meyerhoff Scholars Program mentioned UMBC's Grand Challenges Scholars Program (GCSP) — which takes an interdisciplinary approach to solving big world problems — she knew she was in the right place. Surrounded by students with a wide range of interests, she could take her ideas to the next level.

"I've always had an unbridled ideology that it is possible to change the world," she says of her interest in the GCSP," says Okeh. "Little things I've done in the past like Girl Scouts and community service really paved the way for wanting to take part in something that has a greater purpose." Through the program, Okeh expanded her understanding of factors that impact health disparities and outcomes and she is primed to take what she's learned beyond UMBC.

"We don't expect students to come up with a solution. . .it's more to develop a framework for basic skills and to apply them to their future careers."

need, or a student passionate about restoring and improving urban infrastructure might pursue a study abroad opportunity to learn about cities on other continents.

"We don't expect the students to come up with a solution to a grand challenge. It's more to develop a framework for basic skills and to apply them to their future careers," Sanchez explains.

The GCSP includes five program areas that help students develop a comprehensive perspective on topics. These elements—research, entrepreneurship, service, interdisciplinarity, and global perspectives—are incorporated into the seminars and the students' final projects. "Through these experiences, the students reflect on what the experience has meant to them and how they transform themselves or their views," she says.

The program pivoted during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic to support students as they adjusted to virtual learning and other sudden changes. The students also processed national current events during classes, including the 2020 election, the pandemic, and racial injustice.

Developing Models to Replicate

The national Grand Challenges Scholars Program was founded by three engineering deans at institutions across the U.S. in 2009. In 2011, Arizona State University (ASU) launched their Grand Challenge Scholars Program, which is housed within the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering. Today, ASU invites all incoming first-year students to participate in the program.

Amy Trowbridge, director of ASU's program and chair of the interim executive committee of the Grand Challenges Scholars Program Network, explains that the program allows students to create meaningful connections among their peers and mentors. Students joining the program all take a course that lays the foundation for the experiences they will complete to achieve the five GCSP competencies during their time in the GCSP.

"The Grand Challenge Scholars Program is important for students because of the skill set and mindset that it helps them gain through the program," Trowbridge says. "Members of industry have said that it's valuable as industry continues to change and evolve, and as technology gets more complex. It's the interdisciplinary, global perspective that students gain through the program, and the ability to see the big picture."

> **"Being exposed to different ways of thinking, different cultures, and different thought processes has been very valuable to me."**
>
> **— Alexandra DeCraene '22, public policy**

Meaningful Mentorship

Olorunjuwon Ajayi '22, computer engineering, has a personal interest in sustainability, so the GCSP challenge of "making solar energy economical" resonated with him. Entering the program, he participated in the seminar classes that allowed him to discuss topics with his peers and be exposed to different perspectives. Soon, he had the tools he needed and a network of fellow students to tackle the challenge.

Through the program, Ajayi has been intentional about connecting the research that he conducts on campus alongside **Curtis Menyuk**, professor of computer science and electrical engineering, with the challenge that he focuses on in GCSP. The research focuses on lasers and optics

and can be applied to solar energy issues. He is particularly interested in optimizing energy harvesting from solar panels. This summer, he will complete an internship with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. After graduation, Ajayi plans to work in the renewable energy field.

Ajayi says that he has enjoyed the seminar classes because they delve into topics that he doesn't explore much in other classes. "The classes have been fun but they touch on things people don't really think about in their majors," he explains.

Sharing Perspectives

To support the GCSP, Sanchez works with **Alexandra DeCraene '22, public policy**, a peaceworker fellow through the UMBC Shriver Center who serves as the program coordinator for GCSP. Peaceworker fellows are returned Peace Corps volunteers pursuing their graduate degrees at UMBC while participating in a two-year social change leadership program, which includes a part-time placement with an on-campus program or community partner addressing a range of social needs.

DeCraene explains that she enjoys bringing guest speakers into the classroom to share different perspectives and disciplines with the scholars. She says that one speaker that stands out is a Baltimore-based pastor who got creative about using resources that his churches already had to bring more local food to the community. He connected with local farms and used the church's vans to transport fresh produce to farmers markets in Baltimore.

"Being exposed to different ways of thinking, different cultures, and different thought processes has been very valuable to me," DeCraene says. "The Grand Challenge Scholars Program gives undergraduate students a chance to discuss what is on their minds, share their ideas, and get feedback from their peers."

Striving for Interdisciplinarity

For Okeh, the challenge to engineer better medicines aligned closely with her career goals. She is particularly interested in using her future degrees to address health disparities that are related to socioeconomics, geography, health literacy, and race. Okeh conducts research on the effects of hyperglycemia on neural tubes of zebrafish and works alongside **Rachel Brewster**, professor of biological sciences. This work can help doctors understand the prevalence of neural tube defects in babies born to pregnant people with diabetes.

"By individualizing and acknowledging the health disparities and the issues they've created, and keeping that in the forefront of our minds, we can ultimately engineer better medicines," explains Okeh, who will complete post-baccalaureate research at the University of Pennsylvania before pursuing her M.D./Ph.D.

"Engineering doesn't necessarily mean equations and reactions. It could be putting issues that we are already experiencing in our communities under the magnifying glass and seeing how entrenched they are in our medical and healthcare systems."

Building A Solid Foundation

In addition to guiding students to reflect on their experiences or perspectives throughout the course, Sanchez would like GCSP alumni to reflect on how the program has provided them with a solid foundation on which to start their careers. **Heather Mortimer '18, interdisciplinary studies**, decided to apply for the GCSP after she saw a flier about the program on campus. She was intrigued by the interdisciplinary focus on the program and that it had many parallels to her passions and goals.

Mortimer's self-designed major focused on science communications, museum education and education development, combining her interests in art, education, history, science, and writing, she explains. She participated in the second cohort of the program during her junior and senior years, after transferring to UMBC from art school. Her cohort had fewer than a dozen students, and most of the participants were STEM majors.

The challenge to "advance personalized learning" resonated with Mortimer because part of her major was about active versus passive learning. Her GCSP final project was a remix of things she was already working on for her interdisciplinary studies degree, she says. Looking back on her experience in the program, Mortimer says that she enjoyed the discussions that happened in the classroom as well as the required courses.

As a graphic designer and technical writer at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Mortimer says that her participation in GCSP allowed her to be exposed to people with different skills, perspectives, and interests.

"I am the resident creative on a team of mostly STEM professionals," Mortimer says of her role at NASA. Being a part of the program "gave me a better idea of how scientists see problems and what goes into their thought process. It's been helpful to integrate some of that same way of thinking into the way that I approach creative projects."

Challenge Accepted

As GCSP continues to expand, Sanchez hopes to continue to incorporate elements of social responsibility—encouraging people and organizations to prioritize the best interests of society and the environment—into the experience.

"I'm very passionate about the idea of social responsibility and thinking about what students are going to be doing as professionals in their careers and what they're going to apply from their education," says Sanchez, who is collaborating with **Helena Mentis**, professor of information systems, on a Hrabowski Innovation Fund Grant to implement elements of social responsibility education into curricula across COEIT departments. Sanchez and Mentis are working with faculty and graduate students in a range of disciplines in UMBC's College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

"Even though the National Academy of Engineering developed the Grand Challenge Scholars Program with engineers in mind, it's become clear to me that these topics are on students' minds regardless of discipline," says Sanchez.

Sanchez plans to continue to develop GCSP's curriculum and structure so that it may become applicable to other programs or courses at UMBC. Through the program, she hopes that students are able to make meaningful connections at UMBC and in the surrounding communities and contribute to society through their careers.

In the future, Sanchez would like to increase the range of majors that participate in the program and apply elements of the program to connect with more students. Through her experience leading the GCSP, she has found that students value the opportunity to discuss the topic of social responsibility, and it prepares them to collaborate across disciplines in their careers.

"The way that GCSP was designed is a great jumping-off point for future programs," says Sanchez. "The Grand Challenge Scholars Program has created a foundation and structure for students to think about various topics with social responsibility in mind."

Maria Sanchez (left), director of the Grand Challenge Scholars Program, shares a moment with students Olorunjuwon Ajayi, Diane Stonestreet, Chelsea Okeh, David Paton, and peaceworker fellow Alexandra DeCraene.

CLASS **NOTES**

UMBC Class Notes is compiled by *UMBC Magazine* staff from items submitted online and by mail from alumni as well as from news articles and press releases received by the university. This edition of Class Notes contains information processed by May 1, 2022.

Submit a Class Note

The deadline for submitting Class Notes for the next print issue of *UMBC Magazine* is October 25, 2022. Submit your class note and photos online at umbc.edu/magazine or by email to magazine@umbc.edu.

1970

Richard Bond and **Carol Bond, psychology**, are members of the first graduating class of UMBC and married in 1970. Richard Bond has authored three books, which are available on Amazon. The most recent is *Lights Out...to the Checkered Flag: Chronicling 60 Years of Sports Cars and Motor Racing* (2021).

1973

Diane Bell-McKoy, sociology, interviewed Oprah Winfrey in 2021 for the conclusion of a four-part speaker series developed by Associated Black Charities, of which she serves as president and CEO.

1975

R.A. Cramblitt, English, published their first novel, *Probably Lives in Tahiti*, in February. Cramblitt's five-star collection of fictional vignettes, *The Parker Chronicles*, was published in 2021.

1976

Blair Grubb, biological sciences, is the Distinguished University Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at the University of Toledo Medical Center. *The Toledo Blade* cited how Grubb's research into the blood circulation disorder postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome, known as POTS, has been used in studying the effects of long coronavirus.

1979

Paul Iwancio, American Studies and social work, won first place in the Colorado Music Business Organization's songwriting contest with his song, "Who Took the Donuts Away?"

1981

Jose "Felipe" Anderson, political science, was awarded an endowed chair at the University of Baltimore Law School. This designation was supported by the publication of Anderson's most recent book on Justice Thurgood Marshall's mentor, Charles Hamilton Houston.

1982

Jay Robertson, interdisciplinary studies, was inducted into the Greater Baltimore Lacrosse Foundation's 2022 Hall of Fame class. He was the 1980 U.S. Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association Outstanding Attackman for National Champion Retrievers.

Morgan Thomas '13, political science, and Chris Harried '16, sociology, were married in February 2022 in Raleigh, NC.

1983

Linda Fiore, music, joined the United Lutheran Seminary as the director of strategic marketing and communications for the Philadelphia and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, campuses. Fiore's publication "Living Lutheran" is about how church music thrived at the seminary during the pandemic.

1984

Tarra Deshields, psychology, was appointed deputy chief of the Civil Division for the District of Maryland.

1986

Tony Diana, Ph.D. '99, policy sciences, received the Department of Transportation Team Award for applying natural language processing and text analytics to address community engagement issues related to noise at large airports. Diana is division manager of outreach in the Office of NextGen at the Federal Aviation Administration.

Stephanie Hill, economics and computer science, joined the board of directors for Project Lead the Way.

Lawrence J. (L.J.) Hippler, economics, published his third novel, *A Bridge to Home*.

1987

Sue Ann Lewis Armitage, political science, received a Leadership in Law award from *The Daily Record*. Armitage is an attorney at Armitage & Armitage, Pennsylvania. Her daughter, Sydney, is in graduate school pursuing a career as a child therapist.

Joanne Smikle, political science, is program facilitator for the Professional Leadership Program for Women in the Dr. Nancy Grasmick Leadership Institute at Towson University.

1989

Scott Morrison, economics, retired from coaching lacrosse after 13 years at DeMatha Catholic High School and a total of 31 years of high school coaching.

1991

Jeff Gross, sociology, is head coach of the women's soccer team at Campbell University.

Eric Nastasi, philosophy, was promoted to deputy director for administration and finance at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

1992

Ralph D. Semmel, Ph.D., computer science, the director of the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, is included on *The Daily Record's* "2022 Power 30 Higher Education" list.

Aaron West, political science, discussed the founding and work of the Iota Phi Theta Fraternity in an article from *The [North Carolina] A&T Register*.

1993

Alan Aymie, theater, published his first book, *Turning Points: Tips, Tales, and Tactics of a Revolutionary Teacher*, a memoir on his first year of teaching in south Los Angeles.

Angela Hodge, M3, electrical engineering, is program executive for quantum communications science and technology at NASA Space Communications and Navigation.

Jenny Miller, interdisciplinary studies, was selected to be the interior construction coordinator for commercial real estate firm St. John Properties.

1994

Karen Friedman, political science, was appointed by President Joe Biden to serve as director of criminal justice innovation, development, and engagement at the Department of Justice.

Brian Loewe, interdisciplinary studies, was named St. Mary's Ryken Novice Teacher of the Year.

Angel Webb Reese, information systems, was mentioned as the UMBC women's basketball season record holder for rebounds in a PressBox article about her daughter, who is also a rising basketball star.

CARRYING ON A PHILANTHROPIC LEGACY

Hema Gowda '01, biological sciences

Behind every story of giving lies a story about someone's generosity. For **Hema Gowda '01, biological sciences**, this story was about continuing a generational legacy through philanthropy.

"My mom came to this country in the late '60s, and education was a huge foundation for her in propelling her forward," says Gowda, a Prince George's County native who works in pharmaceutical research.

"When she retired, she set up endowments at [the University of Maryland,] College Park in the name of her parents because they were the ones that pushed her for higher education. She is the person she is today because of them... So I'd always been inspired by that and wanted to give back to UMBC because it was the foundation for my career."

Gowda followed in her mom's charitable footsteps by establishing the Gowda Scholarship Endowment for UMBC in 2016 (and a similar scholarship at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy in 2015) to help students interested in pursuing graduate studies in pharmacy find success at UMBC.

As an undergraduate, Gowda knew she wanted to give back to her alma mater, but it took her longer to decide what she really wanted to study at UMBC. Even after deciding that certain routes like medical school were not for her, it took more steps to narrow down what path called out to her most.

She applied to the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy in her senior year at UMBC and entered the next stage of her academic career. Prior to graduation in 2005, she caught sight of a posting for an editorial internship at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists—an experience that would eventually lead her to a medical writing position at a medical communications agency in the Philadelphia area the following year. There, Gowda collaborated with pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to help develop their clinical trial publications and scientific communications for products that were marketed or in development.

After about five years at the agency, Gowda joined the biopharmaceutical company, Incyte, and gained experience in the company's medical affairs and clinical development groups. This latter opportunity allowed her to take advantage of the communication skills and clinical expertise she had gained through her previous positions and educational experience.

In April 2020, a month into the pandemic, Gowda started her new position as a global development scientist director at AstraZeneca.

"I collaborate with colleagues from many other functions to execute registrational clinical trials in lung cancer. We conduct the trials globally and gather and submit data for regulatory agencies in hopes of getting new drugs approved for different types of cancers," explains Gowda.

Gowda's journey down multiple routes in pharmacy shows that taking the time to figure out the right path was not at all a setback. Even if it took a bit longer for her to settle on the research route, Gowda does not regret any of the experiences she gained along the way.

"Each segment of my career helped define my path a little bit better," she says.

The Gowda Scholarship Endowment, open to students interested in pursuing a career in the pharmaceutical sciences, gives preference to students who graduated from a Prince George's County high school or current residents of the county. Gowda's first scholar, **Adam Kouyate '22, biological sciences**, was grateful to have been chosen, as it meant she no longer needed to turn to student loans.

"Because of this scholarship, I was able to work less hours during the school year and focus more on classes and finding myself. Though I did end up switching from pharmacy to nursing, this scholarship gave me the peace of mind to focus on what I really wanted to do with my life," says Kouyate, who will attend the University of Maryland School of Nursing's Master's-Level Entry-Into-Nursing Clinical Nurse Leader program this fall.

A second scholarship recipient, who graduated from Eleanor Roosevelt High School, is currently planning to pursue a graduate degree in pharmacy.

Moving forward, Gowda hopes to echo a legacy of giving modeled by her mother and inspired by familiar faces at UMBC. Most importantly, she is eager to pass on a future of giving to her scholars—a future that may consist of trial and error but also with valuable experiences along the way.

"It's the gift that I want to keep giving, and I can only hope that this small amount for a semester or a year sets them up for a lifetime of success."

— Anna Lee '22

CLASS **NOTES**

Christel Temple, M.A., African American studies, was promoted to full professor in the Department of Africana Studies at the University of Pittsburgh. Temple's book, *Black Cultural Mythology* (2020), received the College Language Association's annual Book Award for 2021. In 2022, Temple published an edited collection, *Muhammad Ali in Africana Cultural Memory*. Temple will appear on an episode in the History Channel's series *The UnXplained*.

1995

Alycia Marshall, mathematics, is vice president of academic and student success at the Community College of Philadelphia. Marshall, chair and professor of math, helped establish the African American Leadership Institute and established the Engineering Scholars Program supporting women and students of color in pursuing STEM programs of study.

Alison Lake Robinson, emergency health services management, celebrated 15 years of service as the contracting officer's representative at the Department of Homeland Security.

1996

Felicia Sanders, chemical engineering, is chief human resources officer of Michelin North America, Inc.

1997

James Foye, visual and performing arts, and his wife **Kristen Kachurak Foye, biological sciences**, met at UMBC. James Foye's feature film screenplay *Revolutionary Spy*, based on the true story of James Armistead, was the First Place Gold Award Overall Winner in the 2021 Titan Awards from Industrial Scripts.

Robyn Iglehart, biological sciences, married Stephen Ross, Jr., in July 2021. The wedding was featured on Brides.com.

Tamara Kim, emergency health services, joined UM Shore Medical Group as a pediatric nurse practitioner.

George Derek Musgrove, history, is one of 28 scholars across the U.S. to receive the 2022 Andrew Carnegie Fellows Program award.

Cindi Lin, visual and performing arts, and her husband, Douglas Kissick, welcomed a third child, a son named Tenzin Kai Lin-Kissick.

Major Bruce Perry, psychology, is acting chief of UMBC Police. Major Perry has been a member of UMBC's Police Department since 1998.

Renee Russell, modern languages and linguistics, was on *Jeopardy!* on April 28, 2022, narrowly missing the win.

1999

Mark Tyler, history, was sworn in as a magistrate for the First Judicial Circuit of Maryland in January. He hears cases in the Somerset and Wicomico County Circuit Courts.

Dawn Humphrey Quattlebaum, health science and policy, is chief executive officer at Seabury Resources for Aging, a nonprofit that provides personalized and affordable services and housing options to help older adults live independently in and around Washington, D.C.

2000

Jamie Friedman Chriqui, Ph.D., policy sciences, was appointed senior associate dean of the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Aaron Ross Krebeck, American studies, is the director of library and user services at the Washington Research Library Consortium, a nonprofit that provides library services to nine universities in the District of Columbia.

Cindi Lin, visual and performing arts, and her husband, Douglas Kissick, welcomed a third child, a son named Tenzin Kai Lin-Kissick. They have two other children as well: Lani, 16, and Webster, 13. Lin is dance director for the DC Hippodrome Variety Show.

2001

Kafui Dzirasa, M8, chemical engineering, received the 2022 Benjamin Franklin NextGen Award for studies investigating how stress and other environmental factors affect the brain through genetic and electrochemical mechanisms.

2002

Paul Lurie, mathematics, talked about his roles with the Jewish Community Center of Greater Baltimore in an interview with David Nevins.

Tina Williams-Koroma, computer science, and her company CyDeploy are included on Technical.ly's 2022 RealLIST of top startup tech companies.

2003

Brenda Bateman, Ph.D., policy sciences, has been appointed director of Oregon's Department of Land Conservation and Development.

Letitia Dzirasa, M11, biological sciences, was named one of the *Baltimore Sun's* 2021 Marylanders of the Year and was included in *The Daily Record's* list of the 30 most powerful health care professionals in Maryland. She is Baltimore City health commissioner.

Nicholas Krider, mathematics, discussed his career as a machine learning engineer in an *InfoWorld* article.

2004

Delali Dzirasa, computer engineering, and his company, Fearless, created a digital Searchable Museum for the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Fearless won the bid to create this digital museum in fall 2020.

John Klausmeier, mechanical engineering, became a crew chief for Stewart-Haas Racing.

Alicia Wilson, political science, was featured in a *Baltimore Style* article highlighting her personal, academic, and professional experiences that inspired her career and leadership in Baltimore.

2005

La Jerne Terry Cornish, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, was named president of Ithaca College after serving as interim president since August 2021.

Kenneth Gibbs Jr., M13, biochemistry & molecular biology, was named a 2021 Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Gibbs Jr. is chief of the undergraduate and predoctoral cross-disciplinary training branch within the division of training, workforce development, and diversity at the National Institute of General Medical Sciences.

Avery Posey, Jr., M13, bioinformatics, received the inaugural career development award for pancreatic cancer research in honor of the late congressman and civil rights leader John Robert Lewis from the Lustgarten Foundation-AACR.

Angel Kristi Williams, visual arts, directed an episode of *Colin in Black and White* and won an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Breakthrough.

2006

Kelley Anthony, social work, is the new assistant director of the VA Maryland Health Care System.

Alyssa Bush, social work, married Jennifer Banegas on April 1 at the Elkridge Furnace Inn.

Jessica Farmer, psychology, was named a partner at the national law firm Holland & Knight.

Andrew Haines, biology, is clinical pharmacy manager at Fort Walton Beach Medical Center. Haines is also celebrating a one-year marriage anniversary.

2007

Adjoa Smalls-Mantey, M15, biochemistry and molecular biology, co-authored *Anjali the Brave: All About Vaccines*, an informative picture book geared toward children 3 to 8 years old, featuring a set of diverse characters.

2008

Alex Chan, psychology, has spent over 11 years at the U.S. Tennis Association Mid-Atlantic Section and has been the associate director of community services since 2021.

Bonnie Crawford, M.F.A., imaging and digital arts, was featured in a *BMore Art* article that discussed her care-themed artwork and sources of creative inspiration. Crawford is a manager at the digital marketing firm the Berndt Group.

Bill Holman, M.A., management of aging studies, a former adjunct faculty member in the Erickson School of Aging Studies, has been named president and CEO of St. Andrew's Resources for Senior Services.

Douglas Nivens, II, political science, received the Generation J.D. award for demonstrating professional accomplishment, community service, and a strong commitment to the legal profession early in his career. He was also named to *The Daily Record's* 2022 list of Leaders in Law and received a Leadership in the Law Award. He is an attorney at Maryland Legal Aid.

Kristin Wodrich, interdisciplinary studies, spoke about her coaching career, faith, and family in a Sports Spectrum podcast.

2009

Mike German, chemical engineering, co-founded Drinkwell, a water solutions company based in India and Bangladesh, in 2013. He also works for Revel, whose mission is to accelerate electric vehicle adoption in cities by helping with infrastructure.

Karsonya "Kaye" Whitehead, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, was named a Baltimore Newsmaker for 2021 by *The AFRO* and included on *The Daily Record's* Top 100 Women list for 2022. She hosts *Today with Dr. Kaye* on WEAA FM, and received an award for excellence in journalism on Black life in America.

2010

Adrienne Starks, Ph.D., biological sciences, was highlighted for her work with her nonprofit, STREAM Innovations, by #IfThenSheCan, an exhibit of 3-D printed statues that celebrates contemporary women leaders in fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). A statue of Starks was exhibited this past March in Washington, D.C.

2011

Mindy Cleveland Neira, economics and psychology, is now the principal and wealth manager at Modera Wealth Management, LLC.

Dionne N. Curbeam, M.A., instructional development systems, was named one of *The Daily Record's* "Maryland Top 100 Women." She is deputy chief information officer at Coppin State University.

Bill Joyner, health administration and policy, is director of the Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. He works on initiatives to advance priorities related to EDI strategic planning, implementation, and accountability.

Eliseba Osore, social work, was named to *The Daily Record's* 2021 Leading Women list. Osore is the program director of ShareBaby, a nonprofit dedicated to meeting the needs of children in the Baltimore area.

David Pourshoushtari, political science, is communications director for the New Hampshire Democratic Party.

2012

Carmen Jackman, history, is included on the list of 40 under 40 Outstanding BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) Leaders in Drug Policy in the United States.

Dono James, economics, bought his first rental property last October and started a real estate business last November. James is now setting up to expand.

Monroe Kennedy, mechanical engineering, M20, received an National Science Foundation Early Career Award for his work on improving robotic dexterity. Kennedy is an assistant professor of mechanical engineering at Stanford University, where he also heads the Assistive Robotics and Manipulation Laboratory.

Samantha Kahan Strakes, individualized study, is co-director of 4Front, a Baltimore organization that supports Jewish teens and their parents.

CLASS **NOTES**

2013

Jim Kruger, political science, M.P.P. '14, Ph.D. '21, public policy, a senior policy advisor for the Institute for Energy & Resource Management, authored a letter to U.S. congressional members advocating for improvements in solid waste management.

Robbin Lee, visual arts, was named to *The Daily Record's 2021* Leading Women list. Lee is the executive director of Baltimore Homecoming.

Morgan Thomas, political science, and **Chris Harried '16, sociology**, were married in February 2022 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Thomas is acting director and Title IX coordinator for UMBC's Office of Equity and Inclusion. Harried is a community engagement coordinator at the Morehead Planetarium & Science Center.

2014

Eileen Barde, psychology, a current doctoral student at Binghamton University, received a fellowship from the Enhancing Diversity in Alcohol Research program.

Aboshioma Obemeata, visual arts, opened Panthera Elite Training & Performance near downtown Indianapolis.

Jennie Williams, American studies, was appointed to the West Virginia Humanities Council as its new state folklorist.

2015

Mustafa Al-Adhami, M.S., Ph.D. '20, mechanical engineering, and his company Astek Diagnostics, received $850,000 in funding to apply for breakthrough designation with the Food and Drug Administration. Both are included on Technical.ly's 2022 RealLIST of top startup tech companies.

Shahidou Mariko, mechanical engineering, received the Modern-Day Technology Leader Award for work to increase hospital capacity for COVID-19 patients in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

2016

Poulomi Banerjee, health administration and public policy, M.P.P. '21, received the 2022 Rising Star Award for the Council for Advancement and Support of Education in the mid-Atlantic district. Banerjee is assistant director of Annual Giving at UMBC.

Briana "Bri" Hall, visual arts, has launched the podcast *Count to Ten* about changing the notion of "staying calm" in the face of social and racial injustice.

2017

Emily Escobedo, psychology, won the 200-meter breaststroke for the U.S. at the Short Course World Championships, her first world championship.

Amy Hoffman, biological sciences and health administration and policy, completed her final year of medical school at Penn State College of Medicine and will be entering family medicine residency in 2022.

David Sears, M.P.P., has been appointed the new vice president for institutional advancement at McDaniel College. He is currently a Ph.D. student at UMBC.

2018

Inte'a DeShields, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, and **Christine Mallinson** discussed the intricacies of the Baltimore accent in a WYPR podcast.

Naomi Mburu, chemical engineering, and President Freeman Hrabowski discussed the idea of "prestige" and ways to make the Rhodes Scholarships more accessible to students of all backgrounds in an *EdSurge* podcast.

2019

Jordan Evans, aging studies, co-authored an article in *McKnight's Long-Term Care News* about three ways senior living leaders can address ageism within the field.

Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman, M26, economics, discussed her new book, *The Black Agenda: Bold Solutions for a Broken System*, a collection of essays from Black scholars and experts, on an NPR podcast.

2020

Joseph Davis, mechanical engineering, was promoted to project engineer at Datamura Solutions, an asset management company based in New Hampshire.

2021

Anjali DasSarma, media and communication studies, graduated from Brown University with a master's in American studies. She will attend the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School this fall to pursue a Ph.D. in communication, with a focus on colonialism, journalism, equity, media structures, and race/ethnic studies.

Maryam Elhabashy, anthropology, contributed to a new study that shows rapid tests to detect COVID-19 in adolescents are a viable alternative to PCR tests, with implications for their use in a wide range of contexts.

Alex Levanduski, mechanical engineering, was recognized at the Volunteers for Medical Engineering program's annual gala for his leadership on the Capstone Team Project, "Unique's Trike." Levanduski is currently a project engineer at Whiting-Turner.

Mary Ann Rupli, aging studies management, was awarded the 2020 – 2021 Erickson School Academic Achievement Award for outstanding excellence in the Management of Aging Services major.

Nikkie Stevens, media and communications studies, moved from an internship into a full-time position as a sourcing specialist at Career Communications Group.

Antione Tomlin, Ph.D. '21, language, literacy, and culture, received the 2022 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Zeitgeist Award for his work with the Black Student Union at Anne Arundel Community College.

FRIENDS WE WILL MISS

Tom Blass, one of UMBC's earliest psychology faculty, passed away on December 29. A Holocaust survivor from Budapest, Hungary, his mother saved his life by taking him into hiding at two years old. He went on to a career of more than 40 years at UMBC, helping to found the CASP track (community and social psychology), which later became the community psychology track. He was an award-winning author of many psychology books, a renowned social psychologist with a specialty in the field of obedience to authority, and a lover of jazz.

John P. Cook, former chief of police at UMBC, passed away on January 6. After 29 years of service as a major for the Maryland State Police, Cook stayed at UMBC for over 10 years. He enjoyed family vacations to Ocean City and Disney World as well as spending time with family, gardening, and being a fan of NASCAR and football.

Anthony James (Jamie) Cuticchia '87, biological sciences, passed away on January 6. After receiving his Ph.D. from the University of Georgia, Cuticchia became one of the youngest professors at Johns Hopkins University, where he contributed to the Human Genome Project. Cuticchia also worked in the biotech industry and provided pro-bono services to underserved communities.

Barbara Lee Ernest '95, information systems, passed away on July 11, 2021. Ernest spent her career in banking and is survived by husband Michael Ernest Sr., three children, and three grandchildren. In her retirement, she enjoyed traveling, needlepoint, and gardening.

Jo Anne Sabas '77, English, passed away on March 31. Sabas was a graduate of the Catholic High School of Baltimore, Harford Community College, and UMBC. She was a member of the Engineers Club in Baltimore, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Parish, and the Augusta Health Breast Cancer Support Group. Sabas oversaw her own professional writing services business and was a Mary Kay Independent Consultant.

Gala Stern, an adjunct instructor in the Modern Languages, Linguistics & Intercultural Communication Department from 1981 to her retirement in 2009, passed away on May 17. She taught Russian and French language and literature and, at times, literature in translation in English.

Scott Tiemann, a percussionist and drummer who taught in UMBC's music department, passed away on April 5.

PEACEWORKERS IN ACTION

Michael Hassett and Chiara Collette

Michael Hassett and **Chiara Collette** first met in 2014 at the Los Angeles International Airport before boarding a 17-hour flight to the middle of the southwestern Pacific Ocean to start their Peace Corps placements in the Kingdom of Tonga.

Little did they know that this shared placement would permanently intertwine their personal and professional lives. In 2018, the couple would go on to marry and co-found an internationally recognized nonprofit, Friends of Tonga—which earned a 2021 Literacy Award from the Library of Congress. Since then, Hassett and Collette have used literacy educational tools and public policy skills gained at UMBC and connections in Tonga to support the island nation they have come to love.

Hassett, M.P.P. '17, Ph.D. '19, public policy, lived in the village of Fahefa on the main island of Tongatapu. Collette, M.A. '21, TESOL, lived in the village of Ta'anga, on the outer island of 'Eua, part of an archipelago made of 170 islands. Working and living alongside community members and teachers, they helped design and implement programs to further develop students' English speaking, writing, and reading skills.

When the pair concluded their Peace Corps service, they relocated to Baltimore so that Hassett could matriculate into UMBC's Public Policy program as a Shriver Peaceworker. Collette became a teacher in Baltimore City and Anne Arundel County, eventually enrolling in UMBC's M.A. TESOL program.

Focusing on graduate degrees did not replace the bond that had grown between themselves and the people of Tonga. In 2018, Tropical Cyclone Gita hit Tonga with over a hundred mile per hour winds causing the most damage in 60 years. Equipped with skills from the Peace Corps and UMBC, along with their community-engaged connections, the pair co-founded Friends of Tonga with Peace Corps colleagues, friends in the nonprofit and development community, and members of the Tongan community.

What began as reactive disaster relief support work grew to become a proactive Peace Corps model community supporting Tongan-identified initiatives like education resources, English language skill development, and building cyclone-safe schools.

Later that year, they returned to Tonga for both their honeymoon and their Sapate Uluaki, a wedding celebration. Hassett's host family planned this celebration, weaving Hassett and Collette deeper into their Tongan community.

During this visit, Friends of Tonga was asked to help rebuild the kindergarten that had been destroyed by a cyclone earlier in the year. As a result, Tonga's first cyclone- and hurricane-resistant building was built to function as a school, community center, shelter, and place to house emergency supplies. With students spread over 170 islands, Collette also developed an easy-to-access digital video library of English-language books.

Collette and Hassett note that UMBC "is baked into all of our programming." **Joby Taylor, Ph.D. '05, language, literacy, and culture**, director of the Shriver Peaceworker Program, along with fellow Peaceworkers, read many of the stories in the read-aloud program. **Lauren Hamilton Edwards**, assistant professor of public policy, is also guiding them in their strategic planning process.

On January 15, 2022, the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted, followed by a tsunami. The eruption lasted for 11 hours and devastated homes across the archipelago. Friends of Tonga leapt back into action, raising money and helping to fund more than $20,000 of work providing water, sanitation, hygiene services, and assisting farmers with harvesting crops damaged by the tsunami before they spoiled. Their cyclone-proof school was not affected by the volcano or the tsunami.

"The work that began a decade ago as Peace Corps volunteers were intentionally driven to build strong, long-lasting, community, and personal relationships," shares Hassett, the 2021 recipient of UMBC's Distinguished Service Alumni Award. "We created a strong infrastructure of people and resources that has made it possible for us to support Tongans right now more than ever before."

— Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque

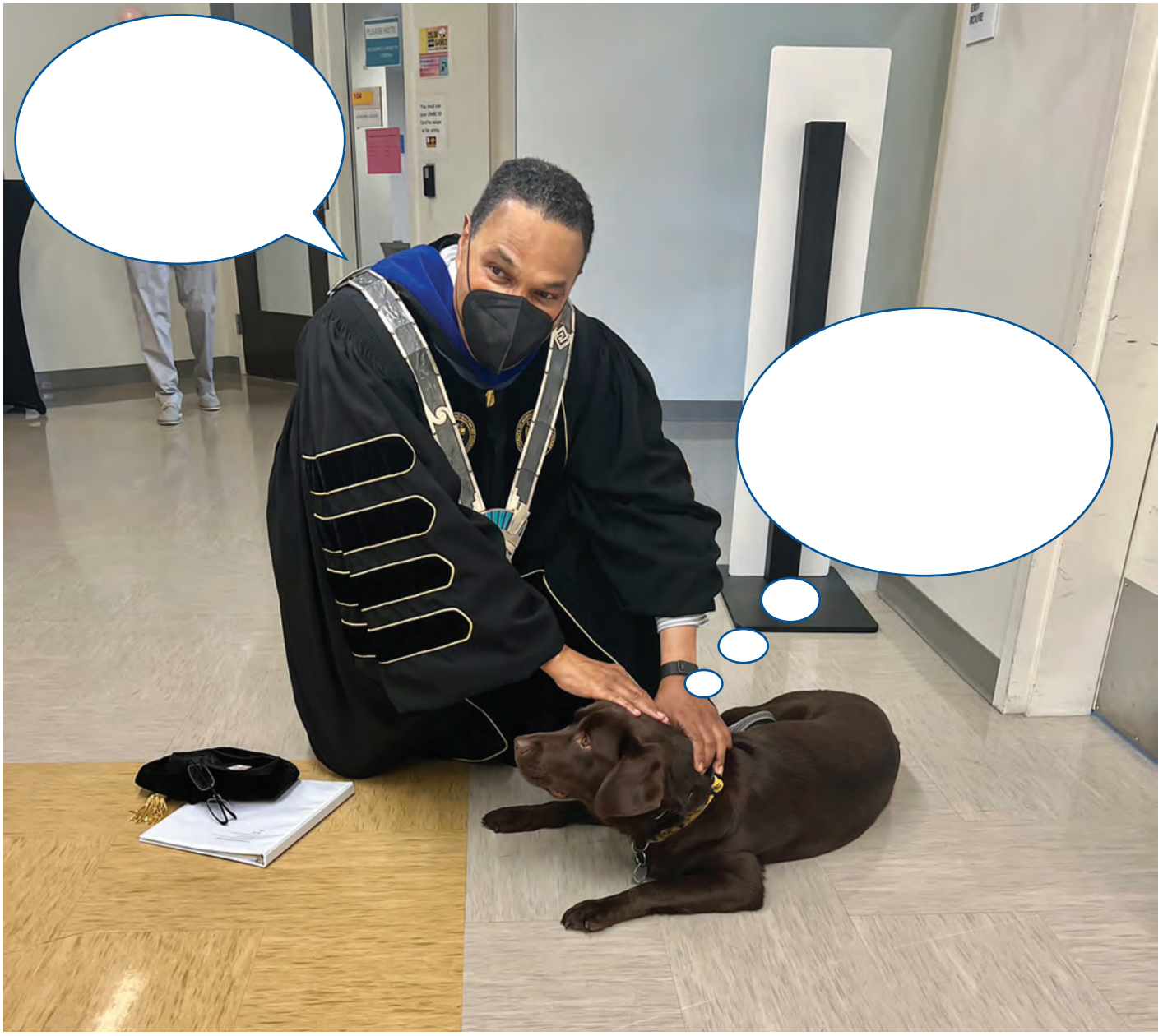
WILD **CARD**

Caption This!

What we said: "Congratulations on your final commencement as president, Dr. Hrabowski!" What Chip, the campus comfort dog, heard: "It's going to be a tough job, but yes, of course I'd be more than happy to take over as President Chip."

We decided not to burst Chip's bubble until our new president starts in August (don't worry, we'll deliver the news with plenty of belly rubs and treats to soften the blow). In the meantime, snap a photo of this picture and share your best caption to your public Twitter and Instagram accounts using #SuccessIsNeverFinal in honor of President Hrabowski. We'll pick one random winner to receive their very own stuffed Chip! Post your submissions by August 15, 2022, and we'll notify the winner via social. Good luck, Retrievers!

– Kait McCaffrey



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When it comes to paying for graduate education, you have options. As a UMBC Alum, you can fund your master's degree with financial aid, loans, payment plans, or select scholarships. Opportunities include:

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"We support UMBC for all that it has done and will continue to do. The recurring option is a fantastic way to ensure we don't miss the opportunity to give back and maximize our contributions during the year."

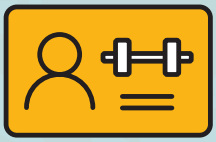
– Nate Dissmeyer '07, information systems

To set up a recurring gift to UMBC, visit umbc.edu/giving/monthlygift

Small Monthly Gifts Make a BIG Impact

Splitting your annual gift into smaller, recurring monthly donations is a manageable way to make a BIG impact.

For the cost of a latte at your favorite coffee shop ($5/month), you can make a $60 impact.



For the cost of a gym membership ($41/month), you're now at $500 a year.

For the cost of a streaming service ($20/month), your annual gift will grow to $240.

For the cost of eating out once a month at a nice restaurant ($83/month), your annual gift can exceed $1,000, making you eligible for The Hilltop Society and exclusive member benefits.

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WELCOME HOME, RETRIEVERS

Save the date for a fall filled with exciting events as we welcome a new president and celebrate Retrievers from all decades! Get these dates on your calendars now:

- Homecoming: October 7 – 15
- Alumni Awards: October 27

Update your contact information at alumni.umbc.edu to stay up to date on all of our alumni and campus events, and follow UMBC Alumni on social media to stay in the loop about all things #RetrieverNation.

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