

Fall 2022

UMBC

MAGAZINE

A SPACE OF ONE'S OWN

After a decade of research dedicated to black holes, physics professor Eileen Meyer is expanding her work to make time for mentoring, her family, and other galactic mysteries. — page 38

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Getting to Know U

She may have only been at UMBC a few months, but President Valerie Sheares Ashby already feels right at home.

By Kait McCaffrey



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Connecting the Dots

From design and research to helping one's community, experiential learning—or learning while doing—helps Retrievers turn knowledge into careers.

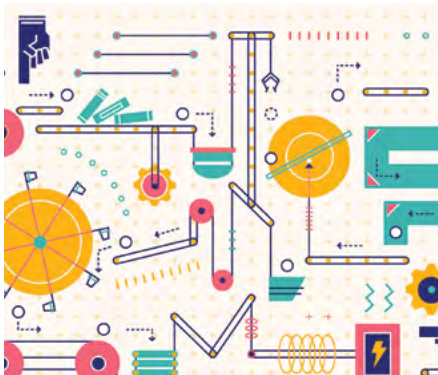
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A Space of One's Own

Eileen Meyer has spent the better part of the last decade using computers (often the “super” variety) to conduct astrophysics research, mostly on black holes (the supermassive variety)—but she is finding fulfillment in expanding her work.

By Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15



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Wrapping up the Grit & Greatness campaign means the chance to celebrate its success with the stories and people that made it all possible.

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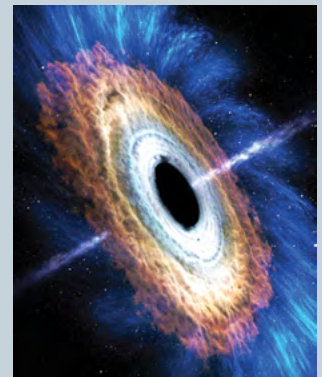
Artist Monique Crabb, M.F.A. '21, shares how she spent a month in residency at the Baltimore County Public Library, teaching workshops and engaging with library users as she created new work inspired by her surroundings.

By Monique Crabb, M.F.A. '21



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ON THE COVER

While telescopes are capturing more intricate photos of the universe these days, this image shows an artist's impression of the debris of a star torn apart after wandering too close to a 3-million-solar-mass black hole. Credit: NASA, Goddard Space Flight Center.

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TO YOU



Dear Retrievers,

The first song I remember genuinely loving was “Penny Lane” by the Beatles. As I recall, my mom played it for me on vinyl when I was about six years old after I heard an actor performing it on an episode of *Fame*, the television show. (And yes, I hope this sends you down a delightful rabbit hole of time travel. You’re welcome!)

In the song, Paul McCartney sings about walking around and meeting people doing all kinds of jobs in his neighborhood. In describing what he sees, he lovingly passes to the listener the joy

of what drives the people and the respect he has for each of them. This is one of a few early inspirations for why I went into community journalism.

Pretending I’m Paul, I often walk around UMBC wondering at the magic of what happens here. I, too, meet folks every day and get to hear about the “why” that drives them and brought them here in the first place. Many come to UMBC to learn and grow, others to teach, and many others are here to support those goals in some way.

In this issue, we explore a number of the “whys” that drive Retrievers, from a physics professor who is making space for herself in the field of black holes (page 38) to the various ways students use experiential learning opportunities to put their skills in design, tech, and community outreach into practice (page 30). We also get to learn more about what drives our new president, Valerie Sheares Ashby, and what she’s most excited about as she settles in at UMBC (page 22).

Now, “whys” are nothing without the “hows” that make them possible—and UMBC is especially good at making sure students from every background, in every discipline, have what they need to succeed. Case in point: When university leaders challenged the Retriever community to raise \$150 million to “make big breakthroughs, forge true partnerships, and transform lives,” we not only hit the mark but exceeded it (page 44). That’s the Retriever way.

It is exciting to see our community come together for an initiative like the Grit & Greatness Campaign because inclusive excellence really does take a village, and who doesn’t love a big goal met? However, as a writer, it is even more thrilling to get to watch and chronicle the way UMBC makes a difference at the individual level. The Penny Lane level.

Maybe it’s a little selfish, but when your “whys” take flight, it makes my “why” all the more satisfying. I love nothing more than making new friends and hearing about what you’re up to. So, keep it up, Retrievers! I think Paul would agree with me—UMBC’s people are worth singing about.

—Jenny O’Grady
Editor, UMBC Magazine

WEB FEATURES

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



Video: Homecoming highlights – don’t miss the Puppy Parade!



The Conversation: **Ivan Erill** on viruses that may be “watching” you



Meet a Retriever: **Emily Faber**, Ph.D. student

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

OFFICE HOURS



UMBC Magazine: *That's a terrific segue!*

What would you like alumni to know about your thoughts on UMBC's future and how you hope they will be involved?

President Sheares Ashby: Well, right now, as you know, I'm holding listening sessions with members of the community, and I want as many alumni as possible to participate. As we do this, I know that I will discover even more about our collective purpose and the possibilities for UMBC. I have said to alumni that I don't know what I'm going to ask them to do yet, but when I feel like I've got something that's worthy of their time and effort and the difference that they can make, I will bring it to them. And there will be something that I need our alums to do, for sure, because they are such an important part of UMBC's future.

I had the opportunity recently to meet with the executive committee of the Alumni Board of Directors and then, of course, many, many more alumni during Homecoming. As they introduced themselves, they talked about what they are doing and what they loved most about their UMBC education. It was wonderful because I could hear how they are living out the values of the institution wherever their careers and lives have taken them. I heard people talk about civic engagement and social justice and the things that we believe deep in our core. They're out there in the world exemplifying what UMBC is, in business, professions, public service, and the arts, and that is just incredible. The more people see our alumni doing this, the more we will continue to attract excellent students, and UMBC will only grow stronger.

*President Sheares Ashby with Farah Helal '24. For more information about the president's listening tour, **UMBC Bold: Campus Conversations**, please visit president.umbc.edu/bold.*

President Valerie Sheares Ashby is a people person. You can see her eyes light up while she talks with folks.

On her very first day as president of UMBC, Sheares Ashby made it clear that she wants to be available to students. Right off the bat, in true professor form, she set up weekly student office hours to do just that.

As you might expect, her office hours are already very popular; so we decided to reflect her friendly open-door philosophy in this regular president's column. Sheares Ashby is also engaging in a listening tour to hear from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and partners across campus and beyond in the coming month. We look forward to sharing highlights from the tour in future issues.

UMBC Magazine: *How would you describe your first few months at UMBC, and what has it been like getting to know this community?*

President Sheares Ashby: These first few months have been energizing, inspiring, and joyful. The more people I meet, and the more I start to make connections, the more I love this place. You can love something from a distance because of its values. But when you meet the people, and they embody those values, your love grows even deeper. It has been especially rewarding to engage with students, see who they already are, and imagine what they will become as a result of their experiences at UMBC.

And then, what is most inspiring for me is that it's becoming more clear every day what the possibilities are for what we can do together going forward.

"These first few months have been absolutely energizing, inspiring, and joyful. The more people I meet, and the more I start to make connections, the more I love this place."

DAWG'S EYE VIEW



NO STRESS, IT'S JUST TREE RESEARCH

Have you noticed any boxes attached to trees around campus these days? **Matthew Baker**, professor of geography and environmental systems, and his team of students are using a smorgasbord of techniques to figure out how the trees are responding to heat stress. Want to learn more about how the metal box on each tree is able to measure the rate at which water is flowing from the tree's roots to its leaves in real time? Check out umbc.edu/stories/urban-trees.



I DOUBLE DOG DARE YOU

Officer Chip and True Grit start off the fall semester with a big hug. These best pals work hard to keep all our spirits up on campus.



NEW KID ON THE BLOCK (OF WOOD)

Mixed-media artist Oletha DeVane's recent show on campus included this statuesque "Nkisi Woman-Universal Nkisi." The outdoor sculpture was activated over the course of DeVane's fall exhibition by visitors and students who were invited to add beads to its surface.



WE'RE JAZZED FOR HER

Shaness Kemp, assistant professor of dance, has been invited as guest performer in the production "Jazz Ain't Nothing but Soul"—an original work by artistic director Thomas Talawa Prestø and the Tabanka African & Caribbean Peoples Dance Ensemble (Oslo, Norway). Tabanka is northern Europe's largest all-Black dance ensemble.





SPOOKY SCARY

UMBC Special Collections received an extraordinary gift of one of the world's largest collections devoted to parapsychology. The collection consists of more than 12,000 volumes related to hauntings, poltergeists, out-of-body experiences, and séances, as well as spirit photographs and much more. (Images courtesy of Shannon Taggart.)



RUMORS OF A UMBC FOOTBALL TEAM

Come for the pro wrestling, stay for the basketball team. That's what we always say at UMBC. Or at least it will be now that Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson, center, came to CEI Arena for an event and then hung around to meet these Retrievers.



RETURN OF THE ALUMNI

KeiLyn Durrel Jones '11, acting (as seen in *Succession*, *Time After Time*, and many others) and **Kiirstn Pagan '11, theatre**, of the Everyman Theatre, came back to campus to teach current students how to self-tape auditions for TV, film, and theatre.



STONEFLIES, CADDISFLIES, ALDERFLIES, OH MY!

Geography and environmental systems Professor **Chris Swan** has his field ecology students in the waterways on campus assessing the biodiversity of stream invertebrates.



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

Next-Level Research Recognition



Last spring, UMBC was named as one of just 146 R1 universities—or doctoral universities with very high research activity—in the nation by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. In the months that followed, UMBC researchers continued to show the world why our institution is worthy of such recognition in all areas of study.

Researchers across UMBC's colleges have secured major grant funding for new and ongoing research—much of it interdisciplinary and community-focused—to study topics as varied as resilience-enhancing solutions to urban climate challenges, new perspectives on African American leisure travel during Jim Crow, and air pollution and how severe thunderstorms form.

A new program supported by the U.S. Department of Energy has funded Urban Integrated Field Laboratories in three American cities (including Baltimore) to generate resilience-enhancing solutions to urban climate challenges in collaboration with community organizations. The Baltimore-centered consortium, named the Baltimore Social-Environmental Collaborative, will receive \$24.5 million through the program. UMBC will receive \$2.3 million of this larger grant.

Leading UMBC's work on the project is **Claire Welty**, professor of chemical, biochemical, and environmental engineering and director of the Center for Urban Environmental Research and Education.

Johns Hopkins University leads the overall project, which also includes collaborators at other institutions.

"This Baltimore Social-Environmental Collaborative is an important program during a critical time for our region, for our state, and for our planet," says **Karl V. Steiner**, vice president for research at UMBC. "I am pleased that Baltimore was selected to serve as a representative metropolitan area for the climate challenges faced by many mid-sized industrial cities across the U.S."

Humanities faculty **Elizabeth Patton**, **Mirjam Voerkelius**, and **Amy Froide** received prestigious research fellowships totaling over \$135,000 to explore archives and reveal new findings about unique historical events in the United States, Soviet Union, and United Kingdom, respectively. Their research will help further book manuscripts that will share new perspectives on African American leisure travel during Jim Crow, Darwinism in the Soviet Union, and financial fraud in the early stock market involving women investors in 18th-century England.

As an art historian, **Preminda Jacob**, an associate professor and associate dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, compares scholarship in the humanities to detective work. "Humanities research requires painstaking, patient piecing together of clues to develop narratives that have

the power to subvert or challenge accepted knowledge about a historical period or contemporary phenomenon," says Jacob.

Over the past five years alone, UMBC's cutting-edge humanities research has garnered funding from major sponsors that include the American Council of Learned Societies, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Institute of Advanced Study, the Institute of Citizens & Scholars (Mellon Foundation), Harvard's Loeb Classical Library Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Whiting Foundation.

Two UMBC Ph.D. students in atmospheric physics, **Maurice Roots** and **Kylie Hoffman**, received competitive Future Investigators in NASA Earth and Space Science and Technology awards that will support the remainder of their graduate studies. Roots' research project will focus on air pollution and Hoffman will target thunderstorms, both using remote sensing techniques. Each will receive up to \$150,000 over a maximum of three years for tuition, research, professional development, and other expenses.

Roots will use a network of ground-based remote sensing instruments to improve understanding of how ozone forms and moves around, with a focus on the Eastern United States. Hoffman's work will explore how severe thunderstorms form in the southern United States, especially at night.

Learn more about research at UMBC at umbc.edu/research-creative-achievement.

— Magazine staff

Left to right, Elizabeth Patton, Amy Froide, and Mirjam Voerkelius.

Bold Ideas Welcome

UMBC President **Valerie Sheares Ashby** has announced the launch of **UMBC Bold: Campus Conversations**, an initiative that invites members of the Retriever community to share their perspectives on the state of the university and to reflect on its future potential.

"It has been such a pleasure to witness firsthand the strength of this community and to get to know many of you in my first few months," shares Sheares Ashby. "You have accomplished great things together and are poised to take bold steps forward as a national leader that redefines excellence in higher education through an inclusive culture. I know that my next step must be to engage in deep and comprehensive listening."

A mix of in-person and virtual conversations are being planned to allow for all members of the UMBC community to weigh in on a breadth of topics, including the academic experience, our research enterprise, partnerships, governance, and other areas that impact students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Community members may also submit thoughts using an online form.

Vandana Janeja, chair and professor of information systems; **Michelle Scott**, professor of history; and **Greg Simmons, M.P.P. '04**, vice president for institutional advancement; will chair a committee charged with leading the campus conversations. Two distinguished community members will also serve as honorary committee chairs: **Adrienne Jones '76**, speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates, and **Alan Wilson**, chair of the UMBC Board of Visitors.

"I am eager to spend this time listening and learning with you," says Sheares Ashby. "I know that as we go forward, we must go together."

To learn more about how to share your thoughts about UMBC's future, visit president.umbc.edu/bold.

Finding Joy in the Democratic Process

On a Tuesday evening in early November, Main Street in The Commons was uncommonly crowded. Hundreds of students eagerly—and perhaps, anxiously—milled around watching the 2022 mid-term election returns. **Dilnaz Hasim '25, economics**, found the scene fitting, saying, "Election Night Extravaganza is supposed to be experienced as a community, rather than as a single person, because when you make a vote, you're making it for the whole community."

Jointly hosted by the Center for Democracy and Civic Life, the Student Government Association (SGA), and the Graduate Student Association, the campus-based election event has been around since 2004. Students from every political affiliation bonded over a breakfast buffet and made room for bipartisan conversations in multiple breakout spaces. Other rooms had craft tables set up for students to creatively distract themselves while results rolled in.

As exciting as this night is, it's only one part of efforts put forth throughout the year by the Center for Democracy and Civic Life to engage students in the day-to-day processes of democratic involvement. Leading up to elections, students are encouraged to "cast your whole vote"—an idea from Henry David Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience—to commit fully to building strong, inclusive, just communities in which everyone can thrive. Following elections, students, staff, and faculty can take part in Together Beyond November discussions to talk about the election outcomes and envision a common future.

Musa Jafri '24, political science, SGA's director of civic engagement, was heartened by the turnout. "Democracy doesn't end at the voting booth," said Jafri, who is also co-chair of the University System of Maryland Student Civic Leaders Committee. "There's so much more we can do as we watch the results and come together as a community. Even after whatever happens, we have fellow Retrievers coming together, watching the results, having food, and playing games."

Another one of the event organizers, **Meghna Chandrasekaran '25, biology**, hosted a social takeover during the night, interviewing her fellow students about their civic engagement. Many mentioned feeling the need to have their voices heard on issues they cared about. To wrap up the evening, Chandrasekaran said, "Election Night Extravaganza is an event to celebrate that we did come out. We had one job as citizens to come out and vote, express our concerns about certain things, and show that we are part of the process."

To read more about engaging college students in everyday democratic practices, check out an extended Q&A with **Musa Jafri**, **Sunil Dasgupta**, professor of political science, and founder and host of the podcast "I Hate Politics," and **David Hoffman, Ph.D. '13, language, literacy, and culture**, the director of UMBC's Center for Democracy and Civic Life, at umbc.edu/stories/voting.

—Levi Lewis '23 & Randianne Leysbon '09

Sunil Dasgupta, Musa Jafri '23, Markya Reed '18, M.S. '23, David Hoffman, Ph.D. '13, and Tess McRae '22 gather around the mail-in-ballot drop off box on campus.



THE NEWS

Celebrating Retriever Achievements

Standing out on the Alumni Awards stage, Rising Star honoree **Stefanie Mavronis '12** shared a sentiment echoed by several other speakers—UMBC is a place to flourish.

“UMBC did more than accept students like me who brought idealism and lots of passion to campus,” said Mavronis, chief of staff in Baltimore City Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement. “This institution embraced it, it fostered it, and it gave us space to actively change the culture.”

The 33rd annual Alumni Awards celebration was one event of many in the weeks around Homecoming that allowed the UMBC community to reconnect with our Retriever pride and celebrate the accomplishments of our amazing alumni.

On Thursday, October 27, the UMBC community gathered in the Earl and Darielle Linehan Concert Hall to recognize eight Retrievers at the 2022 Alumni Awards, hosted by the UMBC Alumni Association Board of Directors.

“This year’s honorees represent the very best of our alumni community, and their contributions are making a difference all over the world,” says **Brian Frazee '11, political science, M.P.P. '12**, UMBC Alumni Association President.

This year’s awardees are:

- **Josiah Dykstra, Ph.D. '13, computer science**—Outstanding Alumnus in Engineering & Information Technology

- **Karsonya ‘Kaye’ Wise Whitehead, Ph.D. '09, language, literacy and culture**—Outstanding Alumna in the Humanities
- **Joy Haley, Ph.D. '01, chemistry**—Outstanding Alumna in Natural & Mathematical Sciences
- **Keith Elder, Ph.D. '02, health policy, policy sciences**—Outstanding Alumnus in Social & Behavioral Sciences
- **McKenzie Chinn '06, theatre**—Outstanding Alumna in Visual & Performing Arts
- **Benjamin Garmoe '13, political science**—Distinguished Service
- **Stefanie Mavronis '12, media and communication studies, political science**—Rising Star
- **Carolyn Forestiere**, professor of political science—Outstanding Faculty

This year’s ceremony was as inspirational as ever. Haley, a research leader in the Air Force Research Laboratory, shared about the life-changing power of this university, saying, “As I think back to my time at UMBC, it really provided me the foundation for who I am today.”

As a faculty member, Forestiere said, “UMBC is a magical place. It’s a place where transformations are not only possible, they are probable. And that’s not just for the students, it’s for all of us.”

The UMBC Athletics Hall of Fame first launched in the 1970s and was later made an annual ceremony in 1990. This celebratory event

recognizes UMBC community members for their athletic excellence and contribution to the university. To date, 129 members have been enshrined. And this year, **Brian Barrio**, director of Athletics, made a key change, moving the popular event to Homecoming weekend to capitalize on the #RetrieverNation excitement.

The 22nd edition of the Hall of Fame inductions took place on Friday, October 7, honoring:

- **Steve Levy '85, interdisciplinary studies**—associate director of Athletics/director of athletic communications, 1986 – present
- **Dana Eberly Keiner '97, biological sciences**—volleyball, 1993 – 1996
- **Jean Salkeld Battista '98, sociology**—softball, 1997 – 1998
- **Mohamed Hussein '14, mechanical engineering, M.S. '17, systems engineering**—swimming, 2011 – 2014
- **Levi Houapeu '15, financial economics**—men’s soccer, 2007 – 2010
- **Mercedes Jackson '15, psychology**—track and field, 2011 – 2015

After postponing the event for two years due to COVID-19, says Barrio, Athletics was eager to celebrate their community. “This class is a diverse and talented group that set high standards of excellence for Retriever Nation.”

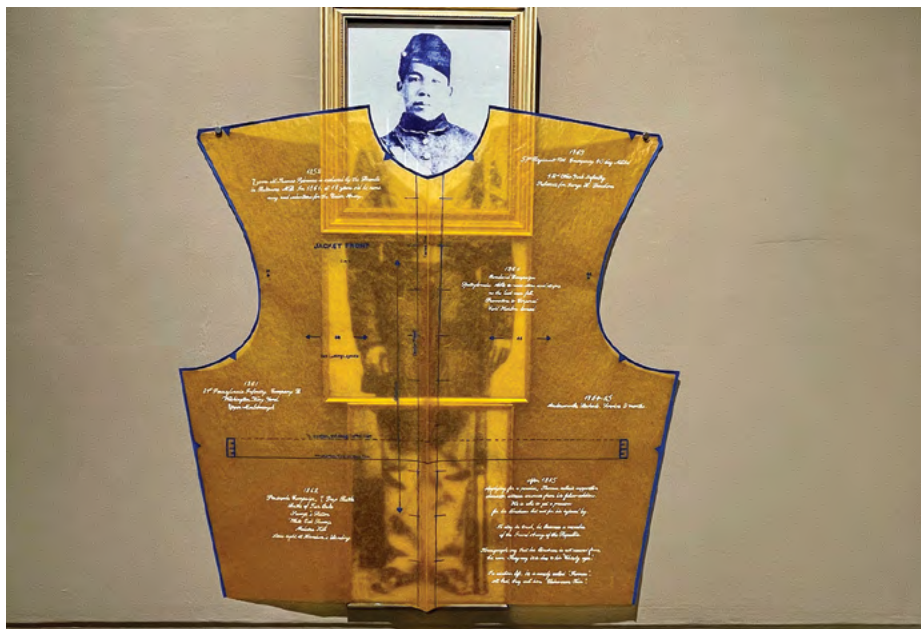
— *Bobby Lubaszewski '10*





AT PLAY

Sparking History at The Peale



The commonly told histories of the American Civil War don't usually include any Asian stories, although Asian Americans were certainly engaged with the war to end slavery.

"Thomas Sylvanus (aka Ching Lee, Ye Way Lee, Ah Yee Way), was born in Hong Kong, brought as an orphaned child to America for schooling in 1852, but was enslaved in Baltimore," says **Irene Chan**, an associate professor of visual arts at UMBC. "He ran away at age 16 to join the Union Army and served all the war years. His story, along with many 19th-century Chinese in America, has been forgotten."

Chan's new six-part intermedia work, "The Thomas Project," is devoted to telling Sylvanus' story in many mediums: fabric silkscreens, paper lithography, drawing, hand lettering, embroidery, and book arts and debuted in August as part of SPARK: New Light at The Peale in downtown Baltimore.

SPARK, an annual group exhibition of works by faculty, staff, alumni, and students at UMBC and Towson University curated by Catherine Borg, returned for its fifth edition in 2022. SPARK: New Light featured work from 24 artists and opened concurrently with the Founder's Day Grand Reopening of The Peale, a celebration of the completion of extensive renovations to the historic facility. Each of the

annual SPARK exhibits was made possible through a partnership with PNC Bank, which also helped secure the venue.

The Peale, the first building designed as a museum in the United States, was established in Baltimore in 1814 by the artist Rembrandt Peale. Over the course of its nearly 200 years, The Peale has seen many incarnations before landing on its current role as a center devoted to celebrating the unique history of Baltimore and telling the stories of the city's people and buildings.

"The Peale is Baltimore's community museum," says Chan. "I have had The Peale space in mind throughout the development of 'The Thomas Project,' and this exhibit uses the unique architectural features of the room to tell part of Thomas' story, starting with living his early American life in Baltimore."

Chris Perego '81, visual and performing arts, M.F.A. '99, IMDA, a photographer who manages the photo and print facilities for the visual arts department, also incorporated The Peale's architecture into "Time Capsules," his new work for SPARK: New Light.

"Working with The Peale, I placed pinhole cameras on windowsills in east, south- and west-facing windows for six weeks in May and June," Perego says. "The results capture the streak of the sun and the accumulated light that had fallen on the scene during the long exposure."

In all, 24 artists exhibited new work in SPARK: New Light. UMBC contributors included Chan and Perego as well as **Lynn Cazabon; Adam Droneburg, M.F.A. '22; Kathy Marmor** (with Penny Rheingans); **Lisa Moren** (with Tsvetan Bachvaroff, Dan Deacon, and Woody Lissauer); **Timothy Nohe; Corrie Francis Parks; Foster Reynolds-Santiago, M.F.A. '22**; and current IMDA graduate students **Ahlam Khamis** and **Fahmida Hossain**.

Hossain's video work, "Touch," focuses on the artist touching different objects in the context of urban life in her hometown, Dhaka, Bangladesh, expressing the yearning for physical contact with loved ones and her friends.

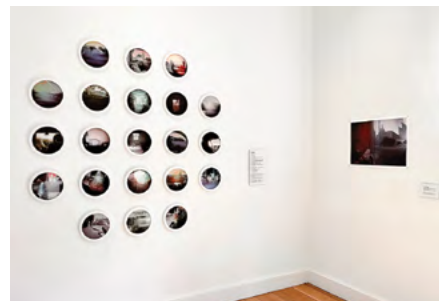
"I am always curious about touching objects around me and feeling their textures, but the recent pandemic made us fearful of handling things," says Hossain. "This work represents my visualization of the human brain, which is a subconscious world where we can have different personalities and experiences, like the changing abstract shapes in my video."

— *Rabne Alexander, M.F.A. '21*

Main image: Irene Chan, Thomas in the War, 2022. Paper lithography, in three frames, with hand-drawn overlay with calligraphy on golden yellow glassine. Photo by Catherine Borg.

Below: Chris Perego, detail of Time Capsules, 2021 – 2022. Archival pigment prints, 8" diameter each. Photo by Catherine Borg.

Bottom: Adam Droneburg, detail from Top 5 Outfits Trending Right Now (from Post Us series), 2022. Mixed media costumes.



Hang Ten with New Friends

When UMBC's volleyball team headed to the University of Southern California (USC) for a tournament, Athletics reached out and invited West Coast Retrievers to an LA happy hour before the game. Eager to reconnect with their alma mater and meet other alumni in the area, folks gathered together and new friendships were formed.

*Despite the decades between their UMBC experiences, **Matt Sheriff '00, political science**, and **Nathanael Dereb '21, computer science**, bonded over a quintessential California connection—surfing. Specifically, Dereb, a recent relocater, wanted to learn how and Sheriff, who's been on the West Coast for years, had the skills to teach. Since then, the pair has been meeting before work in the mornings catching the waves. They carved out some time to share the experience with UMBC Magazine.*

UMBC Magazine: *We know how you two met—can you tell us how you hit it off?*

Sheriff: I attended graduate business school at USC, so when I read about a tournament volleyball game at USC that the UMBC team was invited to attend, I was simply amazed that my undergrad school was coming to USC. At the alumni pre-party, I met Nate Dereb, who, like me, also relocated from Maryland to L.A. He was interested in learning to surf, so I've been introducing him to the sport when our schedules align. The beauty of living in Los Angeles is we can surf in the morning and be at work by 9 a.m., even earlier if necessary!

UMBC Magazine: *What are your best surf tips?*

Sheriff: Take it slow in terms of expectations and remind yourself that the best surfer is the one having the most fun.

UMBC Magazine: *How was the change from Maryland to California?*

Dereb: Relocating across the country to a city I've never been before was an overwhelming experience, but I was fortunate to have my family around me during my relocation. One of the shocking things was finding myself outside only in shorts and a shirt in February! I'm still amazed by that.



UMBC Magazine: *What are you up to now?*

Sheriff: I'm a senior advisor at Southern California Edison where I lead regulatory economics projects and represent the company before the California Public Utilities Commission as an expert witness. Most of my work is finance-related but the communication and analytical skills I learned at UMBC are immensely helpful.

Dereb: I am working as a software engineer at Adobe within the analytics organization. On the side, I'm still maintaining and adding data for the platform I built during my senior year that assists students and faculty in retrieving data regarding course grades, course evaluations, and professors at UMBC.

UMBC Magazine: *What was your experience at UMBC like?*

Dereb: My involvement in the Center for Women in Technology organization, as a Cyber Scholar, is an experience I will always cherish. I was also fortunate to win several awards and scholarships, get multiple internship opportunities, become a teaching fellow for Computer Science 202, and do innovative research as part of the Interactive Robotics and Language lab on campus. I am a proud Retriever!

Sheriff: More than anything I feel like I grew into a young adult who was ready for the world.



Top: Alumni meet with UMBC Athletics staff at a happy hour in California. Middle: Sheriff, left, and Dereb, right, meet up to surf. Bottom: Dereb and Sheriff at the USC Volleyball tournament.

AT PLAY

Think Fast

The only things faster than **David** and **Caitlyn Bobb** themselves, perhaps, are the zingers they toss at one another.

As Caitlyn, a rookie running star now in her sophomore year, describes what it's like to have a father as head coach of track and field at UMBC, her dad dryly turns it into a bit.

"My dad has many sides to him, okay?" Caitlyn laughs as Coach Bobb literally acts out everything she's saying while seated beside her. "There's the coach side, where he's stern, and he's got the stopwatch in his hand, arms crossed, hat on, and 'GO!'...And then there's the dad side, who comes to practice all excited, and says 'Woo, I'm hyped, let's go!'"

It's not surprising that Caitlyn is poised for another amazing season. She's a very hard worker, of course, and also the product of phenomenal athlete parents. Her mom, Dawnnette, represented Bermuda in the 1992 Olympics in the 100-meter dash, and Coach Bobb '97, information systems, still holds six separate records for indoor and outdoor events at UMBC.

"My mom, she was like, 'Okay, I saw that coming.' I'm pretty sure my dad did, too. It's in my genes. I didn't have a choice," Caitlyn says.

Caitlyn wowed the competition in her rookie season, earning several "most outstanding" titles at the America East Championships and placing 17th in the 400-meter dash at the NCAA Championships with a school record-breaking time of 51.84 seconds. And as she continues to learn from her dad and other coaches—like paying attention to the way she pumps her arms, for instance—she's on course to make improvements each season.

"We're doing what we've been doing for years—the only difference is we're now doing it at UMBC," says Coach Bobb. "Hearing my experiences and her mom's experiences helps her prepare for situations she's going to encounter herself."

Although bubbly off the track, Caitlyn is extremely serious in her training—pushing thoughts out of her head in order to focus on breathing above all else. She often runs and studies with her friend **Ibra Khairat**, a

sophomore biological sciences major.

"I would describe Caitlyn and Coach's relationship as one that's balanced just right," he says. "Although she is the coach's daughter, Coach Bobb gives her room to grow as an athlete and doesn't give any type of special treatment, which is why it works so well. They are both able to balance that father/daughter and coach/athlete dynamic."

Coach Bobb is big on building relationships and trust and making sure his runners feel supported, both as athletes and students, he says. As father and daughter gently rib each other, it's clear the one-upping is grounded in love.

"I know what it takes to be successful in this sport, so I just sit back and look at the execution of her race. Is she doing what she's been trained to do?" Beyond that, he says, it's about seizing the moment and improving wherever you can. "As a parent, I'm just making sure that I'm supportive. Track and field is only going to be X years of her life. I'm always going to be her dad."

It's true: Nobody runs track forever. Caitlyn is studying biological sciences with a minor in entrepreneurship and innovation with hopes of someday being a biology teacher—and possibly a coach herself.

She has a great model right next to her, even if she doesn't always get his *Karate Kid* training jokes. (Don't worry, they can watch it together later.)

"He cares about his students' well-being, and he makes it a warm, welcoming environment. He cares a lot," she says, getting serious for a moment. "Good job, Dad."

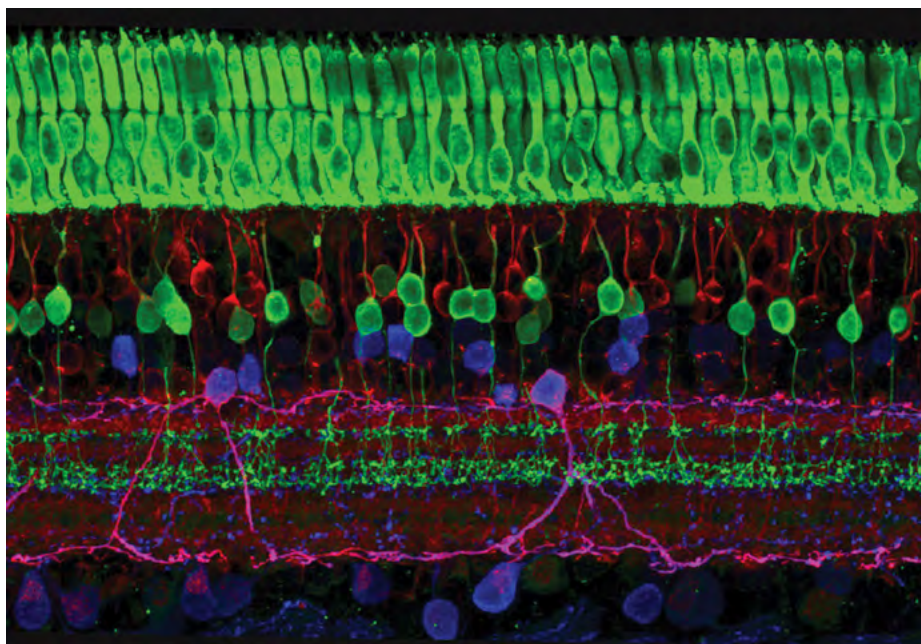
—Jenny O'Grady





DISCOVERY

Vision Beyond Sight



Most people rely heavily on image-forming vision to navigate the world, but our eyes do much more than help us “see” in the traditional sense. In addition to rod and cone cells that help us perceive contrast and color, there are a small number of other specialized cells in our eyes. These cells, called intrinsically photosensitive retinal ganglion cells, play a role in what’s called non-image-forming vision. This type of vision affects our mood, our sleeping and eating patterns, our ability to adapt to time zone and seasonal changes, and more.

Despite the importance of non-image-forming vision, our understanding of it is still in the early stages. An important path forward is examining melanopsin, a key protein regulating how non-image-forming vision works.

Phyllis Robinson, professor of biological sciences, has been studying melanopsin since its discovery. For the next four years, she’ll expand on her prior work with a new \$2.5 million grant from the National Eye Institute (NEI), which is part of the National Institutes of Health. Colleagues on the grant include researchers at the NIH, Johns Hopkins University, Washington State University, and the Oregon Health Science University. The

grant is a renewal of a previous five-year R01 award, traditionally the most sought-after and largest grant type from the NIH.

The new work will focus on how certain modifications to melanopsin affect its function. Robinson and colleagues will also examine the role of dopamine—a neurotransmitter involved in a huge range of mental and physical processes—in regulating this critical protein and its effects.

“We’re looking at this cool molecule that affects our light-dependent behaviors in ways we’re not conscious of,” Robinson says. “It’s really exciting stuff within our field.”

Melanopsin and the cells that contain it are also interesting from an evolutionary perspective, Robinson explains. “These ganglion cells may be the ancient photoreceptors,” she says.

“If you think about the evolution of vision, an organism just detecting whether it’s light or dark would be the first step,” she notes. “All you need is a light-sensitive cell.” In fact, even nocturnal animals and animals that live in dark environments, like caves or tunnels, have the cells responsible for non-image-forming vision, Robinson says.

In humans, a better understanding of melanopsin and its regulation could offer insight into health conditions that afflict shift workers, since their schedules do not align with their bodies’ natural hormonal responses to light. It could even reveal new potential targets for treating conditions like seasonal affective disorder or jet lag.

“Our research is going from molecules to behavior,” Robinson says. Her lab at UMBC focuses on physiology by doing studies with cells. Then, based on the findings, her NEI colleagues and graduate students, who are jointly advised by Robinson and NEI faculty, carry out behavioral studies with mice as a next step. Eventually, it could lead to work directly supporting human health.

— Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15

Left: The many layers of nerve cells that make up the retina. Rod and cone cells, that help us see contrast and color for typical image-forming sight, are here, as well as the cells that enable non-image forming vision that affects many subconscious processes. (Image courtesy of the National Eye Institute)

Below: Headshot of Phyllis Robinson.



Rethinking the Intersection of Food and Identity

If you were looking for **Sarah Fouts** in New Orleans, chances are you would find her at one of the many taco trucks or pop-up food vendors across the city, chatting with locals. Relationship-building is at the core of her work, which focuses on the experiences of Black, Central American, and Mexican food industry workers in post-Katrina New Orleans.

Fouts is an assistant professor of American studies at UMBC who earned her Ph.D. in Latin American studies at Tulane University. For more than a decade, she has volunteered for, collaborated with, and supported the work of grassroots organizations in New Orleans. Now, with a \$50,000 Public Engagement Fellowship award from the Whiting Foundation, Fouts along with local organizers **Toya Ex Lewis** and **Fernando López** are implementing Project Neutral Grounds: At the Intersection of People, Street Food, and the Hustle.

Lewis is the organizer of Project Hustle, born in New Orleans, and López is a Mexican-born documentarian. The three partners have worked together since 2013. Their latest collaboration will bring together Black, Brown, LGBTQ+, and immigrant food vendors in New Orleans to celebrate, share, and document their experiences and histories.

“In collaboration with Black and Brown food vendors, Project Neutral Ground will showcase the culture, complexities, and potential futures of post-disaster economies,” says Fouts. “We seek to dismantle barriers and foster dialogue to build networks across factors like race, gender, and class in order to foment an understanding of these vendors as they occupy and vie for city spaces.”

New Orleans has a rich history and culture of street food vendors, particularly led by the city’s Black community. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans with wind speeds of over 100 miles per hour and a monumental storm surge that flooded 80 percent of the city. Many Black and Brown vendors were forced to leave their homes and businesses or find new ways to continue to live and work. Central American food vendors migrated to the city to help fill the void.



Now, almost 20 years after Katrina, New Orleans street vendor culture is a mixture of traditional and modern takes on soul food and Latin food representative of its burgeoning Black and Brown communities. The success of taco trucks and soul food pop-ups has raised complex questions about food-truck regulation, worker rights, immigration issues, and local versus tourist experiences that often pit these communities against each other.

The Whiting Foundation funding will help Fouts, the project director; Lewis, the organizing director; and López, the creative director, work in collaboration with the Southern Food and Beverage Museum to document and share the history, culture, cuisine, and personal journeys of 10 food vendors in post-Katrina New Orleans food culture.

The team will first film and photograph the vendors cooking a dish of their choice at the Southern Food and Beverage Museum. A follow-up filming will document a “day in the life” of each food vendor. Finally, an audio recording will capture personal oral history interviews. Over the course of the year, López and Lewis will use the footage to develop 10 mini-documentaries showcasing each vendor’s story.

This fall, Fouts, Lewis, and local artist SheRa Phillips are working with students in Fouts’

UMBC Public Humanities course to convert these stories into a zine that highlights historic and contemporary vendor stories, maps of where street food vendors are, a historical timeline of street vending in New Orleans, and recipes. Vendors will be able to give the zine to their customers, helping to share this important part of New Orleans history with new audiences.

“This is a way for native New Orleanians to have opportunities to tell our own stories,” says Lewis, “instead of the usual extractive way our stories get taken and told for us.”

The Project Neutral Grounds digital and physical collection of stories will be on exhibit and archived at the Southern Food and Beverage Museum to share with future generations of locals, vendors, visitors, and public humanities scholars.

— Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque

Left to right: Sarah Fouts, Toya Ex Lewis, and Fernando López. (Images courtesy of Fouts.)

DISCOVERY

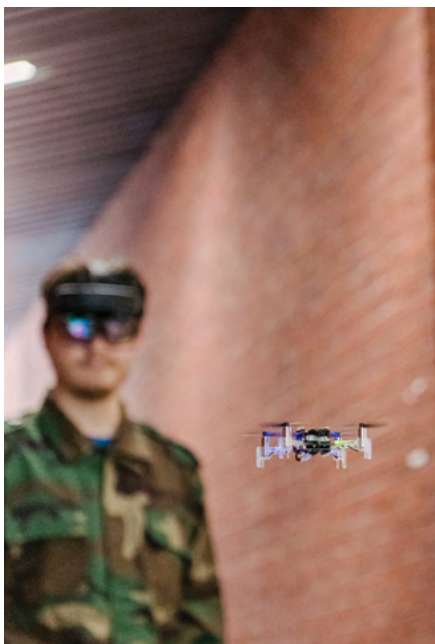
Engineered to Detect and Protect

From surveillance tools to autonomous machines, countries around the world are ramping up their military artificial-intelligence (AI) assets. Such robust technologies are necessary to protect the United States from surprise attacks, which occur these days not only on the ground but also on the cloud.

To this end, utilizing a recently awarded \$20 million subcontract, UMBC researchers are partnering with the University of Maryland, College Park, and the DEVCOM Army Research Lab to work on advancing AI-based autonomous systems for military use.

“The question we’re trying to solve is: Can we design and develop tools, techniques, algorithms, software, and hardware that can work autonomously and make their own decisions but also collectively, interfacing with human decision makers?” says UMBC’s principal investigator **Aryya Gangopadhyay**, professor of information systems and director of the Center for Real-time Distributed Sensing and Autonomy. “The landscape of war is changing, and we must build systems that can make human-like decisions in real time and under real-world pressure.”

— B. Rose Huber



Above: Drone-assisted blindspot coverage that provides immersive visualization. Below and across: Gangopadhyay and his team test out Jackal, a robotic ground vehicle mounted with a LiDAR for remote sensing, RealSense camera, a battery operated single board computer running their AI algorithm, GPS, battery pack, and a SubGHz board for long-distance communication. Some of the lab members are wearing army uniforms and ghillie suits to hide through camouflage and obfuscation.





IMPACT

Research Takes the Stage



As a Research 1 institution, it's no surprise that UMBC values innovative academic breakthroughs. UMBC's sixth annual GRIT-X event elevated the world-class research taking place on campus while also showcasing our alumni excellence in action. **President Valerie Sheares Ashby** called out the brilliant, people-centric research. "They were thinking about things that were real and important to each one of our lives being better, the universe being better, our bodies being better, and our communities being better."

Delali Dzirasa '04, computer engineering, opened the event with a presentation about empathy in the digital world. Dzirasa's company Fearless—including the work of several Retrievers—led the development of the Searchable Museum to complement the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture's "Slavery and Freedom" exhibition, reimagining this exhibit specifically for online audiences amid the pandemic.

Currently vice president for economic development at Johns Hopkins University, **Alicia Wilson '04, political science**, has taken part in some of the largest

redevelopment efforts in the country, overseeing more than \$10 billion in redevelopment projects—but more important than these brick-and-mortar projects, shared Wilson, are the community-building bonds when people are actively engaged in the enterprise.

Kaitlyn Sadtler '11, biological sciences, who earned an honorary doctorate from UMBC in 2022, presented on immunology and how the body works to heal after injuries. As an investigator and chief of the section on immunoengineering at the National Institute for Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering, Sadtler described how her team is working to develop new methods to help modulate the immune response to injury and implantation of medical devices.

UMBC's professors across a variety of disciplines took the stage to shine light on their research—much of which is working toward the public good. **Vandana Janeja**, professor and chair of information systems, presented on utilizing data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence in ways that could help populations respond to the harmful impacts of climate change. **Nkiru Nwawulezi**, associate professor of psychology, spoke about collecting

data on the experiences of intimate-partner-violence survivors and what can be done to create more inclusive community responses in these cases.

Matthew Fagan, associate professor of geography and environmental systems, asked the audience if planting trees sometimes does more harm than good as he delved into his research related to forest restoration and reforestation.

On a different note, **Airi Yoshioka**, professor of music, played excerpts of music from several composers around the world, explaining how they were able to express their cultural identities through their music. In a first for GRIT-X, the violinist then captured the imagination of the audience with her striking performance of "Sentimental" from "Five Little Milonguitas" by composer Pablo Ortiz from her 2015 album *Sueños Místicos*.

Sebastian Deffner, associate professor of physics, focused his presentation on demystifying the world of quantum physics and the quantum universe. He explained different interpretations of quantum mechanics with his analysis of the "Schrödinger's cat" thought experiment.

Associate Professor **Minjoung Kyoung**, chemistry and biochemistry, got her audience's attention by starting her presentation on metabolic enzymes with a picture of donuts. The image enticed the audience as they listened to Kyoung's research on how the food we eat transforms into glucose and the metabolic process that happens as a result.

— *Adriana Fraser*

Watch all the 2022 GRIT-X presentations at youtube.com/umbc.

Retrievers Behind the Scenes



Whether it's through setting up world-class exhibitions or coordinating educational programs, **Sandra Abbott** has been

working in UMBC's art world for 14 years. In her work as curator of collections and outreach at the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture (CADVC), as well as affiliate faculty in the visual arts department, Abbott thrives in her role of introducing Retrievers and community members to great art.

What part of your job do you enjoy the most and why?

I love working with students who are exploring my profession. They keep me on my toes and ask the best questions.

Who is someone in the community who has supported you, and how did they do it?

When I needed to research local 3D printers for a special K-12 art project, I reached out to alum **Maks Prykhodko, M.F.A. '21**, IMDA. Maks returned my email within 24 hours and offered help, including a personal introduction to those I needed to connect with at the best vendor.

This is only one example of many alumni I've reconnected with professionally after UMBC. This community supports you at UMBC and beyond. It's the best network!

Tell us about what you love about where you work.

What I love about the CADVC gallery is the amazing, world-class artwork I pass by every time I come and go from my office.

What would you tell someone who is considering a career at UMBC?

There is always someone who can help you when you have a question or a challenge. The network of experts we have access to at UMBC is astounding. They range from those in cybersecurity and STEM to the arts and beyond. I've made many connections here, which often continue beyond UMBC.

There is also always something happening—live theater, films, exhibitions, lectures, and performances. Personal growth, wellness, and education are among so many shared values here.

Coming into His Own



Growing up in a small farming community on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, **Phil Shockley** didn't feel like he belonged there and thought the answer to this was to find a college far away. Surprising himself, when he visited UMBC at the urging of a guidance counselor, he immediately found himself right at home.

"UMBC is special to me for countless reasons. I felt like I was able to come into my own for the first time in my life," says Shockley '04, political science and information systems, M.P.P. '09. "People genuinely respected what I had to offer and encouraged me to take on leadership roles all while demonstrating moral character and ethical conduct."

In his multiple service roles at UMBC, including student regent on the University System of Maryland's Board of Regents and president of the Student Government Association, Shockley began to see the uphill battles some of his fellow students faced in paying for college. This disparity stuck with him over the years, and he began to plan how he could give back to the university that had supported him so holistically.

An introduction to John Erickson, founder of Erickson Retirement Communities, made by then-President **Freeman Hrabowski**, gave Shockley a foot in the door for a career he could have never imagined. When he was working as an associate executive director with Erickson Living, Shockley said his work gave him "a deep sense of meaning knowing I was able to help older adults continue to live a life of significance as they aged." He's since endowed the Shockley Family Scholarship in honor of his parents, David and Sandra Shockley.

Through the fund, scholarships are awarded to other students from the Lower Eastern Shore, who now have the opportunity to walk in Shockley's footprints and make their own impact at UMBC and beyond.

— *Randianne Leysbon '09*

Shockley with the latest recipient of his scholarship, Emma Golden '24.

IMPACT

Her Story of History

Ellicott City, founded 250 years ago this year, holds more than its share of history.

The lore of the old mill town is dense with pioneers, millers, astronomers, abolitionists, fires, floods, and firsts, including the nation's first national road and railroad.

Writer **Ellen Nibali '90, English**, wanted to tell the history of the town. But how could she condense all those years into something that would both enlighten and entertain? Then she thought of the magic of the musical.

"The underlying thing is that I love stories," Nibali said. "And I always enjoyed music. Then I realized that a musical was a great medium for storytelling."

As a girl, Nibali played piano in her family's chilly basement, finishing up practice when the timer dinged, then making up ditties. But she never imagined herself writing a musical, despite a life of putting pen to paper. After two years of college, Nibali took time off to get married and have children. But she continued writing—novels, children's books, poems, even a bicentennial history of a Baltimore County community.

In her 30s, Nibali went back to college, attending UMBC. Nibali remembered writing a poem for class, and UMBC senior lecturer **Michael Fallon** telling her, "You're on fire." "That meant a huge amount to me," Nibali said.

"I loved every second of it, the intellectual stimulation," she said. This year, she endowed a scholarship for students transferring from community college. "I'm impressed with how UMBC has built its reputation and excellence," Nibali said. "I'm proud to be an alum and want to give that opportunity to others of modest backgrounds. What UMBC does is transforming on so many levels, and it keeps on giving for generations."

After graduation, Nibali wrote the weekly horticulture column in the *Baltimore Sun*. The column was part of her job at the University of Maryland's Extension Service, answering hometown's garden questions.

Nibali began writing the musical 25 years ago, for her son's school history project—songs about the National Road, about the revolutionary tea party in Annapolis, and

about the Underground Railroad.

Over the years, Nibali ended up with 15 songs and took the idea for her musical "On National Road" to EC250, the nonprofit formed to spearhead celebration of Ellicott City's sesquicentennial.

"Being a lover of history and especially Ellicott City history, I was immediately taken with the concept and the songs," said **Ed Lilley**, president of EC250 and fondly known as the city's informal mayor. "The finale song, 'Sing Me a Memory,' immediately brought tears to my eyes, reminding me of what a special place Ellicott City is."

The board agreed to put on the show. Nibali wrote a libretto and two new songs at their request, then worked with Wilde Lake High School choir teacher **Kevin Crouch**, who composed and recorded the songs.

"On National Road"—which ran at Howard Community College for two weeks in early December—spans, of course, 250 years. It starts with the three Quaker Ellicott brothers who saw the Patapsco River's potential as a force to power their mills and includes more recent history, including when 19-year-old Babe Ruth was married in Ellicott City due to its lax laws about youngsters marrying.

"I wish I could convey even better how revolutionary and earth-shaking and exciting these things are," Nibali said of the history. "The theme is freedom, about being free to be who you are in the time you are in."

One Saturday this autumn, Nibali and 50 other audience members gathered at the Museum of Howard County History to watch a preview song, a ragtime tune about Babe Ruth's marriage at St. Paul Catholic Church, less than a half a mile away.

An actor playing Babe, in a baseball uniform, sang out Nibali's rhyme of "Ruth" and "uncouth," and then warbled the song's final line, "I'm gonna take a swing at, gotta take a swing at, get to take a swing at life," and Nibali clapped enthusiastically as the last note faded into the rafters.

— Susan Thornton Hobby



Headshot of Ellen Nibali '90, and Main Street in Ellicott City, decked out to celebrate the town's 250th anniversary.



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CELEBRATE THE SE

Getting to Know U

Written by Kait McCaffrey

It's only been a few months since she took the helm, but it feels like President Valerie Sheares Ashby has been at UMBC for years. She can often be seen engaged in lively conversation as she makes her way across campus, treating each new face not as a stranger, but simply as a friend she hasn't met yet. She's already a familiar face at sporting events, cheering on #RetrieverNation as a fan in the stands. And her first Homecoming felt just like that—coming home. You already know she's a chemist, a former dean, and now a president, but we're going to tell you how she's so much more.







Ear to Ear

Flipping through photos of Sheares Ashby's first Homecoming, it's almost impossible to find a photo of her without a grin on her face. Though she met numerous members of #RetrieverNation during the festivities, each interaction held something special.

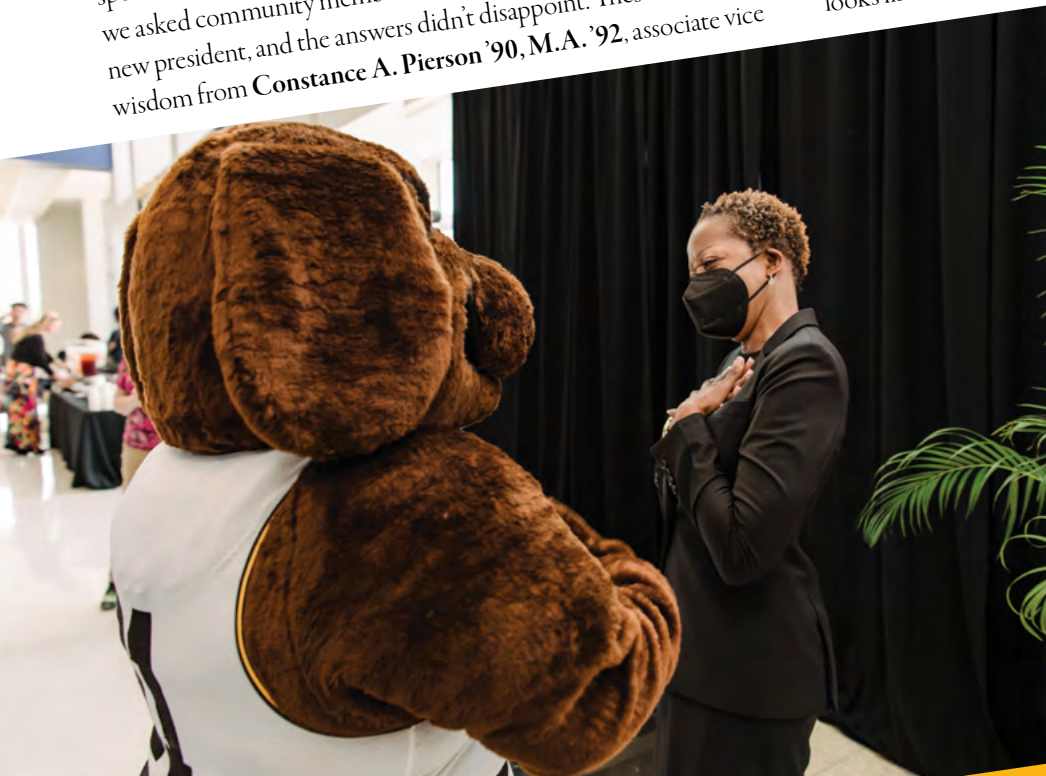
Finding A New Home

From the moment Valerie Sheares Ashby started her tenure as the new president of UMBC, we wanted to make sure she knew what a special community she was joining. At the opening of the semester, we asked community members to share some advice for our new president, and the answers didn't disappoint. These words of wisdom from **Constance A. Pierson '90, M.A. '92**, associate vice

provost for institutional research, analysis, and decision support, sum up who we are as a campus best: "Take the time to get to know the people. You will likely meet some of the most extraordinary individuals who will change your world. And be sure to find the joy in every moment that you can. Laugh a lot—it's contagious." It looks like President Sheares Ashby has that one down already.

Fast Friends

The real GOAT of UMBC gave Sheares Ashby his paw of approval as soon as he met her. As any Retriever knows, True Grit is the real one you have to win over around here.



On one of her first days in the office, President Sheares Ashby found this group of students dancing together in the walkway outside of the Admin building. They couldn't resist snapping a pic!



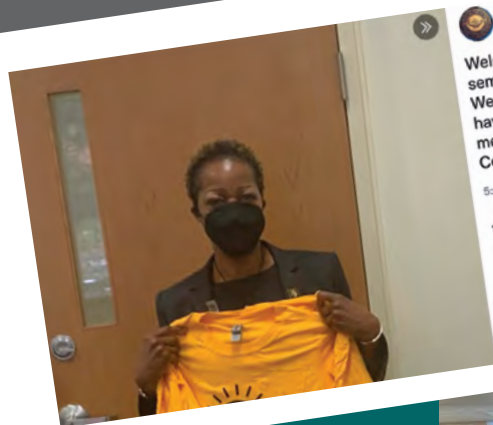
Talk about a family affair! Sheares Ashby's whole family decked themselves out in black and gold to celebrate her appointment as UMBC president.





Joining the USM

"It has been a pleasure getting to know President Sheares Ashby. She fits right into the UMBC community and readily meets with students, faculty, and staff. Her commitment to developing UMBC's culture of inclusive and academic excellence is evident in her priorities and appreciated by everyone," says **Farah Helal '24**, global studies and political science, University System of Maryland (USM) student regent. She joined USM Chancellor **Jay Perman** in welcoming Sheares Ashby.



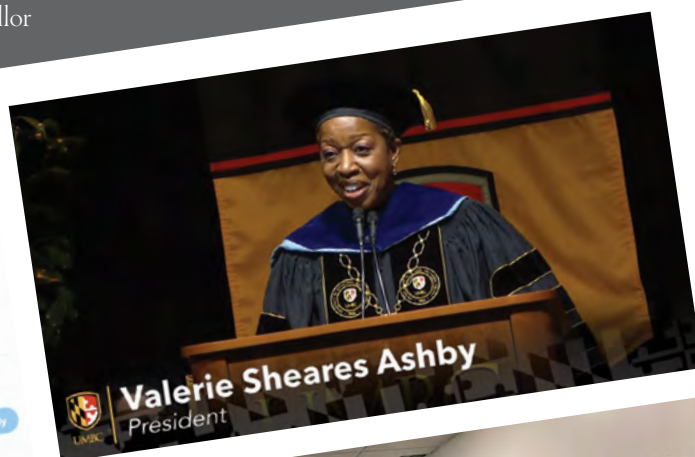
UMBC Honors College
@UMBCHonors

Welcome to your first official semester, Dr. Sheares Ashby! We couldn't be happier to have you as an honorary member of the Honors College! #UMBCpresident

5:07 PM · Aug 29, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

11 Likes

Tweet your reply



Addressing the Crowd

One of the hallmarks of Sheares Ashby's conversations is the reminder to "take care of yourself." At this year's new-faculty meeting, she assured the audience, "You are a human being and what you bring to us is more than enough."



Golden Girls

Making her rounds on the first day of classes, Sheares Ashby encountered the UMBC inevitable—unintentional matching outfits. **Jasmine Lee** (center), director of inclusive excellence, and **Samantha Smith** (right), director of health promotion, joined Sheares Ashby for a photo op we couldn't have planned better!

Learning from the Community

For Sheares Ashby, the best way to learn about our community is to immerse herself in it. In her first few weeks and months, she's made it a point to attend meetings, get to know constituents, and turn a simple walk down Academic Row into an informal meet and greet. Each of these interactions serves as another piece of the puzzle that makes up UMBC. At a welcome reception with USM Chancellor Perman, Sheares Ashby addressed the audience and said, "People keep thanking me for coming to UMBC, and I don't understand that because the gift is all mine."

Family Ties

When you think about a university, you think about students, faculty, staff, and alumni. But families are the support system that keep UMBC going. Sheares Ashby stopped by the Family Breakfast during this year's Homecoming to meet some of these integral members of our community.



Getting to Know You, Getting to Know All About You

We know that Sheares Ashby loves getting to know our community, but if possible, we love getting to know her even more—as evidenced by the fact she is the most flagged down *person* on campus for a selfie (we have to accept campus comfort dog Chip is still #1 overall). To further your presidential education, here are five fast facts straight from the source.

What has been your favorite spot to do work on campus?

I've really only had the chance to work in the Administration Building, but what I consider my job and what people call work are interesting. Sitting in my office and having meetings, that's work. But it's also my job and my joy to be out amongst people.

Do you have a favorite theatre production?

My mother instilled in me *The Sound of Music*. My whole family can sing and quote almost every word.

What's your go-to coffee order?

I haven't had coffee in years because, I don't know if you could tell, I have a little energy so I don't need caffeine. Occasionally I'll drink tea, chamomile or Earl Grey. I love a good Earl Grey.

When given 15 minutes for self-care, what do you reach for?

If you gave me three hours, I would take a nap. But for 15 minutes, I'm probably going to call my friends and just laugh. I love talking to my friends. They keep me grounded.

What advice would you give someone getting ready to start their first year of college?

It doesn't matter if you don't know the whole plan. Don't worry about it. You're going to be fine.



We had a great time at Gathering On The Green! We didn't know [#umbcpresident](#) Dr. Ashby could get a bucket! [#RetrieverNation](#)





Connecting the Dots

Students come to UMBC for many reasons—to find community, to explore a passion, to make change in the world. Once they figure out the “why” that truly drives their interests, the Retriever community is ready to kick in with the “how” to help make those plans a reality. Part of that looks like the traditional classroom experience with a professor, of course—but just as important are the experiential-learning moments that help many students actively connect the knowledge to careers they hope to pursue after graduation.

UMBC students pursue applied learning in huge numbers. Despite the pandemic, nearly 80 percent of our recent graduates engaged in applied learning, including internships, research, co-ops, and service learning during their time at UMBC. An impressive 91 percent of new grads head directly to a job, advanced degree, or both within six months of graduating—and of those, more than half interned or worked for their employer as a student.

“When it comes to impact, there is nothing more valuable than engaging in applied-learning opportunities to help clarify one’s career direction, build professional skills, and increase one’s professional network,” shares Susan Hindle, the Career Center’s assistant director of internships and employment.

For students pursuing experiential learning through internships, campus jobs, research, and community engagement, it’s not just about learning how to do the thing they want to do. It’s about connecting the work to the passions that brought them to UMBC in the first place. These students and alumni working in their chosen fields tell the whole picture—what hands-on learning looks like when it comes full circle.





Essential Connections

The desire to help people comes from deep within. But knowing how to do it successfully on a large scale—and understanding the systems and politics that can make the job more or less challenging—takes more than just compassion.

On the morning of the monthly food delivery from the Maryland Food Bank, the brigade of students who keep the Retriever Essentials food pantry running see all sides of the work. Together, they unload and shelve staples like rice, pasta, and huge crates of broccoli for the more than 2,100 visits to the pantry so far this year. At the same time, they work with community members to understand what might make life better—halal meats, for one; more campus job opportunities, another biggie—and then put their heads together to try to make those changes happen.

For **Ariel Barbosa**, a grad student in UMBC's community leadership program, working in this space is part of a journey that started with her trying to understand her Brazilian father's immigrant experience better. As she works with Retriever Essentials, she's learning about the complexities of these experiences in a way that will help her as she carves out a career in service.

"There are so many signs showing me that I'm supposed to be right here, right now. I feel like I'm preparing," she says. "Right now, I feel like I'm in a confidence-building, skill-building phase where I'm just trying to pick up as many skills as I can to be able to create what I feel I need to create at the right time."

As a student, **Matthew Dolamore '08, modern languages and linguistics**, caught a first glimpse of what would later become a service-based career when he tutored Spanish-speaking clients for an immigration services office in Baltimore. After graduating, he went on to serve with AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps and earned a master's degree in community planning before pulling all of those skills together into a full-circle career in Baltimore.

Today, Dolamore is program director for the Esperanza Center, a project of Catholic Charities that assists more than 3,000 individuals each year with walk-in immigration services, including healthcare, legal assistance, and education tools. Dolamore serves as a connector between people and solutions, helping people get what they need when they need it and looking for ways to help improve the system.

"Among our managers we have a nurse practitioner, a managing attorney, a licensed social worker, an individual who got their master's in teaching English from UMBC, and a woman who oversees our one-touch client services desk who's a former immigrant and just has a really dynamic background. And just those five people alone is symbolic of what I love about my job," says Dolamore.

"I'm not a medical professional. I'm not a legal professional. I'm not a social worker. I'm something myself of a generalist nonprofit manager at this stage in my career, but I get the opportunity every day to come in and out of these really focused professional engagements and try to help all five of them think of each other as teammates, and that's the part of my job I really enjoy."

Lydia Sannella, a Peaceworker and grad student in applied sociology at UMBC, also enjoys the organizational aspect of her job with Retriever Essentials. As she looks ahead to her post-academic career, she's already thinking about how she can continue to marry her values with her career—knowing that it won't likely be quite the same as what she's experiencing at UMBC.

"I find that, whenever we want to do something, there are supportive, knowledgeable experts who want to help," she says. "There's just hoards of students who want to be involved and engaged and do any variety of work, from physical lifting to technical projects. And it's just this canvas for creativity and possibility. It's very reciprocal. What I'm able to contribute ends up being more significant and then what I get ends up being more significant."

—Jenny O'Grady



Top: Matthew Dolamore '08, tutored Spanish-speaking clients before making a career at the Esperanza Center in Baltimore.

Above: Lydia Sannella and Ariel Barbosa (L-R) and Nyla Howell (right) sort canned goods for Retriever Essentials.



Becoming Part of the Solution

Students come to higher education for a variety of reasons, and among them, many have the goal of learning to create new things—from innovative water-quality solutions to entire companies. For many students, in fact, learning while doing is an integral part of going to college.

If you ask **Premal S. Shah '98, biochemistry and molecular biology**, however, he'll tell you that there's a world of difference between learning while doing and learning from doing.

That's not to say that Shah, who earned a Ph.D. from the California Institute of Technology on his way to founding and leading a string of successful healthcare-related companies, doesn't believe in academics. But from his vantage point as CEO at MyOme, a genomics firm based in northern California, classroom-based learning is only a part of the puzzle.

Shah said he's always had a practical streak, but he found out how much experiential learning can boost classroom learning thanks to a hands-on internship and fellowship at the National Institutes of Health, beginning while he was a student at UMBC.

"When I got to grad school, there were a lot of people who hadn't really worked in a lab or done stuff," he said. "I had a huge head start, just because I was able to pick up a pipette and actually use it. I knew what a DNA extraction protocol was. I knew how to use certain machinery."

It was a vivid object lesson—one Shah has carried forward into his career.

"When you start building companies, there's always that challenge...of analysis paralysis, right?" he said. "There's a notion of, 'We could do this or that. Let's read and learn more or get additional inputs in search of the perfect answer.' Or we can actually go build something that will benefit people and iterate even faster as we learn more to make it much better."

That's the big difference between studying science and, for example, running science-based companies, Shah says: "The hypotheticals are great. The theories are great. But you've got to get [things] done."

Getting things done is **Matt Stromberg's** perennial modus operandi. Being a Ph.D. student studying environmental engineering means he is very much both an environmental scientist—someone who studies environmental problems—and an engineer: someone who works to solve those problems.

"I always knew I was a passionate environmentalist, but I also knew I liked to build things," he said.

In fact, Stromberg, who graduated in 2019 from the University of Virginia with bachelor's degrees in both environmental engineering and environmental science, is a literal embodiment of

learning while doing. Working as both a graduate research assistant and a researcher in the jointly run University System of Maryland Institute for Marine and Environmental Technology (IMET), he sometimes finds himself simultaneously running experiments and keeping the experiments running.

A few months ago, Stromberg said, the night before an experiment was scheduled to start, a pump failed in IMET's Aquaculture Research Center, a 1,800-square-meter facility with hundreds of fish tanks.

"It was a large pump, and it needed to be replaced—and it was eight o'clock at night," Stromberg said. "I had already worked 12 hours that day, [but] I realized that there's no way this experiment is going to run if I don't have a pump tomorrow. So...I got the wrenches and I got all the fittings I needed," and found a way to fix it.

Stromberg's ability to save that experiment is part and parcel of his approach. One of his main research projects is unclogging a major bottleneck that prevents more farm-raised fish from getting to market: purging them of an unsavory flavor that's sometimes characteristic of fish that aren't caught in the wild.

As Stromberg put it, "You're not going to sell the fish if it tastes like dirt."

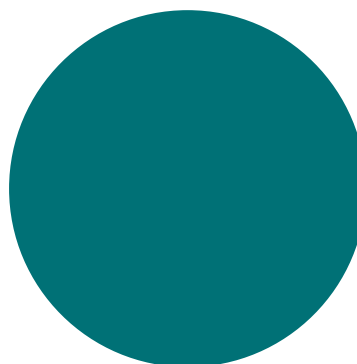
That's a problem not only for aquaculture companies—which have to use lots of water, time, money, and energy





Left: Premel S. Shab '98 interned at National Institutes of Health before founding a genomics firm. Photos by Barack Shrama.

Bottom: Matt Stromberg, a Ph.D. student in environmental engineering, is studying aquaculture at the University System of Maryland Institute for Marine and Environmental Technology.



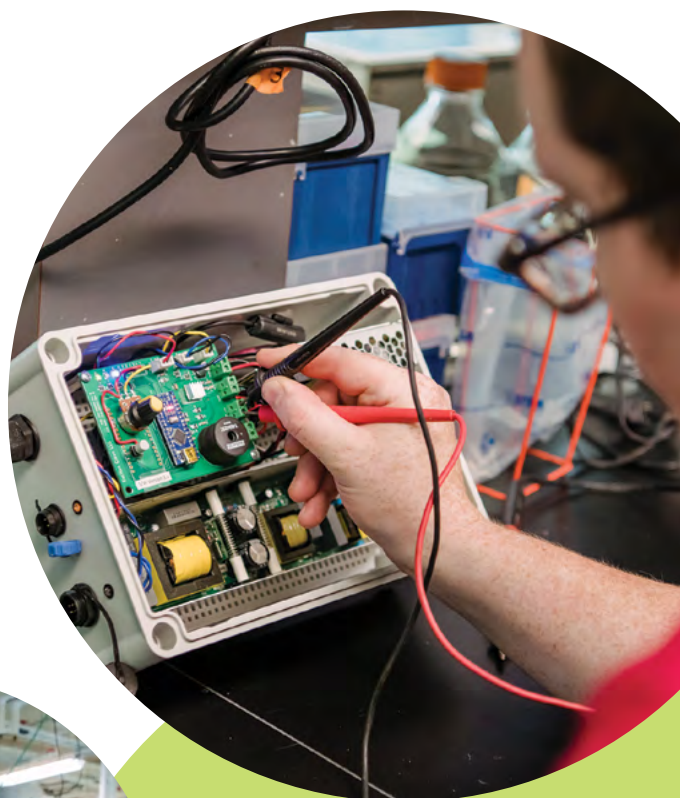
to purge the fish of this taste—but also for the planet. That's because the only alternative to aquaculture is fishing in the wild, which can destroy ecosystems but is still cheaper than aquaculture, due to the expensive purging process.

He's working with advanced oxidative processes and a technology of his own that would effectively create a shortcut, making it more cost-effective to farm fish and thus helping to protect wild habitat in the process.

And Stromberg aims to eventually put his Ph.D. to work in a similarly practical way: His goal is to create a company that performs chemical analysis and remediation of water contaminants.

"I've learned a lot from my time here," he says. "Especially not to over-engineer things!"

—Scott Cech



Community-Centered Art

Visual art is all around us—in flyers, television commercials, and even clothes. And while many of us may never know the artists creating work behind the scenes, their lives and experiences certainly do shape their work.

For instance, earlier this year, **Jennifer White-Johnson '08, visual arts**, designed a collection for Target's national Latino Heritage Month campaign, including a tumbler with stacked text reading *sonando vivamente vividly dreaming* and a T-shirt proudly proclaiming *piel canela pelo rizado* (brown/cinnamon skin curly hair). As a disabled, neurodiverse, Afro-Latina designer from Baltimore, White-Johnson sees her inclusion as an opportunity to highlight and provide a voice to communities that often aren't heard or represented.

"I am really honored to have been chosen and included in this year's Target Latino Heritage Month collection and campaign," says White-Johnson. "Using art and design to celebrate and elevate my cultural stories, the strength, and legacy of my ancestors, felt like something that was meant to be!"

Living with undiagnosed ADHD as a student, White-Johnson often felt like her intensity, excitement, and point of view were unwelcome or just too much. That changed when she transferred to UMBC, where she immediately felt at home. In particular, her time as director of promotions for the Student Events Board [(seb)] gave her her first taste of how graphic design could marry with community-centric work.

Working closely with the Office of Student Life, White-Johnson and other members of (seb)

volunteered

during an alternative spring-break trip to post-

Hurricane Katrina New Orleans. White-Johnson also designed the T-shirts.

"This was in 2007, so we could help offer some sort of relief from Hurricane Katrina," says White-Johnson. "It was life-changing because I was able to surround myself with other like-minded scholars that were serious about academic life but who also understood that school is about self-discovery."

Enter **Patch Hatley**, a sophomore visual arts major with a concentration in animation. Fresh from a session learning how to create stop-motion animation puppets from paper, she is excited to test out some of what she's learned on the job at commonvision, the student-driven print and design center in The Commons. On any given day, one might find her





working on anything from animating cute countdowns for student activities to designing stickers.

"I'm always constantly learning in an environment like commonvision," she says. "Each new skill helps transition to the next project, and each project creates new and exciting opportunities. You're always surrounded by a team who are all community-driven, so I always feel like I can ask for help or constructive criticism. commonvision supports, drives, and motivates me to keep reaching for the stars and will always be an important part of how I've grown—not just as an artist but as a team player."

Hatley finds work at commonvision particularly helpful because it stretches her creative muscles and opens up her craft to new programs, tools, and mediums, and also because other creators surround her. After spending a decade in animation and illustration before becoming a Retriever, Hatley loves the opportunity to expand her craft in a place that has fostered the

foundation for budding designers for years—and getting to bring her personal perspective into work for clients.

"At the end of the day, you're drawing for yourself and for the people around you whether you realize it implicitly or not," says Hatley.

At the core of both artists' practices is community. Both White-Johnson and Hatley recognize that their art doesn't live in a vacuum but exists as a letter of inspiration, solidarity, and encouragement to their respective communities. Both artists, years apart in their practice, found similar communities to nurture and invest in them.

"Being given the space to bring visibility to themes of cultural intersectionality, specifically the parts of our natural beauty that aren't always celebrated, our caramel brown, cinnamon skin, and our natural curls," says White-Johnson. "I hope my work can culturally inspire others to center what they want to see more of."

— Sharéa Harris

Above: Sophomore visual arts major Patch Hatley learns while working on animations at commonvision.

Left: Former Student Events Board member Jennifer White-Johnson '08 now has designs at Target.



Taking Experiential Learning to the Next Level

Developing high-level skills in a highly technical field like computer science is difficult enough. But the ability to both master and successfully teach those skills to others takes the challenge to a whole new level.

Fortunately, **Amina Mahmood** and **Zach Margulies** thrive at that level. With their dedication to passing along computer science knowledge, these Retrievers amply demonstrate that doing while teaching and learning while doing are just different parts of the same equation.

As Mahmood '21, computer science, tells it, she started learning while doing quite literally. Just weeks into her first year at UMBC, Mahmood found herself working 20 hours a week as a junior malware analyst at Huntress, a cybersecurity firm that was then still in the startup phase at the bwtech@UMBC Research and Technology Park.

"I didn't really have any experience, but I was pretty ambitious, so I learned everything on the job," she said.

Mahmood, part of UMBC's Cyber Scholars Program, quickly learned how to run different types of malware on a virtual machine, dissect the particulars of each, and create mitigation reports. The nascent company's culture also helped boost her confidence. If she ran into a problem, she said, the people she worked with were glad to bring her up to speed.

"It was just like, 'Oh, you don't know this—let me teach it to you.' And then I picked up on it and then I was like, 'OK—I can do this,'" Mahmood said.

Mahmood was quick to apply such on-the-job learning to her academics, even persuading an academic advisor to allow her to add her to his over-enrolled, graduate-level software reverse-engineering course at the same time

she was enrolled in an undergraduate prerequisite class.

Mahmood not only aced the graduate-level class, she also started using what she had learned to complete the experiential-learning cycle at her new part-time job at Parsons Corp., a technology-focused defense, intelligence, security, and infrastructure engineering firm.

"One of my mentors at Parsons—he really supported me, and he said, 'You know a lot about reverse engineering. Why don't you just make a course and teach coworkers?'"

That's exactly what Mahmood did—and now does for new summer interns as a full-time reverse engineer at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab.

Recently she found herself completing the circle, coming back to UMBC for the same kind of career fair where she'd found her first job as a first-year student.

“But [this time] I didn’t go as a student,” she noted. “I went as an employer.”

Margulies ’14, biological sciences, is completing his own trajectory: Nearly a decade after earning his first bachelor’s degree, he has returned to UMBC to earn a bachelor’s in computer science and a master’s in education, with the goal of teaching computer science to Baltimore high school students when he graduates in 2024.

Margulies started his career pivot before diving back into academics immersing himself in on-the-job data science and programming – including a Maryland Institute for Innovative Computing internship at the Maryland Department of Health after starting in the computer science program. Because of this, he’s able to pursue his studies with a greater sense of perspective.

“I feel like it inspires confidence and it builds your self-esteem, taking what you’ve learned in the class and not even a semester later applying it in a real-world setting,” he said.

Margulies noted that, as a teacher, he’ll also be able to fully address high schoolers’ perennial classroom question: ‘When am I ever going to use this in real life?’

“It’s really important for teachers to know what the practical application of [schoolwork] is going to be and what working in a computer science job will look like,” he said.

A case in point, Margulies said, was the work he did as part of a Maryland Department of Health internship last summer, reviewing and finding improvements for data collection, including the creation of a data dashboard.

“Last semester, I took Computer Science 201, and we learned the programming language Python, and I really wanted to start applying that language at the internship,” he said.

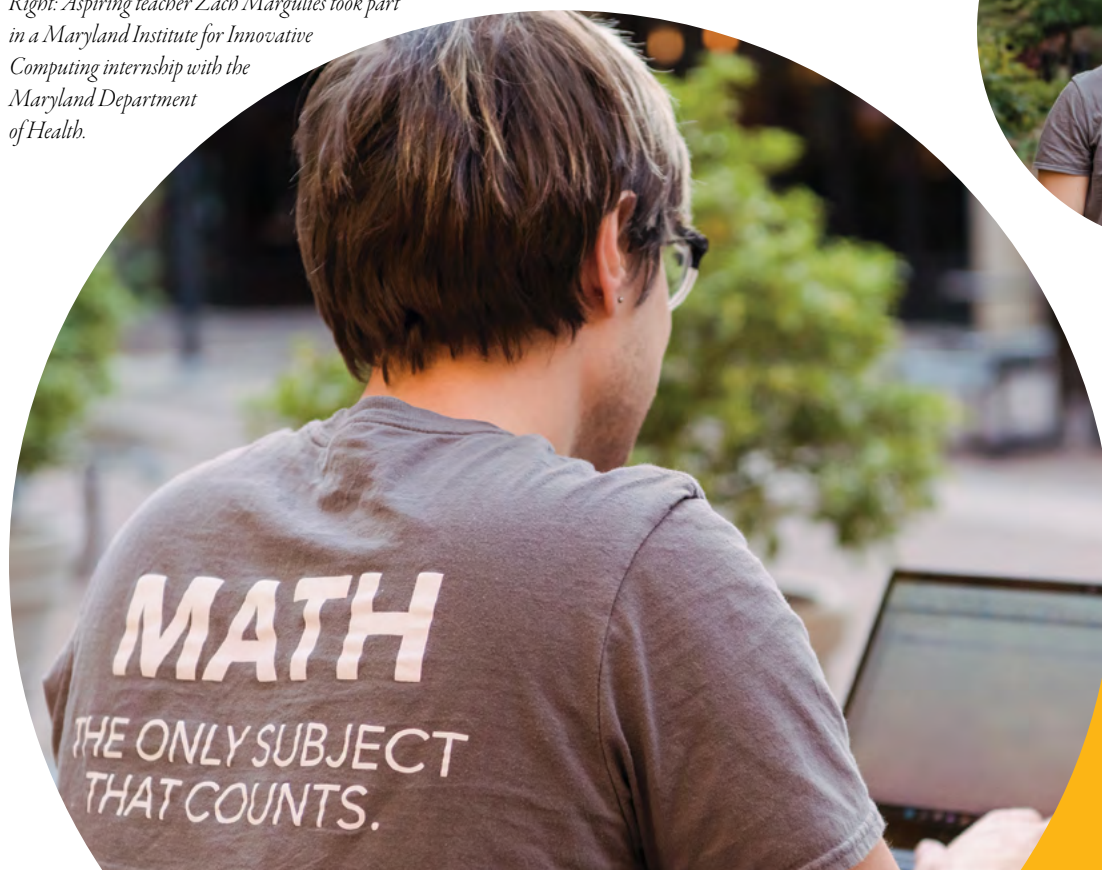
Because he’d had both practical experience and formal training, Margulies said, he was able to see that he’d have to adapt what he’d learned to suit the task at hand.

“[I had] to figure out a way that I could take Python and apply it to developing the database because that’s not something we necessarily learned in the class,” he said. “I had a lot of fun taking the thing that I learned academically and not just applying it, but also taking it to the next level.”

— Scott Cech

Left: Amina Mahmood ’21, is now sharing her knowledge with interns at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Lab. Photos courtesy of Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory.

Right: Aspiring teacher Zach Margulies took part in a Maryland Institute for Innovative Computing internship with the Maryland Department of Health.



A SPACE OF ONE'S OWN

By Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

On a chilly morning in early spring 2022, **Eileen Meyer, Roy Prouty, and Erik Crowe** were on the roof of the UMBC Physics Building. They were inside the observatory dome, trying to figure out what had gone wrong with the 32-inch telescope installed when the building was constructed in 1999. They had already determined that the shutters designed to keep dust off the mirrors were jammed, rendering the telescope temporarily unusable.

“So we’re up there with flashlights and ladders that are not quite tall enough,”

Meyer recalls, “trying to figure out what is happening and realizing that some of the motors have died.” They weren’t terribly surprised, given the age of the instrument and the harsh conditions on the roof of a building: extreme heat in summer and cold in winter as well as high humidity. At one point, Meyer says, birds unfortunately had to be evicted from one of the ventilation grates, but not before they had spread debris around the dome.

As someone who decided as a first-year graduate student that hands-on lab work wasn’t really her thing, Meyer may seem

an unlikely candidate for climbing ladders, ordering parts, and figuring out wiring as the observatory refurbishment lead. In fact, Meyer, associate professor of physics, has spent the better part of the last decade using computers (often the “super” variety) to conduct astrophysics research, mostly on black holes (the supermassive variety)—but she is finding fulfillment in expanding her work.

“That’s the beauty of having a career that is hitting its mid-stage,” Meyer says. “You can start trying different things.”



Eileen Meyer reviews research data with a student.

Leaning Into The Turning Points

The telescope renovation project is a symbol of Meyer's evolution as a scientist. Because it requires expertise outside her wheelhouse, it's enhancing her management and delegation skills, she says, and allowing her to collaborate with a wider range of students and colleagues, including engineers. Plus, the upgraded telescope will enable other projects she's diving into now, creating new opportunities at a turning point in her career, she says.

When it was built, the observatory was a state-of-the-art facility, designed to conduct observations of the near-Earth atmosphere and to serve as a public-outreach tool. The latter function is still underway today, with programming offered by observatory director and current Ph.D. student **Roy Prouty, M.S. '16, atmospheric physics**, but the aging of the telescope and its original cameras means it is no longer up to the task of cutting-edge research. With generous financial support from the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences and hands-on help from people like Prouty and Crowe, the Physics Building manager, Meyer says, "The goal is to modernize the observatory and bring it up to the level of something that we can actually put research-grade equipment on and do observations."

The Beauty Of Physics

While the details of Meyer's research might be shifting, her overall drive to conduct research and create knowledge are longstanding and unchanged. "I always wanted to be a scientist from as soon as I knew what that was," Meyer reflects—although astronomy was something "I fell into by degrees," she says.

As an undergraduate at Rice University in Houston, physics won her over because "it's so beautiful," she says. "It's this interplay of the natural world and the mathematical descriptions you can make of it. It can be deceptively simple."

This color composite of Centaurus A, an elliptical galaxy located about 13 million light-years from Earth, reveals the lobes and jets emanating from the active galaxy's central black hole. Credit: ESO/WFI (Optical); MPIfR/ESO/APEX/A.Weiss et al. (Submillimetre); NASA/CXC/CfA/R.Kraft et al. (X-ray)

“THE HISTORY OF STUDYING BLACK HOLES,” MEYER SAYS, “IS JUST ONE SURPRISE OR ‘WHAT THE HECK’ AFTER ANOTHER.”

“And once you’ve been trained as a physicist, it’s something you can’t turn off,” she adds. “You’re driving down the highway, and you see something oscillating on a truck, and you start to think how you could model this with equations ... You start seeing these things everywhere, and it explains to you why the world works the way it does. It takes away a lot of the mystery, but it does it in a beautiful way.”

Plasma Jets And Giant Mergers

To date, her work has largely focused on “understanding why black holes do what they do,” Meyer says, with a good deal of it focused on the giant jets of extremely high-energy plasma that often stream from them in opposite directions. The jets can be bigger than entire galaxies, carrying tremendous amounts of energy and material, Meyer explains. “And galaxies themselves are already hard to imagine, they’re so big.”

Supermassive black holes, denser than anything known in the universe, can have a volume about the size of our solar system. “It’s unbelievably tiny compared to the scale of the chaos that they’re unleashing” with their jets, Meyer says. The existence of the jets “was something that nobody predicted,” she adds. Even in the 1960s, some scientists were still arguing that black holes themselves (forget about their jets!) did not exist. Today, black holes are well established, but, Meyer says, “it’s still a major open question—how do they produce these jets?”

Black holes and their jets “are basically super extreme environments, so they’re interesting to study and to try to



After climbing a steep and narrow ladder to arrive in the observatory dome atop the Physics Building, Eileen Meyer and mechanical engineering students she recently brought on board to refurbish the telescope examine the instrument, discussing what needs to be done next. Clockwise from upper right in lower picture: Nathan Wong '25, Connor Kragh '25, David Inko-Tariah '25, Eileen Meyer, and Onkar Rekhi '23.

understand,” Meyer says. “There’s just major things that we don’t know about them. We’re hopeful we can understand them eventually, through observations and heavy-duty computational modeling—because that’s what they didn’t have in the ‘60s. And even today, we regularly run up against the capabilities of what the computer can do.”

Meyer also studies black hole mergers—the combining of two black holes into one. It’s another research area fraught with uncertainty and with much left to discover. Recently, she co-led a project that found the most convincing evidence yet of a merged black hole that has been “kicked” out of the center of its galaxy, in this case, at 4.5 million miles per hour.

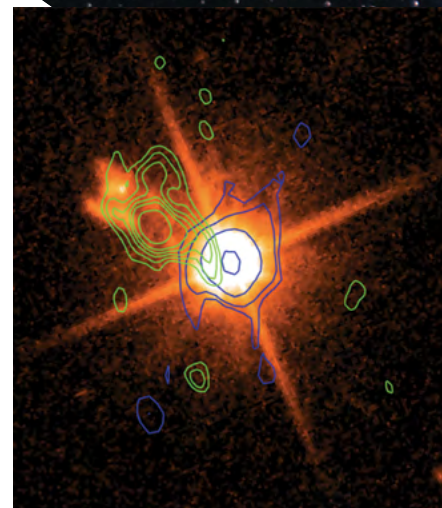
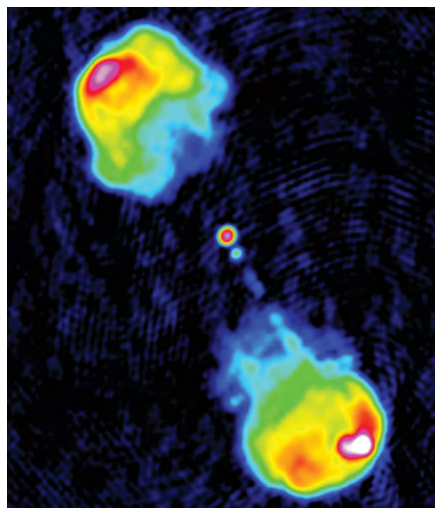
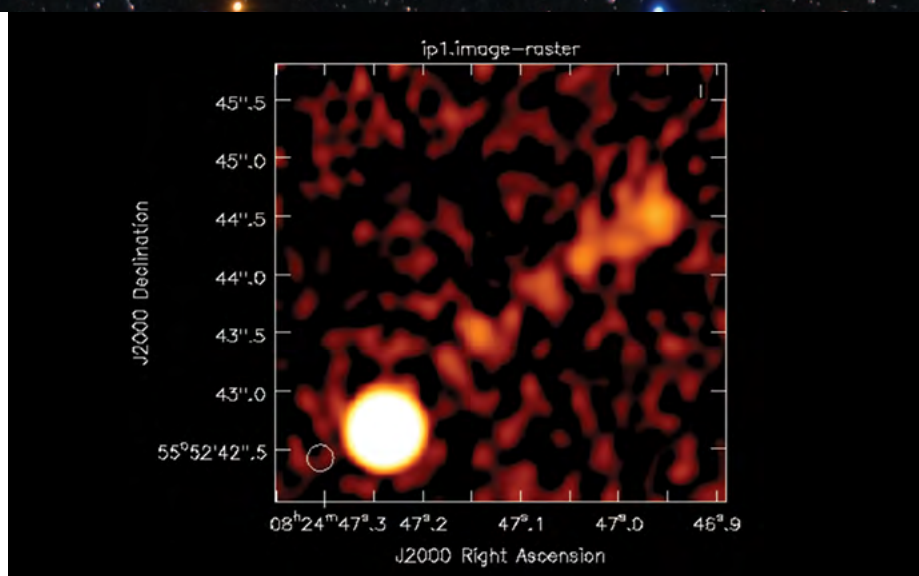
“The history of studying black holes,” Meyer says, “is just one surprise or ‘what the heck’ after another.”

Striking Out On Her Own

After completing a Ph.D., which Meyer did at Rice in 2012, a researcher should transition to becoming truly independent in setting goals and priorities, bringing in funding, managing a research group, and going beyond “the projects your advisor wanted to do,” she says.

After a postdoctoral fellowship at the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI) at Johns Hopkins University under an inspiring mentor, **Bill Sparks**, Meyer joined the UMBC faculty in 2015. It would be the first time she had a “lab of her own.” Sparks was confident she was on a path to great things at the time. “It was a real pleasure to work with Eileen at STScI; we considered ourselves very fortunate to bring her there,” he says, adding that her work there “was extremely favorably received. An eminent astronomer described it as ‘truly beautiful work.’”

Yet, like new faculty members everywhere, at UMBC Meyer says she went through a period of proving herself—working hard to bring in major grants, come up with fresh research ideas, and publishing high-impact papers as a lead investigator. The first major milestone “felt like it happened eventually after I’d been here a couple years,” she says. “I felt like I could call myself an independent researcher.”



Top: Image using radio waves to visualize a faint jet of plasma (extending to the upper right), powered by a super-massive black hole (the bright white circle).

Bottom right: Galaxy 3C 186, where Meyer and colleagues found a black hole that had been “kicked” out of the center of the galaxy. The black hole (blue lines/bright white area) is offset from its galaxy’s center (green lines).

Bottom left: The red dot at the center represents a black hole. The rainbow blobs in either corner represent regions where intense radiation is being emitted. The entire image is about 1 million light-years across, and the galaxy is about 6 billion light-years from Earth. Images courtesy of Meyer.

Independent, But Not Alone

Even as she worked toward independence as a researcher, Meyer certainly wasn’t alone. Mentors like Sparks and Meyer’s husband, **Markos Georganopoulos**, professor of physics at UMBC, and others in the department and at the university have provided support along the way.

“He was a little bit ahead of me in the career stage,” Meyer says of Georganopoulos, “so everything I would go through he had gone through a few years before. You can kind of mentor each other

because you have a sounding board.” Their research is similar enough that Georganopoulos is a co-author on some of Meyer’s publications.

Jane Turner, former director of the Center for Space Sciences and Technology, a UMBC partnership with NASA, also mentored Meyer in her early days at UMBC. “I’ve come to appreciate that UMBC is a very supportive place—the department, the college, and the school in general,” Meyer says. “It’s absolutely true that people want you to succeed here. I’ve always felt that.”

Eileen Meyer with husband, Markos Georganopoulos, and their son, Stefanos.



Meyer understands the importance of mentorship, as the first person in her family to earn a Ph.D. She enjoys paying that support forward to UMBC students. “I really love our student population. They’re just fantastic,” she says. “There’s a certain seriousness and maturity that they have that I really appreciate.”

Some of her students are the first person in their family to earn a college degree, and many more, like Meyer, are the first in their family to be considering graduate school. “I feel like I identify with our student population, which makes working with them really a joy.”

Life As A Parent-Researcher

In 2019, Meyer and Georganopoulos welcomed their son into the world, and she felt the strength of the UMBC community even more. “Parenting and being a highly active researcher is a real challenge,” Meyer says, especially when you’ve moved far from family in order to pursue your dream of being on the faculty at a research university. While “the department and UMBC in general has been very helpful,”

parenting still hasn’t been easy given “systemic bigger issues that we have with supporting parents,” she says.

Always a determined problem solver, however, Meyer has found ways to succeed both as a parent and as a scientist. Mentors advised her to consider all of her unfinished projects and “focus on where you can make major progress in the field. Focus on your most important work, and let the others go,” she says.

And now that she’s more established in her field and as a researcher, it’s time to step back from the “take every opportunity” mentality and learn to say no, which can be a special challenge for women and young scientists, Meyer says. “Bill [Sparks] was always very good at that,” though, she adds—and that’s not the only thing

she's taken from his mentorship. "He is my model for what a scientist should be," Meyer says. Especially with current pressures to publish and win grants at a rapid clip, Sparks "always did only what he was interested in," even shifting focus from astrophysics to astrobiology later in his career. "I want to be as free as he is with how he does his work," Meyer says.

Living The Freedom

Today, Meyer is living that freedom by exploring new kinds of research using the UMBC observatory, and Sparks has joined UMBC as an adjunct faculty member to support the effort. In addition to fixing up broken motors and buying a much larger ladder, Meyer plans to build a new instrument called a polarimeter, which will make observations of objects in our solar system, phenomena farther away such as flare stars, and other targets possible with the UMBC telescope.

"It's great to be working with Eileen again—she's so darn good at everything and always open to taking on something new and unfamiliar, whether it's building polarimeters, climbing wobbly ladders, or thinking about black holes and the origin of the universe," Sparks says. "Eileen is one of the most capable and versatile researchers in astronomy—and our project should keep UMBC at the forefront of a unique, innovative scientific niche."

"I FEEL LIKE I'M GETTING INTO THE THINGS THAT WERE REALLY MINE—THE THINGS THAT WERE INTERESTING TO ME ALL ALONG."

- MEYER

Making New Missions Happen

She is also on the leadership team of a University of Maryland-led consortium competing for NASA funding for a new space-based satellite mission. NASA put out a call for proposals for high-energy astrophysics missions, and her team's entry, the Advanced X-ray Imaging Satellite (AXIS), would capture extremely high-resolution X-ray images to study galaxy formation, black holes, and much more.

This role is an exciting change for Meyer. She describes herself as coming from "a classical academic path," where she relied on data from both land- and space-based instruments but was never involved in their design, construction, or the bureaucracy often involved in actually putting a satellite in the sky. After attending a summer workshop at Harvard, however, her perspective shifted. A scientist on the original Chandra X-ray Observatory mission team gave a talk describing the iconic mission's 30-year journey from concept to launch, which finally happened in 1999.

"I was astounded by how difficult it was—the immense challenge—but then also how amazing it is that eventually this thing flew, and it's still working—it's still taking amazing images all the time," Meyer says. "Ever since then, I always thought I would love to get involved in that process, to help be an advocate for new observatories, new technologies."

The Things That Are Mine

As her career—and her family—moves forward, Meyer is hitting her stride. "I love studying black holes and jets, but it's still true that that was my advisor's topic," she says. But with AXIS, the observatory work, and other new collaborations, "I feel like I'm getting into the things that were really mine—the things that were interesting to me all along," she says.

Put simply, the future is bright for Eileen Meyer, and she's savoring it all.

"I think of myself as an open person; I could see myself doing work that I haven't imagined yet," she says. "I like it when people bring me problems to think about. We'll see where we go next."



Meyer works with students Connor Kragh '25 (standing) and David Inko-Tariah '25 (seated) in her laboratory.



When We Work Together

It's no secret that at UMBC we do things a little differently. As a university, we're young, agile, and (buzzword that it may be) truly innovative. We can see the success of these traits in our rankings or research-lab results or employee-satisfaction surveys, but those numbers don't tell the full story of how, when the Retriever community joins efforts to achieve greatness, we arrive there together.

So on the eve of UMBC's 50th anniversary in 2016, when the institution put forth a goal to raise \$150 million—money that goes directly to student scholarships, graduate fellowships,

professorial awards, and so much more—we didn't question if we would succeed, we just wondered how we'd be able to capture the magnitude of the collective campaign when it came to a close.

Now, wrapping up the endeavor with over \$189 million, we get to celebrate the stories that made this all possible. This campaign called upon our community's Grit & Greatness, and Retrievers responded in kind by making big breakthroughs, forging true partnerships, and transforming lives.

**Written by: Randianne Leyshon '09
and magazine staff**

Illustrated by Marissa Clayton '21

Making Big Breakthroughs

The Talent Goes Both Ways

“One of my top priorities is recruiting the best talent who aspire to be great leaders for our company and the nation,” says **Jennifer Walsmith**, vice president of the Cyber and Information Solutions business unit at Northrop Grumman and executive lead for university relations with UMBC. “Our deep connection with UMBC enables us to recruit and hire the very best. Many of our UMBC graduates have remained at Northrop for decades and play an invaluable leadership role in cybersecurity.”

Walsmith knows something about connection as a Retriever herself, graduating in 1990 with a degree in computer science—something she said was only possible due to 2 a.m. study sessions with classmates and encouraging lunch meet-ups with friends on campus. In her current role, she oversees 2,000 plus employees and is often seen on campus speaking to alumni, faculty, and board members.

“As a nation, we have been enabled by enjoying a technically superior way of life. However, the number of students in the technical fields is getting smaller, especially among women in these majors.” So how do Northrop Grumman and UMBC plan on breaking through that limitation? “I believe it’s vitally important that we all give back,” says Walsmith.

That looks like dozens of UMBC interns each semester who get the chance to work on the toughest problems in space, aeronautics, defense, and cyberspace; an alumni chapter at Northrop Grumman over 600 employees strong who volunteer considerable time at local schools; and millions of dollars spent to benefit students, programs, and research over the last campaign.

Northrop Grumman has a unique relationship with UMBC, but they are not alone in their support of UMBC students and faculty and graduate research. Throughout the Grit & Greatness campaign, 69 percent of commitments came from foundations and companies like T. Rowe Price, Morgan Stanley, Lockheed Martin, and Baltimore Gas and Electric Company.

“We are technical leaders, and I love to see our UMBC students thrive to become future leaders of our company and give back to other students,” says Walsmith. “So when you create the engine where people on each side fuel this relationship, it strengthens everyone.”

— RL

Breaking Through Education Barriers

In Baltimore City, middle schoolers are making roller coasters out of insulation tubing and tape. High schoolers are dunking basketballs to learn math equations. And not too far away at UMBC, the Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars are prepping to spread even more innovative, inclusive lessons throughout city schools.

The Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program, founded in 2006, and other initiatives supporting Retrievers to become culturally responsive and compassionate educators in historically underserved, urban schools, are thanks to the vision of philanthropists **Betsy Sherman** and her late husband **George**.

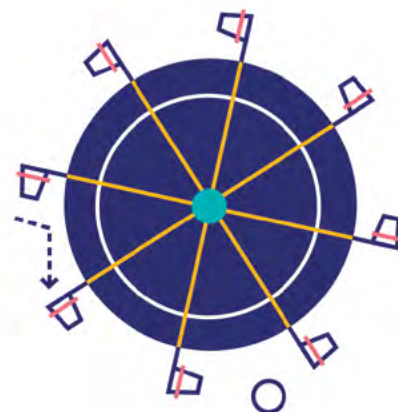
In early 2022, the Sherman Family Foundation donated \$21 million to create the Betsy & George Sherman Center, which expands and integrates UMBC’s work in teacher preparation, school partnerships, and applied research focused on early childhood education and improving learning outcomes for

Baltimore students. This gift allows educators to implement new teaching methods and find ways to break through learning barriers for their students.

The gift—the largest in UMBC’s history—will transform both UMBC and generations of local students. It also serves as a rallying point for others to join in giving and volunteering at participating schools. To date, says **Greg Simmons, M.P.P. ’04**, and vice president of Institutional Advancement, “our school partnership work is our most robust community-based philanthropic effort given the scope and range of donors involved.” In addition to the Shermans’ foundational gift, other organizations—like the Richmond Family Foundation and Northrop Grumman, just to name two—and many individual donors have supported this endeavor with their own time and resources.

“I see the legacy of the Sherman program as a seed,” says **Haleemat Adekoya ’22**, **political science**, a Sherman STEM Teacher Scholar. “It’s been planted and people will continue to water that seed...it will be one of those trees in a folk tale that does not die out because the community and the people who have benefited from its impact see the importance of that tree living beyond generations.”

— RL



Forging True Partnerships

The Snowball Effect

Sandy Geest '72, English, knows the power of how a little can go a long way. When she graduated, she immediately started giving to the department that shaped her UMBC experience, “even if it was just 10 or 15 dollars a year,” she says.

Now, 50 years later, Geest and her husband **Jay** have an endowed scholarship for English majors that has supported 10 students since 2017.

Geest spent most of her career as conference and event planner for James Rouse’s Enterprise Foundation, using her organizational skills to plan ribbon cuttings at the White House and pull together the 1992 U.S. Olympic Gymnastics Trials held in Baltimore. She says it was through the company’s matching shares program that she began to realize the power investments could have—if they could help her savings accrue over time, she wondered how her donations might increase as well.

Geest recounts how her office was located across from the then new Columbia Mall. On lunch breaks, her other coworkers would frequently go shopping. “And I told them, ‘No, you need to be putting your money into this fund because it will grow. When you’re old and gray, you’ll be glad you did that. These shoes will be all worn out by then.’”

Over time, Geest realized the same logic applied to her giving to UMBC. As she got raises and advanced through her career, she upped her giving. “I didn’t do it all at one time, [but] as it grew over the years I gave more and more,” she says, knowing the power for sizable change hinged on an endowment that would be invested by the university and able to sustain its monetary output.

Her scholarship eventually snowballed to support up to four Retrievers a year. Her scholars’ success is the biggest reward, says Geest. At on-campus events, they tell her what a difference her giving made to their UMBC experience—it allowed them to explore career options through internships or it provided a lifeline when they thought they might have to drop out.

“It’s a very good feeling,” says Geest, “to know that you have put a hand back to help somebody behind you.”

— *RL*

The Competition Is Strong

Vanessa Mann, head coach for women’s soccer in her fifth season, has the mindset of leaving things better than you found them and uses the competitive spirit inherent in athletics to teach the power of giving back. This philosophy has led to 100 percent participation in UMBC’s annual Black & Gold Rush Giving Day among her student-athletes.

The itch to compete motivates the other teams as well. Women’s lacrosse goalkeeper **Isabella Fontana '24, economics**, sees it as the perfect way to get student-athletes engaged. “Not only do I want to support the women’s lacrosse team because everyone loves to support our team,” she says, “but as athletes, we always want to win. So if there’s something on the line, we’re like, ‘Oh, let’s do it.’”

Fontana’s competitive spirit earned her a year-long prime parking spot in front of the Chesapeake Employers Insurance Arena after she won UMBC’s 2022 Giving Day student ambassador challenge. By calling on her enthusiastic network of friends and family, Fontana generated the most donors (104) out of all the ambassadors and brought the lacrosse team’s total to 335, almost double the amount from the previous year. Curious what that looks like by the numbers? It’s

the difference between \$5,045 in 2020 and a whopping \$40,040 in 2022.

The lacrosse team isn’t alone in getting people hyped for giving—in fact, Athletics is responsible for bringing in the most donors and dollars for UMBC’s annual Black & Gold Rush. Even so, they’re always striving to top themselves: in 2020, women’s soccer more than tripled their goal for donors.

Both Fontana and Mann would be the first to remind you that good competition is nothing without cooperation. “So it wasn’t that we were really competing with anyone, like any outside entity,” Mann sums up. “We define competition as *competere*, which means to strive together. That’s actually the Latin translation. So it’s not me versus you, it’s actually me with you.”

— *Levi Lewis '23*

Bridge-Building Alumni

Anwesha Dey came to UMBC from Singapore for a summer research internship. She ended up staying much longer, completing her Ph.D. in biochemistry in 2004. “In many ways, I think of the entire experience being one of the turning points in my life,” says Dey. “The sense of community and belonging and the focus on excellence at UMBC would go on to define my career.”

Now, as director and senior principal scientist of Discovery Oncology at Genentech, a groundbreaking biotechnology company, Dey is dedicated to bringing in UMBC students to her own lab and research community. Early in 2022, that meant inviting her former mentor, **Mike Summers**, professor of chemistry and biochemistry and the Robert E. Meyerhoff Chair for Excellence in Research and Mentoring, along with then president **Freeman Hrabowski** to Genentech to discuss the company’s ongoing support of UMBC. “We’re all

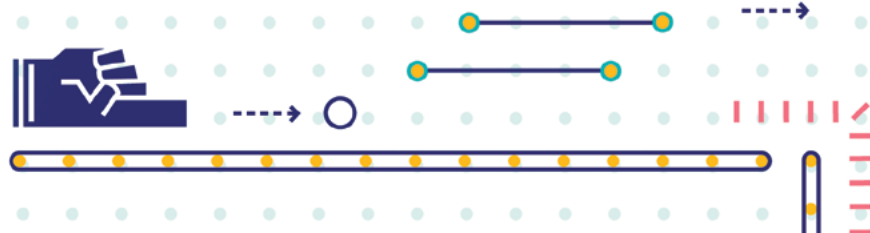
mutually invested in the same thing,” says Dey. “When we first started this fellowship about five years ago, it was really one step at a time. And so it’s great to see where it is now. The trajectory is really strong.”

Dey is far from alone in bringing her enthusiasm for her alma mater to the workplace, and as more Retrievers go on to work in the upper echelons of the scientific community, they are finding ways to connect their industries to the campus that shaped them.

Bobby Allen ’99, M7, computer science is clear that he has a lot to be thankful for because of UMBC. He met his future wife **Frances Allen ’99, M7, computer science**, and many of his closest friends as teenagers in the Meyerhoff Program’s Summer Bridge. But aside from his personal connections, as a product manager at Google, it’s Allen’s personal mission to connect UMBC’s proven pipeline of talented Retrievers to his workplace. “At Google, we know we need to have underrepresented populations as managers, champions, executive support, and mentors so that as we hire graduates and interns, they see people who look like them and know what is possible.”

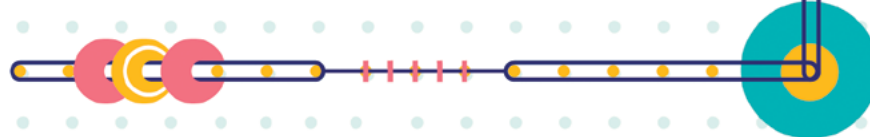
— RL

What was your personal breakthrough in deciding to give to UMBC for the first time?



“My first contribution was to the then newly created Center for Democracy and Civic Life. They were instrumental in helping me realize the power of my voice and how to actualize change on campus and more broadly in our community.”

— **Meghan Lynch ’18, political science, M.P.P. ’21**



“I was energized by seeing Retrievers rally around Giving Day. I gave because I want to contribute to making sure that UMBC stays relevant and prestigious in the higher education world.”

— **Bentley Corbett-Wilson ’17, music, M.A. ’20, education**



“I gave my first gift to The Women’s Center because of the incredible work that they accomplish and the important space that they provide on campus. I wanted to provide my support so others could experience the same growth that I saw in myself.”

— **Sahand Yazdanyar ’15, political science**



CASE IN POINT



1981

Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation has been supporting UMBC mature/returning students since 1981, its first year of grant

FOUNDATION

Newcombe is UMBC's longest continuous foundation relationship.

670 STUDENTS

Newcombe has given almost \$1 million to provide scholarships to support 670 mature/returning students.

3.39

The average GPA of scholarship recipients

34

The average age of scholarship recipients

Transforming Lives

Rising to the Top

It's no accident that when visitors arrive on campus from the west entrance, they're greeted by the radiant reflection on the silver slope of the Performing Arts and Humanities Building (PAHB). This LEED Gold-certified building, which opened in 2014, is a symbol of UMBC's investment in the performing arts and humanities. But, it's the students and activities inside the facility that really shine.

Deven Fuller '23 is a case in point. Double-majoring in dance and math, Fuller is a Linehan Artist Scholar—part of a selective program endowed by **Earl** and **Darielle Linehan** that has launched the careers of more than 300 Linehan Artist Scholar alumni in dance, music, theatre, and other creative disciplines.

Fuller is focused on commercial dance—a highly competitive field that's

principally centered in New York and Los Angeles—which would put a career in his chosen field effectively out of reach were it not for the Linehans.

Thanks to the scholarship, Fuller said, he was able to join a New York-based dance training company in his sophomore year, take classes at local studios with accomplished touring commercial dancers, and enjoy other unique opportunities. The fact that the Linehans are “recognizing dance as a serious career...is just such an amazing thing,” Fuller said.

Most recently, with a Linehan Summer Research Award, “I was able to travel and do a certificate program at one of the most prestigious studios in the world for commercial dance. ... I was very lucky to have the grant to be able to branch out in that direction.”

Fuller is far from the only student to benefit from philanthropists' investment in UMBC's arts-focused students. **Todd Carton '77, interdisciplinary studies**, has created the Carton Family Endowed Scholarship to support talented students in the performing arts who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Along with a gift that helped to fund the PAHB, Carton has included UMBC in his estate plan so that the endowed scholarship can grow and benefit even more arts students far into UMBC's future.

Fuller hasn't had the opportunity to meet the Linehans, but if he could, he said, “I would thank them for the opportunities that I've been able to have because of them ...and let them know how much they are positively affecting the community of artists.”

— Scott Cech

A Family that Gives Together

Professor **Bimal Sinha** and his family weren't content to let his 30-plus years of pioneering academic contributions to UMBC be his only professional legacy. Even though neither he nor his sons **Jit** and **Shomo Sinha** attended the university, they decided to collectively donate \$750,000 to create the Dr. Bimal Sinha Professorship in Statistics at UMBC.

The professorship permanently funds a new statistics faculty position at the university, which seems especially fitting, considering that Sinha founded the statistics department in 1985 and helped transform UMBC into a national leader in statistics education.

But Sinha's sons remember that beyond his academic accolades, the way their father has always interacted with his mentees is what made the deepest impression—whether meeting international students at the airport or inviting groups of students to their family home for dinner.

Creating community has been a hallmark of Sinha's career: The professor successfully spearheaded the African International Conference on Statistics, held in a different African country each year since 2014. In 2018, UMBC signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Limpopo in South Africa to foster collaboration and exchange. A number of graduate students from African countries have also flourished with Sinha's mentorship.

"Bimal has not only engaged in groundbreaking research for decades but has also produced and championed an impressive number of influential Black statisticians throughout Africa," noted **Freeman Hrabowski**, UMBC president emeritus.

In fact, the family's dedication to continuing Sinha's legacy has already inspired others: Forty alumni and friends

of the university pitched in a combined \$150,000, and the Maryland E-Innovation Initiative Fund committed to a matching grant, bringing the professorship's total endowment to \$1.8 million.

"I feel honored and fortunate to have played a small role in the evolution of this beloved institution," Sinha said. "Through this gift, I want to ensure that future generations of leading scholars will view UMBC as an attractive home to advance their contributions to the field of statistics."

— *Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15*

Gesture of Gratitude

When **Felicia Sanders** moved into Susquehanna Hall in the early '90s as part of the fourth cohort of Meyerhoff Program Scholars, she found herself experiencing a series of firsts. It was her first time living in a mixed-gender dorm; the first time she understood the power of study groups; and she was a member of a scholarship program so new it hadn't yet graduated its first class of scholars. "I thought I was just making friends, but this setup was really part of an ecosystem, a very effective one that set us up for success."

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program fosters a collective spirit from day one—when students tackle Summer Bridge together. So when it came time to celebrate the program's 30th anniversary and thank **Robert Meyerhoff**, the philanthropist who founded the program with President Emeritus Freeman Hrabowski, the graduates decided to give together, with an initial half-a-million dollar gift.

"When we give collectively, we keep the continuity of the culture that was built by the program," says Sanders '96, M4, chemical engineering, and a leadership-level giver. "We keep the family bond that was built by the program. It doesn't become something that is piecemeal or start-stop or becomes intermittent because

it is something that was fun for someone one year and then wasn't supported the following year."

The word Meyerhoff Scholars most often use to describe themselves is *family*. Not just a family of 1,300+ alumni who have gone on to use their gifts as industry leaders and academic powerhouses, but including the students who have yet to join their ranks as scholars, the future generation of Meyerhoffs.

Jason Dixon '02, M10, computer science, and **Rhea Brooking-Dixon '02, M10, biological sciences**, whose origin story began in Summer Bridge, give together because "we know that our successes are never truly our own," they share. "We are confident that our gifts to UMBC and the Meyerhoff Scholars Program will help other young scholars the same way the program has helped us and more."

"It's important for the family to be engaged in the program's continuity," says Sanders. "Now that Doc [Hrabowski] has moved on to the next chapter of his life, it's important that the Meyerhoff Program is something we're still talking about in another 30 years. And that can't happen if the family doesn't continue to reinvest."

— *RL*

HOW TO BRIDGE YOUR TWO HOMES

With **Jess Presuel '23**, biological sciences, an international student from Mexico



Jess Presuel's route to UMBC was not a direct flight from Mérida, Yucatán—her home state in Mexico—to UMBC. She originally arrived in Maryland in 2015 as an au pair to a family with five children. There, she immediately felt accepted and as she cared for the children, they helped her learn English. Over time, Presuel realized she was ready to pursue her dream of becoming a surgeon, starting in fall 2021 working toward a degree in biological science. At UMBC, Presuel knew that she wasn't just on campus to take classes; she wanted to bring her Mexican and Mayan heritage to her time as a Retriever. Now, as a global ambassador through the Center for Global Engagement and through other connections on campus, Presuel has found platforms to bridge her two homes and she wants to share how she's going about it.

Step 1 FIND YOUR FAMILY

For Presuel, this was both easy and hard. When she arrived in the U.S., still using Google Translate to communicate with her au pair family, she found the parents and kids eager to help her learn English and navigate life in Maryland. Most importantly, she says, they supported her personally when she shared that she was gay. "Part of the rough patch of my life in Mexico," Presuel shares, "was that at the time, my mom didn't accept me as being gay. So when I first got here, the family was welcoming to me. Just for me, I began to experience how American culture, especially in Maryland, can be welcoming to the LGBTQ community. It made me feel safe."

Presuel would later meet her fiancée, Lyana Cortes, in D.C. and over time, she says, her mother has grown to accept her daughter and love her future daughter-in-law. "My mom was a single mom, so she was always working. At the time, she sustained three jobs and I raised my siblings. So when I left, she felt my absence. Now, we've patched things up and she's finally accepted me. She adores Lyana," says Presuel. In fact, the couple got engaged on their most recent trip to Mexico, building stronger family ties internationally.

Tools of the Trade

1. A sense of adventure
2. Backpack of study skills
3. Openness to joining clubs and volunteering
4. Grandma's recipe book

Presuel poses, back center, with other UMBC global ambassadors. (Marlayna Demond '11/UMBC)

Opposite top: Presuel brought her fiancée to Mexico to meet her family. (Photo courtesy of Presuel.)

Opposite bottom: Presuel with friends at Welcome Week. (Photo courtesy of CGE.)



Step 2

SHARE YOUR FAVORITE THINGS FROM HOME

“For me, being a Latina means always taking the time to cook something from my hometown,” says Presuel. “In addition to being Mexican, I’m Mayan too. Not many people know that the Mayan community is still alive. So I’m spreading the word, we’re here.”

Presuel uses any opportunity to make food for her communities on campus, including her medical fraternity Phi Delta Epsilon. For her Mayan dishes, she incorporates pumpkin seeds into many different recipes, and on Mexican Independence Day, September 16, she made pozole, a rich stew.

In addition to food, Presuel wants to share a sense of Latina empowerment. She’s currently in the process of replicating Harvard’s Latina Empowerment & Development (LEAD) conference at UMBC. “I am trying to get more Latinas involved in any type of workshops and educational settings,” says Presuel. “I want to showcase Latina leadership.”

Step 3

GET THE LAY OF THE LAND

Higher education in the States is a convoluted process for someone coming from outside of the system. For international students in particular, specific and important paperwork must be submitted to the right authorities. At UMBC, staff in International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) help handle this bureaucratic burden. “I knew that when I finally picked UMBC as my university, ISSS was the first office I needed to connect with.”

In addition to ISSS, Presuel says, she doesn’t hesitate to ask her advisor **Philip Farabaugh**, a professor in biological sciences, endless questions, even things she might be able to find online, because inevitably the conversation ends up being so useful to her. “He always gives me good advice. And he’s so funny, that makes me feel like, ‘Okay, I got this. I definitely can do this.’”



Step 4

TELL YOUR STORY

After a year taking classes at UMBC, Presuel felt like she was ready to start offering advice to other international students. She’s now a global ambassador through the Center for Global Engagement.

“It’s such a rewarding role,” says Presuel, “because I finally get to share my experience. When you first get here from another country, you likely feel lost, so having someone who can help or speak your own language, it’s so relieving.”

Step 5

FIND WAYS TO GIVE BACK TO YOUR COMMUNITY

“As an international student, it’s important to have a community even outside of campus,” says Presuel. She wanted to find a way to give back to other Mexicans and Spanish speakers in the area and found a home at the Esperanza Center in Baltimore City. This nonprofit is a comprehensive resource center for immigrant communities. “I do absolutely anything that’s possible for me to do,” says Presuel, who has been volunteering there for the past year.

“I help from the front desk. I’ve been assisting dentists. I translate for doctors. So being part of the immigrant community in Baltimore, it has filled my heart,” says Presuel. “I wouldn’t call it a hole, but something was missing from Mexico. I needed to have that link between my American culture, my Mexican culture here.”

— *Randianne Leyshon '09*

ALUMNI ESSAY

Unstuck in Time

Peeling Back Layers Through Art

As a visual artist, Monique Crabb, M.F.A. '21, draws from her environment quite literally—producing textile-based artworks colored with the rich hues of plants and objects around her. This fall, she spent a month in residency at the Baltimore County Public Library, teaching workshops and engaging with library users as she created new work inspired by her surroundings. These are her reflections from that experience.

One of the most calming places to be in is a public library surrounded by people's research, stories, and history of every place and culture from almost every perspective imaginable. At times, the amount of knowledge at my fingertips can feel daunting knowing I'll never be able to take it all in. I'm reminded of a scene in the '80s movie *My Stepmother Is an Alien*, when the main character Celeste, played by Kim Basinger, travels to earth in a model's body to conduct research on human life and discovers books. She's able to retain the books' information instantly through osmosis, spanning the gamut of human emotions, and is starved for more. This scene has imprinted itself in my mind as a superpower I wish I had.

Growing up in a working class neighborhood to a mom who would every weekend pull open the large rolling door to our garage for the permanently set-up sale of our used things, and a father who worked various jobs and seemingly was never around, I spent most of my time outside of school on the streets, at friends' homes, or playing in the woods. My parents did not engage much with books, the arts, or academia; I was mostly influenced by pop culture.

As I got older, books came to me at very specific times in my life to change my perspective and help me find my place in the world of things. One of those times was my junior year in high school when my English teacher gave the class a list of authors to pick from for a book report and I selected Kurt Vonnegut, solely on the fact that his name sounded cool and he shared a first name with Kurt Cobain. I then found myself sitting on the floor of my school's library absorbed by the opening line of *Slaughterhouse-Five*: "All this happened, more or less." The rest of the book was an eye-opening view of one person's experience in the world during a time so far removed from my own, yet with relatable philosophical ideas with quotes like, "All time is all time. It does not change. It does not lend itself to warnings or explanations. It simply is. Take it moment by moment, and you will find that we are all, as I've said before, bugs in amber." Books allow us to travel through time and place to help us find meaning in our lives, which is a magical experience that visual arts achieves just as profoundly.

The Baltimore County Public Library month-long Artist in Residence program



was a gift to take part in. Each week I walked through a sea of books and would greet the librarians on my way to their maker space, The Hive. Being there allowed me the time and space to focus on one project. I also had the opportunity to engage with a community outside of my own through two workshops I gave on eco-printing and dyeing with food waste as well as having the studio space open to visitors while I was working. On my lunch breaks I would browse books and take walks, once visiting the nearest cemetery and other times just taking in the colors and patterns from the intersecting relationship of plants and human-made constructions in the area.

During my time in residency, I started a project using secondhand vintage linens made with open cut and intricately detailed hand and machine embroidery. I either cut up or used the entire napkin, handkerchief,



Top: Pojagi-style piecing of secondhand vintage embroidered napkins. Middle: Window of a vacant building interacting with a bush near the Hereford Branch of the Baltimore County Public Library. Bottom: Cyanotype-coated vintage cotton napkin with an image of a toilet brush exposed using the light of the sun. Photos courtesy of Monique Crabb.

or tablecloth and machine-pieced them together using pojagi, a Korean form of quilting that creates a seam on both sides of the pliable plane. These textile objects, often made by women, were and continue to be so precious that the folds and creases in them become deep from decades of being stored away unused. I was drawn to bringing these objects out of storage, unfolding, and piecing one to the other to create a frankensteinian curtain that was large and would present as a confrontation in the middle of a room. I

hadn't fully unraveled the idea, but I knew if I put in the work that richer layers of context would reveal themselves. Toward the end of my residency I had a library visitor come through and we chatted for a while about art, the artist's process, and the meaning behind what is made. It was during this exchange that I had a lightbulb moment for my project of painting cyanotype directly onto the napkins and exposing stark images of tools used in the domestic world like a toilet brush. Adding this layer of context expanded my



exploration of materials from domestic life by bringing attention and exposing the hidden labor behind the undervalued role of homemaker, woman, and caregiver.

It's essential to my growth as an artist to be in new environments and around new people as well as the opportunity to step back from being so deeply inside of my artwork by engaging with communities outside of my own. Meeting the folks who took my workshops and the ones who came through the studio to ask questions about what I was working on reminded me of the importance of my role as an artist. I believe our stories connect us and often find that the narratives I encounter, whether in person or from books, inform and enrich my practice in ways I could never do alone.



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 October 25, 2022.

How to Submit Class Notes

The deadline for submitting Class Notes for the next print issue of *UMBC Magazine* is April 24, 2023. Submit your class note and photos online at umbc.edu/magazine or by email to magazine@umbc.edu.

1976

Michele Fantt Harris, psychology, retired from the National Cooperative Bank as the executive vice president of human resources after 21 years and a total of 35 years in the human resources field. Her first HR job was as a student worker in the administrative office of the UMBC Library. Harris recently started her own coaching and consulting business, MFH Associates, specializing in career coaching and “un-retirement.”

Shane McCormick '07, M.P.P. '14, and his wife Jenessa welcomed their first child, Jameson Ellsworth McCormick, in March 2022.



1981

Shirlyn Sherman Baker, social work, Afro-American studies, received a Doctor of Management Degree earlier this year from the University of Phoenix focusing on leadership and organization development.

Debora Fajer-Smith, political science, co-edited the *Maryland Automobile Accident Deskbook*, Third edition, and released a new children's book, *The Boy Who Ran Like the Wind*, under her pen name Leah Kelly.

1983

William Hoffman, Jr., health sciences and policy, was selected by the Society of Research Administrators International as a recipient of the 2022 Hartford-Nicholsen Award for his impactful service to the field of research administration on a global level.

1984

Tom Hallowak, history, published a new book, *John Guttenko: Kid Williams the Baltimore Tiger, Fighting to Become the World Bantamweight Champion, 1910-1914*, earlier this year.

1985

Karen Johnson Shaheed, political science, executive vice president and general counsel at Bowie State University, joined the board of directors for the National Association of College and University Attorneys.

1987

Paul Comfort, history, published his third book on transportation, *Conversations on Equity and Inclusion in Public Transportation*.

1991

Lorelei Sattler, social work, psychology, was appointed to assistant warden at the Maryland Correctional Pre-Release System Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services.

1992

Ram Mohan, Ph.D., chemistry, has been named the 2023 recipient of Illinois Wesleyan University's Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.

1993

Donald Barnhart, M.A., instructional development systems, a director for business advisory firm Opportune, spoke with *Permian Basin Oil and Gas Magazine* on the relationship between an organization's culture and the way it handles change.

Chester Hedgepeth, M1, biological sciences, and his personalized wellness startup gWell were featured on the TV series *Viewpoint with Denis Quaid* in a section titled “Future of Healthcare—Leading Innovation in Personalized Healthcare.”

Luz Huntington-Moskos, biological sciences, was promoted to associate professor with tenure at the University of Louisville School of Nursing.

Jane Wang, biochemistry and molecular biology, was appointed chief scientific officer at the biopharmaceutical firm Apollomics in July 2022. In this role, Wang will lead the drug discovery pipeline for the company.

1994

Chris Kojack, interdisciplinary studies—fulfilling a lifelong dream—finished 89th out of 8,663 entries at the 2022 World Series of Poker Main Event, the biggest event in the world, winning \$86,000.

Kent Lai, Ph.D., molecular and cellular biology, a professor in the division of medical genetics (pediatrics) at the University of Utah, was recognized for his research contribution to rare diseases by the Rare Disease Clinical Research Network.

NON-LINEAR PATHS TO LEADERSHIP

Francisco Cartagena '19, political science, M.P.S. '22, cybersecurity



Francisco Cartagena describes his academic journey as unorthodox. Now an employee for the City of Gaithersburg, Cartagena started his educational path as an undocumented student. While charting numerous challenges, Cartagena '19, political science, M.P.S. '22, cybersecurity, also found ample opportunities for growth along the way, becoming an effective leader of social change at UMBC at The Universities at Shady Grove (USG).

Cartagena arrived with his family from El Salvador as a preteen. In 2009, he graduated from high school and set out to Montgomery College to pursue his associate's degree in general studies—a goal that would take him a decade to accomplish because of his legal status. There, Cartagena joined the college's Latino Student Union and together they advocated for the Maryland Dream Act—a statute that would allow undocumented high school students to pay for in-state college tuition.

"That experience really exposed me to the political science environment and how policy—with momentum, people, and activism—can actually be changed," says Cartagena, who hopes eventually to leverage his role in local government to share the message that there are many attainable pathways to and through higher education.

Prior to the Maryland Dream Act's passing in 2012, Cartagena was paying the international student rate for community college classes. To him, pursuing a bachelor's degree seemed like a faraway dream.

"There were some instances when I couldn't attend school or when I could only attend one class," reflects Cartagena. "But it gave me that momentum to say, 'I'm just going to keep at it.'"

At Montgomery College, Cartagena learned about the UMBC-Shady Grove campus and its

political science program. As a full-time working adult, he believed that UMBC-Shady Grove would be a good fit. With an extra push from his wife **Cora Trelles Cartagena '12, social work**, Cartagena reached out to **Sunil Dasgupta**, political science program director and professor at UMBC-Shady Grove, to find out more.

To Cartagena's surprise, Dasgupta asked a question that would sell him on applying: "Why do you think you can complete this program?" Motivated by the challenge, Cartagena pushed forward and eventually proved that he would do more than succeed—he would lead.

"Francisco is somebody that intuitively knew the importance of politics in transforming and changing our lives," says Dasgupta. "I think part of the reason that happens is because he comes from an immigrant family. When you're in that position, you quickly realize you have to master this if you want to help yourself, your family, and your community."

Cartagena saw USG as a place to practice his role in politics. As one of two students representing UMBC on the Student Government Association's executive board, he learned more about the funding process at USG, the development of programs on campus, and the ins-and-outs of university partnerships.

"When you have an environment with multiple people from different schools, you can truly see the different backgrounds, their intent, and how people process things," Cartagena says.

When Cartagena attended USG's job fair and spotted a table for Congressman Jamie Raskin's office staffed by a fellow Latina, he saw a vision for his future. "At the time, a career in government or interning for a government official was so far-fetched, whether because of my status or my prior

experiences. It was something I would just dream of," explains Cartagena, who wound up spending the summer splitting his internship between Raskin's Rockville office and his congressional office on the Hill—two experiences that propelled his career in government.

"I still pinch myself because I'm a first-generation immigrant who came here from El Salvador with my parents. ... To be able to represent the county I grew up in—it was a bunch of mixed feelings that were finally culminating into something very positive," says Cartagena.

In 2018, Cartagena started with a role in the City of Gaithersburg's human resources department and, in 2021, transitioned to his current role as an information technology project manager. Now, he oversees applications, business needs from different departments, and processes in the technology sector.

In 2019, as a master's student studying cybersecurity at UMBC-Shady Grove, Cartagena continued his ongoing involvement on campus, joining the Graduate School Council and USG's Advisory Board.

During his final year in the program, Cartagena received a phone call from Dasgupta, who was creating an interactive bot to help Maryland voters identify political candidates most aligned with their values. He hoped that the bot, along with his podcast, *I Hate Politics*, would serve as informative tools. But realizing that a significant portion of the county was Spanish-speaking, he enlisted Cartagena's help.

"The first person I called was Francisco. And it wasn't a small job; it was pages and pages of translation," Dasgupta says, adding that they only had about a couple of weeks to complete the project before elections began. Still, Cartagena took on the translation task without hesitation.

"That kind of collaboration uplifts UMBC and the community," notes Dasgupta. "We continue to work with our students and alumni, and those interactions are very revitalizing. We find meaning through those relationships."

Cartagena notes he wouldn't have made it this far without the resources and opportunities he found at UMBC-Shady Grove. "If there was a change I could recommend, it would be showing students and adult learners that there are other pathways for you to get that Ph.D., get that bachelor's, or get that associate degree," says Cartagena. "I think oftentimes students are afraid; it's an investment of money and time, and you don't know if you're going to make it through...but you will find your niche if you stick it out."

By Anna Lee '22

Along with other USG student council members, Cartagena (center, seated) attended the State of Maryland House Appropriations meeting to advocate for the funding of USG by the state.

CLASS NOTES

1995

Rita Choula, information systems, M.A. '16, management of aging services, was appointed to the board of directors for the National Alliance for Caregiving.

Alycia Marshall, mathematics, was appointed vice president of academic and student success at the Community College of Philadelphia in June 2022.

1997

Jerome Adams, M4, biochemistry and molecular biology, the 20th U.S. Surgeon General, will serve as the Kelley School of Business Poling Chair of Business and Government at Indiana University.

Kristol M. Taylor, political science, a special educator in Howard County Public Schools, was excited to accompany her nephew Marcus King to his 2022 orientation to UMBC. Taylor shares that after bringing her nephew to Homecoming events over the years, he saw his future at UMBC. King hopes to continue in his aunt's footsteps by completing his degree as a Retriever.

1998

Steven Fischer, visual & performing arts, was approved for the Fulbright Specialist Roster as a specialist in creativity and cartoon storytelling. In this role, he'll lead a cartoon book project in Tokyo, Japan, and another project at the University of Debrecen in Hungary.

Padhu Seshaiyer, Ph.D., mathematics, gave the inaugural lecture of the UMBC College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences Alumni Speaker Series. His topic was "Transforming Institutional Practices Through Innovative Educational Approaches to Prepare the Next Generation Workforce."

1999

Joseph A. Riley, information systems, was appointed as a Caroline District Court judge in Caroline County, Maryland.

2000

Jason Burik, psychology, shares that his company Brick Model Design has worked on custom LEGO projects for Amazon, Google, Pro Sports teams, UMBC, and more.

Jackie Vreath Regales, American studies, recently left the world of K-12 teaching to work at Howard Community College as the program coordinator for the Center for Civic and Community Engagement.

Daniel Singh, dance, has been named the next executive director of Metro Arts: Nashville Office of Arts and Culture.

2001

Brea Souders, visual arts, made the photograph featured on the cover of *The New York Times Sunday Review* for the May 8, 2022, story "The End of Roe is Coming."

2002

Achaia Andoque Walton, political science, was selected as one of the 40 Adobe Analytics Champions for 2022. This program searches for the top analytics experts around the world to provide input in developing the Adobe Analytics platform and to train other users.

2004

Delana Gregg, M.A., instructional systems design, Ph.D. '19, language, literacy, and culture, performed in Baltimore's Fluid Movement water ballet over the summer with a number of UMBC alumni: **Rochelle Underwood '84, Leah Marcus '04, Stephanie Johnson '86, Judy Reynolds '87, and Maria Blanca '15.**

Alicia Wilson, political science, vice president for economic development at Johns Hopkins University, was awarded the 2022 Pro Bono Partner of the Year Award from the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau.

2005

Eric Butkiewicz, sociology, was inducted into the Plainville Sports Hall of Fame in Connecticut.

Angel Kristi Williams, visual arts, was recently awarded a WIF Directors and Cinematographers Fellowship from Women in Film, with support from Netflix and the Sundance Institute.

Wei Xie, M.A., intercultural communication, was named the new east region research lead for real estate firm JLL.

2006

Sylvia Trent-Adams, Ph.D., public policy, was named president of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth.

Josh Welborn, biochemistry, joined Liff, Walsh, & Simmons law firm as an associate attorney.

Peter Wood, theatre, performed his stagecraft on the CW's *Penn & Teller: Fool Us* in an episode that aired on November 11, 2022. After showing off his magic first in a January 2021 episode, Wood joins the small cohort of only 10% of contestants who get asked back for a repeat appearance.

2007

Sarah Christa Butts, social work, received a 2022 Excellence in Advocacy Award (Federal Issue Campaign) from Women in Government Relations for her work advocating for student loan debt relief on behalf of the social work profession.

Nathan Kurtz, M.S., Ph.D. '09, atmospheric physics, after a recent research trip to the Arctic, discussed his findings on sea ice loss with The Real News Network.

Shane McCormick, political science, M.P.P. '14, was promoted to the position of executive assistant and scheduler to the State Superintendent of Schools at the Maryland State Department of Education. On a personal note, he and his wife welcomed their first child, Jameson Ellsworth McCormick, on March 13, 2022.

Kyla McMullen, M13, computer science, was promoted to associate professor with tenure. She is the third Black woman to receive tenure and promotion in computer science at the University of Florida.

Felicita Russo, Ph.D., atmospheric physics, was featured in *Analog Forever Magazine* for her innovative photography techniques.

Samantha Sankovich, media and communication studies, vice president of football operations and NFL agent at Steinberg Sports & Entertainment, was included on *The Baltimore Sun's* 2022 list of "25 Women to Watch."

2008

Kizzmekia Corbett, M16, biological sciences and sociology, was awarded the 2022 J. William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding jointly with Anthony Fauci, chief medical advisor to the president of the United States. Corbett, who is now an assistant professor of immunology and infectious diseases at Harvard University, was also honored as Woman of the Year by the Baltimore chapter of Girl Friends.

Jessica Owens-Young, political science, assistant professor in Health Studies at American University, participated in a panel discussion with the Aspen Institute about hunger among college students.

Jen White-Johnson, visual arts, was interviewed by ABC Baltimore and other outlets about her collaboration with Target for its special collection in celebration of Latino Heritage Month.

2009

Kristina Gaddy, modern languages and linguistics, history, published her second book, *Well of Souls: Uncovering the Banjo's Hidden History*, in October 2022.

2010

Erwin Cabrera, M18, biological sciences, was named the inaugural executive director of the Stony Brook Simons STEM Scholars Program. This initiative will partner with the Simons Foundation and UMBC to replicate the success of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program and

bring this same spirit to the State University of New York System.

Danielle Kennedy, English, successfully defended her dissertation and graduated from the University of Iowa with a Ph.D. in English in May 2022.

Jennifer Kent, financial economics, was elected to the partnership at Latham & Watkins LLP, effective January 1, 2023. She resides in the firm's Washington, D.C., office where she represents private equity sponsors and private and public company borrowers in secured lending and other financing transactions.

2011

Bill Joyner, health administration and policy, started a position as assistant vice president of community engagement at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

2013

Josh Dick, mechanical engineering, will be inducted into the James Wood High School's P. Wendell Dick Athletic Hall of Fame in Virginia.

2015

Mustafa Al-Adhami, M.S., Ph.D. '20, mechanical engineering, CEO at Astek Diagnostics, was named a *Baltimore Business Journal's* "40 Under 40" honoree.

Leigh Dalton, Ph.D., public policy, of the law firm Stock and Leader, was selected by the *Central Penn Business Journal* as a 2022 Women of Influence honoree in celebration of her career accomplishments and commitment to mentoring.

Brian Keane, biological sciences, was named the new assistant coach for the men's and women's swimming and diving teams at Boston College.

David Nicholson, M23, computer science, earned a Ph.D. in genomics and computational biology from the University of Pennsylvania. He is now employed with an international data analytics company, where he aids government funders in understanding more about research output and trends.



Alumni of UMBC's Africana studies department celebrate the program's 50th anniversary. Pictured (L-R, back): James Wiggins '75, Gary Brooks '79, Eric Talley '79, Kathy Brooks Foust '80, Cheryl Boyer '81, Nancy Carpenter '80; (In front): Rhonda White-Yakoub '80, Robert House '81, Jadi Omowale '80, and Alex Spencer '75. Photo by Kiirstn Pagan '11.

2016

Justin Glaze, business technology administration, was featured as a popular contestant on season 8 of the *Bachelor in Paradise* television series.

Xavier Mack, modern languages and linguistics, has been announced as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's newest member.

2017

Emily Bernstein, psychology, and **Patrick Alejandro '18, information systems**, were joined in marriage.

Hannah Carter, biochemistry and molecular biology, and **Joe Skowronski '18, biochemistry and molecular biology, M.A. '19, education**, celebrated their three-year wedding anniversary in June 2022.

Emily Escobedo, psychology, retired from competitive swimming and began a career as a special education preschool teacher.

Humon Heidarian, environmental science, and **Briana Yancy '19, geography and environmental systems**, spoke with *Bay Journal* about their experiences as members of the Chesapeake Conservation Corps.

CLASS NOTES



Fluid Motion performers left to right: Stephanie Johnson '86, Leah Marcus '04, Maria Blanca '15, Delana Gregg, MA. '04, Ph.D. '19, Rochelle Underwood '84, and Judy Reynolds '87.

2020

Steven Dashiell, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, was interviewed on NPR earlier this year about his research on the game Dungeons & Dragons.

Anwar Glasgow, visual arts, spoke with the Associated Press earlier this year about his participation as a camper and camp counselor at the Brethren Woods Camp and Retreat Center Mid-Atlantic Burn Camp.

Jethro Ssengonzi, M28, mechanical engineering, is one of six scholars named to the 2022 cohort of Energy Data Analytics Ph.D. Student Fellows at Duke University.

2021

Ethan Crookshank, geography and environmental systems, a graduate student in environmental science, conducted biomonitoring fieldwork with Montgomery County Parks in summer 2022.

Calista Ogburn, health administration and policy, was a vendor at an Asian night market at the Howard County Fairgrounds. She sold her published poetry books and other related poetry merchandise such as poem prints and bookmarks.

Luis Soto, information systems, joined the Truckload Carriers Association as a data analyst.

2022

Ciara Christian, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, was named the associate director of UMBC's Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion, and Belonging (i3b).

Rehman Liaqat, political science, has been awarded a Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship.

Friends We Will Miss

Perry Alexander '91, visual and performing arts, retired in 2021 from his position as the evening supervisor at the Albin O. Kuhn Library & Gallery after 40 years of exceptional service. Alexander passed away in his sleep on May 29, 2022. He will be remembered for his superhuman work ethic, friendly smile, and wonderful stories.

David Crandall, M.F.A. '99, imaging, media, and digital arts, a longtime member of Baltimore's underground and theatre arts scene, passed away suddenly in July while on vacation with his family.

In August 2022, former undergraduate **Vijay Gill** passed away. **Jack Suess '81, mathematics, and M.S. '95, information systems**, vice president the Division of Information Technology (DoIT) remembers, Gill starting as a student employee in 1995 in what was then called Academic Computing Services. When an opening came up, he moved into a full-time role as a Unix system administrator, an integral part of the DoIT team. "Vijay was brilliant and a quick learner," says Suess. From UMBC, Gill went to work for the Baltimore brokerage firm, Alex Brown & Sons, and then on to have a remarkable career working at companies such as Microsoft, Google, Salesforce, and Data Bricks. When Suess last talked to Gill in 2017, he had been awarded seven patents, been a part of eight Internet Request For Comments (RFC) documents, and had a half-dozen major articles in peer-reviewed journals. "What I will always remember," says Suess, "is how Vijay was someone who was passionate about supporting his friends and colleagues."

Bruce Kermit '73, history, passed away on August 25, 2022. While a student at UMBC, Kermit learned about transcendental meditation (TM). Following a six-month teacher training course, Kermit dedicated himself to teaching and working in the international TM organization. As part of a successful peace-creating delegation in 1978, Kermit traveled internationally to calm violence by employing an age-old group practice for peace, known as the TM-Sidhi program.

Kermit was known as a man of peace who spent his life creating peace for himself and for the world he loved.

Daniel Ruben Martinez '17, biochemistry and molecular biology, passed away in April 2021. At the time, he was a doctoral student at the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. He was remembered by his classmates as "warm-hearted, open-minded, brilliant, driven, well-rounded, naturally gifted, athletic, competitive, encouraging, and full of joy."

John Charles Donald Meise Jr. '79, interdisciplinary studies, passed away on July 19, 2022, from cancer. Formerly a computer science instructor at UMBC, he was an avid train enthusiast, photographer, and kayaker.

Chintan Arvind Patel, M.S. '01, computer science, Ph.D. '04, computer engineering, passed away on August 9, 2022. Patel had a very successful and accomplished career in academics as associate professor in computer science and electrical engineering at UMBC, achieving the status of tenure in 2016. Throughout his career, he was a well-respected colleague and mentor and made an everlasting impact on the lives and careers of his students.

Daniel Sappington '88, mechanical engineering, passed away on August 24, 2022. After graduation from UMBC, Sappington, a veteran of the Korean War, worked for Baltimore Asphalt Paving Company and P. Flanigan and Sons, Inc. in Baltimore. His most recent employer was Coleman's Machine Shop in Linthicum, Maryland, where he worked restoring high-performance engines.

Linda Louise Hankey VanDerBeek '76, interdisciplinary studies, M.A. '95, instructional development systems, passed away on June 29, 2022. She spent her post-graduate years working in instructional design and higher education and raising her four children in Relay, Maryland, where she was an instrumental member of the community. She is predeceased by her husband Stan VanDerBeek, the avant-garde filmmaker who taught at UMBC for more than a decade.

Raymond Zilinskas passed away on September 14, 2018. Zilinskas, who previously worked at the Center for Public Issues in Biotechnology at UMBC, was one of the world's foremost experts on chemical and biological weapons. He is survived by his wife, **Helen Zilinskas '89, psychology**.

MUSIC MAN

Devin Walker '89, political science



Devin Walker '89, political science, is a man with a plan. And a cause and a vision and a passion. Oh, and a Grammy nomination.

"Uncle Devin, the Children's Drummussionist," as he's known professionally, was nominated for a Grammy for Best Children's Music Album in 2022 as a member of the 1 Tribe Collective, one of his many top-level endeavors that center around education, music, and young people.

He's the musical muscle and co-owner of The Uncle Devin Show, an interactive musical experience for children that uses percussion instruments to inspire both fun and critical thinking.

Walker also runs a training course, "Racism in Children's Music: Liberating Music for the Black Child," and he has created an online music radio program for children called WEE Nation Radio, streaming R&B, funk, hip-hop, jazz, go-go, reggae, calypso, and world music, all created for children and families.

But the roots of many such accomplishments, says Walker, can be traced back to his years at UMBC.

Although music has always been a passion, Walker saw majoring in political science as an opportunity to probe systemic inequities and effect meaningful change.

"I was very active in the student movement back in the '80s," he said. "Understanding the politics of everything really gave me the keen awareness to start to look for those things inside of whatever I was involved in."

Those sharpened critical-thinking skills came in handy when he found himself researching a film called *Ethnic Notions* through UMBC's Albin O. Kuhn Library.

The Emmy-winning 1987 documentary peels back the anodyne veneer of familiar songs, books, cartoons, and movies meant for children to reveal their poisonously racist stereotypes, themes, and origins.

Even the sing-song silliness "Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe," the film notes, originally alludes to the capture of African Americans fleeing enslavement.

"I was blown away," Walker said. "I had no idea that there was a dark history" to so many songs, along with all the many stereotype-perpetuating movies and other media.

"So the seed was planted," he said. "But even then, I didn't think about coming in and really making a contribution to changing [the direction of children's music] until around 2007."

It was at this point, Walker said, that he truly began to understand firsthand the unique influence that music can have—for good or ill—on children. He and his wife **Lolita Johnson Walker**, whom he met at UMBC, don't have children, but his sister had four, and he spent time with them every week.

"Every Wednesday, it was Uncle Devin's time," Walker said, and that time included lots of music. But he remembered all too well the veiled racism of traditional songs he had researched as a UMBC student.

Neither did he want his nieces and nephews to soak up too much of the wrong adult pop music.

"I couldn't let them listen to all that music because it just wasn't appropriate," Walker said. "And so I said, I'll create my own music for them. And as they got older, I said, let me record it, so they can have a memory of it."

Things snowballed from there, according to Walker. His nieces and nephews started playing the music for their friends, and the friends started asking Walker to record more songs, and people started asking him to perform for children and families.

During Walker's college days, he said, "I used to always participate in all of the [UMBC] talent shows. But it was all just us having fun. I never thought of it as a profession or anything like that."

In fact, **Cynthia M. Hill**, a retired UMBC associate provost, remembers Walker primarily as a driven student.

"I met Devin when he participated in the Learning Resources Center's academic support program for incoming UMBC freshmen," Hill said. "He was impressive because he was anxious to learn and worked hard."

But because they were both members of the UMBC gospel choir, she also knew firsthand that he had a professional-level musical talent. He even got to play with Dizzy Gillespie: The jazz giant visited UMBC in 1985, when Walker was a first-year student.

And although he worked full time after graduation, helping to investigate and resolve workplace issues covered by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on behalf of both public- and private-sector employers, he continued to play with local bands.

And as Walker's deep love of music—with the training and talent to match—continued to grow, he focused more and more of his prodigious energy into the journey that became The Uncle Devin Show, creating positive songs set to infectious beats such as "No Such Thing as Good or Bad Hair."

"I try to find a way to help—not to tell children what to think, but to teach them how to think," Walker said; he sees music as the key.

"We have a perfect tool here to help our children navigate these very difficult waters of life right now and in a fun, entertaining, and engaging way," he said "That's really what my goal is."

— Scott Cech



CLASS NOTES

Heartwarming Homecoming

Every year, Retrievers of all ages (including some actual Retriever pups) and community members gather together for UMBC's Homecoming to celebrate this special place—and this year's celebration was the largest in school history.

Some Retrievers started their day off with the 5k Dawg Chase and Fun Run. From there, alumni and friends could sit down for Family Breakfast, cheer on the Puppy Parade, attend the compelling talks at GRIT-X, watch UMBC volleyball defeat UAlbany 3-0, and take in all the rides at the carnival.

Left: These future Retrievers frolic on campus together while attending Homecoming with their parents. Katie Heater '09, M.F.A. '13, and Matthew Davis '08 brought their daughters Quinn, left and June, right, for their first Homecoming, and Dann Malibom '10, M.A. '16, attended with his son Miles, center. Photo credits: Below, Jill Fannon, M.F.A. '11. Across, Maximilian Franz.





THEN & NOW





Band of Sisters

At the 2022 Homecoming alumnae volleyball scrimmage, **Kasey Crider**, who joined UMBC as head volleyball coach earlier this year, got a firsthand view of the connections the program has forged over the last 50 years—connections that he considers the foundation of the team's success. "I exist in that ecosystem of this legacy, which hit me like a ton of bricks. I'm walking out of there going, 'Man, this is why you do it. You have these incredible people.'"

The volleyball players over the years would tell you that common values and hard work unite a team that comes from all over the world. **Robbin Lee '13, visual arts**, remembers the process of bonding with her teammates, even in some unexpected ways: "We spent the preseason meshing and melding our languages—like the way we talk and the slang we use," she says. "By the end of the season we all sounded like each other." This only reflected the close bonds they'd forged. To hear Lee tell it, "our team was a group of sisters. We loved and annoyed each other a lot. But,

at the end of the day, we held each other accountable and we pushed each other to be better off and on the court."

Earlier alumnae recount a similar sisterhood. **Elizabeth (Straley) Beckelman '90, psychology**, played in the '80s under the nickname "Biff" and met her lifelong best friend **Melissa (Diehlmann) Little '90, psychology**, on the first day of tryouts. "I was a walk-on," Beckelman remembers. "I didn't even know if I would make the team." And yet she did, and now fondly remembers her coaches keeping her grades on track, getting "more competitive" as the program grew, and strenuous running drills. "It really grounded me and kept me focused and kept me on a track and on a path," Beckelman says.

As the newest member of the team celebrating their 50th anniversary this year, Crider came in as coach with one question on his mind: "What's best for the players?" It sounds like the program is well-equipped to answer him.

— Levi Lewis '23



UMBC Volleyball, in pink, on their way to defeat Bryant University 3-0 at an October 2022 match. Inset, A team photo from 1983. Photos courtesy of UMBC Athletics.

WILD CARD

Bird Brainiac

At UMBC, we welcome Retrievers of all stripes... and feathers. Spotted on campus recently enjoying student life is an 87-year-old yellow crowned amazon parrot named Chicken. Yes, you read that right, *Chicken*.

Elle Kreiner '20, anthropology, a current master's student in applied sociology, rescued the bird in 2017 after his long-term caretaker passed away and the family wasn't able to keep him. Despite coming to campus to spread his wings (metaphorically—Chicken doesn't enjoy flying), Kreiner doesn't believe their parrot would make a great student, although he does speak three languages. Prior to his time with Kreiner, Chicken lived in pre-World War II Germany and then spent most of his years in Florida. As a result, he is prone to colorful language in German, Spanish, and English, says Kreiner, but his favorite word? "Definitely 'cracker.'"

"If I had to personify him, he'd be a really old crotchety professor, who should have retired 20 years ago but is still here because everyone likes him," says Kreiner. Like many octogenarians, Chicken doesn't enjoy the cold, so if you see him on campus on a sunny day, be sure to say *Guten Tag!*

— *Randianne Leysbon '09*



Creating a **UMBC** Legacy



Sharon Johnson (second from right) with fellow Meyerhoff alumni and staff at the program's 30th anniversary celebration.

What's Your **UMBC** Legacy?

Make your impact on UMBC and its students by exploring your planned giving options today. Contact Stacey Sickels Locke by calling 410-455-5634 or emailing giving@umbc.edu.



Meet **Sharon Johnson**, a dedicated member of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program staff for more than 17 years. Now retired, Johnson chose to continue **to support UMBC with a planned gift** that will focus on the program and students she loves dearly. In 2021, Sharon made a legacy gift by listing UMBC as a beneficiary of her life insurance.

*"My hope is that I will be able to help future scholars achieve their academic goals and dreams. I also want to inspire others to consider planned gifts for Meyerhoff and UMBC. One does not need to be wealthy to create a **meaningful legacy**."*

— Sharon Johnson

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

UMBC Bold: Campus Conversations

Alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends are invited to participate in a series of conversations about UMBC's future. Retrievers can find information about in-person or virtual events, or how to submit thoughts online, by visiting president.umbc.edu/bold.

Swoosh—It's Time for Basketball!

Join the UMBC Alumni Association as we cheer on the men's and women's basketball teams on February 4 (WBB vs. Maine) and February 11 (MBB vs. Bryant) at UMBC's Chesapeake Arena. During these special alumni events, we'll have a pre-game reception and an alumni fan section in the arena. For more information and to check out other alumni activities, visit alumni.umbc.edu.



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