

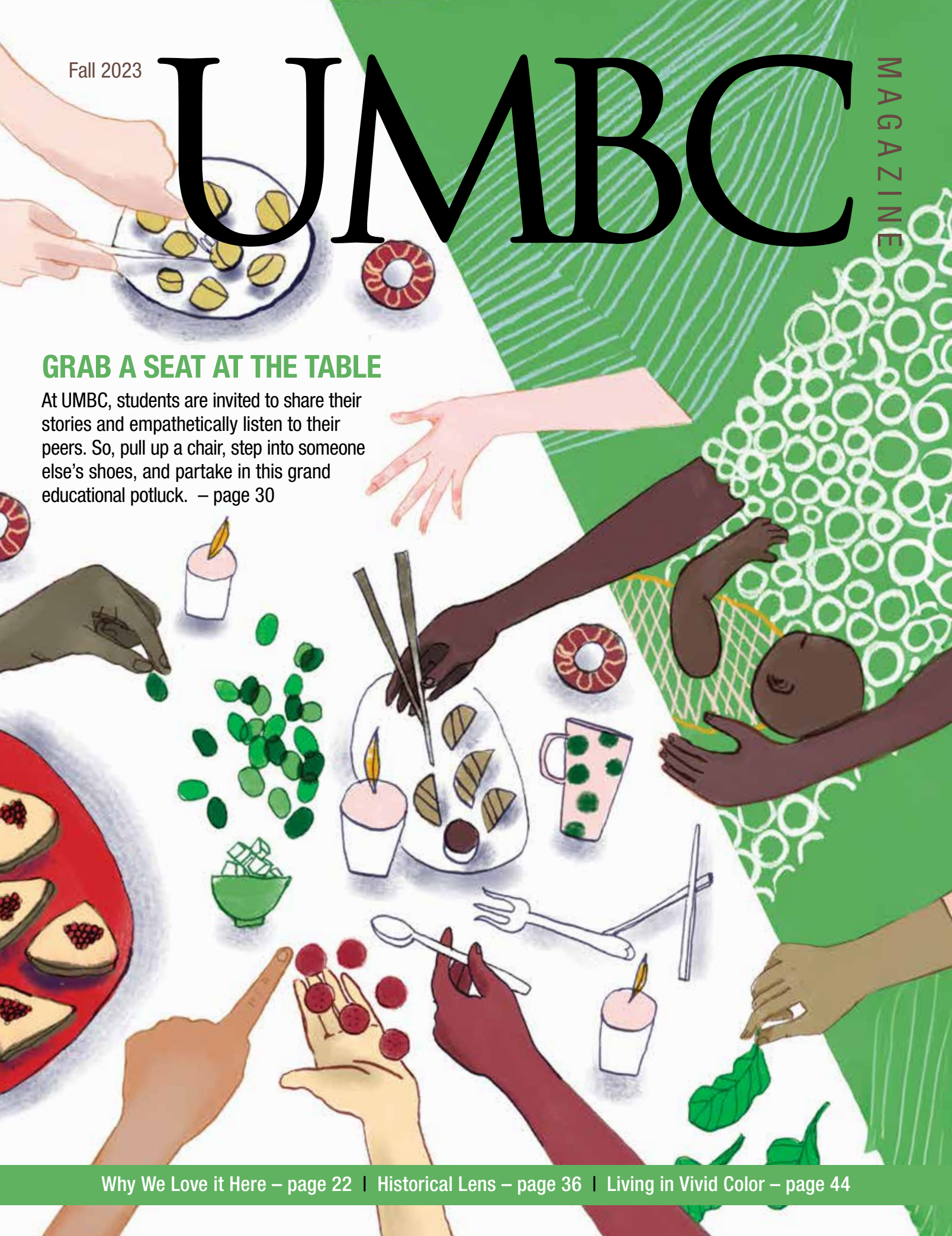
Fall 2023

UMBC

MAGAZINE

GRAB A SEAT AT THE TABLE

At UMBC, students are invited to share their stories and empathetically listen to their peers. So, pull up a chair, step into someone else's shoes, and partake in this grand educational potluck. — page 30





1940-20
Lewis Hine and Father on a Rock Creek Farm
Boy Worked for Young Board, S.C. One Winter July 1.



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Historical Lens

UMBC's Special Collections houses the archive of over 5,400 Lewis Hine photographs that continue to inform our collective understanding of child labor.

*By Rabne Alexander, M.F.A. '21,
Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque, and Beth Saunders*

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Grab a Seat at the Table

These days, it’s tempting to grow numb to the polarization of society and the breakdown in public discourse and to retreat into our silos of solidarity. But the liberal arts could offer us an antidote—through encouraging empathy.

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“As I’ve progressed as a scientist, I’ve learned how much imagination it takes to be a researcher,” says **Kathryn Feller, Ph.D. '14**. “And now that I’m a faculty member, I understand how much creativity you need to run an interesting class.”

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



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ON THE COVER

When empathy is on the table, students and colleagues expand their capacity for problem solving. Baltimore-based illustrator Rebecca Bradley re-envisioned this line of thinking as a grand educational potluck.

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

TO YOU



Dear Retrievers,

This semester, Maryland Delegate **Mark Chang '99**, psychology, stopped by campus for a panel discussion with a roomful of political science students and their professors thanks to a Constitution Day program sponsored by UMBC's Center for Social Science Scholarship.

Full disclosure, I met Mark nearly 25 years ago when I was a reporter at the old *Maryland Gazette* newspaper and he, freshly graduated from UMBC, was already throwing his heart and every

spare hour to the citizens of Glen Burnie as a community volunteer.

What a feeling it was to come full circle as Mark spoke with a room of students who, in a year or two, hope to be making a difference in their own communities. He inspired these future doers, I could tell, as they asked question after question about political life. But more importantly, he invited them deeply into some of his personal reasons for service—the realities of life as a kid raised by a widowed father, of growing up around cruel displays of racism—and into a moment of shared empathy.

I've been thinking about empathy a lot lately, largely because my colleague **Randianne Leyshon '09** and I have been having conversations for about a year now about the intrinsic value of higher education. At the end of the day, as you'll read in her marvelous story, "Grab a Seat at the Table," on page 30, the decision to put yourself in someone else's shoes is a personal one. But at UMBC, it also feels like part of the mission, something we can all learn from and take into the world if we open our hearts and minds to other people's experiences.

As I listened to our students asking Mark about his life and career, it was exciting to think about the many ways they might take what they learn at UMBC into their lives beyond. I came away thankful for Mark's vulnerability and inspired by the power of empathy to prompt positive change.

And I could feel our mission at work.

—Jenny O'Grady
Editor, UMBC Magazine

WEB FEATURES

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



Music educator **James Dorsey '05** helps others find the right note



Homecoming highlights: Retrievers love playing in the rain



Slice of Life: Finding your people at Involvement Fest

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OFFICE HOURS



Each week, UMBC President Valerie Sheares Ashby meets with students to chat about their lives and experiences at UMBC. Today, she's speaking with Okechukwu Tabugbo '25, computer engineering, president of UMBC's Black Men's Society, a group that provides mentorship, skills training, and community to students while trying to eliminate negative narratives and stigma around what it means to be a Black man in America.

Okechukwu Tabugbo: I found out about UMBC's Black Men's Society when I was in my first year. I knew **Marvin Onwukwe**, the club secretary at the time. He was always walking around campus smiling, and I would ask him, "Why are you smiling so much, Marvin?" He would say, "It's because I have my life together. I have everything going for me. So what reason do I have to frown?" I would say, "Why do you have everything going for you?" He said, "Because I'm on top of my work. I can help you out, too. You should come to Black Men's Society so that we can all be on top of our work."

President Sheares Ashby: Oh, that is so good.

Tabugbo: But, in all honesty, I did not go to the first one. Then **Amery Thompson**...the current advisor, told me that I should come out, and I have to be honest, I did not go at that time

either. [Laughs.] Then, finally, our current vice president, **Israel Funmilayo**...invited me, and he said, "It's about financial literacy...I just need you to come out." I looked at my bank account, and I said, "Okay."

After getting there, I sat down. Amery was giving the introduction on financial literacy and telling us everything that we need to know. It honestly just made me feel at home and appreciated, the fact that someone took the time out of their day to teach me something that I constantly left on the back burner. I took that for what the club is. I take it especially as a safe space for Black men on campus—to make them feel appreciated, to give them the time they need to grow in a world that rushes them so often. I appreciate the overall aspect of giving Black people on campus a space for professional development that they may not have had before and giving us a space to talk about issues surrounding the community. The Society allows everyone, despite their views, to be understood and to have time to understand others.

Sheares Ashby: That is amazing. And what is so interesting to me is the mentorship of the more senior students to the younger students because I see it all the time. I see the senior students saying, "Hey, come on over here. This is where we are. This is what we're doing. This is how we can support you." They're really living out the mentorship in ways that are so

important. And it is so wonderful to see the younger students come in and then become those mentors to other people. I can see that growth even in a year.

Tabugbo: Exactly. And on that note of mentorship, that's why we wanted to start moving toward outreach programs, especially to local high schools and middle schools. This effort is spearheaded by our secretary, **Daniel Bajulaiye**. If we can get to these students early and make them know that they're appreciated, make them know that they can be heard, that will be important in fostering a good relationship, especially as they come into UMBC. Just letting people know that you're there for them is so important because a lot of people, especially on this campus, don't know their potential.

Sheares Ashby: I one hundred percent agree. One of the things I'm really excited about for UMBC is the work that we continue to do in Baltimore. We're right here, and we know that there are a lot of Black men, young men, in Baltimore who would benefit. I don't think too many Black men in Baltimore walk around feeling appreciated.

Tabugbo: Even when I did get the role [as president of Black Men's Society], I still had imposter syndrome. I didn't truly feel I belonged until actually stepping into the shoes and having to take over. Talking to my brother all summer, the amount of encouragement he had to give me to say just, "You can do this. You are here for a reason." Hearing it from Amery, hearing it from Israel, it took a lot to be able to have the confidence to come and do this again and again every day.

Sheares Ashby: Mentorship has always been important. Sometimes it just takes somebody to look at you and tell you, "I see you, and I think you're pretty special," or, "I see this gift or talent that you have," and it can change somebody's life just like that. I don't know anybody who doesn't need encouragement.

Okechukwu Tabugbo chats with President Sheares Ashby on the seventh floor of the Albin O. Kuhn Library.

DAWG'S EYE VIEW



HOOP DREAMS

Is NBA superstar Stephen Curry interested in joining the Retriever squad? While that remains to be seen, Curry—who visited UMBC in August through a partnership with Under Armour—showcased how he prepares for games and then hosted a three-point competition and a skills challenge.



CAPTURE THE FLAG

This summer, **Zachary Amoss '24**, **Kevin Chen '23**, and **Leela SaiNadh Gade, M.P.S. '24**, competed in an international “capture the flag”-style cybersecurity competition in Japan, with Chen taking home a victory—and all three bringing back a greater range of expertise. The trio took the trip with Vice President for Research and Creative Achievement **Karl Steiner**.



WHO'S A GOOD BOY?

True Grit, best campus mascot and overall good pup, got some love from Wholesome Memes on X, formerly known as Twitter. Now who wants to play catch?



TEACHER'S PET

The student became the teacher this summer when **Laila Shishineh**, director of Academic Engagement and Transition Programs, took her high school AP biology teacher for a tour around campus. It was a return home for **Robert Hartswick**, who graduated from UMBC in 1973 and then dedicated his career to teaching in Montgomery County. And no visit to campus would be complete without the obligatory stop at True Grit!





FIND OUT FRIDAYS

We may be partial, but University Communications and Marketing's social media intern **Allison John** '25, psychology, has added a new dimension to our social channels this semester. Allison has been taking her Retriever audience on "Find out Friday" tours of gems near campus. Recent finds include waffles at the Catonsville Farmers Market, remote work at OCA Mocha in Arbutus, and study cubes on the second floor of the Interdisciplinary Life Sciences Building. Keep sharing your finds with us, Allison!



DOGGY PLAYDATE

Tucker Moore, Maryland's first dog, stopped by campus to say hi to all the Retrievers during the first week of the semester. Officer Chip and our student Grit Guides* gave Tucker a VIP tour that included lots of treats and belly rubs.

*Grit Guides do not normally give treats and belly rubs on campus tours. We are sorry to disappoint.



MEET THE FAMILY

Nate Dissmeyer '07 never dreamt that he'd meet his wife through UMBC's Greek life and then one day bring their kids to Homecoming together. Joined by Emmett, left, and Ethan, right, Nate—a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors—and **Sena Dissmeyer** '08 had a blast on a rainy Saturday Homecoming.



TEAMS ON THE TOWN

Retriever women's and men's soccer teams set up shop at a recent Frederick Road Friday, a free event put on by Music City, Maryland (aka Catonsville). Fresh from practice, the soccer teams took the time to chat with local kids and hand out freebies. Their biggest fan, President **Valerie Sheares Ashby**, surprised them with a visit!



WHAT'S YOUR VIEW?



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

THE NEWS

Your Story Belongs Here



Joining a new community can be tough sometimes, especially post-pandemic. And with new Retrievers coming from every background imaginable, it's important to make sure everyone feels welcome when they get here.

That's where "Your Story Belongs Here" comes in. Now in its second year, this video storytelling collaboration between Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion, and Belong (i3b) and the Department of Theatre brings students together to learn how to share—and celebrate—their own stories of belonging.

"I think it's pretty common to enter college and be worried that you're not going to find your people. It's very different from high school," said **Adam Bayoumi**, a public health major, who spoke about the worries he faced about keeping up with school after his father passed away. "I personally thought the transition would kind of knock me out...and it wasn't easy, and it wasn't quick, but I did find my people eventually."

The resulting film, which was shown at Welcome Week to incoming students, showcases the experiences of 10 students from a variety of backgrounds. Some explore identity or overcoming imposter syndrome. Others speak from the perspectives of adult learners reentering college or international

students settling into a new culture. Some felt comfortable in front of a camera while others had to overcome that fear over time. Thankfully, in this second iteration of the project, students took advantage of a four-week workshop-style internship to perfect their performances with help from their cohort and guidance from faculty and staff co-creators.

"We got to have much, much more time with students this year to develop their storylines and infuse some social justice education around identity...storytelling and monologuing, all that good stuff," said **Ciara Christian**, acting associate director of i3b, and a co-founder of the project. "We also had a really cool opportunity to take students to see some live theatre performances...there was a storytelling event in Washington, D.C., that we took the students to, to help inspire them, and it was a beautiful process."

Project co-founder **Eve Muson**, associate professor of theatre, called the workshop experiences "magical." She also brought in alumna **Kiirstn Pagan '11** to film and edit the work.

"Because we had more time, the stories were more complex and students were really talking honestly about the identity that they bring with them when they come to UMBC—their

doubts, their fears, their trepidations, all of that," said Muson. "And then there's the moment when they discover themselves at UMBC. So, that's the shape of every story."

When **Jaya Marshall**, a transfer student focusing on cinematic arts, first arrived at UMBC, she, too, worried she wouldn't fit in, that she might be the lone theatre person in a sea of STEM students—something she realizes now was a misperception. But seeing the inaugural "Your Story Belongs Here" video at her own Welcome Week in 2022 helped change her mind—and also inspired her to take part in the project the following summer.

"When I saw that video I was like, oh, thank you," said Marshall, who quickly found several clubs to join after arriving at UMBC. "Thank God, I am not the only one. I hope people who are arts and humanities will see that and be like, okay, I'm not alone."

Public health major **Mashaal Awan** chose to share her story of going to UMBC's STRiVE leadership retreat, which she says had "a huge impact on me in terms of realizing my values" and also helped her make friends she now considers her "second family." In her video, Awan recalled the first evening of STRiVE, walking outside with friends beneath a beautiful night sky.

"I remember feeling a sense of freedom I had been craving my whole life with these people I instantly felt such a strong connection with," she recalled in the video.

Bayoumi hopes that the vulnerability students show through their storytelling helps incoming students feel more comfortable and welcome at UMBC.

"Fast forward to the end of the school year, and I had done stuff that I never thought I would have achieved in college," he said. "So to me at 17 years old, I would just like to say, 'Hang in there. Life dealt you some hard cards, and it's going to be okay.'"

—Jenny O'Grady

Students from the Your Story Belongs Here project share a moment during their internship. Photo courtesy of Eve Muson.

Welcoming New Campus Leaders



Renique T. Kersh might not have been able to spend her first few days physically on campus, but the new vice president for Student Affairs wanted her students and colleagues to know they were on her mind. So, in late August, as she juggled dropping her sons off at school and navigating a move from Boston, Kersh sent along photos as a travel diary on social media so that the UMBC community could take this journey with her.

“To say it’s been a blur is an understatement, but as I shared with my team, I am all in,” said Kersh, previously the vice president for student affairs at Simmons University in Boston, Massachusetts.

It was a return home for Kersh, who began her career at UMBC two decades ago as a community director in Residential Life. Kersh cherished that time and she reflected on the experience saying, “I truly believe that this is a very special place.”

Of Kersh’s appointment as vice president, UMBC President **Valerie Sheares Ashby** says, “She will bring to UMBC deep and broad expertise in student affairs and student development as well as exceptional leadership capacities and a richness of experience in higher education that spans student engagement and academic affairs.”

To connect even more closely with the UMBC community, Kersh hosts “Coffee Chats” every Wednesday where individuals can sign up for a 30-minute one-on-one conversation with the vice president.



“I’m here to do serious work. I’m here to do important work, work that can never be done in a silo but requires the energy, expertise, and insight of everyone in this room,” she said while addressing the crowd at UMBC’s 2023 Fall Opening Meeting.

In mid-August, **David P. Dauwalder** joined UMBC as the interim provost. Throughout his career, he has served as provost at several institutions, both public and private, including Central Connecticut State University; Woodbury University; University of New Haven; California State University, Stanislaus; and Central Washington University.

“I’ve come here to help this institution continue to move forward and to prepare for the long-term leader that you’re going to hire,” says Dauwalder.

Although he’s here temporarily, the wealth of experience Dauwalder brings to the position will benefit the community in regards to his anticipated work with operational assessments, enrollment planning, and more.

“All of this I look at as being in the context of this university becoming a 21st century model of an R1 and student-success-centered university,” says Dauwalder.

In addition to new leadership under **Tanyka M. Barber**, vice president for institutional equity and chief diversity officer, the recently-created Division of Institutional Equity now includes the renamed Office of Equity and Civil Rights. Barber says, “This new name unequivocally reflects the university’s



commitment to ensuring civil rights protections for everyone within our UMBC community.”

Barber plans to focus on inclusive excellence and the use of restorative practices to help the Division for Institutional Equity succeed.

“This work is personal for me. I wanted to work for an institution that was genuinely committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and belonging,” says Barber.

— Kait McCaffrey

From left to right: Renique T. Kersh, David P. Dauwalder, and Tanyka M. Barber.

“I’m here to do important work, work that can never be done in a silo but requires the energy, expertise, and insight of everyone in this room.”

— Renique Kersh

THE NEWS

In Brief

Success Is Never Final

In September 2023, the UMBC Academic Success Center (ASC) gained a Learning Center of Excellence designation from the International College Learning Center Association (ICLCA). There are only six other institutions in the world with an active designation of excellence from the ICLCA, shares **Amanda Knapp**, associate vice provost and assistant dean for undergraduate academic affairs.

“It’s remarkable what has been achieved since establishing our one-stop-shop learning center model in 2019,” says Knapp. “We can now say with full evidence that our ASC is among the best in the world!”

It was no small feat. ASC staff—in addition to their role providing centralized support services to all undergraduate students at UMBC—completed a rigorous application and peer review process.

The Learning Center of Excellence designation came at the same time that ASC’s Tutoring Program met the College Reading and Learning Association’s rigorous standards and successfully completed the International Tutor Training Program Certification peer review process. SI PASS—ASC’s peer-assisted study sessions—gained programmatic accreditation through the International Center for Supplemental Instruction.

In spring 2024, the ASC will have a grand opening of the newly renovated, expanded, and highly visible first-floor location in the Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery.

Serious About Our Value

UMBC continues to show its strengths in undergraduate research, innovation, value, teaching programs, and several other areas highlighted in the 2023–24 *U.S. News & World Report Best Colleges* undergraduate rankings. This year, the university moved up in the national rankings in numerous categories, showcasing UMBC’s growth in several key areas.

For the second consecutive year, UMBC has moved up several slots on the list of Best National Universities (tied at #133). UMBC also climbed 38 slots in the category of Best Value Schools, coming in at #69 nationally.

The university remains a leader in undergraduate teaching programs, ranking #12 nationally. UMBC also maintains its longstanding position as one of the nation’s most innovative universities, ranking #15 this year. Since receiving a Research 1 Carnegie designation in 2022, UMBC has advanced nearly 20 slots in the undergraduate research and creative projects rankings, now nationally ranked at #27. Those research efforts culminated in UMBC students receiving prestigious Goldwater and Gates Cambridge scholarship awards within the last year.

Food for Thought

Retriever Essentials, represented by student volunteers **Nhi Nguyen** ’25, biochemistry and bioinformatics, and **Ben Bhattarai** ’23, biology and psychology, is a second-place finalist in the 2023 Wilbur-Ellis Innovation Award. Announced at the end of September, the honorable mention award—given to only four schools—recognizes the student teams with the most innovative strategies for providing food for a growing world population.

Nguyen and Bhattarai’s proposal aimed to address the water scarcity in agriculture, which affects the ability to feed a growing world population sustainably. Their project proposed the use of halophytic (salt-tolerant) algae to desalinate saltwater in order to increase freshwater availability to enhance agricultural yields and to create highly nutritious food products. Both hope to continue their research into ways to eliminate food insecurity.

The \$5,000 award for second place will be used to help buy food for the Retriever Essentials pantry and help kick-start research on the algae, says **Ariel Barbosa**, program coordinator and a master’s student in community leadership.

Bhattarai shares, “It is an exciting feeling to know that our project is being recognized for its potential in revolutionizing agriculture and in solving food insecurity. This experience also motivates us to continue our research in innovative ways. Volunteering with Retriever Essentials has been a great learning experience, to see the impact of food insecurity on campus and how motivated teamwork and collaboration can make a difference in the community.”

Can’t Rain on Our Parade

Well, actually, it did rain quite a bit on Homecoming Saturday, but it didn’t dampen the community’s spirit. Alumni, students, families, and friends came out to try their chops at the Retriever Dawg Chase 5K and Fun Run and some stayed late into the night, partying at the brand new Greek Life Alumni and Friends event.

The Alumni and Friends tent served as a central gathering spot, serving up treats as well as libations by alumni-owned business Suspended Brewing Company. The carnival attracted crowds for the unlimited rides and many fun games. Folks gathered at GRIT-X to hear faculty and alumni experts share their compelling creative research.

And of course the Puppy Parade brought everyone together. “This event has become a highlight of Homecoming Saturday,” says **Candace Martinez-Doane**, the assistant director of student engagement and organizer of the parade. “The participants are alums, students bringing their family pets, and community members who all look forward to coming together and participating in a very cute event.”

Across: At Homecoming 2023, Retrievers bonded with friends and family at the carnival, the Puppy Parade, affinity groups reunions, a Lego building challenge, and other engaging events all weekend. All photos by Jill Fannon, M.F.A. ’11.



AT PLAY

Experiment of Note



Before you let your imagination run wild, we're going to go ahead and temper whatever expectations you may have upon hearing the phrase "biology band." Nobody is banging on a centrifuge in lieu of drums. Test tubes aren't lined up as a makeshift xylophone. The final rock flourish is not a shattering of beakers. In fact, when the band members of Fever Dream get together, they leave biology in the lab and concentrate on what matters—the music.

"We are incredibly lucky to be able to do important research on the topics that we are interested in while at the same time being able to share our knowledge through teaching and mentoring students," says **Jeff Leips**, professor of biology. "But our department also definitely embodies the motto of 'work hard, play hard.'"

"I've been involved with music my whole life and was actively looking for opportunities just like this, so it came at a perfect time," said **Michelle Moyer**, M.S. '22, and a current biology doctoral candidate. "I'm blown away by how much the idea has developed into a true passion project for all of us."

The concept of a departmental band started simply enough. In his capacity as chair of the biology department "Fun Committee," Leips asked around at his lab to see if anyone played an instrument and would be willing to play during their end-of-year departmental party. Leips

joined the UMBC community in 2001 and this annual event has become one of his favorite traditions. The same year that Leips came to UMBC, he bought his first guitar.

Over the years, Leips has continued to gather a new musical cohort every few semesters with minimal practices and a one-time-only performance. While the revolving door of students each year allowed for new and exciting instruments to add to their sound, retention and growth was an issue.

Last spring, Leips put out a call to see who would be interested in standing up a more permanent band, and soon his guitar and ukulele were joined by vocals, percussion, keys, and more.

"I know Dr. Leips has previously labeled me as lead guitar, but I feel that might overpromise on my skill set! But it's been a lot of fun," says **Ryan Bacon** '23, biology doctoral candidate, of his involvement.

While the group may have come together as a hodgepodge, their dedication was clear from the outset. "Anthony said he was just learning guitar, so I suggested that he learn bass. He borrowed the bass from our drummer and started playing and actually got pretty good, pretty fast," said Leips.

In addition to jumping in feet first to learn how to actually play the instruments, the

members of Fever Dream have also put in the time—upping their practice schedule to two nights a week, three hours per session—to make their ultimate goal of playing a show a reality.

The group works together to choose songs they think will speak to their skillset, with classics like "Piano Man" (with the added bonus of highlighting Rosenthal's harmonica skills) and hits from Tom Petty and The Doors. But the students also become the teachers, introducing Leips to music he's never heard of from bands like alt-J. The band is looking forward to showcasing their sound at a few Biology Department gatherings this semester and they're kicking around the idea of potentially branching out to local venues.

And to answer your burning question—why the name Fever Dream? It's both a bittersweet tribute to a dedicated fan and an explanation of their musical selections, which are "all over the place." When Leips first got his PA system, his dog Chiku would stand listening at the door. "If I made a mistake, she would look at me like she knew," muses Leips.

After sharing a photo of Chiku visibly dreaming in front of the PA system, Leips' pup became the band's unofficial mascot. And when she sadly died, the group decided to make it permanent, inking her on their band shirts and settling into their official name.

Ultimately, the group is just glad to have found each other and have an outlet for their passion.

"When Jeff invited me to join a low-stakes, fun-oriented band, it seemed like a great idea," said **Steve Caruso** '94, Ph.D. '02, who studies phage biology. "I've learned that while I really like playing the drums, I love playing with other people. Making music with people is just a wonderful kind of thing that people need to do to understand."

—Kait McCaffrey

Band members (l-r): Biochemistry doctoral student Winny Sun on keyboards and contributing vocals; Jeff Leips; Steve Caruso '94, Ph.D. '02, on drums; Michelle Moyer, M.S. '22, on vocals and percussion; and Ryan Bacon '23, on lead guitar. Not pictured, Anthony Rosenthal '20 on bass and harmonica.

The Long Shot



Cleopatra Borel had no athletic aspirations when she arrived in Baltimore from Trinidad and Tobago in 1997. She enrolled at what was then Coppin State College on the advice of her high school math teacher, a Coppin alum. Powerfully built and an eager learner, Borel quickly developed in the throwing events and broke Coppin's shot put record early in her tenure there.

After the Eagles' coach left the program, UMBC offered Borel an athletic scholarship and she made the move to Hilltop Circle.

Borel '02, interdisciplinary studies, flourished both academically and athletically at UMBC. She earned All-America honors (top eight) in the shot put both indoors and outdoors in the 2000–01 season. However, she would have only one more crack at the NAAs, with one year of indoor track and field eligibility remaining.

On March 9, 2002, Cleo, as she was known at UMBC, took to the shot put circle at the University of Arkansas. On her next-to-last throw, she uncorked a personal best of 17.50 meters (57'5"), putting her in first place. When the last shot had landed, the black-and-gold clad Retriever had outdistanced the field and captured UMBC's first Division I national title.

In her first year of eligibility (2006–07), the UMBC Athletic Hall of Fame Committee tabbed Borel for induction. However, some events on her calendar kept getting in the way

of her returning to campus—namely the 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016 Olympics. At 37 years old, she produced her best finish, placing seventh at the 2016 Rio Games. Her final Olympic moment occurred as she served as Trinidad and Tobago's flag bearer at the closing ceremonies.

Borel returned to the United States in January 2022 to coach the throwers at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. And, in October 2023, she finally made the journey back to Hilltop Circle to be inducted into the UMBC Athletics Hall of Fame.

We asked Borel to reflect on her incredible journey.

Q: You arrived at UMBC under unusual circumstances and remain the only Retriever to win an individual NCAA Championship. Reflecting on your time here, what did it mean for you to be a Retriever and how did your UMBC experience assist you in all of your endeavors?

Borel: I walked away from a very good situation at Coppin State College, not knowing how things would evolve at UMBC. However, I have to say, taking a chance on UMBC is still among the top three best decisions I have made thus far. My UMBC student-athlete experience prepared me for life as an Olympic athlete, essentially taking on the world.

I believe I was prepared to navigate life on the professional track and field circuit because of [UMBC Athletics Director] Dr. **Charles Brown's** sports management class and because my event Coach **Brian King** and track and field Head Coach **David Bobb** '97 taught me to work hard, be confident, and play to my strengths.

UMBC's academic accomplishments, artistic expressions, community outreach initiatives, and of course athletic triumphs reflect the unwavering commitment we all share in making our school a truly exceptional place. A special place where a young person can take a chance and, through hard work and dedication, rise to the top of their field.

Q: What did it mean for you to represent Trinidad and Tobago in international competitions, including four Olympic Games?

Borel: Trinidad and Tobago is a small, developing nation in the Caribbean with a population of less than 1.4 million individuals on two islands. As a result, I felt like one of a few sporting ambassadors representing my country. I am proud to have been responsible for the playing of my national anthem at stadiums across the globe.

Q: What prompted you to develop the Cleopatra Borel Foundation and what is its mission?

Borel: The mission of the Cleopatra Borel Foundation is to facilitate the development of youth through sport and education. We believe this can be accomplished at the grassroots level in Trinidad and Tobago by assisting with coaches' education, gear, and equipment distribution.

Q: Anything else you would like to share with the UMBC community?

Borel: It was indeed an honor to represent you at the NAAs and on a global level. I am a proud Retriever, excited to see how UMBC will continue to positively influence Maryland and the world.

— Steve Levy '85

Above: Borel during the 2001–02 track and field season. (Photo courtesy of UMBC Athletics)

Below: Borel on campus for the 2023 UMBC Athletics Hall of Fame. (Max Franz/UMBC)



AT PLAY

The Man Behind the Camera

When LeBron James comes calling, you answer the phone. **Philip Knowlton** '03, visual arts, knows this better than most.

The NBA legend doesn't have the UMBC alum in his contacts because Knowlton is great at one-on-one (probably). Instead, Knowlton has collaborated with James' media company Uninterrupted on several documentaries as a director, editor, producer, and director of photography. Uninterrupted was founded to empower athletes to tell their stories in their own words. This time, Knowlton was called upon to direct and co-executive produce *Redefined: J.R. Smith*, a four-part Prime Video documentary series released in April 2023 that follows J.R. Smith, a retired two-time NBA champion, as he navigates a new challenge—college.

"This is the story of him post-NBA as he decides to go to college at North Carolina A&T [State University] to pursue a degree but also to try out for the Aggies golf team," explains Knowlton.

"It was just a really inspiring project to be a part of," says Knowlton, who made his first sports documentary about UMBC track and field when he was a student-athlete on the team.

Having played (and won championships) with James on both the Cleveland Cavaliers and Los Angeles Lakers, Smith became good friends with James. So, when Smith made the decision to pack his book bag, head to college, and try out for the golf team, his team connected with Uninterrupted about a possible film project.

"Of course they were," says Knowlton, who received the call from Uninterrupted soon after. "They asked me if I'd be interested in flying to Greensboro to film a sizzle." In the film world, a sizzle is like a demo—a short trailer used to pitch the story to networks.

Knowlton jumped at the opportunity to once again work with Uninterrupted.

"I think what they really like about me is that I'm able to direct and shoot," says Knowlton. "It keeps the team smaller and more intimate. So, you're able to be in places that a big crew may not be able to get into. Or athletes may not want a whole big team following them around."

Knowlton worked with the team at Uninterrupted to put together a treatment and map out the story they wanted to tell. Then, he hopped on a plane to Greensboro and filmed the sizzle.

"Next, we took meetings with everyone like HBO Max, ESPN+, Amazon—all of them," explains Knowlton. "There was interest from quite a few networks, but it ultimately landed on Prime Video."

By this point, Smith was just about two or three weeks out from starting school. So, Knowlton had to move quickly. "This production, specifically, was really dictated by Smith's golf season and his school year," says Knowlton.

The team made it in time to film the first couple days of school and practice. Then, they returned every month or two for different milestones throughout Smith's first year, like his first tournament and A&T's homecoming celebration.

"It was amazing to see J.R., who could have retired and moved to Miami to hang out by the pool, want to go to college for the first time and push himself," says Knowlton.

Of course, this story starts way before Smith decided to trade basketballs for golf balls. This story starts at a still-burgeoning university in Baltimore County, Maryland.

"I was looking for a school where I could run cross country that also had a good video or digital art program," explains Knowlton, who now owns and operates Opposit, a creative studio he founded in 2018 specializing in original documentary film content. "A lot of schools have one or the other but not both." UMBC gave Knowlton the opportunity to explore both.

"It was kind of a no-brainer," admits Knowlton, who received an athletic scholarship to run on the cross country and track and field teams while pursuing his B.A. in imaging and digital arts. "That program was perfect in that it let me experiment in a lot of different art forms."

Throughout college, Knowlton was still trying to find his passion. He knew he loved visual arts but was unsure where to focus his energy. He enjoyed photography, graphic design, and film. It wasn't until **Vin Grabill's** video art class that it all started to click.

"I taught students that video could be seen as a kind of 'painting in time.' Utilizing video edits as brushstrokes, students created short rhythmic works that brought impact to their source material," explains Grabill, associate professor emeritus in UMBC's Department of Visual Arts. "Phil's exercises exemplified these goals, eventually leading to final projects where narrative content was successfully built around a solid rhythmic structure. I'm very happy to see Phil pushing his work forward 20 years later!"

"Today, when I do Q&As about my films, I like to quote [basketball coach] Jim Valvano, who said, 'Every single day, in every walk of life, ordinary people do extraordinary things,'" says Knowlton. "When I work on documentaries, a lot of the time I am filming everyday people doing amazing things. But J.R.'s story almost feels like the reverse. He's this extraordinary person doing something more ordinary—going to college. To have been a part of J.R.'s journey and help share with the world has been a great experience."

— Bobby Lubaszewski '10

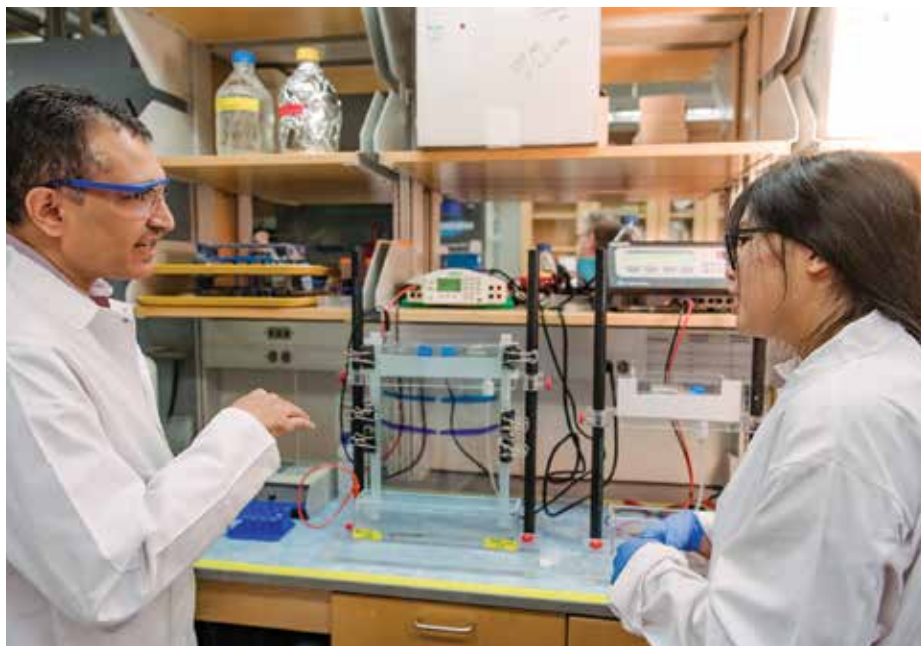
"A lot of the time I am filming everyday people doing amazing things. But J.R.'s story almost feels like the reverse. He's this extraordinary person doing something more ordinary—going to college."

— Philip Knowlton '03



DISCOVERY

Unraveling How Viruses Hijack Our Cells



Viruses must hijack their hosts' cellular machinery to make more viruses, so preventing this hijacking could lead to a host of new treatments for viral diseases. However, much is unknown about how the viruses actually accomplish their takeover. Scientific understanding is especially murky for RNA viruses. These viruses use RNA to store genetic information (unlike animals, which use DNA) and also to code directly for proteins.

With support from an National Science Foundation CAREER Award, **Deepak Koirala**, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry, has been working on figuring out how enteroviruses, a large group of RNA viruses, replicate their RNA genomes. Enteroviruses include viruses that cause polio, the common cold, and many more diseases that affect humans and other animals. Now Koirala has received a five-year, \$1.8 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to solve another part of this puzzle: How do these viruses commandeer proteins in the host cell to produce viral proteins? The cell must build these viral proteins before the virus can replicate.

When a cell makes its own proteins, the cellular mRNA, a type of RNA that carries the instructions for building proteins, interacts with the protein-building machinery via a

special structure at one end called a "cap," Koirala explains. Enteroviral mRNAs lack this cap—and yet they are still perfectly capable of forcing the cell to do their bidding. Koirala is trying to figure out how.

Koirala has been studying unique structures at the ends of viral RNAs for their role in replication, but they may be doing double duty by initiating protein production as well, he believes. Koirala and his team, which includes undergraduate and graduate students, will use a technique called X-ray crystallography to deduce the precise molecular makeup of these special RNA structures.

At the same time, they will run experiments to learn how the structures interact with the cellular machinery. These two lines of investigation complement one another. "If we have the structure, that would allow us to pinpoint the critical nucleotide or amino acid that is important for the interaction," Koirala says. "And then we can mutate that one, to see how that changes the interaction."

By using a range of techniques, the team seeks to determine what the structures look like and how they work in the cell. "It could be a new biological mechanism we've never seen before," Koirala says.

The team already has some early data supporting their goals, Koirala says. A related publication is under review at a top-tier academic journal. Several lab members are authors on the paper—including three undergraduates. "We are really excited about that," Koirala says.

In the course of the team's work, "We are developing tools that facilitate our understanding of these RNA structures," Koirala says. "The tools we develop may be useful not only for the particular system we are working on, but they could be useful in general for many other RNA structures in other fields of research."

In addition, RNA structures found in one species of enterovirus are very similar to those found in other enteroviruses that cause different diseases—even some that infect very different kinds of organisms, Koirala discovered. That opens the door to developing antiviral treatments that are able to target many different viruses.

With the RNA structures in hand, the next step might be to use artificial intelligence to screen for other molecules that bind to the structures, preventing the viruses from taking over the cell and causing illness. Scientists could then take steps to develop new drugs using these molecules.

"Once we understand the structure, and we have a better understanding of the mechanism, we can better design drugs," Koirala says. "But right now we are at the fundamental level of how these things even work."

— Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

Above: Deepak Koirala has been working on one aspect of how RNA viruses take over their host cells. A new grant will allow his research group to expand their work and answer more questions about how these viruses work. Left to right: Deepak Koirala and undergraduate student Megan Nguyen.

Finding One's Face and Building Financially Resilient Spaces



Sonya Squires-Caesar, a doctoral candidate in UMBC's language, literacy, and culture program, has been interviewing communities who use *susus* to save money for big-ticket items like homes, farms, or everyday needs like transportation and bills. *Susu*, a word thought to come linguistically from West African languages, is an informal structure of communal savings where individuals agree to give an equal amount of money to one pool. Members then decide the frequency of when someone receives the entire amount.

"I remember my mother planning her spending around when she would get her payment," says Squires-Caesar, whose family is from Barbados. Squires-Caesar explains that *susus*—or rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs)—can be a way for people to access larger sums of money without the barriers formal banks and finance systems pose to people without high levels of disposable income.

"While there is a significant body of ROSCA research, it tends to focus on groups living in poverty or with minimal or no access to formal

financial instruments," says Squires-Caesar. "My study differs by focusing on middle-class and upper-middle-class immigrants who opt to use this informal, unregulated financial tool in the U.S. alongside mainstream financial services such as banks, credit cards, investments, etc."

Squires-Caesar, the Drescher Center for the Humanities' graduate student research fellow for fall 2023, is interested in studying the evolution of *susus* from the transatlantic slave trade to today. She explains that for centuries people have pooled their resources for individual and communal needs.

Susus are a cultural practice rooted in African indigenous knowledge, a term for how various African cultures orally passed a range of information, customs, and beliefs from generation to generation. "In African indigenous knowledge, the act of learning is thought to be a fully engaged journey to 'find one's face,'" says Squires-Caesar, "which is considered the path to discovering your roots, revealing your spirit, and determining the 'fire in your belly' or core elements that matter most to you."

Squires-Caesar "found her face" when she aligned her research path with her authentic identity. "Western research methods couldn't guide mine. I felt I was trying to fit a square peg into a circle," explains Squires-Caesar. "I found my face when I realized the methodology that my project needed had to model the community I was looking to understand."

Squires-Caesar's approach to understanding financial literacy is less about the stock market and credit and more about what is intangible. She calls it the iceberg effect.

"On top of the iceberg are tangible things like bank accounts and credit cards," explains Squires-Caesar. "You can see, touch, feel, and

measure them, but beneath the iceberg are the processes that may not have official rules and regulations and where the general public may not know they are happening, like *susus*."

During the four years she managed a community college financial literacy program, Squires-Caesar met many students surviving from month to month. Through ethnographic research, she found students were using non-traditional ways to make ends meet, like getting cash advances from bingo halls to pay for bills and groceries. The data also showed that some students were overwhelmed by the idea of saving.

To shift that thinking, she created a micro-savings project for her students to take them through the process of saving—a few cents here, a few dollars there, which grows over time.

These stories about the complexities of *susu* communities have inspired Squires-Caesar, as part of her Drescher Fellowship, to decorate physical masks as three-dimensional representations of financial identity, of "finding face."

"We're happy to support Sonya in her work to shift thinking about financial literacy and to explore ways to help students find their own financial identity," says **Jessica Berman**, professor of English and director of UMBC's Drescher Center for the Humanities. "Her mask project is a great example of how the arts and humanities can come together to raise questions common to us all and address issues like financial literacy that seem abstract but touch our daily lives."

Squires-Caesar sees the legacy of African indigenous knowledge flourish as the children of families that belonged to *susus* growing up now have established careers earning social, cultural, and financial capital.

"I have a teenage niece that was fascinated by my research. We are creating a *susu* with our families and she is the co-leader," says Squires-Caesar. She has the chance to find her face by leading and teaching her family. "Instead of telling young people about it or seeing their parents manage *susus*, they will live it."

"In African indigenous knowledge, the act of learning is thought to be a fully engaged journey to 'find one's face.'"

— Sonya Squires-Caesar

— Catalina Sofia Dansberger-Duque

DISCOVERY

Clearing Up the Impact of the Region's Smoky Skies

Starting this May, a series of wildfires in Eastern Canada sent enormous smoke clouds wafting into the U.S., triggering air quality warnings in cities from the Midwest to the Northeast. For days, orange skies backdropped landscapes clouded by acrid air. People who could hunkered inside with the doors and windows shut. Those who had to go out faced itchy eyes, burning throats, and worse.

As a resident of the Baltimore area—which was blanketed with particularly bad smoke in both early and late June—UMBC Professor **Chris Hennigan** looked at the haze with dismay. But as an environmental engineer who studies air pollution, he had an additional thought: “We were looking at the air quality forecasts, and we thought ‘We have to gather data,’” he says.

The public found many colorful words to describe the summer's unwanted smoke: brutal, eerie, dystopian.

Hennigan and his team have been working to put numbers to the adjectives. On the roof of the engineering building, the researchers installed a squat, white sensor that monitors the levels of tiny particles in the air, particularly those measuring 2.5 micrometers in diameter or less—smaller than most bacteria. Called $PM_{2.5}$, these particles are released in large numbers during fires. They are dangerous to human health because they can work their way into the deepest parts of the lungs and even enter the bloodstream.

The sensor showed huge spikes in $PM_{2.5}$ when the smoke blew through, on some days reaching levels considered unhealthy for anyone to breathe.

The researchers also set up equipment to filter particles out of the air. After 24 hours, they collected the filters, which they are storing, neatly labeled, in a refrigerator in Hennigan's lab.

The filtered samples will advance at least two ongoing investigations, Hennigan says. In one avenue of inquiry, **Joel Tyson**, Ph.D. '23, biochemical engineering, is studying how tiny particles can harm human lung cells. Before this year's smoky summer, Tyson had been studying the toxic effects of particulate matter normally

found in the Baltimore air. With the new smoke samples, he will start to investigate whether wildfire smoke particles, per unit, are more toxic than regular urban particulate matter, which comes from sources such as cars and power plants. Some studies have indicated that wildfire particulate matter is indeed more toxic, but more research is needed before any definitive conclusions can be reached.

In another line of research, Hennigan is also studying how particles in the air, including from smoke, may affect the climate. Undergraduate chemical engineering students **Danielle Larios** '25 and **Luis Rodriguez** '25 are assisting in the investigations.

The researchers study how particles of brown-colored carbon-containing material absorb light. Burning vegetation sends large amounts of this brown carbon into the atmosphere. It's possible that the particles are trapping significant heat from the sun, accelerating the pace of planetary warming. Such effects are not normally included in global climate models, and better understanding of the process could improve humanity's ability to predict, and manage, the coming years of climate upheaval.

Climate change and wildfires are intimately linked. This summer was not only smoky, but also scorching. July marked the hottest month ever recorded, and scientists predict that as the world continues to warm, wildfires will continue to increase in quantity and intensity. “Smokeageddon,” as headlines put it, may become the new normal.

Hennigan says recent research illuminates how much wildfire smoke has contributed to air pollution trends. He points to a paper published in September in the scientific journal *Nature* that estimated that since 2016, wildfire smoke in the contiguous United States has undone around 25% of the progress in air quality made between 2000 and 2016.

For the researchers in Hennigan's lab, those effects have been felt personally.

Rodriguez recalled how in June he had to go out to buy a fresh pack of N95 masks. “The smoke was just awful,” he says. Larios says she felt a burning at the back of her throat in just 15 minutes walking to her car.

For Tyson, the effects of the smoke were so bad that at one point he struggled to breathe and had to visit the doctor. The episode, he says, drove home the importance of his toxicology research.

All three note both the complexity of the systems they are studying and the importance of discovering new knowledge that might help society handle the environmental challenges it faces.

“Our work can have real-world impact, and that's exciting,” says Larios.

— Catherine Meyers

*Below: From left to right: Luis Rodriguez '25, Danielle Larios '25, and Chris Hennigan discuss their research in the lab. .
Across: Baltimore's Inner Harbor shrouded with smoke this past summer.*





IMPACT

Uplifting Up-and-Coming Economists



As a student **Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman** took notice of something missing in the field of economics—people who looked like her.

Since then, this *Forbes* 30 under 30 star in Boston has worked to shed light on the harrowing diversity issues in economics while carving out a space for economists of color, specifically Black women, to thrive. But she's not carrying on this work in a vacuum. Inspired by and connected with other aspiring economists at UMBC through Sloan UMBC, Opoku-Agyeman '19, mathematics, and others leveraged the resources in that scholars program to uplift underrepresented voices in economics—including their own.

In 2017, UMBC received a \$1.3 million grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation in an effort to diversify the field of economics by creating interventions from the undergraduate level through the post-baccalaureate (post-bac) level. The program was originally intended to conclude in five years but has since been extended to support UMBC students in post-bac programs through 2025.

Program scholar **Yetunde Oshagbemi** '23, mathematics, benefited from the material and financial resources from Sloan, but also credits the personal connections she developed. In 2022, Oshagbemi participated in an economics conference organized by The Sadie Collective—a nonprofit co-founded by Opoku-Agyeman that addresses the pipeline and pathway problem for Black women in economics and related fields—and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

"There are many things I wouldn't have known without a program like Sloan," says Oshagbemi, now a first-year research assistant at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. "It introduced me to other students who were on a similar path and people like Anna who can possibly guide me through my research experience."

"It's important to do this work at an early stage—it's often a path that students haven't thought about when they enter college," says **David Mitch**, principal investigator of the Sloan program.

Mitch, department chair and professor of economics, explains that when it comes to professions in his field, students often think about careers in finance or the stock market. The program educates students about the academic side of economics careers and provides participants with mentoring, scholarships, research experiences, and financial support in research programs specializing in doctoral preparation. To date the program has placed six students in post-baccalaureate programs—one more than the original goal—with a further 17 students participating in various program activities.

"There's this route that involves graduate work in economics through all sorts of social impact areas such as health, the environment, education, and upward mobility of minority groups," Mitch shares. Much of this work "deals with policy issues that could benefit from somebody with an underrepresented background."

With support from the Sloan program to cover travel, lodging, and conference fees, Oshagbemi developed her research skills with internships at the University of Chicago, Brown University, and Howard University.

Growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, and then emigrating to the U.S. in 2010, keeping in mind the economic potential of her home country helped to influence Oshagbemi's goal of addressing microeconomic issues of gender inequality and wealth disparities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Sloan UMBC, says Oshagbemi, "levels out the playing field for us, teaches us how to apply for opportunities, and what to do to be prepared to enter the field."

Despite growing up with parents working in the field of economics, Sondheim Public Affairs Scholar **Brevin Franklin** '22, economics and mathematics, wasn't familiar with academic economics—teaching and researching—before coming to UMBC.

"The program exposed me to people doing economics research in post-bac programs and those who were in Ph.D. programs," says Franklin, who is now a second-year economics scholar at Harvard University, supported by the Sloan grant. "It gave me a sense of whether I would like doing any of those things in the future."

Myles Ellis '19, mathematics—who was also a post-bac economics scholar at Harvard—says the Sloan program encouraged him to take part in opportunities not initially aware of.

He's now a third-year Ph.D. candidate at Brown University with a major concentration in econometrics. Ellis' research focuses on how mistrust of institutions can shape the financial decision-making of Black households and how that might contribute to the racial wealth gap.

"Seeing people in this space that look like me is really important," Ellis explains. "It's important for this pipeline to be established because we need more Black and brown faces to shed light on what's going on [in the world] through research, especially in this academic space."

Oshagbemi, Franklin, and Ellis all referenced the significance of the mentorship they acquired as Sloan program scholars, pointing to guidance from the program's coordinator, **Ivanna Abreu**.

"We make sure students have what they need," says Abreu. "The program gives students the opportunity to really consider the economics field and to see themselves in it, as opposed to thinking about all of the stereotypes of economics. That's the biggest thing we teach our students."

— *Adriana Fraser*

Myles Ellis and Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman pose at the 2019 UMBC Commencement ceremony. Photo courtesy of Ellis.

Retrievers Behind the Scenes



Meet **Ting Huang** '21, psychology, program coordinator for the McNair Scholars Program in the Office of Academic

Opportunity Programs. Huang, who was previously a McNair Scholar, is now in a position where she gets to support the UMBC community the same way it supported her.

Q: What's one essential thing you'd want another Retriever to know about you?

A: I'm a UMBC McNair alum and my undergraduate field of study was psychology. I'm currently the interim program coordinator for UMBC McNair, and it has been a very meaningful, full-circle moment for me to come back and serve students in the same boat as myself just two years ago.

Q: What's the one thing you'd want someone to know about the support you find at UMBC?

A: Don't hesitate to reach out. It can be daunting to try to find community, particularly on a campus where you may not know which communities are safe or supportive of you. But UMBC has many wonderful scholarly programs and clubs that celebrate different parts of each person's identities. Community is just a step away from you.

Q: Tell us about someone in the community who has inspired you or supported you, and how they did it.

A: So many people in the UMBC community have inspired and supported me, but especially my mentors at UMBC-Shady Grove and my McNair family. Each person I've encountered has dedicated their time to academic excellence and uplifting the voices of those who are traditionally unheard. Their advocacy and passion inspires me to pursue intersectional research and do my best to support my scholars.

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

A: Talking to scholars! It's truly inspiring to listen to my scholars' aspirations as they will be the future leaders of the world.

Making Impact Through Relationships



On the stage of the 35th annual Alumni Awards, awardees and their nominators repeated a shared theme: The freedom and flexibility to grow at UMBC—not alone—but in community.

Presented by the Alumni Association Board of Directors, the event recognizes inspiring alumni in a range of fields, as well as a rising star and an outstanding faculty and staff member.

Rehana Shafi, recipient of the inaugural staff award, emphasized that she was only able to do so much “*with* so many.” Shafi, the retired director of the Sherman Teacher Scholars Program, said: “This work, this way, isn't an individual endeavor....Impact happens inside of relationships.”

Several of the alumni recipients have come back to work at UMBC. Recipient of the Outstanding Engineering and Information Technology alumna award, **Annica Wayman** '99, mechanical engineering, called it her “full circle” moment. Wayman, now associate dean for Shady Grove Affairs in the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, said, “Now that I'm on the ‘inside’ as a faculty member, it's the same as I observed as a student and alumna—UMBC's commitment to inclusive excellence, innovative teaching, and supportive community is authentic and I have the chance to see it every day working with UMBC faculty and staff.”

Josh Michael '10, political science, Ph.D. '22, public policy, found his why at UMBC. “I knew I was planted in the right place,” he said, “a place where I would evolve and grow.... It is here at UMBC where I developed a voice and confidence to lead in public education.” Michael, the awardee for Outstanding Alumnus in Social

and Behavioral Sciences, is dedicated to public service and community engagement.

A former Baltimore City math teacher and now executive director of the Sherman Family Foundation, Michael took the opportunity on the stage to remind the audience, “For as a community, it is how we treat other people's children that demonstrates our collective belief in our future.”

Another teacher was honored for his long commitment to Maryland's children. **James Dorsey** '05, music technology and vocal performance, is in his 19th year as an elementary music teacher. He shared that, “All of our creativity is rooted in big ideas. Ideas that relate to our shared human experience and how we interact in our world.”

Dorsey, who received the award for Outstanding Alumnus in the Visual and Performing Arts, said, “I'm blessed to get to help students express their messages and respond to their cultures through creating. It sets a precedent that the arts are a natural way to respond to the issues of our community, self-expression, coping with change, and social justice.”

Other 2023 Outstanding Alumni awardees include: Humanities—**Aaron Ralby** '05, English and modern languages and linguistics; and, Natural and Mathematical Sciences—**Kay Bidle** '91, biological sciences. The Rising Star award was given to **Asif Majid** '13, interdisciplinary studies, and the Outstanding Faculty award was presented to **E.F. Charles LaBerge**, Ph.D. '03, professor of the practice in computer science and electrical engineering at UMBC.

—Randianne Leysbon '09

Read more about the honorees at alumni.umbc.edu/alumniawards.

From left to right: Kay Bidle, Joshua Michael, James Dorsey, E.F. Charles LaBerge, Asif Majid, Valerie Sheares Ashby, Rehana Shafi, Annica Wayman.

IMPACT

The Right Award for the Right Researcher

Inioluwa Oluseyi has wanted to be a neurosurgeon for as long as she can remember. She didn't anticipate how much fly husbandry would play a role in her reaching her goal. In a fall 2022 genetics class with **Fernando Vonhoff**, "he talked about how his lab works on flies to answer questions related to neurological issues, so that just immediately clicked for me," says Oluseyi, a biological sciences junior.

She talked to Vonhoff, an assistant professor of biological sciences, after class about opportunities. He gave her a tour of the lab the following week, and she started working with his research group soon thereafter. In the fall and spring, Oluseyi gained skills in fly husbandry, dissection, and common testing protocols.

Vonhoff was impressed with her progress, and it was clear that by summer Oluseyi would be ready to take on her own project. Vonhoff suggested she apply for research scholarships, including the new Thomas F. Roth Research Award.

Thomas Roth joined the UMBC faculty in 1972 and helped get the fledgling university off the ground. He was instrumental in forging the culture of collegiality in the biological sciences department that continues today. Roth passed away in 2021, and his sons **Kurt** and **Peter Roth** established the research award in his memory.

Oluseyi is an international student from Nigeria, and she was happy to learn that she was eligible for the Roth award. Many scholarships are limited to U.S. citizens or permanent residents. "I was so excited," she recalls. "Finally, I had this opportunity to apply to."

Oluseyi is the first recipient of the Thomas F. Roth Research Award. She also successfully applied for a UMBC Undergraduate Research Award (URA) for the 2023 – 2024 academic year based on her work in Vonhoff's lab. Her URA proposal builds on her Roth-funded summer research and outlines experiments to study the behavioral responses of flies to pain, including whether experiencing pain changes their preference for ethanol-laced water versus apple juice or if it affects their mobility or feeding and mating patterns.

This summer, she bred the flies needed for her fall experiments. She also supported testing on flies with altered genes, for a project led by Ph.D. student **Claudia Gualtieri**, to learn how those genes are involved in various behaviors. "Ini has always been willing to go the extra mile," Gualtieri says. "She was eager to learn despite challenges, and she did all of this while bringing a contagious smile into the lab," Gualtieri says.

Oluseyi's summer experiences funded by the Roth award "made me push my thinking," she says, and may lead to changes in the project she proposed for her URA.

"I think I want to broaden my horizons," Oluseyi says. "My research proposal was very much behavioral, but now I want to refine it and go deeper into the gene level."

Spending so much time in the lab over the summer also afforded opportunities to enrich her relationships with labmates and think deeply about her future. "I branched out and talked to a lot of new people and learned what they were studying," Oluseyi says. "That helped me to improve my scientific thinking."

Her connection with Vonhoff also shifted. "Now we've talked more and connected in a different way," Oluseyi says. "Before I saw him as my supervisor, but now I see him as a mentor—someone I can come to if I need anything."

Those conversations covered the immediate work in the lab as well as Oluseyi's longer-term goals. Originally, she was planning on medical school. Now that she knows she enjoys research and has discussed her options with Vonhoff, Gualtieri, and others in the lab, the M.D./Ph.D. path toward life as a physician-scientist is appealing.

"Inioluwa is a living example of how access to research opportunities can be a transformative experience for growing young minds," Vonhoff says. "From the beginning, it was obvious that Ini was driven by her intellectual curiosity and passion to make meaningful contributions to our society."

Oluseyi's research has not progressed as quickly as she hoped, mostly due to unexpected flooding in UMBC's biology building last winter, but even the challenges became a learning experience. "My biggest takeaway from this summer is that research doesn't always go as you want it to go," she says. "But even if it changed, I liked what I did. I got to explore other things and learn more about flies in general."

And the experience has paved the way for future work—which will certainly be full of both challenges and successes. "The Roth family's generosity has made it possible for me to pursue my dreams," Oluseyi says.

— Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

When Inioluwa Oluseyi, right, started working in Fernando Vonhoff's biology lab, he suggested she apply for research scholarships, including the new Roth Award, which she ended up receiving. Below, Vonhoff guides Oluseyi through a fruit fly experiment.





Why We Love it **Here**

What gets you up and out the door each morning? And what makes a job more than a job—or even more than a career? For so many who make UMBC their professional home, the value goes way beyond a paycheck.

Case in point: Employees for the 14th consecutive year rated UMBC as one of ModernThink's Great Colleges to Work For in all 10 categories, including shared governance, mission and pride, job satisfaction and support, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

What does that look like in the day-to-day? We talked to some Retrievers about what they love about their work at UMBC.

by Susan Thornton Hobby



Valuing Our Whole Selves

UMBC is a place that considers the whole person, opening up space for both professional growth and work-life balance. From mentoring programs to embracing our individual stories, when we support each other in our work and lives, we all come out stronger.



BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS CAMPUS

They met so many times at Starbucks, they knew each other's orders.

Damian Doyle ('99, computer science, M.S. '16, information systems): tea, Earl Grey, hot. **Charlotte Keniston** (M.F.A. '14, intermedia and digital arts): coffee, iced.

Over their caffeine of choice, the two UMBC staff, who work in wildly divergent disciplines, forged connections through the Professional Staff Senate mentorship program—a staple of campus connectedness for the last decade.

Doyle, who works in information technology and has been a staff member at the university for almost 24 years, has served as a mentor for more than five years. Keniston, who started at the Shriver Center five years ago, anticipated a year of opportunity and transition and wanted a mentor to guide her toward balance between a demanding career, family, and finishing her Ph.D. in language, literacy, and culture.

"It was a perfect fit because Damian saw the big picture of the university and explained the campus overarching structures that I had never understood and was really great at advising me on critical points I was at in my career," Keniston said.

As a mentor to a number of staff over the years, Doyle finds the program rewarding.

"One of the things I loved was getting to know different parts of the university. I get exposed to these different areas of the campus at a deeper level. It confirms for me the kind of driven work that people are doing."

The mentorship program matches staff through a mentee-first pairing system that includes a speed-dating session and goal analysis for a year-long commitment. Keniston said the mentorship was crucial to her path at UMBC.

"I was at the point where I felt like I couldn't ask questions, like, 'Who is this person?'" Keniston said with a laugh. "But being in this mentor/mentee relationship gave me an opportunity to say, 'Help me understand this.'"

Doyle said that hearing Keniston's questions and seeing the campus organization through new eyes helped him know what is working and what needs improvement at UMBC. "It's very educational for me, having to think through what is the right answer, what is the honest answer."

After a year of meeting about once a month, Doyle has a new mentee, and Keniston has now become a mentor. But they'll be keeping in touch. Maybe over tea and coffee.



SHARING OUR TIME

Dozens of Retrievers spent time this fall planting 900 new trees around campus, including those pictured here (L-R): **Gavin Gilliland**, **Abby Hart** '18, and **Tim Olivella**.



TELLING HER AUTHENTIC STORY

Melessia Jasper's journey to UMBC was not straight. But something kept pointing her toward UMBC. And toward herself.

"My path to UMBC started before I knew about UMBC," Jasper said, explaining that after high school in Alabama, she arrived in Maryland only to find that the job she had been promised was locked in a hiring freeze. She started at American University, where she worked with two former UMBC staffers. Then she heard UMBC President Emeritus **Freeman Hrabowski** at a faculty retreat. "I didn't realize it at the time, but God was laying the groundwork for where I am today."

When she moved to Baltimore with her new husband, she applied to UMBC and worked in several different divisions, including Student Affairs and Administration and Finance. In each office,

Jasper said, she found acceptance and growth. She now works in the Division of Institutional Equity.

"It was the first university I worked for where you're applauded for your quirkiness," Jasper said. "I was so empowered by the resources UMBC offered to me that I then could empower others."

Last year, she stood on stage to tell her story in a Retriever Talk. For weeks, she and a cohort of other UMBC staff labored with **Jill Wardell '99**, interdisciplinary studies, and other strategic talent management and storytelling staff to shape their life tales, a commitment of time and effort on the part of both the storytellers and for UMBC. Jasper said she felt like she was stripping naked. She was reluctant but told herself, "Sometimes, you have to be uncomfortable in order to follow your purpose in life."

In addition to revealing lifelong intrusive thoughts of inadequacies and imposter syndrome, Jasper also shared—in front of hundreds of people she didn't know—that in 2000, doctors discovered she had a rare condition called a Chiari malformation, in which part of her brain had grown down into her spine. Her doctor was amazed at what she had achieved, but Jasper knew she was only getting started.

After her Retriever Talk, many students, colleagues, and even strangers have since contacted her to affirm how her story helped them.

"This is something that I have gone through," Jasper said. "If I can go through it and possibly help you by telling you my story, I want you to have that same freedom...freedom in understanding who I am and accepting who I am."



INNER PEACE

Many of our staff and faculty take advantage of free exercise and wellness classes in the RAC, some of which are taught by **Joella Lubaszewski '10**.

A Community That Builds Together

Through our unique commitment to shared governance and a deep appreciation of community, we collectively build UMBC into what we know it should be.



FINDING A VOICE IN LEADERSHIP

There's a reason the Nonexempt Staff Senate (NESS) carries the name of a democratic body. Alongside other staff and faculty shared governance groups and student government bodies serving their respective constituents, NESS exists to ensure all UMBC nonexempt employees have a voice, the way democracy is supposed to work.

Desiree Stonesifer, serving the second year of her term as president of NESS, and a business services specialist in the financial services department, believes that the shared governance organization builds trust at the university. UMBC offers both staff and faculty shared governance groups, in which all parties work together on the university's leadership.

"I think it gives people the security of knowing that they're welcome to speak their mind without it being held against them," Stonesifer said. "They're allowed

to have thoughts outside the status quo. And a lot of times, those are the kind of thoughts that maybe the administration or other people in the university haven't thought of. It gives everyone different perspectives and it allows staff the ability to grow more comfortable in their community so that they can be who they are and say what they think."

NESS helps its members handle issues that are vital to employees: Are job descriptions adequate? Are positions equitably valued? Is professional development available?

Many of the nonexempt senate members aren't interacting with students as much as other UMBC employees, Stonesifer said, and many of them want to reach out. The NESS, she said, can help members "find ways to get involved in the community."



SHARING THE MOMENT

The annual cookout put on by Professional Staff Senate and Nonexempt Staff Senate brings folks together from all over campus.



CREATING A GREEN SPACE OF SOLACE

Charles Hogan, UMBC's landscape and grounds manager, is comfortable with trees. He grew up climbing them, building forts in them, and "falling out of them," he said, laughing. For decades, he has run and biked through forests for mile upon mile every week.

As he walks UMBC's Academic Row in his sturdy boots and cargo pants, Hogan (above, right) admires the trees that have survived years of building renovations, root system compromise by tunnels carrying utilities and water underground, and the hundreds of students who tramp over their soil and tie hammocks to their trunks.

Hogan, who has worked on UMBC's landscaping for 26 years, likes to construct park-like pockets dotted throughout the campus. Each of those miniature parks

is based around trees, whether that's the pair of oaks in front of the Administration Building that tower over the hydrangeas below or the diminutive weeping redbud that Hogan wanted to top with a tiny hat and sunglasses because it looked so much like Cousin Itt from the Addams Family.

"I'm a tree person," said Hogan, who is a certified arborist. "Trees should be the focal points. We're creating a lot of little park environments."

A campus' green spaces, Hogan said, make a difference when students and their families are trying to decide where to attend as well as provide succor to everyone making their way through a busy semester. That's why the grounds staff plants 30,000 summer annuals and 10,000 fall pansies every year. Each area on campus is assigned

to a particular gardener, Hogan said, who takes pride in the beauty of the plants under their charge.

Those gardens and the shade of the trees surrounding the buildings offer comfort to the staff, faculty, and students who make the campus their living rooms.

"I never went to college, but I know students are under a lot of stress. They should be able to sit outside, read, study, write a paper," Hogan said. "Any landscape, whether it's at your house or on campus, should make you feel good, feel relaxed."



CREATING CHANGE

Campus offices like the Center for Democracy and Civic Life work alongside students to engage the community and make a difference.

Living the Mission

At the end of the day, UMBC's values and mission are what bring us all together. When we work in service of our students and our academic mission of inclusive excellence, it's hard not to feel connected to the work on another level.



A STUDENT-CENTERED COMMUNITY

At the beginning of each school year, our new students are officially welcomed with the Convocation ceremony, where they each receive a special UMBC shield pin.



LIFTING STUDENTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

When he's deep into extolling the mission and benefits of the McNair Scholars Program he directs, **Michael Hunt** '06, computer engineering, needs only a pulpit to become the preacher he trained to be.

When Hunt sees a student achieve, he feels "that parent feeling, that joy that comes to you. Sometimes I'm more excited than they are when they're telling me. Sometimes it's a sense of awe in knowing their story, in knowing all that had to happen to get to that space," said Hunt, who has a masters in theology. "I feel like we're the mama bird, teaching them all they need before they fly away."

The federally funded McNair program, with a goal of boosting students from underrepresented segments of society into earning research-based doctoral degrees, has expanded over the six years of Hunt's directorship.

Every year, the McNair Scholars Program funds 30 slots for students, who meet with mentors, fulfill service obligations, attend cross-cultural events, and receive the help they need to prepare for, apply to, and excel in graduate school.

Hunt, who was a Meyerhoff and McNair scholar, is earning his own interdisciplinary Ph.D. from UMBC. After he became director of the McNair program in 2019, he

found himself frustrated when he had to shut some students out of opportunities. So he spearheaded, with the backing of the then-current scholars, staff, and McNair Advisory Council, the creation of the Friends of McNair network, a group of students who reap some of the mentoring, community, and support benefits that McNair Scholars enjoy.

Hunt is exploring ways for the university to expand the support it gives to students not in formal scholar programs. He enthusiastically advocates for the need for holistic critical mentoring (HCM), a network of power-dynamic-flipped, student-centered, reciprocal relationships. HCM is the mentoring framework that uplifts both mentor and mentee while dismantling systems of oppression.

"Because of my heart and because of the work that I do, I don't want to turn anyone away when I know there are resources to support them. The institution has to rise and say, 'This is a part of the work of inclusive excellence, and we're going to fund this to make it happen.' What I love about my institution is that the more I talk and have these conversations, the more I do see people beginning to question and challenge what we are doing. And so I don't feel quieted. In other spaces, I know that folks would have been quieted."



SHAPING SUCCESS IN ALL SIZES

At Commencement, **Kyung-Eun Yoon** likes to sneak out of her academic division's seating section to hug students in other majors, she confesses. Of course, she gets to hug all the Korean majors when they rise to receive their diplomas, but other students have taken maybe five or six courses or minored in Korean, and she wants to embrace them, too, to recognize that achievement.

Student success, Yoon says, doesn't come in one shape or size.

"For some students, yes, excelling in every class and getting double degrees and finishing an honors program with a wonderful thesis, going to Korea's top university as a graduate student, getting a job—that's a wonderful, wonderful success story," Yoon said. "But for some

students, completing the semester without withdrawing from too many classes, or without failing one or two courses, completing their degree, finally, in five or six years, that's a wonderful success story for them too."

Yoon started at UMBC in 2009 as the coordinator of the new Korean program and has grown the program so that students can now major or minor in Korean within the modern languages, linguistics, and intercultural communication department. Over her 14 years, Yoon's Korean program graduates have gone on to work at the National Security Agency, to pursue graduate schools in various fields including Korean studies and international relations, to teach English in Korea, and more.

But sometimes, she said, success looks like one student whose achievement she particularly treasures. The student had dropped out, withdrawn from many classes, but after six years and many advising sessions with Yoon, last May, she graduated.

"It was not just a mere graduation for her, it was a really, really huge success for her," Yoon said, and that student's achievement made Yoon feel proud. "I did this much," she says, holding up her finger and thumb an inch apart.

Yoon and her colleagues can help students along the path of hard work, but eventually, she says, "you have to have your ownership. We'll help you, but without your ownership of this time, success cannot be happening."

And when success happens, Yoon is sure to find that student to give them a hug.



MOMENTS OF JOY

There's simply nothing like the feeling of watching our students cross the stage to get their diplomas.

An artistic illustration featuring a large green triangular table. Numerous hands of various colors (green, pink, orange, blue, purple, brown, yellow) reach up from the bottom and sides, holding different types of glasses (wine, beer, coffee, water) filled with yellow liquid. The hands are rendered in a stylized, flat-color manner. The title 'GRAB A SEAT AT THE TABLE' is centered over the table in a bold, blue, hand-drawn font with white outlines.

GRAB A SEAT AT THE TABLE

WRITTEN BY RANDIANNE LEYSHON '09 AND ILLUSTRATED BY REBECCA BRADLEY



These days, it's tempting to grow numb to the polarization of society and the breakdown in public discourse and to retreat into our silos of solidarity. But a liberal arts education has the potential to offer an antidote to these seemingly inevitable fates—through modeling and practicing empathy. At UMBC, students are invited to the table to share their stories and listen to their peers. These acts of educational hospitality help Retrievers find their why and pursue the public good.

It's the first day of class. You're looking around, bright-eyed and a little nervous, and then your instructor smiles at the class and says, "One day you are all going to die." Are you offended? Shocked? Titillated? Horrified? Collectively, the class titters. Already social bonds are forming as **Christine Armstrong Mair**, associate professor of sociology who specializes in gerontology, continues her spiel. "And if we're all lucky, that won't be for a long time."

As sociologists, says Mair, or more broadly as leaders in an educational setting, "it's not our task to make somebody think a certain way. Our task is to show them what exists in society and help them feel empathy for the human experience."

At its most pedestrian roots, empathy is putting yourself in someone else's shoes. How can someone else's emotional experience inform your own personal perspective?

In the best-case scenario, a college campus is a microcosm of its society: a crosshatch of races, ages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. And UMBC holds true to those measures. But something different happens when you step into the Loop—you sit next to someone who didn't go to your high school. You eat at the same table with someone outside of your cultural background. You take a test side by side with someone who voted differently than you. And even more than

sharing space, you start sharing notes and books and stories—even your own story—with these strangers and then suddenly they're no longer strangers.

When empathy is on the table, students and colleagues expand their capacity for hard work. You might change your thesis to address human trafficking or leave your home island to work toward healthy aging for all populations. So pull up a chair, step into someone else's shoes, and partake in this grand educational potluck.

“WITH MY BACKGROUND—WHAT I’VE SEEN WITH HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND MIGRANT SMUGGLING—WHAT CAN I DO AS A PERSON WITH MY KNOWLEDGE AND RESPONSIBILITY?”

– SAYDEH KARABATIS, PH.D. CANDIDATE

AFTER EMPATHY COMES ACTION

You’re sitting at a beach-side cafe in Greece with your husband. It’s 2015 and Greece’s financial troubles are in the news, but the waves of migrants washing ashore are not yet as publicized. As you enjoy your coffee, you see a group of 40 to 50 people sitting seemingly aimless and distraught nearby. Based on their clothing, you make a guess that they are Muslims and Arabic speakers. What do you do?

If you’re **Saydeh Karabatis**, originally from Lebanon—and a survivor of the 17-year Lebanon civil war—and fluent in Arabic, you let that immediate moment of empathy guide you and approach the group.

Karabatis and her husband **George**, a professor of information systems at UMBC and from Greece, changed the plans for their summer in the Mediterranean to volunteer as translators, food finders, and listeners for the refugees, primarily fleeing the war in Syria and arriving in Greece in dire straits. They did so again in 2017.

As Karabatis interacted with these desperate groups and read more about their plight, she realized familiar patterns were emerging in their stories. They were not just migrants fleeing a war, they were trafficked people, paying dearly for not-safe passage, and many others headed toward labor and a life they did not sign up for. Struck by the limits of her actions—and even her emotional capacity for empathy—when Karabatis returned home to Maryland, she found her next step.

Karabatis, who has a master’s in computer science from UMBC and works for the university’s Department of Information Systems, knew she would need to fill her time when her two sons left for

college. Karabatis asked herself, “With my background—what I’ve seen with human trafficking and migrant smuggling—what can I do as a person with my knowledge and responsibility?”

She contacted **Vandana Janeja**, then chair of information systems, and explained the project she wanted to complete for her Ph.D. During her master’s, Karabatis had tried to conduct a research project on human trafficking for a class with Janeja but couldn’t find a robust data set to use for her project and ended up having to leave the work incomplete. This time, she pitched using the stories of trafficked people. “Instead of dealing with numbers, numbers as data, I am now dealing with stories as data—the stories of people being trafficked,” says Karabatis.

It’s not been easy going. Many trafficked people are not open about their stories, for fear of retribution or simply because of how horrific the experience was. Additionally, it’s hard for Karabatis to take in their trauma. “I’m reading about all these abuses,” says Karabatis. “I’m reading about sex trafficking, labor trafficking, organ trafficking, human smuggling. I can’t imagine—how can a human being do something like that to another human?”

Eventually though, with the end goal of combating the network of smuggling routes, Karabatis says, you need to reach a level where you can try to put your emotions aside: “You need to detach yourself from these emotions if you want to do something to help these people. If your emotions are the only thing driving you, you wouldn’t be able to produce the research. Use these emotions as a spark and then put them on the side.”



CARING STARTS WITH LISTENING

You're a teenager riding the bus for fun in Puerto Rico, killing time by people watching. You're struck by the number of older adults on the bus, noticing their many bags stuffed with x-rays and other apparent medical paperwork. Unthinkingly, you just assume they're enjoying the ride like yourself, but this older generation seems eager to talk.

If you're **Jaminette Nazario**, a curious if bored high schooler, you strike up a conversation.

What she heard from her fellow travelers shook her: "We don't have people to help...." "My wife just died of cancer...." "I need to use this bus to get to my medical appointments." It wasn't until she was pursuing her bachelor's degree in social sciences that Nazario was hit by the realization that those conversations might have been the only time those older bus riders had talked to someone that day. "So I started thinking about the many barriers older adults have in order to achieve healthy

aging," she says. "When older adults don't have resources or people, they miss out on social networks that are vital to healthy aging." This aha moment would propel Nazario to a master's degree in public health with a focus on gerontology, but in order to study further, she'd have to leave her island for the next academic step.

Now in her second year of UMBC's Ph.D. program in gerontology—a joint program with the University of Maryland, Baltimore—Nazario is beginning to research aging Hispanic immigrants and their increasing challenges accessing medical care.

And unlike her fellow bus riders, she's not doing this alone. "Even though it's really hard to be far from family, I feel like I'm home here. And I love how Dr. Mair teaches." Like most classes, says Nazario, there are readings and discussion, but Mair brings a "specific dynamic" to the setting. Each class starts with questions prepared by the students, which is really empowering, says Nazario. It might end up that the class all resonates with one question and they

stay on that topic, guiding the trajectory of the discussion.

In summer 2022, Nazario joined Mair and others from the gerontology program at a conference in Japan. She presented a poster on her research and walked away from her talk with a new level of confidence. "There were professionals from Japan and China and they're asking me about something in the United States... it was kind of cool. People came up and treated me with so much respect."

Students in Mair's gerontology classes are finding their drive to solve crises in aging care not only because they might have loved ones suffering, but because aging (if we're lucky) and death are unifying elements. "It's something that really applies to all of us," says Mair, "to make sure that we're taking care and setting up a good system so that when we all arrive there, that us and all of our people that we care about are okay."



SWAPPING STORIES STRENGTHENS NEIGHBORLY BONDS

You're driving your car on tour in Texas when you're hit by a criminally intoxicated drunk driver. You survive, but a host of physical and psychological repercussions are still taking their toll 10 years later. As a musician, you fuel your art with your resiliency and work through the healing process by creating music. But when the pandemic hits, and live, in-person music disappears, you look for a pivot point—and the community you're missing.

If you're **Kristin Putchinski**, a student in UMBC's M.F.A. program for intermedia and digital arts, you lean into the concept of "platonic intimacy."

Putchinski coined the term to sum up her goal of "trying to strengthen neighborly bonds. What I'm looking for is an intimate experience between two people. And when people hear intimacy, they tend to think that it's about a romantic or sexual component. But how do I frame that intimacy—and how important intimacy is—in terms of friendship and neighborliness?"

Through a graduate assistantship jointly funded by jointly funded by UMBC and the University of Maryland, Baltimore's Community Engagement Center (CEC), Putchinski was given the opportunity to shadow CEC's then-director **Tyrone Roper** and learn about the center's mission, which includes strengthening neighborly bonds. Roper told Putchinski they were looking for ways to engage the 18- to 24-year-old demographic. When Putchinski was tasked with creating an art project for CEC the following semester, she kept this age goal in mind.

As a student in UMBC's intermedia program, Putchinski "explores the textures between mediums," she says. As a musical artist who performed under the stage name

ellen cherry, "I have 25 years of experience as a performing songwriter and storyteller, creating my own and interpreting other people's stories." So she began to imagine a strange game of telephone that would give participants the opportunity to swap stories, with the end result of creating instances of platonic intimacy.

This multifaceted project connected post-high-school-aged individuals with older generations through curated, facilitated sessions. The participant-pairs met four different times and talked about a song, a photograph, and a memory—and at the last session, the neighbors "swapped" their stories. A recording of the swap was sent to local artists who interpreted the stories into their own mediums—painting, poetry, and a video soundscape. Then, at an event open to the public in the CEC, the storytellers took the stage, retelling their neighbor's story. For example, a Latinx college graduate took to the stage to reshare her stranger-turned-partner's tale of being raised in foster care in 1970s Baltimore.

Putchinski was eager to find out "when you talk to somebody that's 40 years different from you...did your perceptions change about yourself, about them, and what were those changes and the answers?"

It makes sense she's asking these questions based on her ongoing empathy toward the man who altered her life in an accident 10 years ago. "It was very conflicting for me to be the victim of a crime that I really feel like was committed not by a criminal but by a person who abuses alcohol. At the base level, he's a human being. How can we think about his human potential after this experience and mine?"

"IMAGINE INTENSELY" A BETTER WAY FORWARD

One of the greatest assertions of the liberal arts comes from Percy Bysshe Shelley's essay "A Defence of Poetry." The short-lived husband of Frankenstein's creator writes, "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own."

On college campuses, and at UMBC in particular, through thoughtful classroom instruction and intentional commitment to community, students trade their stories—pains and pleasures alike. Less of a transaction and more of a gift, these stories are invitations to grow in understanding, change your opinion, or shape your research.

But walking in someone else's shoes doesn't mean you misplace your own shoes along the way—in fact professors hope it helps you find your footing at UMBC. "That open-mindedness and appreciation and empathy does not necessarily mean that you lose other parts of yourself," says **Anne Brodsky**, professor and chair of the psychology department. "It shouldn't be a zero-sum game."

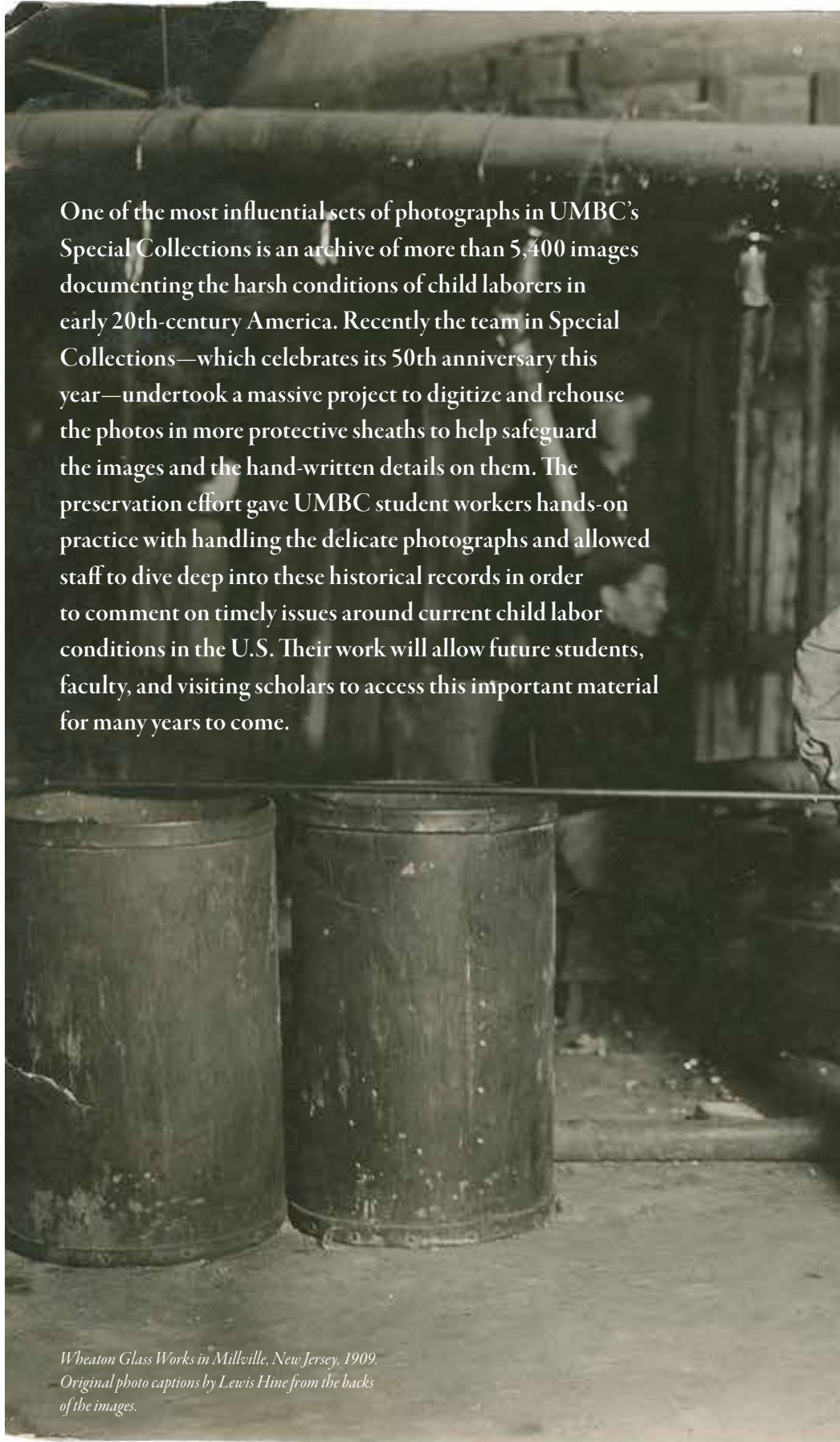
You're walking down Academic Row. You're a first-generation college student with a lot of questions. You're a returning student giving college a second (or third) chance. You're a first-year who misses the familiar halls of high school. You see other Retrievers walking in groups, heading into classrooms, rubbing True Grit's bronze nose, making conversation with their peers. What do you do?

Historical Lens

By Rabne Alexander, M.F.A. '21

One of the most influential sets of photographs in UMBC's Special Collections is an archive of more than 5,400 images documenting the harsh conditions of child laborers in early 20th-century America. Recently the team in Special Collections—which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year—undertook a massive project to digitize and rehouse the photos in more protective sheaths to help safeguard the images and the hand-written details on them. The preservation effort gave UMBC student workers hands-on practice with handling the delicate photographs and allowed staff to dive deep into these historical records in order to comment on timely issues around current child labor conditions in the U.S. Their work will allow future students, faculty, and visiting scholars to access this important material for many years to come.

*Wheaton Glass Works in Millville, New Jersey, 1909.
Original photo captions by Lewis Hine from the backs
of the images.*





The photographer Lewis Hine secured a place in history as an investigative documentarian by observing and sharing the conditions for child laborers. From 1908 through 1930, Hine worked closely with the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), an organization devoted to preventing the exploitation of children in the workplace. Hine crisscrossed the U.S. creating portraits of a diverse array of children working in fields and factories.

Young boy polishing marble at Vermont Marble Co., in Center Rutland, Vermont, 1910.



Hine's body of work was revelatory and immensely impactful in the efforts to implement child labor laws in the U.S., and continues to be a relevant resource for researchers working in the intersections of art, history, politics, and more.

For 50 years now, UMBC's Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery Special Collections has been the caretaker of the Lewis Hine Collection, comprising some 5,400 photographs taken by Hine during his career. In 2022, the Special Collections team received a Preservation Assistance Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support conservation of this groundbreaking collection.

"Our set is particularly important because it's an almost complete collection of the photographs Hine made for the NCLC. It is very rare to have this incredible collection as a whole body," says **Beth Saunders**, head of Special Collections. "It's one of our most important and most used collections, and it was in immediate danger."

Preserving the work of Lewis Hine

For many decades, the photographs in the collection were protected in envelopes, held in place with adhesive strips. With age, the adhesive has begun to deteriorate, putting the collection at risk.

"If the glue migrates and the photographs are stuck, you have the risk of tearing, discoloration, all the terrible things," Saunders says. "They're not mounted, so the versos—the backs—are visible. All of the original inscriptions, notations by Hine or other folks at NCLC, extended captions, those are all intact."

Part of the preservation efforts included photographing the detail written on the backs of the photographs, which have until now never been officially digitized.

"It was an opportunity to record the versos of the photographs. We needed to

build a new overhead camera setup, and we're very grateful that **Melissa Cormier** [M.F.A. '17] with UMBC's Office of Research Graphics helped us to get that going," says Saunders, who notes that while the behind-the-scenes work of preservation is unglamorous, the work requires a dedicated multidisciplinary team across the university community.

"My colleagues, **Lindsey Loeper** ['04] and **Susan Graham** ['98] have just written an essay about the teaching exercises that they've developed out of the Hine collections," Saunders says. "Lindsey runs our instruction program, and Susan is the mastermind of this project. She's been the one troubleshooting, setting the standards, and training everybody to do the work."

Meredith Power, a graduate student in UMBC's historical studies program who has been interning with the preservation project, notes the power Hine's images still possess.

"Some are heartbreaking, some are thought-provoking, while others made me stop short and smile as I pulled them from their storage folder to photograph them," Power says. "The collection still manages to evoke an emotional response. It's that emotional connection, the shared sense of experiencing something."

Power notes the interdisciplinary power of the Hine collection and the need to preserve it. "As we've all learned since COVID-19's arrival, physical access to research or archival material is sometimes impossible. In those cases, digitized resources and online information about them are invaluable."

Photography as a teaching tool

The Hine canon was among the inaugural collections for UMBC, leading in turn to a specific focus on photography in Special Collections, which now holds an estimated three million photographs



stretching back to 1840, including the *Baltimore Sun* archive.

In 1974, the Hine collection was acquired by the then new Special Collections program from the NCLC, facilitated by former Library Director **Antonio Raimo** and **Jerry Stephany**, a photographer in the visual arts department who had once worked at the George Eastman Museum in Rochester, New York.

"Jerry really saw the importance of a teaching collection of photography," says

Saunders. "The idea behind collecting this particular body of work was to show photography's relationship to a variety of social issues and the way that photography can be used as a tool of visual communication across disciplines."

Above: 7-year old Rosie. Regular shucker. Her second year at it. Illiterate. Works all day. Shucks only a few pots a day. Varn & Platt Canning Co. in Bluffton, South Carolina, 1911 – 1913.

Handle With Care

By Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque



A nine-year-old stands at the mouth of a coal mine covered in coal dust, wearing a small headlamp. A woman holds her baby on her lap as she packs boxes in a warehouse along with her 5-, 8-, and 12-year-olds. These are just two of thousands of evocative black-and-white photographs handled by Special Collections interns **Meredith Power** '21, history, a public history graduate student, and **Gabe Morrison** '23, anthropology. Along with library staff members, these two worked diligently to ensure that the images of the families and children who lived through these harrowing work conditions are accessible to the public for research and learning.

Fine motor skills

"Photos from the early 1900s were developed on fine photographic paper that is prone to crinkling around the edges, ripping, and fading," Power says. Wearing blue nitrile medical gloves, they rehouse photos from their cellophane sleeves to museum-grade mylar sleeves, keeping them from further discoloration, tears, wrinkles, and sticking to the sleeves. "They're very

delicate," Power says. "You need good eye-hand coordination to pick up the photos from the corners, remove them from whatever packaging they are in, and slide them into the mylar sleeve."

This process is second nature for Morrison, who has been working at Special Collections for over a year. He has worked with securing the Lewis Hine photos as part of his public humanities minor, as well as the Maryland Folklife Program Collection, the Coslet-Sapienza Fantasy and Science Fiction Fanzine Collection, and the George Cruikshank illustrations and papers.

"I had to learn how to properly handle photographs and manuscripts and how to catalog them according to the Library of Congress classification system," Morrison says. For both Power and Morrison, developing greater patience and manual dexterity and embracing working through hundreds of documents alone in a quiet space surrounded by stacks of materials was well worth the effort to broaden access to these historic documents.

Above: Trapper boy in Turkey Knob Mine, MacDonald, West Virginia. Boy had to stoop on account of low roof, photo taken more than a mile inside the mine, 1908.

Across, top: Meredith Power, left, and Susan Graham, right, handle the century-old photographs.

Across, below: Laura Petty, a 6 year old berry picker on Jenkins farm, Rock Creek near Baltimore, Maryland. Picked two boxes yesterday (2 cents a box), 1909.

“The value of this project is ensuring people understand that this resource exists,” says Power, “to help these photos live beyond a heavily controlled and restricted space on campus into a digital space where more people are able to access the information.”

Digital accessibility

Protecting delicate, historic documents includes digitizing them. The digitizing process is another lesson in precision and patience. Power begins the process by taking a photo out of the mylar sleeve—making sure to only touch the corners—along with a small rectangular white piece of paper describing the photo. They gently place the photo underneath a camera, delicately straightening the image before the camera snaps the picture and sends it to a computer where Power edits it using Adobe Lightroom.

“It’s an elaborate setup with lights at 45-degree angles, and the camera pointed straight down at a small white stand where I place the image,” explains Power, who would work on digitizing for six to eight hours at a time. “Once I take the image, I edit the size and angle of the photo. The metadata is then added into an Excel spreadsheet, which includes noting if there was a corner missing or if the photo had adhesive stuck to it.”

Digitizing rare books, something Morrison has spent months working on, requires using a special book scanning machine with raised sides, like hands cradling the book open, and small snakelike bean bag weights to keep the pages flat without using his fingers. “I make sure I’m not blocking any text or any important image. And then I press a button, flip a page, press a button, flip a page for hours on end until I finish digitizing that book,” Morrison says, smiling. “So, it’s not the most exciting work, but I find digitization



specifically important because it’s a process that helps preserve documents too fragile to be in public circulation. Digitally, you can share it with a broader audience.”

Workforce skills

Both Power and Morrison brought many special collections skills to their public humanities internships. Archaeology camp inspired Morrison to learn about how to study and take care of important and fragile objects. He worked at the Montgomery Parks Archeology Program throughout high school, where he met a friend who introduced him to UMBC’s Special Collections. “I’ve always had an interest in historic things, in the preservation of artifacts,” Morrison says, who plans to apply to a master’s program in library and museum studies after graduation. “I think Special Collections has helped me realize I want to do archival work.”

Power found their footing working full time in the conservation rooms at

Baltimore’s Walters Art Museum. “I was the administrative assistant in the Conservation Division and was around a lot of conversations on handling art objects and special collections materials, but I did not work with the materials directly,” says Power. “Working with the Hine Collection was a great opportunity for hands-on experience working with physical items and digitization.” These skills have also come in handy for Power, whose master’s degree focuses on 14th-century religious women hermits in Yorkshire, England. In 2022, Power had the opportunity to visit parish archives in Yorkshire to read through medieval-primary source documents.

For Power, history isn’t just books, dates, and lists of events. They say that there are a lot of living materials out there, whether that’s parish churches or photographs from the early 20th century, like the Hine collection. There is a connection between public history work and the people who lived before us. “It’s important to continue to help students remember that history is not dead and dusty. It’s alive,” says Power. They feel that the connection element is essential, and sometimes it gets lost. “Special Collections prove that these events really happened. They can inspire students to visit those places. To stand in that space where it happened and say, ‘Yeah, I was here too.’ I love that.”



The U.S. Child Labor Problem Persists

By Beth Saunders, originally for The Conversation



At UMBC's Special Collections, where I am head curator, we've recently completed a major digitization and rehousing project of our collection of over 5,400 photographs made by Lewis Hine.

Traveling the country with his camera, Hine captured the often oppressive working conditions of thousands of children—some as young as 3 years old.

As I've worked with this collection over the past two years, the social and political implications of Hine's photographs have been very much on my mind. The patina of these black-and-white photographs suggests a bygone era—an embarrassing past that many Americans might imagine they've left behind.

But with numerous reports of child labor violations, many involving immigrants, occurring in the U.S., along with an uptick in state legislation rolling back the legal working age, it's clear that Hine's work is as relevant today as it was a century ago.

An investigator with a camera

A sociologist by training, Hine began making photographs in 1903 while working as a teacher at the progressive Ethical Culture School in New York City. Between 1903 and 1908, he and his

students photographed migrants at Ellis Island. Hine believed that the future of the U.S. rested in its identity as an immigrant nation—a position that contrasted with escalating xenophobic fears.

Based on this work, the NCLC, which advocated for child labor laws, hired Hine to document the living and working conditions of American children. By the late 19th century, several states had passed laws limiting the age of child laborers and establishing maximum working hours. But at the turn of the century, the number of working kids soared—between 1890 and 1910, 18 percent of children ages 10 to 15 were employed.

In his work for the NCLC, Hine journeyed to farms and mills in the industrializing South and the streets and factories of the Northeast. He used a Graflex camera with 5-by-7-inch glass plate negatives and employed flash powder for nighttime and interior shots, hauling upward of 50 pounds of equipment on his slight frame.

To gain entry into factories and other facilities, Hine sometimes disguised himself as a Bible, postcard, or insurance salesman. Other times he'd wait outside to catch workers arriving for or departing from their shifts. Along with photographic records, Hine collected his subjects' personal stories, including their ages and ethnicities. He documented their working lives, such as their typical hours and any injuries or ailments they incurred as a result of their labor.

Hine, who considered himself “an investigator with a camera,” used this information to create what he termed “photo stories”—combinations of images and text that could be used on posters, in public lectures, and in published reports to help the organization advance its mission.

Legislation follows

Hine's muckraking photographs exemplify the genre of documentary photography, which relies upon the perceived truthfulness of photography to make a case for social change. The camera serves as an eyewitness to a societal ill, a problem that needs a solution. Hine portrayed his subjects in a direct manner, typically frontally and looking straight into the camera, against the backdrop of the very factories, farmland, or cities where they worked.

By capturing details of his sitters' bare feet, tattered clothes, soiled faces and hands, and diminutive stature against hulking industrial equipment, Hine made a direct statement about the poor conditions and precarity of these children's lives.

Hine's photographs made a successful case for child labor reform. Notably, the NCLC's efforts resulted in Congress establishing the Children's Bureau in 1912 and passing the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act in 1916, which limited working hours for children and prohibited the interstate sale of goods produced by child labor.

Although the Supreme Court later ruled it and a subsequent Child Labor Tax Law of 1919 unconstitutional, momentum for

enshrining protections for child workers had been created. In 1938, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established restrictions and protections on employing children.

The ethics of picturing child labor

A recent surge of unaccompanied minors, primarily from Central America, has brought new attention to America's old problem of child labor and has threatened the very laws Hine and the NCLC worked to enact.

Some estimates suggest that one-third of migrants under 18 are working illegally, whether it's laboring more hours than current laws permit, or working without the proper authorizations. Many of them perform hazardous jobs similar to those of Hine's subjects: handling dangerous equipment and being exposed to noxious chemicals in factories, slaughterhouses, and industrial farms.

While the content of Hine's photographs remains pertinent to today's child labor crisis, a key distinction between the subject of Hine's photographs and working children today is race.

Hine focused his camera almost exclusively on white children who arrived in the country during waves of immigration from Europe during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. As art historian Natalie Zelt argues, Hine's pictorial treatment of Black children—either ignored or forced to the margins of his images—implied to viewers that the face of childhood in America was, by default, white.

The perceived racial hierarchies of Hine's era reverberate into the present, where underage migrants of color live and work at the margins of society. Contemporary reports of child labor violations offer few images to accompany their texts, graphs, and statistics. There are legitimate reasons for this. By not including identifying

personal information or portraits, news outlets protect a vulnerable population. Ethical guidelines frown upon revealing private details of the lives of children interviewed. And, as Hine's experience demonstrates, it can be difficult to infiltrate the sites of these labor violations since they are typically kept secure.

Digital cameras and smartphones offer a workaround. Beginning in 2015, the International Labour Organization urged child laborers in Myanmar to become "young activists" and use their own images and words to create "photo stories"—echoing Hine's use of the term—that the organization could then disseminate.

Photographs of child labor in foreign countries are far more common than those made in the U.S., which leaves the impression that child labor is someone else's problem, not ours. Perhaps it's too hard for Americans to look at this domestic issue square in the eyes. A similar effect is at work when viewing Hine's photographs today. While they were originally valued for their immediacy, they can seem to belong to a distant past.

But if Hine's photographic archive of child laborers is evidence of the power of photography to sway public opinion, does the lack of images in today's reporting—even if nobly intended—create a disconnect? Is the public capable of understanding the harmful consequences of lack of labor enforcement when the faces of the people affected are missing from the picture?

Left: Small newsboy, height 40 inches, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1908.

Opposite page: Elwood Palmer Cooper, helper on miller's wagon, 7 years of age. Carries bags of flour, weighing 25 pounds, from wagon to stores. Receives 25 cents per week. Money not needed at home. Wants money to spend. Wilmington, Delaware, 1910.





Living in Vivid Color

Written by Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

The shower was full of mantis shrimp. Bubblers bubbled and the cranky crustaceans skulked in their tanks, looking for things to punch with their famously fast strikes. Complicated electronics for measuring brain activity stood sentinel beside the bed in the next room. And out on the balcony, **Kathryn Feller**, Ph.D. '14, biological sciences, was wearing a respirator and gloves, working with nasty chemicals.

In other words, it was another day of fieldwork as a behavioral neuroscientist—a career Feller has embraced after a journey of self-exploration that took her to surgical operating theaters, drama summer camps, and a range of research institutions around the world. At UMBC, Feller found a robust research atmosphere, supportive lab mates, and a lifelong mentor. Now, as a professor and mentor herself, she's able to exercise her natural creativity in a way she might never have predicted and play off her strengths from visual arts to handling sensitive scientific instruments.

Feller was in Malaga, Spain, living and working out of an attic apartment in her collaborator's mother's home. She

was collecting data for her work at the University of Cambridge, where she was fulfilling a two-year Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowship focused on a new line of research into mantis shrimp vision.

Mantis shrimp are famous for two things: their powerful punches and their vision. Humans have three types of cones in our eyes for seeing color. Mantis shrimp have 16. They can see UV light and polarized light, and there is still more to learn. Feller's Ph.D. at UMBC in **Thomas**

Cronin's lab focused on vision in mantis shrimp larvae. At the time there was almost no work in that area.

"While studying the visual system, a lot of times I kept wondering: 'There's all these cool things that mantis shrimp eyes can do, but what are they actually using this for?'" Feller says. "What are the consequences of this in a behavioral context?"

Her Ph.D. opened up the field of larval mantis shrimp vision and took her down rabbit hole after rabbit hole. "If something interests me, I follow it, and—uh-oh—here's something else I'm interested in," Feller jokes. In the end, her thesis explored the visual system using umpteen different scientific techniques, each providing its own insights, she says. "It was like the whole package of describing mantis shrimp visual systems."

"Just really jazzed"

The broad scientific foundation Feller obtained at UMBC set her up well for postdoctoral experiences that have taken her around the world, including stints studying butterflies in Japan, mouse brains in Minnesota, and insects in England. In fall 2020, she launched her own laboratory as an assistant professor of biology at Union College in Schenectady, New York.

Feller's research interests now include new projects on the connections between vision



Feller is the only identifiable person in the mural on the first floor of the Biological Sciences Building at UMBC. Her swim cap covered in bright plastic flowers is unmistakable. (Randianne Leyshon '09/UMBC)

Kate Feller, left, teaching a new course she co-developed with English and computer science colleagues at Union College on cyborgs. (Image by Paul Buckowski/Union College)



and behavior and work on brain-machine interfaces, initially inspired by a student in one of her classes. That work helped spawn a brand-new course on cyborgs that she's teaching with Union colleagues in English and computer science.

Things are going well.

"Life is awesome. It really is. You know, it has its ups and downs; it's not like every day is a dreamboat—I live with a two-year-old," Feller laughs. But "at this point, I'm just really jazzed about the research I'm doing."

Into the limelight

Back in Malaga, Feller was getting lots of great data, "but also psychologically it was a bit difficult," she says. She didn't speak Spanish, and her hosts barely spoke English. "For six weeks, I was just alone in someone's house, doing science." And then came the email: an invitation to participate in FameLab, an international competition for scientists based out of the United Kingdom. Each participant had three minutes to explain a scientific concept using only their body and any props they could carry on the stage—no slides. Entries were judged on content, clarity, and charisma.

"I got this email, and I wrote my script in one night," Feller says. The topic? Glittery camouflage structures in the eyes of mantis shrimp larvae. "When you're in the field, you have a finite number of hours to do what you need to do, so you need to push yourself to the extreme—but you also need to take a break. And that was my break—just to sit down and poke fun at the ridiculousness of my life."

She won her region in the U.K. and got to spend a weekend in Devonshire, England, with the other county winners, learning about science communication and refining her talk. The final performance was at the London Museum of Science.



Feller (pink dress) is involved with a robotics laboratory at Union College. Her work has recently expanded into brain-machine interfaces after a student in one of her classes expressed enthusiasm for the topic—just one example of how her teaching continues to inform her research. (Image by Paul Buckowski/Union College)



"I didn't win, but it was awesome," Feller says. After that, she was hooked on science performance. Back in Cambridge, she pursued science stand-up comedy with a group called "The Variables."

Research requires creativity

Feller's affinity for performance didn't come out of nowhere. As a teenager, she attended Camp Quin, a summer arts camp in the Finger Lakes region of New York. And despite a natural affinity for visual arts, she ended up focusing on drama at the camp. A skit she developed with other campers "was hilarious, and it was a hit, and from that I was like, 'I really like this,'" Feller remembers.

As an undergraduate at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (HWS), she participated in an improv comedy troupe and in her senior year, the Shakespeare club. In the summers, she served as a counselor at Camp Quin.

Performance may have taken a backseat in her life for now, but Feller still finds that her communication skills and natural creative energy are huge benefits in her current role.

"As I've progressed as a scientist, I've learned how much imagination it takes to be a researcher," Feller says. "And now that I'm a faculty member, I understand how much creativity you need to run an interesting class. I love that aspect—designing a new course is a super fun and creative process, and I find that my students respond quite well to the different ways of communicating

I throw at them."

Feller also applies her visual arts skills to creating research talks and class lectures. "The art of slide design is underrated," she says. "I think that's why I've been invited to give so many talks—not only do I have that performance element, but I understand the connection between hearing and seeing and information transfer."

An "all-in" personality

Feller has always recognized her artistic side, but she wasn't always encouraged to integrate it into her career plans. She was a good student, and her kindergarten teacher told her parents she would probably become a doctor. "I got that message my whole life," Feller says.

It sunk in, and she started at HWS on the pre-med track. As an undergrad, she took an

internship as a surgical assistant in a hospital. "There was a major clash with who I was as a person," Feller says. "Literally, you are in a sterile environment. So while I was good at that job, it crushed me."

But expectations die hard, and in her junior year, she was still looking at medical school. She decided she should do research to boost her chances. "Literally, it was just for my CV," she says. Little did she know the experience would permanently shift her trajectory.

Feller did some background research and requested a meeting with HWS biology assistant professor Kristy Kenyon, who studies development of the visual system in frogs and fruit flies, to pitch an honors project. As it turned out, her pitch was a little off the mark. "It was at least within the organ system that I worked," Kenyon says. Yet, Kenyon decided to give her a chance.

Why? "Kate Feller is such a dynamic person," Kenyon says. "She was such an all-in, live-life-to-the-fullest kind of person, that it was very easy for me to get excited about working on a project with her despite having never had her in a class. The energy, the creativity, the curiosity—those are three words I would use to describe that initial



Feller created this beetle illustration and others like it for a colleague who studies beetle coloration and evolution. Right: For this design, Feller incorporated the organisms studied in the UMBC biological sciences department for their annual, informal graduate student t-shirt.

impression of Kate.”

Research in sight

Feller and Kenyon settled on a bat vision project, and it transformed Feller’s future. Kenyon gave her a crash course in what she needed to know, and Feller thrived. The project led to Feller’s first scientific publication, reporting the discovery of a type of UV-sensitive cell in bat eyes that is evolutionarily related to the same cells in mice.

“I loved it,” Feller says. “Just the idea of thinking about how a different creature sees, because I’m so visual—it just fit so well. It took me a while to realize why I found it so exciting, but then I was like, ‘Oh, that makes sense.’”

And yet. After graduating with a double major in biology and environmental science, Feller took a position as an ophthalmology surgical assistant. She quickly soured on that, though, for the same reasons she had struggled with roles in sterile environments before. Her personal life brought her to Baltimore, and looking for new opportunities, she found Tom Cronin on a Google search.

She applied to other Ph.D. programs, but when she visited UMBC, “there was the pond, and all the grass, and meeting Tom, and I was like, ‘Oh, this is where I need to be.’”

A tight-knit group

Feller’s Ph.D. years spanned a special time in the Cronin lab. “It was an incredible group of people who formed a tight-knit community and helped each other grow into outstanding scientists,” says **Megan Porter**, a postdoctoral fellow in the lab during that time.

Sometimes, that support involved tough love. An intervention conversation Porter had with Feller when she was experiencing a third-year slump helped get Feller’s Ph.D. back on track. The exchange helped Porter as well.

“It has helped me to be a better mentor to my students now, to have had that conversation first with a friend,” says Porter, who now is a professor at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. “It’s an important conversation to have with any graduate student, as it isn’t the right path for everyone. There are many other careers out there for anyone who loves science.”

If Porter was the nurturing mother figure in the lab, **Michael Bok**, Ph.D. ’14, biological sciences, was the goofy uncle. Feller and Bok started the same year, and both needed to earn an advanced level of scuba certification to conduct fieldwork in Australia. Given the limited diving options in the mid-Atlantic, “we spent a total of 15 hours goofing around in a pretty uninspiring quarry, but it was worth it

for the diving we got to do in Australia,” says Bok, who is now a researcher at Lund University in Sweden.

Feller and Bok conducted fieldwork at Lizard Island Research Station off the northeast coast of Australia for many months across five years. “Some of these stressful and intensive work experiences would probably strain some people’s friendship, but Kate and I seemed to always be quite happy with each other despite having pretty different personalities,” Bok says. “We were definitely kindred in our love for science, appreciation for being out in nature, and senses of humor.”

Feller came to love diving and did so with typical flair. “You could always tell where Kate was in the water,” Cronin says, because she always wore a brightly colored swim cap with plastic flowers stuck all over it. “It was very Kate because it made her look kind of silly but also very distinctive, because even underwater far away you could identify her.”



Current and former members of Tom Cronin’s research group have made it a tradition to reunite and take a “family photo.” From left to right: Kate Feller, Tom Cronin, Alex Kingston, Megan Porter, and Michael Bok at the 2013 event. (Image courtesy of Tom Cronin)



Feller contributed substantially to decorating Tom Cronin's lab. One day she came home from a thrift shop with a gift for Cronin: this sketch of a cat, with the inscription, "Tom is tough. But he is your friend." It was a perfect fit for an advisor who held high expectations along with offering generous support. It still hangs in the Cronin lab today.

Dance parties and lost turtles

Alex Kingston, Ph.D. '15, biological sciences, arrived in the lab after Porter, Bok, and Feller. "I really wouldn't be where I am today without each of them," she says.

Kingston, who today is an assistant professor at The University of Tulsa, was always very organized and on top of things, Cronin recalls—"very type A." She kept the lab running smoothly as lab manager but wasn't afraid to have fun. Feller and Kingston would have dance parties as a break from drafting scientific manuscripts. "It was hilarious when other people would come into the lab, not expecting us in the middle of the lab blaring music and dancing around," Kingston remembers.

The group had other shared adventures, like caring for Scott, a box turtle who frequently escaped, necessitating a lab-wide search. And Feller took it as her role to decorate the lab. "In my lab today you can still see Kate stuff," Cronin says. "She had a tendency of sticking stuff up there that didn't want to come down again."

Cronin's approach to mentorship allowed each of his students to find their own way, with the level of support or independence that worked best for each of them. That means Cronin's students have complete ownership of both their successes and their struggles and grow the confidence to face both once they leave UMBC.

"Tom was really hands off. However, he was so supportive," Feller says. "Pretty much any time I came to him with an idea, he was like, 'Cool, let's do it.' So it was that mix of, you're steering the ship, but you don't have to worry about resources."

"Kate was not afraid to try anything—she was particularly inclined to do things her own way," Cronin recalls. While she may have taken some time to find her footing, in the end, "she did really great work—really original and creative work."

Rigor, excitement, and resilience

Today, Feller is focused on furthering her research, engaging her students, and raising her family—her second child arrived this October. As a faculty member, Feller is maintaining old connections and forging new ones.

"Kate is really doing a fantastic job of creating and maintaining a network across different areas of science and education, in the research that she does but also in the way that she teaches and the way she facilitates those connections across institutions," Kenyon, her mentor from HWS, says. For example, Kenyon is now collaborating with a colleague at Union because Feller connected them. And Kenyon is using a book in her courses that features the Cronin lab's research—including some carried out by Feller.

"What I have thoroughly enjoyed is watching Kate progress at each step along the way, and find her passion, and be able to pursue something with such rigor, and excitement and resilience," says Kenyon.

Illuminating the unknown

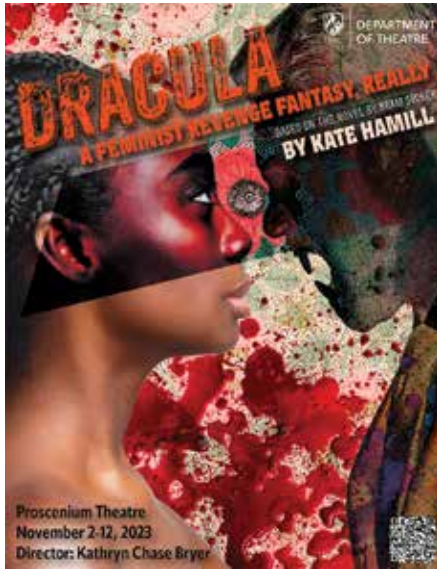
Whether creating art, performing on stage or in the classroom, working hard in the lab, or collecting specimens underwater, Feller is embracing each stage of her life and career with a zest that is uniquely hers. As Cronin puts it, "She was always Kate. She never started or stopped being Kate."

"The thing that I love most is just trying to figure out how the world works," Feller says. "I like to describe myself as an explorer. I am not a Magellan or a person on a ship looking to explore new places—I'm pushing the boundaries of knowledge. Where is the edge, and how can I shed light on the unknown?"

Feller is on the exploration of a lifetime, discovering new things about how brains work, transforming the lives of students, and doing it all in full color. As her research program takes off, her family grows, and her network broadens, her greatest adventures may be ahead of her.

HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY DIE ON STAGE

With the UMBC Theatre Department



Tools of the Trade

1. 2,000 ounces of stage blood, some homemade, some bought
2. LOTS of baby wipes
3. Several mops and buckets
4. A taste for corn syrup

*Van Helsing straddles the vampire, brandishing her cross and wooden stake. The undead—mouth and shirt stained with blood—had just confessed to a brutal kill when the vampire slayer brings down her stake. A half second delayed, a comically small amount of blood spurts from the wooden prop. Van Helsing, played by **Franchesca Parker '25**, acting, and the rest of the group in the theatre rehearsal space titter at the anticlimactic moment. **Tessara Morgan Farley**, production stage manager, and **Sierra Young '23**, the fighting and intimacy director, immediately jump in to triage a better death for the vampire, **Lucy** (played by **Liza Mupende '25**, action and information systems technology).*

*It's stage blood rehearsal day for UMBC's fall production of **Dracula: a Feminist Revenge Fantasy, Really** by **Kate Hamill**, directed by **Kathryn Chase Bryer**. Snags like this are the reason the crew is spending four hours on a Monday evening trying out blood capsules, strawberries (aka, mini bags of stage blood), sponges loaded with blood dye, and grits mixed with edible stage blood for various effects on stage.*

What does it take to pull off a veritable bloodbath on stage for six performances? That's what this crew of staff and students aim to find out.

Step 1

FINDING THE RIGHT VEIN

For **Morgan Farley** and **Emerson Balthis '24**, theatre design and production, assistant scenic designer and newly-christened stage blood mixologist, finding the perfect combination of purchased and homemade stage blood was a multi-month project. Several of the pressing questions at hand: Some of the blood needed to be edible—could they make it taste at least OK? Was anyone allergic to

the substance? Most importantly, could it be washed out of the costumes every night? Oh yeah, and how to stay on budget?

"It's going to be a bloodbath on stage," says Morgan Farley, "but also not being too excessive to the point where it becomes funny. We're trying to go more in the vein of reality versus comical, which also influenced our choice of color for blood. Of course, we were looking for washability, but we were also looking at the color and the viscosity."

In order to stretch the budget, Morgan Farley and Balthis found ways to water down what they bought and manufacture the rest—simmering vats of chocolate syrup, corn syrup, food coloring, and various thickening agents dissolving into a viscous, sugary brew.



Right: Various types of blood and props waiting for trial and error during rehearsal. Across, top: Van Helsing practices stabbing the vampire Lucy. Across, bottom: Dracula and Lucy are coached through a violent moment by Sierra Young, right, and Tessara Morgan Farley, left.

Photos by Kiirstn Pagan '11.

Step 2

OUT DAMNED SPOT

Moods are high, hands are stained red, and it's obvious the student actors are having a blast (and most likely, a sugar high, based on the recipe). Standing in a six-foot-long pristine white cape—except for a few new blood smears—with a curved collar another foot high, **Cece Smith** '24, acting, who plays Dracula, is nearly giggling with glee.

"I'm having so much fun," says Smith. "I honestly don't see a downside to the blood, even when it gets all sticky and nasty—it makes me feel pretty badass."

Enter the people responsible for wardrobe and laundry: **Margaret Caster**, assistant costume shop manager and wardrobe supervisor, and **Jennie Hardman** '23, theatre studies and environmental studies, wardrobe head for the show. While they could potentially see downsides galore, the duo is taking their tasks in stride.

"It was a little bit of 'oh no,' if I'm going to be honest," says Hardman, who has worked on many UMBC shows in her time as a student, but this is her first as wardrobe head. "When you read the script, there is so much blood. So you think, 'We're going to do this with real red liquid. On white colored clothing. Oh boy, that's going to be my problem, isn't it!'"

"I've done blood shows before, so it's not my first blood rodeo," says Caster, "but I like to think of it like 'How do you wrangle the blood?' Because as you can see, it spreads everywhere. So my side is to think, 'How can we contain it?'"

Their answer? Overnight soaks in Oxiclean and Shout spritzes for the tougher stains.

Step 3

MAKING THE MAGIC HAPPEN

In her role as an intimacy and fight director, **Sierra Young** has done vomit, has done other bodily fluids, has done blood—but never this much blood. Her job, as she puts it, "is to choreograph all of those big heightened moments so that they're specific, repeatable, and narratively dynamic. And then give the



actors tools to create a culture that is consent forward and trauma informed so they can feel secure in that space to create."

In a feminist revenge fantasy based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, unsurprisingly, there are a lot of opportunities for staging violence and intimacy, often at the same time. The added layer of Young's already substantial task is designing the choreography so that the blood effects can be effectively masked.

This means actors are subtly handing off blood capsules to each other, picking them up from behind stage props, or accessing them from hidden pockets. "In terms of choreography,

how do I hide these things, because stage combat is the illusion of danger. It's a lot of magic tricks and misdirection."

"We're doing this show on purpose," adds **Eve Muson**, associate professor of theatre and chair of the Theatre Department at UMBC. "These extravagant elements are for teaching purposes."

Step 4

IN PURSUIT OF A GOOD DEATH

Back to rehearsal and the problem of Van Helsing's stake and the paltry amount of blood it produced. The actors, Parker and Mupende, are game to try any workarounds suggested by Morgan Farley and Young. They finally land on a blood strawberry that Parker-as-Van Helsing will place upstage of Mupende-as-the-vampire-Lucy.

While writhing after Van Helsing's stab, Lucy puts the baggy of blood in her mouth and chomps down. She bends over to gasp her last undead breath, spewing the leftover plastic at the same time, looking as much like viscera as imaginable. The entire rehearsal space erupts in applause at the successful, bloody death.

— *Randianne Leysbon* '09



ALUMNI ESSAY

Family Recipe

Aimee, Jamie, and Gina Joshua have a lot in common. All three went to UMBC as members of the Meyerhoff Scholars Program. And the sisters all have great memories of growing up in a house filled with delicious food and love. So, when their mother's YouTube channel focusing on Indian cooking techniques started to take off, the trio made it their mission to create a cookbook of family recipes that would honor their beloved parents.

Our parents, Sara and Abraham Joshua, known to us as Mummy and Chacha, immigrated from India in their twenties separately to begin their careers and continued education to help provide for their families back home. Coming to America in the '70s, they were learning how to navigate a new country and a new culture. After getting married and starting a family, they began raising three daughters in Baltimore, Maryland. The challenge was to figure out how to teach and preserve our Indian culture and traditions when it was over 8,000 miles away.

Growing up as “the Joshua sisters,” we did many things together—singing songs in church at talent shows, Girl Scouts, karate, and even attending UMBC! They wanted the best for us and every day showed us the value and importance of hard work and being and staying humble. Since we were young girls, Mummy and Chacha taught us that everything is possible if you put your mind to it and work hard. Our parents encouraged us to chase our dreams, but as with many parents, they didn't think about pursuing their own, only providing for their family.

Mummy, affectionately known as “Ammini Aunty,” was a nurse at the University of Maryland Medical System and Chacha, affectionately known as

“Bejoy Uncle,” was a realtor. They both kept busy outside of work hours with community and church activities. If you wanted to find our parents in the house, it was usually in the kitchen—and the garden was a close second. Mummy loved to cook our traditional South Indian dishes and prepare food for others and Chacha enjoyed being her sous chef. Food was their love language and we had so many conversations around the kitchen table.

During our years at UMBC, we often brought Mummy's home-cooked food when we returned to campus, always willing to share some chicken biriyani or beans mezhukkupuratti with our friends. Mummy didn't often have time to do more than cooking for her family or special events because of her nursing career and her focus on our education. This meant she didn't get to cook and experiment as much as she would have liked. It was only once we were in college that we began to understand the joy being in the kitchen would bring her.

Once we were older, some of our favorite memories were when we gathered in the kitchen to catch up on how everyone's day had been. When we came home with our friends, Mummy would recruit them to help prepare whatever was on the menu, even if they had never cooked before. We did our best and Mummy would walk us



through the recipe and cooking techniques with a lot of patience. Mummy always said “If you put your mind to it, you can do it. It's a passion, and it takes hard work. But at the end of it all, you get something great.”

Whether we were peeling ginger, grating coconut, or chopping vegetables, we knew we were not just creating a meal, we were also building and creating something better: loving memories and an appreciation for our Kerala food. Because that's what it's about. Food is meant to be shared, and while Mummy was teaching us to cook, she was also teaching us to curate and nurture relationships and be proud of our culture. Cooking together is creating together, which involves trust and building a connection between each person helping create the meal. In addition, we are Indian American and are so proud of what it means to be both Indian and American.

We learned an important lesson during our time at UMBC, taught to us by the late great **Lamont Toliver**, “Mr. T,” former director of the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program. In a moment of vulnerability, Aimee shared with Mr. T that she had been rejected by all of the Ph.D. programs

she had applied to but had gotten into a master's program. In all his wisdom, Mr. T comforted Aimee with these wise words: "[N]ot all paths from point A to point B are a straight line. Sometimes you have to take the long way to get where you want to go." That's a lesson that has stayed with us for some time and that, we soon realized during the pandemic, applied to Mummy.

By this time, Gina had started a family and we welcomed our next generation of children. The pandemic taught us how precious life is and that making every moment count is important. As sisters, we decided that we would work together to make Mummy's dream of teaching our generation and future generations how to cook Kerala food come true.

After the pandemic began, Mummy retired from an over 40-year nursing career to help care for Chacha and avoid any risk due to COVID-19. With more time as a retiree, Mummy began experimenting with recipes and sharing them with close by family, who would pick up the care packages she would leave on the porch.

"Food is meant to be shared, and while Mummy was teaching us to cook, she was also teaching us to curate and nurture relationships and be proud of our culture"

They would then text or call her with feedback, helping perfect the recipes.

In April 2020, Mummy came into our room and asked if we wanted to take a picture of what she was cooking in the kitchen. So Jamie and Aimee, armed only with their iPhones and short notice to their friends online, began to livestream Mummy making Mango curry. Then the unexpected happened. Thousands of people watched it within the first three days, and a flame was lit. Instead of waiting for perfection, we continued to dive into video after video, each an improvement on the one before. What started as a fun project became a thriving YouTube channel, Ammini Auntie's A Pinch of

Kerala, and a full-blown community of "Pinchers." People were excited to learn from Mummy, and we were all thrilled to share her love for cooking with everyone.

Fast forward to today, our first cookbook, *Ammini Auntie's A Pinch of Kerala: A South Indian Inspired Cookbook*, is being published. Thanks to the power of Kickstarter and Pinchers worldwide, what was just once a dream is now becoming a reality. As Mummy reminds her Pinchers, "If you put your mind to it, you can do it." Don't let your dreams stay a dream. Work toward making it a reality.

Jamie Joshua '02, biological sciences, is the diversity, equity, and inclusion manager for Giant Food. Aimee Joshua '03, M.S. '05, computer science, is the senior manager, IT contracts, at PBS Distribution. Gina Wright '05, biological sciences, is a dentist at a Veterans Affairs Medical Center.



Jamie Joshua, Gina Wright, Joshua Wright, Abraham Joshua, Sara Joshua, and Aimee Joshua. All photos courtesy of the Joshua family.

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 15, 2023.

How to Submit Class Notes

The deadline for submitting Class Notes for the next print issue of *UMBC Magazine* is April 1, 2024. Submit your class note and photos online at umbc.edu/magazine or by email to magazine@umbc.edu.

1971

Jerry Kerr, American studies, became involved with El Rancho de las Golondrinas, New Mexico's premiere living history museum, after many years of exploring different career opportunities. Since he began there, he has been a docent, a tour guide, and a miller at an 1880s grist mill on-site. He says of his education, "What American studies taught me—and still does—is that there are an awful lot of ways to look at the American experience, and it is best to be aware of as many perspectives as possible."

1973

Kevin Kelehan, American studies, received the Distinguished Maryland Real Property Practitioner Award from the Real Property Section Council of the Maryland State Bar Association in July 2023.

1980

Margaret Smith Chisolm, visual and performing arts, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, received a JHU Nexus Award to convene a meeting on museum-based health professions education. Chisolm's work, which combines her expertise in visual arts and medicine, was included in a recent segment on arts and health for *PBS Newshour*.

1981

Debora Fajer-Smith, political science, has been named in the spring business edition 2023 of "Best Lawyers in America" as a Best Plaintiff Personal Injury Lawyer.

Howard Siskind, M.S. '95, psychology, was featured in *Up.St.ART Magazine's* summer 2023 edition, highlighting his life, his music, and his children's book, *Honabeats Says: Crazy Words!* Siskind released his latest original song "The Witch's Wand" in June 2023.

1982

Karen Cangialosi, biological sciences, will lead a network of organizations advocating for equity in higher education as the new director of Every Learner Everywhere. Cangialosi is also the cofounder of the Institute for a Racially Just, Inclusive, and Open STEM Education (RIOS Institute) where she served as director of open education and open science.

1984

John Holloway, emergency health services, was featured in *Ocean City Today's* "Spotlight" series for his decades of service as a first responder in Maryland. Holloway joined the Ocean City Volunteer Fire Company (OCVFC) Cadet Program in 1977 at the age of 16. He then joined the OCVFC as a firefighter in April 1984 following completion of his UMBC degree. After 28 years of service, he retired and now is a volunteer firefighter in Berlin, Maryland.

1987

Shawn Vanden, interdisciplinary studies, is developing a pilot episode, "Descent," for a 10-episode metaphysical thriller. Vanden currently works for the Stagecoach Foundation, author George R.R. Martin's philanthropic effort to promote creativity, storytelling, and technology in New Mexico.

1989

Devin Walker, political science—who performs under his persona in the Uncle Devin Show—was recognized with the Practitioner Award for Storytelling by the Canady Foundation for the Arts in June 2023.

1990

Tracey McPherson, economics, was named to the Board of Trustees at Frederick Community College by Governor Wes Moore in July 2023. McPherson has been a partner for 40 years at McPherson and Associates Inc., a commercial real estate appraisal and consulting firm.

Matthew Tobia, emergency health services, the Harrisonburg Fire Department's fire chief, was named the 2023 Virginia Fire Chief of the Year. Tobia has been a firefighter for 35 years and the Harrisonburg fire chief since 2020.

1991

Anthony Maranto, biochemistry and molecular biology, was inducted into the Marquis Who's Who and recognized for his expertise as the chief growth officer of the Lynker Corporation.

1993

Kimberly Ellison-Taylor, information systems, was named one of the 2023 Most Powerful Women in Accounting by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and *CPA Practice Advisor* in June 2023. Ellison-Taylor was also named a 2023 Top 50 Women CEOs by Women We Admire.

1994

Mike Eberhart, visual and performing arts, was a featured guest on the Carroll County Society of Human Resource Management podcast, hosted by **Michael Shelah** '95, English, for an episode discussing Eberhart's disability advocacy.

PRESERVING HISTORY'S MARK ON A PLACE

Jim Bailey '03, M.A. '07, history



Artillery booms in the distance as men hurriedly button up their scratchy wool uniforms and grab their muskets. The smell of campfires and horses intertwine with shouts, neighs, and gunfire.

"It was a sensory overload," remembers **Jim Bailey** '03, M.A. '07, history, of the recreated battles and camps he saw during 125th anniversary Civil War events. "At the age of eight, it wasn't that I was reading books and studying history. It was something I could see. Smell. Hear. Feel."

Exactly what Bailey would do with his early love for immersive history, however, wasn't clear until a class during his first year at UMBC, when a park ranger from nearby Fort McHenry National Monument & Historic Shrine in Baltimore City gave a guest talk on volunteering for the U.S. National Park Service (NPS). By December of 1998, 18-year-old Bailey was signed up with the Volunteers-in-Parks, the first step in a long career that has led him to his current position as superintendent of both Appomattox Court House National Historical Park and Booker T. Washington National Monument.

The NPS is 424 units strong and always expanding. If this number seems large—aren't there 63 national parks?—it's because NPS includes everything from national battlefields and lakeshores to historical parks and monuments, as well as marquee parks like Yellowstone.

Bailey explains that the two parks now under his jurisdiction—although 65 miles apart—tell similar narratives about the end of one story and the beginning of another. Appomattox Courthouse was the site of the April 9, 1865, surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, marking the beginning of the end of the Civil War and the start of a new era of freedom fraught with uncertainty for newly freed people.

The Booker T. Washington Monument tells the story of a nine-year-old boy who had to carry school books for the children of his enslavers but was not himself allowed to learn to read and write. Washington eventually made the 500-mile trek to Hampton University, becoming an influential early African American leader. (Another influential Black leader would follow in his footsteps to Hampton, President Emeritus **Freeman Hrabowski**, who received his undergraduate degree there.)

"As a nation, we for years have been having an open discussion on Civil War memory and monumentation in public places. Who gets remembered? And that is something that as an agency, we've always done," says Bailey. "We've always been expanding the cultural sites that we maintain and the stories that we tell. We recognize that all of these stories make up the tapestry that is our nation. It's not just for George Washington or Francis Scott Key. It's also people like Booker T. Washington and Hannah Reynolds." (Reynolds, an enslaved woman, was mortally wounded during the Battle of Appomattox Court House—and is the only known civilian casualty of the battle—but was free for the three days between the Confederate surrender and her tragic death.)

As superintendent, Bailey leads a team that works on preserving historic structures, keeping up with the latest research on the stories told in those structures, and maintaining natural resources, including water quality, wildlife surveys, wildlife management, and controlled burns.

Conflicts can arise, however, when working to balance both natural and cultural resources.

"How do you do that when you also have to provide access to the public today and you have to do that in a way that doesn't impact the ability of their children or grandchildren or great grandchildren to come to this park and see all the same things?" asks Bailey. "But that's the mission of the National Park Service: To preserve and protect these parks for both this generation and future generations."

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Bailey makes a point of getting out of the office to walk through the parks, greeting staff and talking to visitors. He says that his leadership style is heavily influenced by an early mentor: Hrabowski.

"As an undergraduate, I was shocked to see Dr. Hrabowski out there, talking with students. And you saw it all the time," explains Bailey. "He said that he can wander through campus and easily be looking down and be thinking about the next meeting or issue but had to remind himself not to do that. As a young man, hearing that from someone like Dr. Hrabowski was very powerful. And I've always tried to emulate that."

Sometimes, Bailey will seek solitude and hike a trail, maintaining a regular connection to the park—walking where Booker T. Washington spent his childhood or experiencing the Appomattox River where the Monacan people settled—separate from his administrative role. He describes this as "the power of place." You can experience history outside of books and classrooms because "you're there and you can see it."

"We call it the cultural landscape," adds Bailey. "The national parks are hugely important because they show us that as a people, we continue to define freedom, civil rights, and civil liberty. We can't take that for granted. It's something that each generation has to define and defend and decide—what do these things mean?"

For current Retrievers, Bailey recommends being willing to step outside of your comfort zone.

"Listen and open a dialogue with people who think differently. Engage with other disciplines than your own. Consider different perspectives. UMBC provides that space, both literally and figuratively."

Bailey says his favorite national park is "the next one" he visits. But just in case you need another reason to visit one of the 424 NPS sites: "The value of these national parks is that they are open classrooms where all Americans are welcome to think and to contemplate."

— Polina Kassir '24

Bailey with his wife, Megan Bailey '08, environmental science, and their children: (oldest to youngest) Jacob, Thomas, and Henry. Photos courtesy of Jim Bailey.



CLASS NOTES



Jeff Sickoria '01 recently retired after more than 20 years of active duty service in the U.S. Coast Guard, most recently serving at the Coast Guard Office of Cyberspace Forces.

1995

Khadijah Ali-Coleman, interdisciplinary studies, was appointed the new Prince George's County poet laureate. Her poetry is featured in the first and second volumes of *The Fire Inside: Collected Stories and Poems from Zora's Den*.

Kellie McCants-Price, interdisciplinary studies, became the chief diversity, equity, and inclusion officer for Anne Arundel Community College. In March 2023, she was awarded the ranks of tenure and full professor in the psychology department at Anne Arundel Community College.

Vondaleir Wright, mathematics, vice president of personnel operations at L2 Defense, was featured in the *Baltimore Business Journal's* "Leaders in Diversity" series for her work in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

representative to the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board, and as president for the Maryland Planning Association.

1999

Lola Eniola-Adefeso, chemical engineering, has been named as the Vennema Professor of Chemical Engineering for her outstanding leadership and pioneering research in the field of vascular-targeted drug delivery. Eniola-Adefeso works as the University of Michigan Diversity and Social Transformation Professor of Chemical Engineering.

Tiffany Holmes, M.F.A., imaging and digital arts, has been appointed as vice president for academic affairs at Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, as of August 2023.

1996

Kathleen Weems Guerra, English, the head of school for Lighthouse Christian Academy, received a master's in leadership of classical Christian schools in May 2023 from Gordon College as part of the program's inaugural cohort.

Lynda Eisenberg, environmental studies, was recently named the new director of the Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning. Eisenberg has worked for the Maryland Department of Planning, as Carroll County's

2000

Michael Casper, psychology, spoke with the *Columbia Daily Spectator* about his goals and philosophy in his first season as head coach for Columbia University's men's soccer team. Casper played soccer at UMBC, winning a Northeast Conference championship with the team.

Jacqueline Regales, American studies, was named the director of the Center for Civic and Community Engagement at Howard Community College.

2001

Sushama Chakraverty, M.S., computer science, a senior user interface engineering manager for Sledgehammer Games, was highlighted for her career in the video game industry in *IEEE Spectrum* magazine. Chakraverty has worked for multiple gaming companies, including Atari and Ubisoft, and developed games like *Assassin's Creed 2* and *Far Cry 4*.

Kafui Dzirasa, chemical engineering, was named Duke University's first Presidential Distinguished Chair. He is a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences and assistant professor of biomedical engineering at Duke, and he is also a pioneering researcher whose expertise in neuroscience, psychiatry, and engineering is transforming the understanding of the basic biological mechanisms of mental illness.

Jeff Sickoria, information systems, recently retired after more than 20 years of active duty service in the U.S. Coast Guard, most recently serving at the Coast Guard Office of Cyberspace Forces at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. After retiring, Sickoria joined Science Applications International Corporation as a cyber security chief.

2002

Christopher Valentino, M.S. '06, information systems management, was named chief innovation officer at Peraton, a Reston, Virginia-based federal technology and services contractor.

2003

Leigh Ann Acree, visual arts, was highlighted by the Food Safety and Inspection Service for her career. Originally hired as an intern directly after graduation, Acree now works as an IT specialist, seeking to reduce government waste, manage investments, and utilize readily available tools and products in federal IT programs.

Scott Brillman, emergency health services, was named as the new director of Fairfax County's Department of Public Safety Communications in August 2023.

2004

Elisa Watson, visual arts, was recently promoted to creative director at Alpha Graphics.

Alicia Wilson, political science, was appointed to serve on Governor Wes Moore's Baltimore City Trial Court Judicial Nominating Commission in September 2023.

John Klausmeier, mechanical engineering, was profiled on the website Sportskeeda for his work as the crew chief for NASCAR driver Chase Briscoe. In his three year tenure as Briscoe's crew chief, Klausmeier led him to one win, nine top fives, and 17 top tens.

2005

Tom Briggs, psychology, M.P.S. '08, successfully defended his dissertation and earned a Ph.D. in computational social science at George Mason University in fall 2023.

Huguens Jean, computer engineering, M.S. '08, Ph.D. '15, electrical engineering, was interviewed by UMBC labmate **Adrian Rosebrock** '10, Ph.D. '14, computer science, for his website PylmageSearch. Jean shared his story, starting in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to his schooling at UMBC and now to his current position at Google as an artificial intelligence researcher.

Annie Lee, M.S. '08, information systems, was named a 2023 Top 50 Women CEOs by Women We Admire in August 2023. Lee is the CEO of Avyanna Technologies, which delivers cutting-edge technology solutions to a diverse range of clients.

Patrick Varga, geography and environmental systems, was named the 2023 Larry R. Johnston Local Floodplain Manager of the Year by the Association of State Floodplain Managers. Varga is the environmental review supervisor in the Carroll County Government.

Eugene Young, information systems and sociology, announced his bid to represent Delaware in the U.S. Congress. Young is currently director of the Delaware State Housing Authority and a cofounder of Network Delaware, which focuses on civic engagement, civic advocacy, and training for those who want to be community leaders.

2006

David Ford, psychology, shares in the *Baltimore Sun* his experience as a recent contestant on "Jeopardy." Ford has been trying out for "Jeopardy" almost every year since he graduated from UMBC. While he bet too big on a late double jeopardy question he guessed incorrectly, Ford still says his dream came true.

Sylvia Trent-Adams, Ph.D., public policy, was highlighted in *Texas Metro News* for her career accomplishments. Trent-Adams was the first Black woman to serve as deputy surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

LieAnn Van-Tull, environmental science, an associate with Keller and Heckman's food and drug packaging and tobacco and e-vapor practice groups, was sworn in as president of the Washington Bar Association and honored as a 2023 – 2024 National Conference of Bar Presidents Diversity Scholar.

2007

Jacqueline McKay, modern languages and linguistics, has released four singles on Spotify, most recently "Glorify the Lord." She has also self-published three Christian books. Her newest book is *Empowered: 114 Thoughts That Will Set You Free*.

Drew Westervelt, economics, chief growth officer and founder of HEX Performance, has developed a new laundry detergent designed specifically for active wear. Westervelt launched HEX Performance in 2016 to create modern cleaning solutions for athletic fabrics.

Sherece West-Scantlebury, Ph.D., public policy, is named among top women in nonprofit leadership by Women We Admire in October 2023.

2008

Kizzmekia Corbett-Helaire, biological sciences and sociology, was announced as a member of Howard Hughes Medical Institute's inaugural Freeman Hrabowski Scholars cohort. Selected scholars are outstanding early career faculty in science and will receive up to \$8.6 million over 10 years to create diverse and inclusive lab environments. Corbett-Helaire

is an assistant professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Christopher J. Emmett, M.A., management of aging services, was named senior vice president of community operations at Erickson Senior Living. In his 28 years at Erickson, Emmett has held multiple leadership positions, including regional vice president of operations since 2013.

Kristel Ehrhardt, mathematics, M.A. '10, education, was included in the Marquis Who's Who registry in September 2023 for her work as an associate professor of mathematics at Howard Community College.

Chris Golen, M.S., management of aging services, started as the new CEO in summer 2023 at Carleton-Willard Village, an elder care facility in Bedford, Massachusetts.

Jen Holz, M.A., management of aging services, was the recipient of AARP's 2023 Maureen McKoy Award for Excellence in Service. The honor is given annually to one staff member who has exhibited outstanding service and performance in advancing the nationwide organization's community outreach and volunteer engagement.

Steven Martin, mathematics and computer science, an actuary manager at Liberty Mutual Insurance, won the Variance Prize for a new research paper in actuarial science. The Variance Prize is awarded to original research showing solutions to advanced insurance problems.

2009

Alexander Pyles, English, was named associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism in August 2023.

2010

Andrew Ishmael, information systems, a program manager at Northrop Grumman, was selected as the 2023 Society of Asian Scientists and Engineers Emerging Leader of the Year.

Aminata Jalloh, American studies, launched her sophomore children's picture book *The Taste of Home* in June 2023. The story follows Mariama, a young girl whose annual holiday plans take an unexpected turn.

CLASS NOTES

Tania Long, dance, was profiled in the *Baltimore Sun*, for her studio Dimensions Dance Center for children in Abingdon, Maryland.

Joshua Michael, political science, Ph.D. '22, public policy, has been elected vice president of the Maryland State Board of Education. Michael currently serves as the executive director of the Sherman Family Foundation, which provides grants to nonprofit organizations to promote education and opportunities for young people in Baltimore.

Sarah Murphy, health administration and policy, joined Delaware's Beebe Healthcare's growing clinical provider team in August 2023 as a family nurse practitioner providing emergency walk-in treatment.

Stephen Rafter, M.A., education, was named assistant principal of Kent Island High School in Queen Anne's County, Maryland, in September 2023.

2011

Brian Frazee, political science, M.P.P. '12, is the new president and CEO of the Delaware Healthcare Association. Frazee is also president of the Maryland Government Relations Association and president of the Alumni Association Board of Directors for UMBC.

2012

Stefanie Mavronis, political science and media and communications studies, was appointed the interim executive director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement. Mavronis took over the role in June 2023.

2013

Robbin Lee, visual arts, executive director of Baltimore Homecoming, was inducted to the Thread Hall of Fame. Thread is an organization that harnesses the power of relationships to deeply engage with young people facing the most significant opportunity and achievement gaps.

Anthony Venida, biological sciences, has been announced as a member of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's 2023 Hanna H. Gray Fellows. The program provides each fellow with up to \$1.5

million in support for up to eight years. Venida is interested in understanding the mechanisms that lead to death of dopaminergic neurons, a major pathological hallmark of Parkinson's disease.

2014

Emily Brown, M.S. '14, computer science, was named to Technical.ly's ReallIST Engineers 2023, 15 tech innovators, educators and advocates fueling Baltimore. Brown is a senior engineer at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

Joshua Gehret, English and ancient studies, was University of Baltimore Law School's Class of 2023 Valedictorian.

Courtney C. Hobson, M.A., historical studies, is working to tell the stories of enslaved people who lived and worked at Arlington House, Robert E. Lee's former home.

Charles Mason III, graphic design, was included in a New York City art exhibit "This Too Shall Pass," featuring works by a group of eleven artists who incorporate figurative and abstract representations of flowers in their work. In summer 2023, Maryland Public Television featured Mason in their original series *Artworks*.

Monica Pruitt, biochemistry and molecular biology, shared in the member magazine for the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology the impact Usher syndrome—a rare disease that is the most common cause of genetic deaf-blindness—has had on her personal and professional life.

2015

Mustafa Al-Adhami, M.S., Ph.D. '20, mechanical engineering, and his Baltimore-based company, Astek Diagnostics, received funding from the University System of Maryland Momentum Fund to support the development of a device that determines which antibiotic is best for treating urinary tract infections.

Isabel Aldunate, media and communication studies, was named director of media relations at the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations in September 2023.

Omar Khan, biological sciences, M.P.S. '23, data science, has joined the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) as a data science fellow in the



Retrievers Kelly Casper '91 and Brian Woodhead '90 shared this photo from their son Jack Casper-Woodhead's '20, M.P.P. '22, wedding with Hayley Goodloe '21. "Everyone in this photo is either an alumnus, present, or past employee at UMBC," says Casper.

Operational Evaluation Division of IDA's Systems and Analyses Center.

Anna Zahn, political science, a conflict researcher at Airwars—which tracks, assesses, archives, and investigates civilian harm claims in conflict-affected nations—wrote about the role of metadata in "Civilian Casualty Assessment" reports for the website Just Security.

2017

Lana Fakhry, political science, joined the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a security and science policy nonprofit, as a project assistant in the Joint Advanced Warfighting Division of IDA's Systems and Analyses Center.

Nelli Mosavi, Ph.D., electrical engineering, received a Women in Aerospace's 2023 Aerospace Awareness Award award in August 2023 for excellence and innovation in outreach and raising public understanding of aerospace programs and her commitment to the advancement of women in aerospace. Mosavi currently serves as a project manager at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

Danielle Schmitt, Ph.D., biochemistry, received the National Institutes of Health New Innovator Award in October 2023 for her research on cellular metabolic regulation, which is an expansion of her work as a UMBC graduate student. Schmitt is currently a professor at UCLA.

2018

Valerie Yu, biological sciences and philosophy, joined the Patterson and Sheridan law firm in October 2023 to focus on intellectual property law.

2019

Millan Bhatt, music technology, performing under the stage name MLLN, released an R&B album, *In a Day*, his first fully self-produced album.

Dilay Koçoğulları, M.F.A., intermedia and digital arts, was profiled in a national Turkish newspaper for her bio art installations.

Anna Gifty Opoku-Agyeman, economics, has been named to the inaugural *Forbes* 30 Under 30 class of Boston. Opoku-Agyeman is a doctoral candidate at Harvard's Kennedy School studying public policy and economics and holds fellowships from the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

Nicole Ringel, M.F.A., imaging and digital arts, was awarded a 2023 Grants for Artists from the Maryland State Arts Council.

2020

Jack Casper-Woodhead, health administration and policy, M.P.P. '22, and **Hayley Goodloe** '21, information systems, were married on June 1, 2023, in Aruba, surrounded by family and friends, including many relationships forged during their time at UMBC.

Gabbo Franks, music technology, and **Etai Fuchs** '21, music technology, were featured in an August 2023 *Baltimore Fishbowl* article discussing their band Moon by Moon and how it originated during their time at UMBC.

Vicky Graham, acting, will perform in "I Will Eat You Alive," a new play presented by Interrobang Productions in January 2024. The play portrays a dinner party hosted by three fat women to "celebrate" one's decision to lose weight and confronts diet culture and fatphobia.

EMBARKING ON 'HAPPILY EVER AFTER'

Bethanee Bemis '09, history and anthropology, M.A. '11, history



For those who grew up—or still are—spellbound by movies like *Beauty and the Beast*, *Toy Story*, and *The Lion King*, you are part of what some historians dub the "Disney Generation." Your childhood joins forces with a collective nostalgia that weaves Disney's enchanting tales into our very own identities. In a country with many competing cultural icons, Disney—for better or worse—remains a singular unifying brand for anyone who spent their childhood in the U.S.

Smithsonian museum specialist and curator **Bethanee Bemis** '09, history and anthropology, M.A. '11, history, is an expert in weaving narratives with identity and a storyteller at heart. Her work shines best when married to her earliest passion—Disney.

In her newly published book *Disney Theme Parks and America's National Narratives: Mirror, Mirror for Us All*, Bemis shares her personal journey with Disney. She was brought home from the hospital to a Disney-themed nursery, went to Disney World at age two, and around that age, watched *The Little Mermaid* for the first time, marking her enchantment.

This profound connection with Disney would eventually shape Bemis' academic and then career path. During a recent installation of a Smithsonian exhibition on American democracy, Bemis recalls, "the central inquiry revolved around who holds the authority to narrate America's tales. Must our collective narrative be uniform for national unity? Can such unity even exist? That's when it hit me—Disney! Disney is the narrator of American stories."

As the curator of the exhibit "Mirror, Mirror: Reflections of America in Disney Parks" at the National Museum of American History, Bemis explores Disney's impact on American culture and reminds us of the significance of cultural artifacts

like movies, dolls, and historical items. These artifacts can inspire conversations, challenge assumptions, and even drive change.

Bemis used her time at UMBC to fuse her early fascination with storytelling and her dedication to exploring the intricate threads of history.

Seth Messinger, then an associate professor of sociology and anthropology, played a transformational role in her belief in herself. "Initially, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Dr. Messinger, my undergraduate advisor, believed in me," says Bemis. "He was convinced that I could achieve success with a little extra effort. He pushed me to go outside my comfort zone and grow, which I appreciated. ... Well, later on, not in the moment."

On campus, Bemis felt that she could explore her interests. "I really appreciated how the community at UMBC was a safe space to experiment and think about the person I wanted to be when I finished college," says Bemis, who met her husband **Benjamin D'Alessio** '10, M.S. '11, chemical engineering, when they were both grad students on campus "It's a lifetime community if you want it to be," she smiles. "It's not just a school."

Messinger, who has kept in touch with Bemis after they both moved on from UMBC, says Bemis has made him so proud. "In addition to taking my classes, she served as a research assistant for me. She's very detail oriented and organized, as well as warm and kind as a person. I've loved watching her family and career flourish."

What began as an internship at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History grew into a career mission to uncover stories hidden within the museum's vast collections. Over the years, she moved from intern to curator, specializing in political history and weaving narratives that resonate with the pulse of the nation.

"We must keep telling the stories and make space in the museum for people to tell their own stories," says Bemis. "I hope that whatever I do will contribute to that somehow."

— Roni Rosenthal



CLASS NOTES



Carol Gambrell, Michael Gambrell '75, James Wiggins '75, and Evangeline Wiggins met up at the 2023 Montreal International Jazz Festival.

2021

Rahne Alexander, M.F.A., intermedia and digital arts, was featured in the “Game Changer” section of *Baltimore Magazine*’s June 2023 issue for her artistic works and advocacy for Baltimore’s LGBTQ community. She was also awarded a 2023 Grant for Artists from the Maryland State Arts Council.

Adam Dixon, Ph.D., geography and environmental systems, co-authored a study in *Ecological Applications* with several UMBC faculty in April 2023 that uses a combination of audio recorders and satellite imagery to learn how birds are faring on agricultural lands.

Taylor West, public health, M.P.P. '23, was a member of the National Centers for Environmental Information’s Air Quality Climate Team this summer measuring trends in air quality in the Pacific Northwest.

2022

Courtney Cavin, M.S. '23, chemical engineering, was named to Technical.ly’s ReaLLIST Engineers 2023, 15 tech innovators, educators and advocates fueling Baltimore. Cavin is a product engineer at Astek Diagnostics.

Suhapriya Venkateswaran, M.P.S., has joined Intertek Acumen Security as a project coordinator as of June 2023.

2023

Liza Aleinikova, M.F.A., was included in Maryland Art Place’s “Young Blood” exhibit in summer 2023. The event showcased the works of recent Baltimore-area graduates.

Grishma Prabhukhot, Ph.D., mechanical engineering, was awarded second place in the Institute of Food Technologists’ food microbiology division graduate student oral competition in August 2023.

Cassandra Pollard, translational life science technology, and **Samantha Petros**, translational life science technology, were named members of BioBuzz’s inaugural Board of Buzz in October 2023.

FRIENDS WE WILL MISS

Thomas Luther Benson died on May 10, 2023. From 1970 to 1986, Benson was a philosophy professor at UMBC, as well as the director of the general honors program and the interdisciplinary studies program. He’s fondly remembered by one of his early students, Dale Gough '70, American studies. At the end of one semester, when Gough was sick, Benson allowed him to submit his end-of-term paper by cassette tape, he shared.

Ryan Fidler '00, visual and performing arts, a software engineer and developer, died on Thursday, June 22, after an eight-month battle with pancreatic cancer. From 2004 until 2022, Fidler worked as director of product development and chief technology officer for

Syndicus NACON, a technical recruiting and staffing company based in Annapolis.

Maarja Schuetz (Hildebrand) Gandy '81, health science and policy, passed away on August 31, 2023. She had a long career in healthcare and pharmaceuticals. She enjoyed her retirement running a food pantry in Calvert County, Maryland, and traveling the world.

Douglas Warren Hansen '81, visual and performing arts, suffered a heart attack on September 25, 2023, while pursuing his passion of biking. Hansen worked for *Baltimore Magazine* and Johns Hopkins University. Hansen was known for his attention-grabbing urban landscape photographs.

Tommy Jackson '75, political science, died on July 26, 2023. Jackson met his wife, and life partner, **Dorye Michelle Emory** '77, Afro-American studies, at UMBC. For 20 years, Jackson served as the pastor of Faith Tabernacle in Stamford, Connecticut. During his time at Faith, Jackson served the Stamford community with a weekly food bank in an effort to reduce hunger in the community and held annual back-to-school drives.

Bonnie Anne Lease, M.A. '02, history, passed away on July 6, 2023. Early in Lease’s career she spent many years with the Congressional Information Service as an editor, a project manager, and competitive intelligence researcher. Later she worked for History Associates as a historian, before spending the rest of her career until retirement at the Enoch Pratt Free Library.

Patrice Snyder-Walsh '94, nursing, worked as an ambulance emergency medical technician and as a trauma and critical care nurse at several Washington, D.C., hospitals. She also instructed college nursing courses before retiring. Snyder-Walsh passed away on June 2, 2023.

Denise Ann Tritaik '87, English, returned to school after raising her three children—not wanting to be the only one in her family without a four-year degree. She then enjoyed a career at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources in Annapolis, Maryland. Tritaik passed away on May 15, 2023.

Guy Leslie Yates '79, history, passed away on January 16, 2023. He was a senior real estate assessor for Fairfax County Government before he retired in March 2011. He was the beloved spouse of **Susan Radecke Yates** '86, health administration and policy.

Esther Zells '70, Spanish, passed away in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 3, 2023.

FROM APPLES TO ARMY ROBOTS

Priya Narayanan, Ph.D. '08, mechanical engineering



She didn't exactly experience a Sir Isaac Newton-like epiphany after being conked by a falling apple, but **Priya Narayanan**, Ph.D. '08, mechanical engineering, spent a lot of her time at UMBC interacting with the iconic red fruit.

For her Ph.D. thesis, Narayanan worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to study whether a simple device made of a long, inclined track could reliably orient apples. The ultimate goal was to automate visual inspection of the fruit—using cameras to spot blemishes—and the cameras required the same view of the apple each time.

Narayanan spent thousands of hours performing experiments with rolling fruit, filming high-speed videos of its descent down the track, and developing mathematical models of the apple's motion to explore why the fruit ended up in its final orientation at the bottom of the track.

"I was able to shape the direction of the research and got interested in modeling the contact mechanics of the apples," Narayanan says. "I thought it might be easy, but it turned out to be very hard."

Rouben Rostamian, a professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at UMBC who worked with Narayanan on the modeling, commended her persistence.

"Priya was interested in studying the problem deeply," he says. "She learned new areas of math so that she could really pursue her questions."

Curiosity and commitment to learning have been a constant of Narayanan's approach to problem solving—even as the systems she studies and the roles she takes on have shifted over her career. Narayanan was recently named chief of the autonomous systems branch at the U.S. Army DEVCOM Army Research Laboratory (ARL). She leads teams working to develop intelligent robots to assist the U.S. military.

"I'm not studying my apples anymore," she says. "But in graduate school, I broadened my skill set. That has really helped me throughout my career."

After graduating from UMBC, Narayanan worked for a few years at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore. She studied robotic systems that could assist patients recovering from strokes. The work gave her the opportunity to develop expertise in computer vision and image processing as well as gain experience making prototypes for robotic research and conducting clinical trials.

In 2014, Narayanan was awarded a National Research Council fellowship to work at the Naval Research Laboratory.

"It was around this time that deep learning started making waves," she says. She shifted her focus to building artificial intelligence (AI) models. When her fellowship ended after three years, Narayanan joined the ARL, headquartered in Adelphi, Maryland, and has been there ever since.

She has ascended the ranks at the organization, moving from a research engineering position, to leader of a small team, to ultimately head of an entire branch.

Researchers under Narayanan's leadership conduct research in robotics to help aerial, wheeled, and legged robots autonomously navigate rugged landscapes and difficult terrains, and coordinate their actions with other robots and humans.

As part of her role, Narayanan has worked with UMBC researchers affiliated with the Center for Real-time Distributed Sensing and Autonomy. The center, which is led by information systems professors **Aryya Gangopadhyay** and **Nirmalya Roy**, coordinates with ARL on research to develop AI-enabled smart robots.

Narayanan says she found her way into management by embracing leadership opportunities that came her way, such as leading an ARL seedling

program that encouraged researchers to form teams and submit proposals for new high-risk, high-pay-off projects. "I've also attended an entrepreneurship and leadership program organized by ARL in collaboration with UMBC Training Centers, so I'm still learning from the university," she says.

She honed soft skills, such as communication and networking, that have been critical to her success. She also says her broad range of research experience has been useful in her leadership positions, helping her connect with team members who have varying areas of expertise.

Looking back at her days at UMBC, Narayanan remembers a wonderful community and the feeling of being supported. Not long after she arrived on campus, she and a few fellow students found themselves in the same elevator as then President **Freeman Hrabowski**. He introduced himself and asked all the students their names and what they were studying. Later, when Narayanan and a friend performed a classical dance on campus in celebration of the Indian holiday Diwali, she remembers how President Hrabowski came backstage to complement their performance.

She encourages current students to take advantage of all that the university and the region have to offer: "Realize how many resources you have at your disposal, and really make use of them," she says.

Uri Tasch, her Ph.D. advisor, who is now an emeritus professor of mechanical engineering, recalls how Narayanan showed up nearly every day at the lab. "You couldn't stop her," he said. "She did beautiful work, and she always had a smile on her face."

— Catherine Meyers

Above: Headshot of Narayanan. Below: Narayanan at a classical dance celebration on campus. Photos courtesy of Narayanan.



THEN & NOW



Building the Bonfire from Scratch



At UMBC, we're still young enough to be making traditions. Meet **Thomas Locastro**, biological sciences alumnus, who knew from day one on campus in 2003 that he wanted to leave behind a lasting legacy.

Locastro joined the newly-made First Year Council, designed to help students view themselves as co-creators of our campus community. "They were encouraging us to

pick something to do," Locastro explains. "How do you leave your mark?"

Locastro brainstormed an idea that would be exciting for students but still relatively inexpensive, and therefore hopefully repeatable. He landed on a bonfire. In the center of campus.

Understandably, there were some roadblocks. But Locastro had staff members to champion his idea. **Jen Dress**, then the coordinator for the students events board, was integral to the process. "We are really dedicated to figuring things out when students come to us with dreams to make things happen," says Dress, now director of engagement for Campus Life.

The other MVP, says Locastro, is **Glen Cook**, a member of the grounds crew who collects pallets leading up to the fire and is always trying to make the conflagration bigger and better (while staying safe).

"I talked to so many people before I found the right people to really push the idea forward for approval with me," Locastro says. Since the first bonfire in 2004, Locastro has attended every lighting since.

"I've flown back from Saudi Arabia to make this event," Locastro says. "I've flown back from Monaco. I've flown back from a lot of places in the U.S. I've never missed it."

Thousands of students have warmed their hands at the last 19 years of bonfires.

What tradition will you start at UMBC?

—Jaina Peveto '24

Locastro says David Hoffman, Ph.D. '13, language, literacy, and culture, the director of UMBC's Center for Democracy and Civic Life, was his biggest supporter in this endeavor. Hoffman, who took this photo of Locastro lighting the first bonfire, says, "The big lesson in Thomas's story is that students really can bring their vision and talents to the collaborative work of making UMBC's future bright."



WILD CARD

Sacred Spaces

It makes sense that in a space on campus intentionally left green, wooded, and, well sacred, there would be someplace to sit, and under that bench there would be a notebook waiting for you, along with a writing implement. Your thoughts are the last ingredient for the moment.

Since the founding of the Joseph Beuys Sculpture Park on the Knoll in the southwest corner of the Loop in 2001, UMBC community members have been writing in journals tucked under benches from Nature Sacred—an organization that hopes to promote a connection to nature through journaling and contemplation spaces throughout America.

Sandra Abbott, curator of collections and outreach at the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture (CADVC), has collected and replaced many dozens of the journals as part of her role at UMBC. “Journaling is a very intimate medium. People pour their hearts out in them here just like they would a personal diary tucked under their pillow,” says Abbott, who shares the journals with Nature Sacred and also uploads the texts to CADVC’s website.

“After reading 15 years of journal entries from our site, I can say a significant number of these entries are rife with emotion—whether a writer is waxing on about their newfound love or heartfully responding to someone else’s heartbreak—the moment spent physically writing in a book and in one’s own hand is powerful.”

Maybe you confessed a budding romance in those pages yourself. Maybe you questioned your major, or just drew a funny picture. The filled and empty journals alike call to Retrievers to make their mark on the pages, and in the world.

—Randianne Leysbon '09

UMBC Magazine’s editorial intern Jaina Peveto '24 takes a moment out of her day to write in a Nature Sacred journal.



Thank You! Your generosity impacts everything we do.

From providing student scholarships and funding faculty research to resourcing programs like Retriever Essentials and the Women's Center, your generosity impacts every level of student success here at UMBC. Your gifts also go a long way in supporting our numerous championship teams, including our four-time America East championship softball team and three-time America East championship volleyball team. The culture of giving that you have helped cultivate is making us a better place in so many ways. **We can't say it enough—THANK YOU!**



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WE'RE HEADING YOUR WAY

UMBC will be on the road this spring bringing events to alumni in San Francisco and the Bay Area, New York, and locally in Montgomery County, Maryland, and Northern Virginia. To share suggestions for events you would like to see or to get involved with planning, contact us at alum@umbc.edu. Keep an eye on your email for more information, and check out our alumni events calendar at alumni.umbc.edu.

Cheer on the Retrievers

Alumni and friends are invited to special alumni recognition games for men's and women's basketball. Let's cheer on our teams and help them bring home wins! Both game will be at the Chesapeake Employers Insurance Arena at UMBC and include pre-game event receptions, special giveaways, and half-time alumni athlete recognition.

Saturday, February 10, 2024—Men's Basketball vs. University of Vermont

Saturday, February 24, 2024—Women's Basketball vs. New Hampshire

For a full UMBC Athletics' schedule, visit umbcretrievers.com.



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