

Spring 2024

UMBC

MAGAZINE

CAMPUS AS A LAB

Look closely and you'll see faculty and students turning the everyday infrastructure and green oases of UMBC into out-of-the-ordinary laboratories. – page 22





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Going Back for Seconds

Restaurateur and Retriever **Lane Harlan '21** is known for her excellent Baltimore watering holes, but here, the 2024 James Beard Award finalist talks about returning to UMBC to finish her degree.

By Kait McCaffrey

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ON THE COVER

Julia Crews '24, George Rush '24, and Sam Meisel '25 get their research off the ground in Charles Kaylor's class Exploring the Environment: A Geospatial Perspective. "We use the campus as a laboratory," Kaylor says.

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TO YOU



Dear Retrievers,

On a recent rainy spring day, as I was strolling down Academic Row, my umbrella suddenly sprang backwards and broke, causing the books I was carrying with my other hand to drop. Almost as swiftly as they hit the wet ground, a student walking nearby hurried over to help pick them up. I shared some quick words of gratitude, and we were on our way again—me back to my office, and the student off to class.

Later that evening, during the killer “boot camp” class my colleague Laila Shishineh teaches in the Retriever Activities Center—a perk, indeed, of working here—I found myself a bit out of breath and needed rest. I must have looked worse than I felt because a younger member of the staff took a moment to pause and ask, “Are you okay?” I thanked him, assured him I’d live, and got right back to my jump squats.

But later, I thought about it again and again. It’s funny how unassuming little moments like these make me love our community more each day.

UMBC is known for being a community of extraordinarily smart people, of course, but we’re also helpers, solvers, and givers who use our talents to make the world around us a little nicer for others. We see it on all levels—whether it’s a group of retirees bonding over a common interest in UMBC (page 44) or Fulbright Scholars learning just as much about themselves as they teach other students around the globe (page 30). It can be quiet like an artist and her mentor finding wonder in the seeds of our very own campus lawns (page 22) or it can be awe-inspiringly loud, like the whoops of joy of a team watching years of their work launch into space on a NASA satellite (page 36).

And sometimes it happens on a smaller scale, like checking to make sure a colleague is okay. We all need that sometimes.

These moments add up quickly, and they make us who we are. I’m proud of our Retriever community and all the ways we show up for each other.

— *Jenny O’Grady*
Editor, UMBC Magazine

WEB FEATURES

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“*The Conversation: Is Time Travel Even Possible?*”



A Month of Earth Day Events



Finding a Home in Two Different Departments—Russian and Cybersecurity

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OFFICE HOURS



President Valerie Sheares Ashby makes it a point to meet weekly with students and hear about their UMBC experiences and their aspirations for life after UMBC. Today, Jenna Beshara, a senior English and visual arts double major, shares her Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement Day (URCAD) project with the president. Beshara, who spent last summer on a study abroad program in Wales, painted a series of Welsh watercolor landscapes with paints she made herself using only natural ingredients. In this excerpt of their conversation, she and President Sheares Ashby discuss the importance of pursuing art and research through a sustainability lens.

President Sheares Ashby: These paintings are just beautiful. I feel like the water is just coming off the page. Is that the way you painted it or is it actually texture?

Jenna Beshara: Thank you! It's a little bit of both, because the pigment—no matter how much you grind it or sift it—it's still going to be a little bit coarse and gritty. I found out that it takes about a week to make one batch of pigment. You start with flowers or vegetables or plants—red cabbage actually makes the

best blue—and you put them in a pot and pour boiling water over it. Then it's a sequence of simmering and letting it rest. After you strain out all the materials, you add in a salt compound and baking soda. You grind what's left, which turns into a mud-like consistency. It needs a week to dry and then you grind it and strain it several times.

But to make the paint, there's quite a bit of chemistry involved. The idea just kind of came to me because acrylic paint is like liquid plastic. It's really bad for the environment.

Sheares Ashby: I am a polymer chemist, so I know what you mean. I appreciate that you did watercolor and environmentally friendly materials. That is very impressive. How did you decide to start this project?

Beshara: After I came back from Wales, I knew I wanted to apply for a Fulbright student grant to do more arts research. My mentor, **Timothy Nohe**, a professor in visual arts, suggested I use URCAD as a jumping-off point for my research project. He supports me in everything that I do. I'll come to him and I'm like, "Hey, I want to do this." And he's like, "Awesome, do it."

At one point in this project, I was so frustrated because I wanted to make oil paintings. The homemade oil wasn't drying, and it looked so gritty. So I went to Professor Nohe and said, "I don't know what I'm doing." And he said, "Well, if the medium isn't working, just change it." And that blew my mind, and I was like, "Whoa, I can do that?"

Sheares Ashby: When I look at these paintings of these beautiful landscapes, it reminds me that from an environmental framework that if we do not care for this, it will not continue to look like this. This beauty that you have captured is not guaranteed. We have a responsibility to keep this as beautiful as it is.

Beshara: I'm applying for an Undergraduate Research Award to keep studying this because the supplies to make the paint can get a little pricey. But it's so important, with climate change, that sustainability and art can go hand-in-hand.

Sheares Ashby: I love UMBC because our students are so focused on making some version of difference in the world, no matter the discipline. It is rare that I run into a student who doesn't think about whatever they care about in an interdisciplinary way. Most of my students—like you—are thinking about how they are going to change something in the world to make it better.

Jenna Beshara '24 and President Valerie Sheares Ashby hold two of Beshara's Welsh watercolor landscapes with paint handmade by Beshara using only natural ingredients.

DAWG'S EYE VIEW



HONORABLE MENTIONS

Talk about a powerhouse panel—Maryland House of Delegates Speaker **Adrienne A. Jones** '76, psychology, and Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement Director **Stefanie Mavronis** '12, political science and media and communications, were invited alongside Maryland Comptroller Brooke Lierman to the UMBC Political Science Council of Majors Women's Leadership Conference in April 2024.

 @SpeakerAJones



DECK THE HALLS IN BLACK AND GOLD

The only thing better than arriving home is having UMBC welcome you when you get there. BWI Airport is currently sporting Retriever branding all around the baggage claim and throughout the concourses. Fly in and out of Baltimore this summer, and you, too, like **Corris Davis** '98, biological sciences, M.P.P. '19, the director of Academic Opportunity Programs at UMBC, might see your favorite colors at the airport.

 @CorrisDavis



STAR STRUCK

It's not every day that your science fellowship leads to being cast as an extra in the next Oscar-winning Best Picture film, but for **Nathan Myers**, Ph.D. '22, physics, after working at the Los Alamos National Lab, he landed a role as one of the many physicists in *Oppenheimer*.

 @UMBCphysics



GIVING TREES

Campus volunteers took to the dirt as part of an Earth Day invasive species cleanup on campus. With food, games, and guidance, this event was created with campus partners to help foster a culture of sustainability at UMBC. All in all, about 60 volunteers cleaned up more than 800 pounds of invasive plants!

 @SustainableUMBC



OUT OF SIGHT

While not directly in the path of totality, Retrievers totally showed up for the April 8 eclipse. Sprawled across the Quad and Erickson Field, community members collectively gasped when the 88 percent of the sun slipped behind the moon, momentarily leaving the Loop in an eerie dusk-like gloom before shining again on all the upturned glasses keeping watch.



RESEARCH ON A PLANE

Kat Ball '21, chemical engineering, recently disembarked from NASA's Douglas DC-8, a flying laboratory under NASA's Airborne Science Program. Ball operated a chemical ionization mass spectrometer during the DC-8's final flight, after 37 years of successful airborne missions across all continents.



TO DINE FOR

Retriever Essentials and UMBC's Dining Services joined forces to host the second UMBC Cooking Competition. Students showcased their culinary competency, and the winning dish will be featured at True Grit's. We're calling this one a recipe for success!



SERVING SUCCESS

UMBC volleyball won their fourth-consecutive America East title and went on to the NCAA tournament as the regional three seed. The team got a shout out from Maryland Governor Wes Moore and an invite to the Maryland State Senate to celebrate their impressive legacy. Talk about an ace!



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

UMBC, DOJ Reach Agreement on Title IX Compliance



UMBC is implementing numerous, significant steps to enhance its work to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct and sex-based discrimination. The work, much of which has been underway since soon after President **Valerie Sheares Ashby** arrived in 2022, comes as the result of a voluntary agreement between UMBC and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The agreement follows the conclusion this spring of a lengthy investigation into the university's compliance with Title IX, the federal law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in educational programs and activities that receive federal funding.

The DOJ's investigation spanned three years and focused primarily on the period 2015 – 2020. The DOJ determined that in those years, the university failed to comply with Title IX by not properly responding to allegations that the former head coach of the men's and women's swimming and diving teams engaged in sexual misconduct and discrimination against student-athletes. "As I have shared with many of you in recent days, the DOJ investigation has caused us to reckon with the past," President Sheares Ashby wrote in a message to the UMBC community. "We

cannot take away the suffering and trauma that many of our students endured in those years, nor can we undo the actions or inactions of the past. We can control how we respond to that painful past and how we ensure that this never happens again."

The agreement commits UMBC to implement measures to enhance the strength, accountability, and independence of the university's Title IX office; provide specific support for student-athletes and the Athletics Department staff who serve them; expand training for students and employees to improve UMBC's prevention and response to sex discrimination; and provide financial relief to certain members of the 2015 – 2016 to 2020 – 2021 men's and women's swimming and diving teams, as determined by the DOJ. The agreement requires regular reporting by UMBC to the DOJ and will remain in effect through the 2028 – 2029 academic year.

The DOJ acknowledged UMBC's full cooperation with the investigation and noted the significant progress the university has made since 2022 in strengthening its prevention of and response to sex-based discrimination, including sexual harassment and assault.

Among those efforts was the creation of the role of vice president for institutional equity and chief diversity officer, a role to which **Tanyka M. Barber** was appointed in April 2023. Barber has led ensuing work to enhance Title IX reporting structures and procedures, expand training and prevention initiatives, and provide additional support and resources to students and employees.

"Nothing matters more than the safety and well-being of our students," wrote Sheares Ashby. "I hope the measures that we are taking demonstrate our commitment to make sure that we never again waver from that highest priority. We will create and sustain a culture of accountability and care so that all members of the UMBC community feel safe. You have my word."

— Magazine Staff

Learn more at umbc.edu/dojagreement.

Retrievers Win Gold



For the fifth consecutive year, multiple UMBC students have been awarded a Barry Goldwater Scholarship. **Samuel Barnett** '25, biochemistry; **Nathaniel Glover** '25, chemical engineering; and **Gabriel Otubu** '25, biochemistry, were recently named among the 2024 Goldwater Scholars recipients.

The goal of the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation includes ensuring that the "U.S. is producing the number of highly-qualified professionals the nation needs" in the natural sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

Before transferring to UMBC from Howard Community College, Barnett took part in the UMBC BUILD a Bridge to STEM internship program, which he says was vital for "my development in this Goldwater process." During the internship, Barnett worked with **Maria Cambraia Guimaro**, assistant director of research and international affairs in the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, who he says played a significant role in his research journey at UMBC.

Glover, a Meyerhoff Scholar, says his Goldwater proposal included the research he worked on to develop a dual-phase steel that can combat hydrogen embrittlement, the mechanical damage of metal due to the penetration of hydrogen.

As an undergraduate research fellow in biology professor **Rachel Brewster's** lab, Otubu, also a Meyerhoff Scholar, is investigating the role of a specific gene in the neurulation process and how it affects other genes. This research, Otubu says, is aiming to understand the genetic risk factors associated with specific congenital disorders.

Otubu, Barnett, and Glover are among the 438 recipients of this year's scholarship, the largest number of scholars ever supported in a single year in the program's history.

— *Adriana Fraser*

Preparing for a New Provost

Manfred H. M. van Dulmen will join the university in July as provost and senior vice president. He will succeed interim provost **David Dauwalder**.

"From the first time I met him, Manfred's commitment to students, his care for people with whom he worked, his humility, and his drive for mission-driven excellence were clear, as was his desire to be at UMBC," says President **Valerie Sheares Ashby**. "I could not be more thrilled about this appointment."

Van Dulmen says UMBC's values of inclusive excellence and history of innovation attracted him to the role, and he is excited to work with the UMBC community to articulate strategic priorities and chart a course to the future.

"It is a tremendous opportunity and privilege to be chosen to serve in this role, to build on the incredible history and legacy of the institution to further its excellence and its role as a national leader in higher education," he said.

Van Dulmen comes to UMBC from Kent State University in Ohio, where he most recently served as senior associate provost and dean of the Graduate College. He started at Kent State as a faculty member in the Department of Psychological Sciences in 2004 and since then served in numerous academic leadership positions at the university, including as interim department chair and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. He led Kent State through the COVID-19 pandemic and developed strategies for enhancing graduate education and for supporting student mental health. He also led strategic planning in academic affairs, helped to enhance and promote research strength across all disciplines, and led efforts resulting in new collaborative degree programs in data science



and cybersecurity as well as in innovative micro-credential programs at Kent State.

"As a first-generation college student and a first-generation immigrant to the U.S. who attended graduate school in America, Manfred is passionate about the transformative power of higher education and about its public mission in service of students and society broadly," says President Sheares Ashby.

Van Dulmen is an award-winning scholar with a Ph.D. in family social science from the University of Minnesota. He has received millions of dollars in research funding, published more than 100 articles and book chapters, and edited or co-edited three books. He also founded and served as editor-in-chief of the Sage Publications journal *Emerging Adulthood*. His research interests include adolescent and young adult relationships and experiences, externalizing behavior problems and aggression, and measurement and methodology.

— *Magazine Staff*

"It is a tremendous opportunity...to build on the incredible history and legacy of the institution."

— **Manfred H. M. van Dulmen**

THE NEWS

In Brief

Bringing the Research Energy

More than 400 undergraduate students brought their research and energy to the 28th annual Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement Day (URCAD). The student scholars presented a broad range of research and creative projects to peers, family, friends, and inquiring minds of all kinds. The day included a film festival, interactive video game demonstrations, musical performances, a photography and painting exhibition, and poster board and oral presentations from students across colleges.

“This showcase event not only exemplifies UMBC’s commitment to our students from all disciplines but it also defines our commitment by providing them the opportunity to engage in mentored projects and, through creative thought and focused inquiry, to discover in themselves their passion,” said **Katherine Cole**, dean and vice provost of Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

Among this year’s group of presenters was **Chiad Onyeje** ’24, chemical engineering, who explained the research he’s worked on for nearly three years to develop “spherical shells that we can use as internal Band-Aids,” he said.

“URCAD is different from any other presentations that I’ve been able to give on my research thus far. It really felt like a celebration in comparison,” said Onyeje.

Stefanie Mavronis ’12, political science, media and communication studies, delivered this year’s URCAD keynote speech. Just over a decade ago, Mavronis, who is the director of the Mayor’s Office of Safety and Engagement in Baltimore City, was herself a student presenter at URCAD.

“When I think back to it, it was UMBC that was the first to help me see myself as a creative practitioner. It’s the place that prepared me to confront the challenges and harsh realities of the world head on and to do so while embracing clear values,” says Mavronis.

Going the Distance

The onset of COVID-19 brought a tremendous amount of uncertainty about the way students would learn amid a global pandemic. But within that challenge, UMBC saw a unique opportunity to open its virtual doors to former students.

Finish Line began as an outreach program in the fall of 2020, targeting former Retrievers who had 60 or more credits but hadn’t completed their degree before leaving the university. And while these students might not have had the opportunity to return physically to campus, the sudden availability of a virtual classroom offered them a new pathway to their degree goals.

The intentional outreach and personalized advising offered through the program has allowed nearly 300 former students to return to UMBC to finish their degrees.

“The Finish Line program has allowed me and others from my office to exercise some of our most creative academic advising skills to enable former UMBC students to finish degrees they had intended to complete when they first began here,” says **Ken Baron**, assistant vice provost for academic advising and student success. “We are passionate about degree completion, and each semester, our Finish Line graduates help us recognize and celebrate what makes UMBC special—a place where hard work brings out the best in everyone.”

With the demands that come with everyday life—jobs, families, home responsibilities, restaurant dynasty (see page 12), etc.—this model allows UMBC to meet students where they are. It acknowledges that most don’t have the luxury of being a full-time student and works to best suit their needs and timeline.

“We’re proud to have redefined inclusive excellence in a way that honors UMBC’s core values and ethos,” says Baron.

Welcome, Coach Candice Hill

UMBC announced **Candice Hill** as the new head coach for UMBC women’s basketball team. Hill is the 11th coach in the history of the program.

Hill returns to her home city of Baltimore after spending the last three seasons as associate head coach and recruiting coordinator at perennial Big East contender St. John’s University in New York.

“We are delighted to bring Candice to UMBC to lead our women’s basketball program,” said UMBC President **Valerie Sheares Ashby**. “Her approach to leadership, her coaching philosophy, and her values will help ensure the success of and support for our student-athletes, both on and off the court.”

Hill joined St. John’s as assistant coach and recruiting coordinator in April of 2021. She was elevated to associate head coach following the 2021 – 2022 campaign and previously served in various roles at Loyola University Maryland (her alma mater), the University of Massachusetts (UMass), and Wilmington University in Delaware.

Following the 2019 – 2020 season at UMass, Hill earned the Women’s Basketball Coaches Association’s prestigious Thirty Under 30 Award, an honor that recognizes up-and-coming coaches at all levels of women’s basketball.

“I want to thank President Sheares Ashby and the entire athletics administration for believing in me and granting me the opportunity to be the leader of the UMBC women’s basketball program,” says Hill. “As a Baltimore native, UMBC has been a part of my journey and has always held a special place in my heart. The moment I stepped foot on campus, I knew this is where I needed and wanted to be.”

Right, Hill poses with a Retriever jersey with members of the UMBC women’s basketball team.



AT PLAY

Breaking Ballet's Glass Ceiling



Misty Copeland is a ballerina on a mission—and in March 2024, she brought that mission to UMBC. In 2015, Copeland became the first Black woman promoted to principal dancer at American Ballet Theatre, a top U.S. ballet company. And she continues to break down barriers to democratize this art form born of European privilege and monarchy.

On March 6, Copeland spent a day on campus—meeting with dance majors in the Dance Cube, speaking one-on-one with alumni and young dancers at a reception, watching student dancers perform, and participating in UMBC's first Artful Conversation, a public Q&A in Linhan Concert Hall.

"You are my people," Copeland told about 35 UMBC dance students and prospective students in an afternoon session. "I came into the ballet world at a late age—13," she said, recalling her first ballet classes sponsored by a YMCA Boys and Girls Club in a gymnasium. She wore socks and shorts and had never heard classical music before. What she initially described as a "weird" experience soon became an epiphany. "I felt so free...I was very shy. I didn't have the tools or the confidence to say everything I wanted to say at 13, but I realized this might be the last time I had this chance," said Copeland. And through ballet, she found her voice—and purpose.

Raised by a single mother, she and her five siblings were sometimes "house-less," as Copeland described it. The ballet studio "was the first time I felt physically protected in a space and I could be naked and vulnerable," Copeland said. "That's the feeling we should all have: what it's like to be in a space of freedom and creativity and no judgment." These days through her eponymous charitable foundation, Copeland supports programs that provide funding and classes that break ballet's glass ceiling through diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Victoria Davies, a junior dance major and Linhan Artist Scholar, performed in "Boundless" by faculty member **Shaness D. Kemp**, one of three modern works dance students shared with Copeland and attendees during the early evening public event in the sold-out Linhan Concert Hall. "For me," Davies said, "to see another person of color who has been very successful in her dance career and hear about all the things she went through, hopefully I can get to that point in my own career."

First-year dance major **Ashley Baer** said that learning more about Copeland "makes everything so much more real. She has been so influential to so many. As dancers, it's so amazing to be able to hear her perspectives on performing and life." Baer shared a quote she jotted down from Copeland's talk: "Continue to explore life and live your life....As dancers,

we get so caught up in our training, and we need to continue to live life."

According to College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Dean **Kimberly Moffitt**, who moderated the public Q&A, Copeland proved the perfect choice to inaugurate Artful Conversations, which will invite a high-profile creative to campus annually. "First and foremost, I want my dance students 10 years from now to say, 'I had the chance to interact with Misty directly,'" Moffitt said. "That's a special moment from their academic experience here at UMBC." She continued, "And other students who are drawn to attend will learn something really interesting about Misty's trajectory to becoming not just another ballerina. She has a really interesting story to tell. Often, we believe that these [stars] are overnight successes. We forget how much work, effort, and energy individuals put into making it."

Copeland left the dance students of all ages with this message: "As a dancer, it's so easy to get caught up in the minutiae of daily battles, and a lot of those are within ourselves. Every day, it's important to remind yourself why you're doing this. I love being on stage—it's where I feel the most free. It's liberating. You need to remind yourself of the things that matter to you."

—Lisa Traiger

Above: Misty Copeland and President Valerie Sheares Ashby talk with young dancers at the Artful Conversations event. Below: Student dancers India Blake, Victoria Davies, and Sophia Papparotto perform "Boundless" by Shaness D. Kemp, assistant professor of dance.



Stitching it All Together



In the back of a classroom, at a desk strewn with a colorful palette of commingled notebooks and skeins of yarn, sits **Ephraim Ruttenberg '25**, mathematics. His fingers nimbly and nearly subconsciously manipulate a crochet hook while his ears absorb a lecture on differential equations—one of his favorite subjects. Ruttenberg loves unraveling the principles behind mathematical theorems, and he's recently extended that passion to crochet.

Ruttenberg picked up crochet in 2023 after seeing a math YouTuber explaining concepts with crocheted models of mathematical forms, and it has quickly become an important part of his life.

"Art seems to be a core part of the human experience," Ruttenberg says. In particular, he says, "I like visual art. And this is the most fun and success I've had with making visual art."

Although Ruttenberg's primary motivation for pursuing crochet is as a hobby distinct from mathematics, as something to do with his hands while his mind chews on other things and simply as a way to create beautiful physical objects, he couldn't help weaving in some math. He relies on a shape's mathematical properties and reference images to translate them into crochet.

Ruttenberg creates Klein bottles, single-sided surfaces reminiscent of Möbius strips closed up on themselves. One serves as a hat, and another creation stitches three Klein bottles together. He's also stitched dozens of saddle surfaces,

which look a lot like brain corals or sea slugs with their folds and convolutions. Ruttenberg used 900 yards of yarn to stitch the largest of these, and the surface's curvaceous outer edge measures 50 feet despite it only being about a foot across.

Through his creations, Ruttenberg is hoping to investigate some mathematical concepts "that haven't been explored in physical reality," he says. "Also, I would like to do some math about crochet," he says, such as how the physical properties of a crocheted object define the pattern that describes it.

Ruttenberg doesn't use traditional crochet patterns, instead inventing his own notation for various stitches. "Because I like to make it up as I go along, it's a little more satisfying to me," he says. In fact, the symbols for stitches in crochet patterns echo the symbols and patterns in mathematics that he enjoys. "I was always interested in the aesthetics and visuals of math; all the symbols and things were sort of fascinating to me," he shares.

This eye for patterns extends to Ruttenberg's other interests and hobbies, like juggling and word games. "I love English spelling. I think the confluence of different languages is super cool. It makes patterns that I find very aesthetically pleasing," he says.

Even mathematics has its own language to absorb. While the discipline's lingo may puzzle non-mathematicians, "something that I love about mathematics is all the different words and all the jargon," Ruttenberg says. "I love that math co-opts all these normal words for very technical things," he says, like "ring" or "flag."

Ruttenberg takes time to share his passion for mathematics with others. He tutors students from elementary school through college.

"I like the puzzle of teaching someone something, especially if they already have a misconception of the material that's not serving them," Ruttenberg says. "That, I find, is a cool puzzle—what's the core of the misunderstanding here, and how can we give them a better way of thinking about it?"

Justin Webster, associate professor of mathematics and Ruttenberg's academic

advisor, noted his mathematical talent and willingness to help others when Ruttenberg was in one of his courses. Ruttenberg is the president of UMBC's chapter of Pi Mu Epsilon, the national mathematics honor society, which hosts events for students and participates in outreach at local middle and high schools.

At these events, "Ephraim's crochet work always steals the show," Webster says. "The students are perplexed and engaged by his work. It is wonderful to have something which is both visual and tactile to engage the younger students."

In part as a result of Webster's mentoring, Ruttenberg plans to pursue a Ph.D. after graduating from UMBC. Exactly what he'll study is uncertain. "Ephraim's interests are very broad. And, like him, they are unique," Webster says. "There is a certain amount of intellectual confidence that he has, which is rare."

Ruttenberg will carry that confidence paired with generosity as he moves forward, melding his artistic and mathematical instincts in the world as he perceives it—a world where abstract theorems collide with soft fibers and the geometry of a sphere meets the warmth of scarves. His work proves that equations need not be confined to dusty textbooks; they can be stitched into existence, one loop at a time.

— Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

Ephraim Ruttenberg '25 has found ways to combine art and mathematics through his crochet pieces that explore physical reality.



AT PLAY

Going Back for Seconds

Some have dark wood and cozy corners; some have bright, natural light and textured walls. But each of **Lane Harlan's** dining establishments can be looked at like a love letter to the people of Baltimore, thoughtfully decorated with hand-chosen, local pieces and, in some cases, even the decor from her own living room.

The different vibes, all sumptuous in their own way, transport patrons. Harlan says that's intentional. "I want them to feel like they're elsewhere. They're not in Baltimore—they're somewhere else. I think it's important if you can feel like you're on an adventure."

To say Harlan '21, political science—the highly-accomplished restaurateur who opened W.C. Harlan, Clavel Taqueria & Mezcaleria, Fadensonnen, the Coral Wig, and more—is well-known throughout Baltimore would be an understatement. Her acclaim continues to grow after the recent announcement that Clavel is a finalist for a coveted James Beard Award for "Outstanding Bar" (one step and one sip inside the unique taqueria and within a second, you'll understand why). But while many know of her success, it may come as a surprise that just like many students, she hit some academic roadblocks along the way.

When Harlan joined UMBC as a political science major in 2005, she was already a little different than your average first-year student. Growing up in a military family, she spent her childhood often moving. After graduating high school early, Harlan took her own version of a gap year, traveling to Spain to start her informal education in the hospitality industry. Upon return to Baltimore, she decided to set down roots at UMBC and experience life as an independent adult living in the city.

Brian Grodsky, political science chair, was one of the professors who helped Harlan connect with her major, especially in his classes about international justice. "That class made me want to go to school forever. I felt like it was so fascinating and challenging at the same time," says Harlan.

Reflecting back on the student he taught nearly 15 years prior, Grodsky remembers Harlan as "one of those students for whom class

didn't just stop when she went home—she was always grappling with issues long after we walked out of the classroom."

But if her childhood taught her anything, it was that she still had a lot of the world to explore. "Studying abroad was one of the most important things I did in college. And if I hadn't gone to UMBC, I wouldn't have had that exact opportunity," says Harlan.

Harlan spent a year studying abroad in France, learning the restaurant and bar business from the ground up. While she excelled academically in her upper-level courses through UMBC, she struggled with her math requirement. And so, when the opportunity to return to France through a teaching assistantship arose, she jumped at the chance and eventually decided to leave behind her formal education at UMBC.

Over the next several years, Harlan worked with partners to build her growing restaurant dynasty, starting with W.C. Harlan, a stylish speakeasy in Baltimore's Remington neighborhood. She harkened back to lessons she learned at UMBC to help her during the exhaustive process.

"I used my sense of political science in that I was walking around with the petition to the neighbors, getting people to sign, saying that they supported the reopening of the bar, as well as taking it to the neighborhood associations and speaking with the council people," she says.

After all this success, how is it that Harlan found herself back in the (virtual) classroom? In short—COVID. "In the pandemic, businesses had to close, restaurants became carry-out operations, and suddenly there was more free time in my life," says Harlan. "I started to think about my time at UMBC, and I felt like I didn't have closure from that period."

Through UMBC's Finish Line Program, Harlan reenrolled and found herself again coming face to face with her one-time nemesis—the math requirement. She hired a tutor to come to Clavel once a week to help her study and go over homework. And though she admits it was difficult getting back into the swing of academia after so many years away, she persisted and completed her degree.

"I texted a photo of my diploma to my parents and I said, 'Dad, hang it on your wall! Be proud of me,'" she jokes. "But really, the reason I wanted to finish also was because everyone's life has many chapters, and I might want to have another chapter. And I knew I couldn't do that without my undergraduate degree."

While Harlan spends her free time traveling the world and even expanding her business ventures globally, she's not going anywhere any time soon. "I love Baltimore. I can't imagine my restaurants anywhere else, actually. I think Baltimore is filled with artists and opportunities and people who do things and they own them."

By Kait McCaffrey





DISCOVERY

Around the Clock Research



Time—we buy it and spend it, save it and waste it; it seems to race by as we watch our children grow or drag on in the last hour of a Friday work day. Shakespeare marked “time’s thievish progress” in wrinkles like “mouthed graves.” But for a more objective accounting, humans have turned to physics, measuring days, hours, minutes, and seconds using rhythmic natural phenomena such as the Earth’s rotation, the swing of a pendulum, the vibration of quartz crystals, and, most recently, the oscillation of light waves.

“I have been fascinated by time and how we tell it for as long as I can remember,” says **Curtis Menyuk**, a professor in the Department of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering. For the past 20 years, he has applied his expertise in optics to a host of questions at the frontiers of time-keeping science.

We measure time in chunks—the international standard unit for a chunk being the second. The invention of atomic clocks in the middle of the 20th century allowed scientists to define the second based on the (as far as we know) unchanging properties of atoms. Today, one second is the time it takes the electric field of microwaves that are absorbed and emitted by cesium atoms at a specific frequency to cycle up and down 9,192,631,770 times.

But it’s likely the second will soon be redefined again. Newer versions of atomic clocks, called optical clocks, mark time’s passage with visible light instead of microwaves. Visible light waves oscillate much faster than microwaves—and faster oscillations in principle mean better time-keeping. Many optical clocks keep time so well that if they could have started running when the universe began and kept going until today, they still would not have lost or gained a single second.

Shortly after the first all-optical atomic clocks were developed in the early 2000s, Menyuk began collaborating with scientists at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to study a key component of the clocks called a frequency comb. Frequency combs provide the bridge between the high-frequency light at the heart of optical clocks and modern electronics, which can only process lower-frequency signals. The combs are made from extremely short light pulses, called solitons, that travel without dispersing, similar to how tsunami waves traverse the ocean. And it just so happens that Menyuk is an expert on solitons, having become captivated by the “almost magical balance” of forces that keep the waves from being torn apart when he learned about the phenomenon at age 27.

In 2013, Menyuk collaborated with a colleague to derive the basic equations describing how solitons are created when light travels in a circle around a small crystalline disk called a microresonator. Microresonators offer a compact alternative to the bulky lasers originally required to make frequency combs, and Menyuk and some of his NIST colleagues recently published a paper in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* that reports a new approach to simplifying the use and improving the performance of microresonator-based combs.

Shrinking the components of optical clocks is a key step toward taking full advantage of their powers. Atomic clocks are a critical component of today’s GPS system. Compact optical clocks might improve GPS accuracy to within a few centimeters. Optical time-keeping can also serve as a back-up to GPS, which is vulnerable to disruptions and attacks. Menyuk is tackling this very issue with the recent launch of the Center for Navigation, Timing, and Frequency Research at UMBC, which he directs in collaboration with the Army Research Laboratory and other partners.

For Menyuk, passing time has not noticeably dimmed his prolific research output (of which clocks are just a portion). And while the years add age, they also add perspective. “Curtis is a leading theorist with decades of experience,” says Kartik Srinivasan, one of the NIST scientists who collaborated with Menyuk on the recent *Nature* paper. Srinivasan noted that some of the equations he learned in grad school for predicting light’s behavior in optical fibers were developed by Menyuk in the 1980s. “Curtis’ reservoir of historical knowledge is not something you can easily find.” Even with the use of an atomic clock.

— Catherine Meyers

Three generations of clock-makers: Curtis Menyuk, his daughter, Rachel Menyuk, and grandson, Charles Pearson, with a clock they built together. Photo courtesy of Menyuk.

Building a Winning Bid

Development firms Future Roots and Team Elle Woods are competing to win the City of Yorktown's Elmwood District redevelopment project. The teams hover over their LEGO-built cities moving colorful bricks representing new parking garages, office buildings, retail spaces, housing, and historic buildings. The site planners, financial analysts, environmental and equity directors, and community liaisons are mapping out neighborhood layouts that will draw in professionals and bring businesses to the once-thriving neighborhood.

The firms' offices are on the first floor of UMBC's Performing Arts and Humanities Building. This is POLI 443: Urban Policy Analysis, where two groups of students spend six weeks developing a hypothetical urban redevelopment plan. The teams then compete for the winning bid—that is, the green light of industry experts who've come to campus to judge their proposals.

"I could lecture students about the ethical, financial, structural, and environmental issues cities grapple with in the land redevelopment process, but simulations create an entirely different learning process," says **Eric Stokan**, associate professor of political science.

When **Ghadeer Mansour**'13, political science, senior associate at the Urban Land Institute (ULI), was looking for a faculty liaison who might be interested in ULI's UrbanPlan simulation curriculum program, she found a ready partner with Stokan. The UrbanPlan exercise requires students to design a realistic land-use redevelopment plan, including a 3-D city model, that addresses private and public sector needs and wants.

"The simulation gives students a critical take on how to better balance equity and economic growth and what that means for affordable housing," says Stokan. "They have to confront those trade-offs and understand it's not an all-or-nothing thing. They have to be able to balance growth, equity, and environmental sustainability."

Cooperation, teamwork, and compromise are necessary for sustainable development. International student **Florian Dambacher**,

listens intently to **Alex Schultz**'25, political science, the environmental and equity director; **Sam Kennedy**'26, social work, the neighborhood liaison; and **Meghna Chandrasekaran**'24, political science, the site planner, as he calculates the expenses. "It was a bit daunting at first. You have all these different requirements. The city, the investors, and the community have demands, needs, and wants," says Dambacher.

With two internships under his belt, one at the Frederick County Division of Planning and Permitting and the other at the Maryland Transit Administration Office of Planning, **Travis Martin**'25, political science, was more than ready for his role as site planner. His previous experience proved indispensable as he brainstormed ideas with **Aurora Quezada**'24, the neighborhood liaison, and **Suhaib Mirza**'25, political science, environment and equity director. In the real world, Martin notes, there's a lot more paperwork and sometimes years of deliberation before a development decision is made. The simulation made it possible for Martin to experience the entire proposal process.

On the day the industry professionals arrive to judge their projects, the teams inspect every colorful block of their city models, making sure they reflect their upcoming proposals.

The two student firms stand before the council explaining their vision statements, site plan, and financial model. The council demands a clear cause and effect for each item on the financial statement.

Team Elle Woods wins the bid on many grounds, but most importantly because their finances stayed in the green. Future Roots, while presenting a compelling case, resulted in debt.

Shanika Freeman'24, individualized studies, reflects on the experience through her lens as a member of the Baltimore County Public Library's diversity, equity, and inclusion team. When she was given the role of marketing director in the simulation, Freeman initially didn't want it.

"I was put off because I'm more into social justice—people over profit. Having to shift my focus and my personal biases was difficult, to be honest," says Freeman. But she didn't give up. "Once I dug deep into it, I got excited about it and understood that without money, the city can't build; if we can't build, we can't help more people. It's a collaborative effort. I learned a lot about myself as a person and also about a career path that I might take in the future."

— *Catalina Sofia Dansberger-Duque*

Team Future Roots builds out their redevelopment of the fictional city of Yorktown's Elmwood District.



DISCOVERY

An Infrastructure of Support After Bridge Collapse

In 1987, **Paul Flinton**, then a 23-year-old senior studying at UMBC, decided to make a short documentary focused on the tollbooth workers on the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

The six-minute documentary “One Dollar”—named after the toll’s cost for cars at the time—captures a vehicle’s journey across the bridge from the driver’s point of view in one continuous take. As Flinton ’87, visual arts, drives across the bridge, audio of the tollbooth workers interviewed for the project acts as the film’s narration.

Nearly four decades later, Flinton had all but forgotten about the existence of his film until the March 26 collapse of the Key Bridge after it was struck by a cargo ship. The collapse of the span sent eight road construction workers into the water, killing six of them. “It hit a nerve,” Flinton told local news after the disaster. He unearthed the film from his archives and posted it on YouTube. “[The film is] sort of a treasure... This captures something that in a lot of ways can’t really happen again.”

The Key Bridge opened to traffic in 1977, and 30,000 vehicles regularly crossed the 1.6-mile span over the Patapsco River. An integral part of Baltimore’s beltway, commuters, community members, and experts are now struggling to make sense of the literal change of the transportation landscape. As the wreckage is cleared away and the eventual construction commences, UMBC experts offer up their expertise and resources to confront the tragedy.

After learning that all of the victims of the collapse were immigrants from countries throughout Latin America, **Felipe Filomeno**, associate professor of political science and global studies, immediately sprang into action with fellow members of the grassroots organization Latino Racial Justice Circle (LRJC). Filomeno, who is president of the LRJC, worked with the organization’s leadership team to establish a fundraiser in support of the families of the victims of the bridge collapse.

The crowdfunded campaign initially had a goal of raising about \$5,000 for each of the families impacted, Filomeno said. Within hours

of going live with the GoFundMe campaign, the organization had raised \$100,000 from donors all around the world.

The tragedy has underlined key issues impacting the Latino immigrant community, challenges that Filomeno amplifies through his community-centered research at UMBC. “[The collapse] has highlighted and publicized to the world issues that we already know exist—the fact that Latino immigrants are overrepresented in dangerous occupations,” says Filomeno.

The ship that toppled the bridge was carrying 56 containers of hazardous materials, including corrosives, flammables, and lithium-ion batteries along with more than one million gallons of fuel. City officials began their investigations into the incident, which included determining the environmental impacts to the Patapsco River and surrounding communities.

Upal Ghosh, professor of chemical, biochemical, and environmental engineering, whose research includes examining the effects of toxic pollutants in soils, sediments, and aquatic environments, was among the experts who weighed in on assessing the potentially hazardous effects.

“If you have containers that contain oily material, those things will, if they are breached, be releasing over time,” Ghosh told the *Baltimore Sun*. “I would think if there is a release that goes down into the sediments under the water, it would be a local impact right there.”

Farah Nibbs, assistant professor of emergency and disaster health systems, is thinking about ways to contain the effects of future disasters. Contributing factors to the

bridge’s collapse, she says, can be tied to the 2012 expansion and modernization of the Port of Baltimore. Those changes did not happen hand-in-hand with improvements in safety management needed to accommodate ships of such huge sizes that are now able to port in Baltimore.

“A novel approach for decision-makers may be to view Maryland’s emergency management and transportation experts and service providers—as well as the physical bridge infrastructure itself—as part of the community’s lifeline systems,” said Nibbs.

Deborah Rudacille, professor of the practice in English, is well aware of the lives connected to the construction and opening of the Key Bridge. In 2010, she published *Roots of Steel: Boom and Bust in an American Mill Town*, a book exploring Baltimore’s industrial history of the Sparrows Point steel mill while also capturing her family’s connection to the mill and Baltimore landmarks like the Key Bridge.

Rudacille’s mother was one of the original employees—collecting the toll that Flinton documented in his film—when the bridge first opened in 1977, and her brother worked as one of the bridge’s painters.

“They were kind of reminiscing about the fact that everything down there is now gone,” Rudacille told local media about her family. “First the steelworks, now the Key Bridge is gone. It’s like this world that they lived and worked in has vanished completely.”

— *Adriana Fraser*

Photos by Corey Jennings ’10 for the Office of the Comptroller of Maryland.





IMPACT

Unearthing Significant Climate Change Research



Over the last two years, with painstaking, detailed work, **Emily Faber** concluded that a major NASA climate model's predictions significantly differed from observed measurements of wind speed above some areas of the Arabian Peninsula. Wind speed in that region, which is mostly desert, influences the presence of dust in the atmosphere, which, in turn, plays a role in global processes like the greenhouse effect and delivering nutrients to the Amazon rainforest.

"I was really surprised at the magnitude of the differences," Faber, M.S. '21, atmospheric physics, a current Ph.D. student, says. "It's a model miss. We're not modeling wind speed as well as we could."

Her results are forthcoming in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres*, and the findings have significant implications for global climate modeling and forecasting, like precipitation levels and warming. Faber's latest modeling work would not have been possible without two important mentors and fellow graduates of UMBC: **Adriana Rocha Lima**, Ph.D. '15, atmospheric physics, assistant professor of

physics at UMBC, and **Barry Baker**, Ph.D. '14, atmospheric physics, a physical scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Rocha Lima is Faber's Ph.D. advisor at UMBC. Faber says she appreciates Rocha Lima's consistent encouragement and has had many opportunities to mature as a researcher under her mentorship. Faber recalls that she was full of creative, ambitious research ideas when she approached Rocha Lima about joining her lab—but didn't yet have a clear understanding of how to implement them. "But she didn't run away from that," Faber says. Instead, Rocha Lima welcomed Faber into the lab and quickly got her started on both modeling and observations-based projects

Rocha Lima is the rare physicist who has expertise in both modeling and experimental work. "There's not a challenge I think she couldn't handle," Faber says.

"In the beginning, she was learning how to run the model, repeating prior analyses," Rocha Lima says of Faber. "Now she's exploring new territory. That's the contribution that we want to see from a Ph.D. student."

As Rocha Lima's first graduate student, Faber found herself in a unique position to help the lab grow from the ground up. That included opportunities to write grants and apply for fellowships early in her graduate school career. One of those fellowships was the Weather Program Office Innovation for Next Generation Scientists (WINGS) Dissertation Fellowship, sponsored by NOAA.

Faber was one of three students selected nationwide for the WINGS fellowship in its inaugural year. The fellowship, which began in summer 2023, supplies two years of full funding for her dissertation research and provides Faber with a dedicated NOAA mentor. That's where Baker, a scientist at the National Climate and Atmospheric Research (NCAR) Center in Boulder, Colorado, comes in. He's always been supportive and responsive to Faber's probing questions, she says—"which is great, because I have many."

"Emily is extremely motivated and shows the characteristics for a long and successful career within the science community. I'm excited to be working with her and help guide her through this stage of her education," Baker says. "Emily's work through the WINGS fellowship will end up having direct impacts on operational forecasts using the Unified Forecast System that NOAA provides to give advance warning of extreme particulate matter pollution caused by wind-driven processes."

The WINGS program is a major stepping stone for Faber toward her long-term goal of working at one of the national laboratories, a network of research institutions across the country associated with various federal agencies.

In particular, "I really vibe with the NOAA mission," Faber says, and the WINGS program has "turned out to be a really great interface between the national labs and the university."

The fellowship furthers Faber's personal career trajectory, and it also supports Rocha Lima's growing lab by providing funding for Faber's Ph.D. As a result, Rocha Lima has been able to add an additional graduate student to her group—amplifying the impact of WINGS.

As part of the WINGS fellowship, Faber traveled to NCAR for a workshop on the Unified Forecast System, a huge integrated set of analysis systems that look at everything from ice to dust to vegetation in order to model the Earth as a comprehensive system.

At the workshop, Faber met the other two fellows, and they've stayed in touch since. "It feels like a tiny cohort," she says. She's also looking forward to meeting the incoming class of WINGS fellows, which will offer more opportunities to give and receive mentorship.

— Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15

Faber is pictured in White Sands, New Mexico, around the time she started the WINGS fellowship and met her mentor Barry Baker, Ph.D. '14. Photo courtesy of Faber.

Retrievers Behind the Scenes



Meet **Laurainne Ojo-Ohikuare**, the processing archivist in the AOK Special Collections and Gallery at UMBC. When she applied

to the job in 2020, Ojo-Ohikuare says she was looking for a home away from home, and she's found it in the space she co-creates with her colleagues to make visually and intellectually stimulating collections for the community to enjoy.

Q: What's one thing someone should know about the support you find here?

A: If you have an idea, you can really make a push to make it a reality here. This is a campus where one can pour into a targeted project and find the support to make it happen—either with mentorship or by finding a group of people with similar interests to collaborate with.

Q: Who have you seen go the extra mile at UMBC?

A: Since arriving in 2020, I have watched library faculty and staff throw themselves into ensuring the best possible assistance to our users. I have an immense respect for the folks I work with across library departments.

Q: What do you love about your organization?

A: We have the collections of artists, musicians, UMBC history, scientists on the brink of discovery, Maryland tradition bearers, changemakers in the state, and much more. We have collections with depth and are making them publicly accessible. Simply put, in my department, I am never bored and always learning!

Q: Are you involved in any campus organizations?

A: I am a huge fan of the volleyball program. I haven't shaken the volleyball bug from my younger years of being a college volleyball player and a college assistant coach, and I am really excited by UMBC's success.

Photo by Melissa Penley Cormier, M.F.A. '17.

24-7 Hot Food Solutions at 7-Elevens

In **Shehroze Rashid's** position at 7-Eleven, he didn't anticipate creating a multi-statewide program to benefit people who use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); he just wanted to provide some customers with hot food. But this idea, a small initiative that Rashid started at his family-owned store on the outskirts of Baltimore, would soon find favor from higher-ups at 7-Eleven and spread throughout stores in seven states. Rashid's goal is for the solution to expand across the country.

Rashid '23, individualized studies (INDS), is a first-generation college student. He began working at a 7-Eleven in Reisterstown, Maryland, in 2010, and he continued to work there throughout his time at UMBC to help fund his education. Over his years at 7-Eleven, Rashid built relationships with many of his customers, who would often express to him their distress and the difficulties they had with accessing hot food.

"There was a sign at the store saying no hot food can be sold on EBT," said Rashid, referring to the electronic system that allows participants to access funds for SNAP benefits. But many of the customers he was serving were from low-income communities and relied on EBT and SNAP programs. Rashid started brainstorming ways to bridge the societal gap in hot food access.

At UMBC, Rashid recognized his INDS major was an opportunity to work through solutions to the problems he saw in his everyday life, and eventually, he used his capstone project to showcase the work he had done with his job at 7-Eleven via the "Hot Food Initiative," which officially started in 2011.

With the support from 7-Eleven executives, Rashid spearheaded a program that would allow certain recipients of SNAP benefits, in this case people experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities, and people over age 60, to be eligible for an additional resource at the store. "After you sell specific items to SNAP recipients, the cash register screen displays a prompt. After that, you can heat the item as a

favor to the customer," Rashid says. Maryland's Department of Human Services started its Restaurant Meals Program as an expansion of Rashid's vision.

Rashid acknowledges how important the INDS program has been to his success and how he implements many of the skills he has learned from it within his daily life. He credits **Stephen Freeland**, director of INDS, as a life-changing mentor who recognizes and polishes students' potential.

Freeland is impressed with all Rashid has accomplished. "What stuck out to me about him as a student was his extreme patient goodwill, coupled with the determination to just to keep doing the work, way more than the average student," said Freeland. "He is incredibly smart, humble, and hardworking."

"I'm just blown away by the impact," Rashid says, "that just as a young student, I've been able to do something."

— *Cristina Reid '24*



Rashid at the current 7-Eleven store where he works. Photo courtesy of Rashid.

IMPACT

Credit Where Credit Is Due

As **Charles “Chuck” Peake** celebrated his 90th birthday late one December evening in 2022, a contingent of middle-aged investors, bankers, and academics—Retriever alumni of various decades—were present to cheer on the founder of UMBC’s economics program. As their professor and mentor, Peake had built a tight-knit but inclusive community of economics students and, half a century later, those social bonds still held strong.

Peake was hired as the university’s very first professor in economics and entrusted with a daunting task—building the department from the ground up. Peake was up for that challenge but he had two conditions.

“First, I would get a graduate assistant, and second, economics professors would not be required to give large lectures.” However, Peake, recalls, “For the first economics course offered in 1967, we expected 30 or 40 students. To our surprise, 170 students enrolled, and we were compelled to offer a large lecture.”

Peake prioritized getting to know his students and engaging them in the learning process, says **Joseph Gallagher** ’93, economics. “As a student, the first thing Dr. Peake did was give you agency,” recalls Gallagher. “‘Mr. Gallagher, what are your thoughts on this?’ He did this with all his students. By empowering his students, it conveyed a gravity to his classes and made you take stock of your opinions and your own retention of concepts. Dr. Peake wanted you to be engaged in his class and wanted it to be a conversation.”

This engaging type of classroom is more difficult in a large lecture format. So Peake began recruiting additional faculty members to meet demand and decrease class sizes. “Our strategy was to start with young faculty members who studied at the highest quality institutions,” says Peake. “Amazingly, our first six core faculty members did their graduate study at a top 10 economics program.”

“Dr. Peake was not only a great professor, role model, and mentor, but he was also very social and loved to have a good time,” says **Donald Blair** ’89, economics. “He definitely

helped create a sense of strong culture within the economics department.”

Peake was instrumental in the formation of two student organizations: the Political Economy Club and the UMBC chapter of Omicron Delta Epsilon (ODE), an international economics honor society. He also sponsored the annual ODE banquet, when students were inducted into the honor society and awards were given out.

“This banquet was a major social event in the life of the department,” says **Marsha Goldfarb**, professor emerita, economics.

“He was trying very hard to make UMBC more than just a commuter school,” says **Andrew Colyer** ’89, economics, who, like Blair and Gallagher, credits Peake with much of his career success.

“Dr. Peake helped me straighten up my life,” says Colyer, who said he nearly failed out of another institution before transferring to UMBC. Today, Colyer is the director of research at The Ithaca Group and still values Peake’s practical approach to advising and education. “You weren’t just going to get an econ degree,” says Colyer. “Dr. Peake took some personal responsibility in making sure you had a career after graduation.”

For **Jack Mullen, III** ’72, economics, that career saw him become the first Retriever to work on Wall Street. Mullen, along with his wife, **Carol Mullen** ’70, American studies, later created an endowment honoring Peake—the Charles F. Peake Endowment for Economics. The endowment established the annual Mullen Lectures, which bring top economic minds from across the country to speak at UMBC.

“Dr. Peake’s influence went well beyond the classroom,” says **Patricia Rudolph** ’72, economics. “I believe that Dr. Peake’s help and guidance made my career possible. I had the vague idea that I wanted to be a college professor, but I had no idea what I needed to do to achieve that goal. Dr. Peake took the time to help me through the entire process of applying for admission to a Ph.D. program.”

Not even retirement can slow down a man like Peake. In fact, what he calls his “most important academic contribution to UMBC” didn’t even occur until 2001—two years after retiring—when the economics department launched its second major, the bachelor of science in financial economics. Before long, it started attracting more students than the traditional bachelor of arts in economics.

While Peake points to the B.S. degree as his most important academic contribution to UMBC, his former students know his kind nature and above-and-beyond support for his students is his real legacy.

“He always had time for everyone,” says Colyer, who is honored now to make time for Peake.

— *Bobby Lubaszewski* ’10, M.P.S. ’23

Across, clockwise: Two images of Peake in his office in 1969; Economics faculty celebrating UMBC’s 50th anniversary in 2016; Peake interviewed during UMBC’s 50th celebration; Peake spending time with his great grandchildren, Charlie and Cabell.

“By empowering his students, Dr. Peake...made you take stock of your opinions and your own retention of concepts.”

— **Joseph Gallagher** ’93



PUTTING UMBC RESEARCH ON THE MAP

By Catherine Meyers & Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15



Spring on UMBC's main campus brings a host of familiar sights and sounds: blooms on the magnolia trees, the chatter of red-winged blackbirds calling from the reeds around Library Pond, greening grass on the campus Quad, and black-and-gold-bedecked Grit Guides leading groups of prospective Retrievers around what may soon become a home away from home.

The guides cover the usual highlights—Academic Row, the Retriever Activity Center, the AOK Library, eating establishments, and residential halls. UMBC is a place to live, to learn, and to find community. And while some of the functions of campus spaces are obvious, others are often hidden.

Look more closely, and you'll see faculty and students turning the everyday infrastructure and green oases of UMBC into out-of-the-ordinary laboratories. Beeswax sculptures, tactile maps, robots helping other robots—read on to discover some of the amazing ways Retrievers are using the campus itself for experiential learning and diverse research.



PING-PONG BALLS AND GRAVELOMETERS

The Stream Lab Northwest of Campus

Two students wearing knee-high waders stand several meters apart in the middle of a rapidly flowing stream at the north end of UMBC's campus. One releases a Ping-Pong ball, which bobs along with the current, as the second starts a timer, stopping it when the ball reaches his feet to determine the stream's flow rate.

Nearby, another student measures the size of rocks in the streambed using a device called a gravelometer—a rectangular piece of metal with square holes of various sizes. The smallest hole a given rock will fit through becomes its measurement.

Farther along, other students capture photos that include reference posts on the stream bank. Each small group of students also takes measurements of the water depth at one-foot intervals along strings hung from one bank to the other. The students (with the help of specialized software) will use these measurements and photos to generate 3D models of the streambed.

"It's a little DIY, but we get some amazing pictures," says **Charles Kaylor**, the instructor and director of GIS and cartography labs in the Department of Geography and Environmental Systems (GES).

This is the "stream lab" in Exploring the Environment: A Geospatial Perspective, a course best known in the UMBC community for its semesterly launch of a dozen or so brightly-colored balloons that dot the campus skyline. Throughout the semester, students train their brains in the ways geographic data can help answer a wide range of research questions.

For the students, there are a range of perks to the course. "It's cool to see different applications of computer science, which can

sometimes feel pretty theoretical," says **George Rush** '24, computer science. **Luke Thomas** '27, GES, who was partnered with Rush, is grateful for the senior's support with the programming aspects of the coursework.

Rhonda Plofkin, Ph.D. student in GES and the graduate assistant for the class, concurs that having students with different strengths facilitates peer learning. "This is real-life stuff that geomorphologists do in the field," she adds.

For some, the benefits are just as real, but simpler: "The cold water wakes me up," **Anthony Roytenberg** '24, computer science, says with a smile.

FINE ARTS IN THE GARDEN

M.F.A. Thesis Defense Joseph Beuys Sculpture Park

When **Alich Rezaei** arrived at UMBC from Iran, she couldn't take her eyes off the ground. Almost immediately she was mesmerized by the flora and fauna of her new residence, and as an master of fine arts student in the intermedia and digital arts (IMDA) program, she decided to incorporate pieces of UMBC into her artwork. She walked around campus, picking up windfalls of seeds and exploring hidden nooks of nature. A place that would come to be her sanctuary, Rezaei, M.F.A. '22, says, was Joseph Beuys Sculpture Park.

"The solidity of the stones alongside the growth of the oaks and the evolving shape of the garden reflect concepts of erosion and growth," says Rezaei. "As an immigrant, I found solace in my attachment to the settled and solid stones, representing a sense of grounding to me."

Students collect data that measure flow rate, depth, pebble size, and more as part of the "stream lab" in a popular, interdisciplinary GES course. Photo by Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15.



Rezaei was drawn to UMBC's M.F.A. program because of its multidisciplinary approach and the freedom she felt to choose an unconventional path. She praised **Kathy O'Dell**, IMDA professor emerita, who was her advisor. "Kathy was someone who—it was like I was floating in the air and Kathy held my hand and grounded me. She was very supportive for the whole journey."

To create the art for her thesis project, Rezaei used almost exclusively materials collected on or near campus, including fallen tree bark, shattered wood, and seeds. She bought her main material—beeswax—from Baltimore beekeepers. One piece, "The Collective Womb," featured hundreds of native seeds, called Devil's Darning Needles, held together by beeswax around orange peels.

When the pieces were finished, Rezaei immediately knew the stage she wanted to showcase them on—Joseph Beuys Sculpture Park. "I installed my pieces there and had a performance as a way to extend the concept of public sculpture, aiming to reactivate the space and revive the concept of ecological engagement central to Beuys' 7000 Oaks project."

PHAGE HUNTERS LAB

● **Genetics and Bioinformatics** **Biological Sciences Building**

IchabodCrane. MindFlayer. Annihilus. TonyStarch. These are viruses previously completely unknown to science discovered by UMBC students in the Phage Hunters program, a two-course undergraduate genetics and bioinformatics sequence.

Since its launch in 2008, UMBC students have discovered 661 viruses that infect bacteria, called phages. Ninety-seven of them originated in samples collected on campus, with the most popular location being the Library Pond. Seventy-seven phages have been sequenced and 60 have been fully



A photograph from Rezaei's three-hour performance "The Tongue in the Landscape" at the Joseph Beuys Sculpture Park featuring the artist laboriously peeling the wax layer off the pieces of bark. Photo courtesy of Rezaei.

characterized and submitted to GenBank, an international digital repository of genetic and protein sequences.

Steven Caruso '94, Ph.D. '02, biological sciences, principal lecturer of biological sciences, runs the genetics course where the students collect samples, isolate their phages, image them with help from **Tagide deCarvalho**, (director of the Keith R. Porter Imaging Facility), and present their findings. They learn foundational laboratory techniques and get a taste for research.

Phage Hunters gives students "a first glimpse of what research is, with all that goes with it: determination, grit, inspiration, frustration, and more," says **Ivan Erill**, professor of biological sciences and co-instructor for the bioinformatics course with Caruso. "Students get to see all the possible outcomes of a research project, from total success culminating in a DNA extraction for sequencing to failure to isolate a phage in the first place."



A composite of several microscope images of phages discovered by UMBC students in the Phage Hunters program demonstrates the variety of shapes phages can take. Photo by Tagide deCarvalho.



Amanda Belunis prepares samples for later analysis in the Molecular Characterization and Analysis Complex. Photo by Catherine Meyers.



In addition to measuring buildings, students in Math in Action discovered other ways that math naturally interacts with their lives and studies. Here they are recording the movements of brine shrimp. Photo by Sarah Hansen, M.S. '15.

FINDING THE “FOREVER CHEMICALS”

**Molecular Characterization and Analysis Complex
Meyerhoff Chemistry Building**

In the basement of the Meyerhoff Chemistry Building, in a tiled expanse called the Molecular Characterization and Analysis Complex, sits a sleek, roughly human-sized instrument with the power to measure extremely tiny amounts of chemicals.

Amanda Belunis, a chemistry Ph.D. student now in her final year, knows the instrument like an old friend, having turned to it to analyze a smorgasbord of UMBC water samples.

Belunis studies a group of chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS. The chemicals are used in products as varied as makeup, clothing, and fire-fighting foam and are found in trace amounts in many water sources as well as in human blood. Dubbed “forever chemicals” because of the way they persist in the environment, they present a growing concern to human health.

Belunis’s research is part of a growing effort by scientists to understand how PFAS enter and travel through the environment and, ultimately, figure out ways to remove them.

To validate her procedures for measuring PFAS concentrations, Belunis tested water from drinking fountains, the sink in her chemistry lab, the pool, and the pond and streams around UMBC, all of which contained trace amounts of PFAS, as would be expected. Confident her methods worked on real-life samples, she then turned her attention to analyzing water in aquaculture fish tanks.

“My lab mates and I sometimes discuss how all of us have these chemicals in our bodies,” says Belunis. “It’s concerning, which is why we need to do more studies.”

MEASURING UP

**Math in Action
The Administration Building**

When asked how to measure the height of a building, most students in Math in Action, a new laboratory course for non-STEM majors, “came up with various ways to measure the height directly—for example, by dropping down a string and then measuring the string or stacking up various objects,” says **Alexis O’Malley** ’18, mathematics and psychology, who teaches the lab.

But today, students are peering along the edges of homemade clinometers—plastic protractors with drinking straws attached—taking measurements from safely on the ground with a meter stick, and running simple calculations based on the properties of triangles to measure the height of UMBC’s Administration Building (123 feet, 2 inches).

Throughout the course, “I want students to see how math can be used to solve problems creatively,” O’Malley says.

Math in Action covers different math concepts each week through hands-on activities. The purpose of the clinometer activity is to remind students that “science is based on measurement, and you can build a tool to measure almost anything,” shares **William R. LaCourse**, dean of the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, who originally generated the idea for the course to help a wider range of students develop math skills relevant to their everyday lives. The course, he adds, “is a doorway to a lot of different math concepts.”

IMPROVING CAMPUS ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

Office of Student Disability Services
Math/Psychology Building

Shawn Abraham ’24, political science, has gotten lost on the UMBC campus more times than he can remember. As a blind student, he finds his way using a white cane, auditory cues, mental maps, and by asking people for directions. “People are surprised when I tell them, but big cities are much easier to navigate,” Abraham says. “College campuses are hard to get around.”

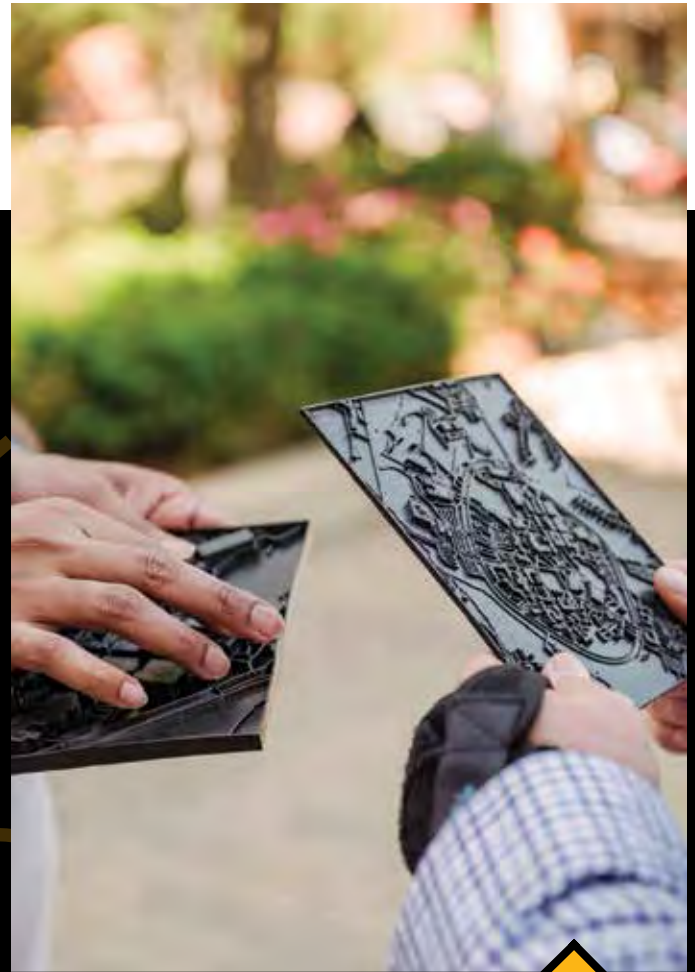
Tactile maps are one tool that could help. **Erin Higgins** and **Kirk Crawford**, Ph.D. students in human-centered computing, have recently been working with blind students at UMBC to create and test 3D-printed maps of campus.

The researchers launched the project after being approached by **Michael Canale**, assistant director of the Office of Student Disability Services. He says UMBC currently has four completely blind students enrolled and his office wants to provide personalized maps that each student can carry with them as they navigate campus. He’d also like to see a large 3D-printed map mounted somewhere on campus.

“A beautiful tactile map could be used by visitors of all kinds,” Canale said. “It’s the principle of universal design.”

Meanwhile, **Md Osman Gani**, an assistant professor of information systems, is spearheading a new project, named MyPath, to develop a Google Maps–style app to help wheelchair users navigate campus.

“Uneven surfaces, discontinuous sidewalks, and steep slopes can make wheelchair travel challenging and even impossible” Gani says. The MyPath app would help by providing users with personalized turn-by-turn navigation with real-time updates. The app will rely on a machine-learning model that recognizes path accessibility conditions based on crowd-sourced data, and Gani is currently recruiting wheelchair users to contribute data using their smartphones.



Shawn Abraham (left) tests prototype tactile maps made with 3-D printers with Michael Canale (right).

TREE HUGGER

Ecological Research Southwest Campus

It's 7 a.m. in July, and **Megan Curtiss '23**, GES, is standing next to a tree just outside The Loop on UMBC's southeast corner. It's wrapped in a thin metal band at about chest height. Curtiss carefully measures the small gap between the two ends of the band with digital calipers three times, takes the average, and then moves on to the next tree. Only 98 to go.

This scene played out weekly from March to October 2023 as Curtiss collected data for a study led by **Matthew Baker**, GES professor, and **Nancy Sonti**, a research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service. "It became like a morning meditation," Curtiss shares.

The metal bands, called dendrobands, "are a cheap and easy way to get pretty detailed information," Curtiss says. By measuring the trees' growth over time, the goal is to look at how trees of different species and in different immediate environments (such as a parking lot versus a forest) handle conditions like fluctuating temperatures and water availability.

After attending Anne Arundel Community College in her 30s, Curtiss then found a home at UMBC. She began working with Baker in fall 2022 and will enter the GES master's program at UMBC this fall. A graduate degree was not something Curtiss originally planned on, but now she's excited about the further experiences it will bring. "I'm looking forward to the unexpected," Curtiss says.

ROBOT PROVING-GROUND

Center for Real-Time Distributed Sensing and Autonomy Former Walker Avenue Courthouse

Take a left off Hilltop Circle, just past the greenhouse on the right and toward the Walker Avenue apartments, and you'll find yourself outside a traditional brick building that used to house trial rooms and detention cells. In 2021, UMBC turned this former courthouse into the main hub for the Center for Real-time Distributed Sensing and Autonomy (CARDS). Researchers here develop artificial intelligence-enabled smart robots for military and search-and-rescue operations.

On a sunny day in spring, you will likely see students gathered in the courthouse's "backyard," huddled around dog-like Spot robots and wheeled vehicles called Jackals and Huskies.

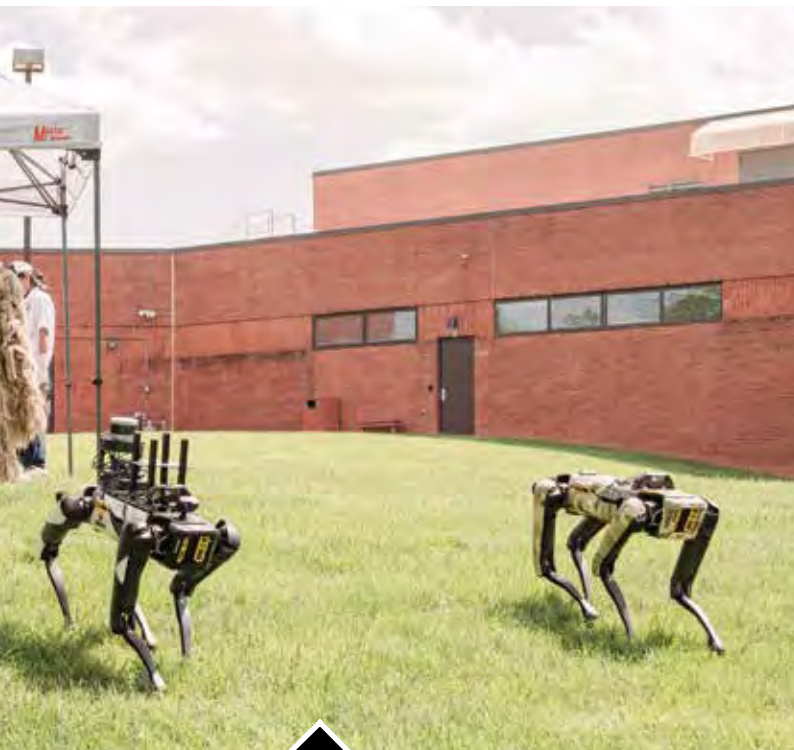
The researchers outfit the robots with a host of custom devices, such as cameras and radar to sense their surroundings and microprocessors to run on-board algorithms. While the robots can be commanded via voice and gesture, the ultimate goal is for them to operate mostly autonomously.

Recently, the team has demonstrated this capability by verbally assigning the robots the task of jointly surveying a given area. The robots must translate the instructions from plain English into machine-level commands, divide up duties, detect and avoid obstacles, come to a fellow robot's aid in the case of unexpected problems, and identify and keep track of the objects and people within their assigned perimeter.

"People from around campus will see us testing and will stop to watch," says **Aryya Gangopadhyay**, a professor in information systems who directs CARDS. "The robots are an attention getter."



On big screens, CARDS researchers monitor the activities of robots performing a surveying task.



On the back lawn of the courthouse building, student researcher Kevin Rippy, left, controls three Spot robots with gestures. Another student stands by in a gillie suit, a type of camouflage clothing.

Erin Hamner collected weekly water quality data from this stream for six months, using the battery-powered digital probe she's holding. Photo Sarah L. Hansen, M.S. '15



GETTING YOUR FEET WET

● Applied Research in the Environment Herbert Run Greenway

After traipsing across a swampy field between research sites, **Erin Hamner** '22, GES, and a current master's student in the Interdisciplinary Consortium for Applied Research in the Environment program, scampers down a streambank in thigh-high waders and plunges a battery-powered probe into the water. It reports concentrations of ammonia and nitrates—key water quality measures. The probe also measures the water's conductivity, which indicates the level of ions, such as salts used to melt snow.

It's beautiful out today, but Hamner completed the trek to a dozen campus sites weekly from September 2023 to February 2024, sometimes dealing with mud, snow, or rain. The goal of her master's thesis is to confirm that stormwater management features UMBC has installed to reduce flooding, filter storm runoff, and otherwise improve water quality are working as intended—or if they aren't, to suggest improvements.

Hamner and her collaborators in Facilities Management and the Office of Sustainability want to see the data collection effort continue after she graduates. So she is working with faculty in GES to incorporate crowd-sourced stormwater monitoring into the undergraduate curriculum, including generating a public dashboard.

"Erin has done incredible groundwork collecting water quality data across our campus, generating useful data that can tell us about the health of UMBC's waterways," says **Taylor Smith**, assistant director of sustainability.

Long-term data will help the university "see how our development affects our watershed so we can continue to be good stewards," Smith adds, noting that, "data like Erin's can help us advocate for more greenspace and stream buffers around campus."



Sianna Serio, right, with Maria Veršova, her mentor in Slovakia.



Tiffany Powell at the Panoramic Cetățuie Restaurant during the Fulbright ETA Media Literacy Seminar in Cluj-Napoca, Romania.



Nailah-Benā Chambers teaches students in Taiwan.



David Bullman's view in North Macedonia.

A Journey of Growth

By Catalina Sofia Dansberger Duque

International travel offers ample opportunities to stretch yourself—one minute you may be the expert and the next, completely clueless about how something works. Fulbrighters currently in the Fulbright U.S. Student Program—teaching English or researching around the globe—find themselves oscillating between their teaching and student roles on a daily or hourly basis. By engaging their host communities through openness and cultural humility (and many shared cups of tea or coffee), these Fulbrighters are finding their balance along the way.

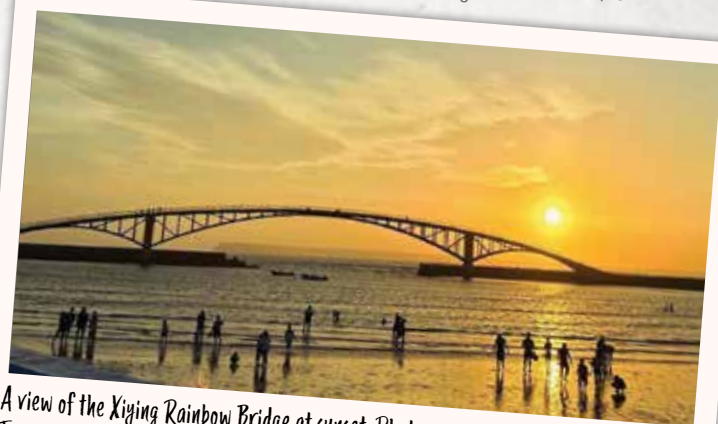
All eyes are on **Milan Richardson '23** as she helps her co-teacher keep score in a Jeopardy-like game her students are playing. Richardson teaches English to several classes of first through sixth-grade students at Jinsha Elementary School in Kinmen County, Taiwan. As she completes the Mandarin character for the numeral 5, a wave of giggles and chatter flows through the room.

Similar to a U.S. tally—four strokes and a strike though, the Mandarin character has 5 strokes total and needs to be written a certain way to represent 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. “The students were so confused because I wrote the character strokes in the wrong order,” says Richardson, who is used to solving complex math as a Meyerhoff

Scholar having earned a bachelor’s degree in bioinformatics and computational biology and minors in computer science and modern, languages, linguistics, and intercultural communication.



Nailah-Benā Chambers sightseeing in Taiwan.



A view of the Xiyang Rainbow Bridge at sunset. Photo courtesy of Joyce Yang, a fellow Fulbright ETA with Kara Gavin in Taiwan.



Milan Richardson at the local lantern festival celebration in Taiwan.

“I wanted to write the character correctly. I asked, and they showed me the proper order to write the strokes,” says Richardson, a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA). “They started clapping once I got it right. This was one of the many cool moments where my students were able to teach me.”

While she may be new to teaching in Taiwan, Richardson brings with her four years as an English and math tutor and a minor in Mandarin. “Taiwan was so different from any place I’ve ever been to. I was overwhelmed at first,” says Richardson. “I like it a lot, now. In my second month, I applied for a scooter license. Now I ride around the island and have taken my scooter other places on trips.”

Diplomas earned. Visas in hand. Vaccines completed. Luggage packed. Destination confirmed.



Milan Richardson at Taroko National Park, one of many stops while traveling around Taiwan on a scooter with new friends.

Last summer, UMBC’s eight participants in the 2023 – 2024 Fulbright U.S. Student Program checked off all the important items on their to-do lists. The only thing left was to get to their placements on islands and in landlocked countries, cities, and countrysides across East Asia and Eastern Europe. It’s easier written than done. To adapt well to a new community, job, language, and culture, they must practice the art of humility and flexibility as their roles shift regularly from teacher to student.



English Teaching Assistants and others from Kimmen and Penghu (two of Taiwan's islands) at a Thanksgiving event. Photo courtesy of Kara Gavin.

Leading the Fulbright charge

All technicalities aside, the Fulbright experience is the beginning of building an international network of teachers and researchers who share the diversity and possibility of the U.S. with the world. In return, across the globe, communities welcome the next generation of leaders into their cities, neighborhoods, schools, and homes to share their country's history, innovations, and culture. Since Fulbright's inception in 1946, these reciprocal acts of kindness have created multiple paths forward to lifelong worldwide collaboration and understanding based on the simple act of giving someone different than yourself a chance.

"The Fulbright Program truly demonstrates public diplomacy in action," says **Brian Souders**, M.A.'19, TESOL, and Ph.D. '09, language, literacy, and culture, the associate director of global learning at UMBC's Center for Global Engagement. In this role, Souders, who received a 2023 Fulbright International Education Administrator award to Germany, has led hundreds of Retrievers through the Fulbright application process as UMBC's Fulbright Program advisor. "Whether in the classroom as teachers, students, or

researchers, recipients learn about the world as much as they share what it means to be from the U.S. and UMBC alumni," says Souders.

Thanks to Souders' guidance, UMBC is one of 57 doctoral universities nationwide and three in Maryland to receive a Fulbright Top Producing Institution designation for 2023 – 2024, for the

third time in the last five years. In the last decade, more than 80 UMBC alumni have received Fulbright awards. Out of the 10 Retrievers who received a 2023 – 2024 Fulbright, eight are currently placed internationally, seven are ETAs and one is on a research grant.

The hard work of play

There are U.S. Fulbright student scholars in more than 100 countries worldwide. Three Retrievers were placed in Taiwan—they keep in touch regularly, see each other at ETA trainings, and are planning to travel together during their Fulbright year. But they all arrived in Taiwan separately and faced different challenges settling in.

"I arrived in Taiwan and immediately changed my plans because the airline lost my luggage," says Humanities Scholar **Kara Gavin** '20, English. She was grateful to have a carry-on. "It was chaotic. I was taking it all in," says Gavin. A day and a 50-minute plane ride later, she arrived in Penghu County, Taiwan, an archipelago of about 90 islands between China and the main island of Taiwan. "The little beach town is in its own little world," says Gavin. "The smell of the sand gave me comfort."

Gavin teaches beginner English at two local junior high schools. New to Asia and Mandarin, Gavin's thinking cap is on 24 – 7, including learning

Mandarin in between teaching classes. "Living independently for the first time is hard on its own, but doing it in a foreign country is a whole other ball game," says Gavin. "I'm acquiring many new life skills that will last me a lifetime."

One of those is sympathizing with her students and anyone learning a new language and culture. "I teach the English pronunciation and spelling of a word," says Gavin. "Then, they like to share the Mandarin equivalent with me. It's all about patience, balance, and trust." She also models intercultural teamwork by developing and teaching lessons with her bilingual (Mandarin/English) Taiwanese co-teacher to foster student engagement and enrichment.

For Fulbright Scholars, it is equally important to engage with communities beyond the classroom. When they apply for the grant, the Fulbright Program asks them to develop ideas to share their passions and skills in a community project. For Gavin, this meant adding a little drama to have a lot of fun. As a performing artist, Gavin knows the



Kara Gavin at the Fulbright Taiwan English Language Teaching Program for first-year grantees in April 2024.



Nailah-Benā Chambers with her host family at a shrimping restaurant where you can catch, cook, and eat the shrimp.

theatre can be a powerful community-building outlet. “I wanted to encourage students and other community members to express themselves and share their culture with me and others,” says Gavin.

She found a kindred spirit in a professor at a local university. They formed a drama club at the university for English language learners at all levels to explore American play formats with Taiwanese traditions and histories. “Writing original bilingual plays, in English and Mandarin, based on folktales about island traditions is creating an artistic and fun cultural exchange and understanding outside of my ETA duties,” says Gavin.

Finding the right pace

For fellow Humanities Scholar **Nailah-Benā Chambers** ’23, global studies, a Fulbright award to Taiwan was a natural next step. Chambers began learning Mandarin and all things Taiwanese in sixth grade at a Taiwanese Mandarin language immersion school in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia. As her Mandarin improved, she tutored other English speakers. This oscillating pattern of being a student and a teacher makes Chambers adaptable and persistent, she says.

But it hasn’t always been easy. When she first visited Taipei, Taiwan, in the spring of 2023 on a Mandarin language-intensive study abroad program, “I was so confident. I walked into a 7-Eleven to shop. No one could understand me,” says Chambers.

ground, both culturally and linguistically. “I felt such a sense of calm and familiarity. Taiwan is so welcoming,” says Chambers. “It calms you down. Things are much slower here than in the U.S.” Soon enough, Chambers was balancing classrooms at Huludun Elementary and Fu Chun Elementary in Taichung City, on the main island of Taiwan, with students at both schools on the extreme spectrum of English proficiency.

The upside of working with proficient English language learners is connecting on more advanced topics and sticking to Fulbright’s English-only immersion model. At one of her schools, the students are beginning English language learners, and the administrators only speak Mandarin. “My experience as a bilingual teacher and learner with a high level of understanding of the local language and culture has helped with classroom management and fostering powerful connections with students and administrators,” says Chambers. “It also helps to advance their grasp of the nuances of American English, especially when there are gray areas or misunderstandings.”

Keeping your ears open

Watching anime, reading manga, (Japanese graphic novels), and participating in their fandom inspired **Paul Ocone** ’22, individualized study, a Linehan Artist Scholar, to research these subjects and learn Japanese. “I have deeply engaged in fan social life and communities—from leading

“It was a bit embarrassing. Even with my language and cultural skills, I had a long way to go to mastering Mandarin.”

Now on her Fulbright ETA grant, Chambers arrived on solid

an anime club to participating in and running conventions to moderating online communities—my affinity for and interest in anime fan spaces runs deep,” says Ocone. Part of Ocone’s observations include witnessing how some fan subcultures limit their membership in fear that a broader fanbase would weaken their subculture identity. In contrast, he says, other fan subcultures are more flexible while maintaining their identity.

Interested in adding to his initial research in U.S. fan spaces, Ocone is now at the epicenter of anime and manga culture as a Fulbright Student Researcher doing anthropological research with Morikawa Kaichirō, a leading scholar in this field at Meiji University’s School of Global Japanese Studies in Tokyo, also home to the Yoshihiro Yonezawa Memorial Library of Manga and Subcultures.

“I have had some amazing experiences participating in anime pilgrimage or anime tourism, including learning much from other fans and benefitting from their generosity,” says Ocone. “My Japanese is conversational—sometimes it’s challenging



Paul Ocone in front of a display of shikishi, or illustrated boards, at a fan event in April.

to understand specialized topics, but this has not deterred me from adding anime and manga tourism as a second research project.” In January, Ocone presented his work at the Popular Culture Tourism Stakeholders Summit in Japan.

Ocone is a sort of tourist himself, enjoying various aspects of Japanese pop culture. The daily musicality of Tokyo teaches him about enjoying the rhythm of the day. “Each train station plays a unique melody when the train departs,” says Ocone. These melodies or “hassha merodii,” are catchy and echo around in his brain like the convenience store jingles that also greet customers. “I was happily surprised when I heard a loudspeaker playing a symphony in my neighborhood,” says Ocone. “Another one played the following day and the next. I learned this was a daily sunset ritual.” He knows these sound experiences will play in his head long after returning to the U.S.

Learning new languages

This is not the first time **David Bullman** ’22, ancient studies, visited North Macedonia. He first went in 1995 as a performing musician and public affairs representative for the U.S. Army.

“North Macedonia was very different coming out of the Cold War,” says Bullman. “The infrastructure and general state of repair of public spaces and businesses is much better than I recall from that time.”

Now, as an ETA, Bullman teaches British civilization and American civilization in addition to three different levels of English at the University of Totovo in the Republic of North Macedonia, a landlocked country north of Greece. In Totovo, students begin learning English in elementary school and are fluent by the time they reach college. “I thought I would be teaching English basics,” says Bullman, “but it’s been great to teach a complex subject in the context of where my students live.”

His students are equally glad to help him with the local language. Macedonian and Albanian are the country’s two official languages. Bullman began learning some key Macedonian phrases in preparation for his trip. However, Albanian is the preferred language in Tetovo. After traveling with the Army to more than 15 countries on three continents, Bullman is used to rapidly switching gears and accepting help.

He eagerly takes on the student role when it comes to learning about new foods. Bullman’s apartment faces the Hapësira Socio-Kulturore Tetovë, a community center where locals and the nearby Peace Corps Volunteers sometimes organize activities, like an ajvar-making gathering. Ajvar is a delicacy across the Balkans made every fall. It’s a tradition passed down through centuries with many recipe variations. “Ajvar is made by charring red bell peppers that are then peeled, minced, seasoned, and cooked for hours,” says Bullman. It boils down to a relish that can be preserved for months, but locals tell Bullman that’s rare because it’s too good to keep for even one week. After participating in the preparation and getting to take home a few jars, Bullman agrees with the locals. Ajvar is now his go-to condiment on eggs, pasta, toast—anything goes.

Albanian and cooking are not the only languages Bullman tapped into while in Tetovo. As a lifelong clarinet player, Bullman hoped to create a musical exchange with local musicians. The opportunity presented itself when the dean of the Faculty of Art wanted to celebrate Thanksgiving. Bullman collaborated with the music faculty, the orchestra director, and students to create a concert of six songs. “I’m glad I returned to North Macedonia. The people are as warm and friendly as I remembered them to be,” says Bullman. “I wanted to come back and experience it myself again.”



Ajvar, a red pepper relish native to North Macedonia, that David Bullman made with community members.



David Bullman, fourth from left in blue shirt, at an Iftar dinner on the last night in Ramadan hosted by the American Corner in Tetovo.

Tapping into curiosity

On her way to her Fulbright placement, **Sianna Serio** ’23, computer science, went city hopping. “I was headed to Žilina, Slovakia, east of Austria and south of Poland,” says Serio. “I flew into Vienna, Austria, then I took a one-hour bus ride crossing Austria’s eastern border into Slovakia to get to Bratislava, the capital.” There she met other ETAs for orientation. “A week later, I hopped on a two-hour train ride to my teaching placement in Žilina and I met my wonderful mentor, Maria Veršova, who became my second mom.”

Serio teaches at the Hotel Academy, Žilina. The academy focuses on hotel management, gastronomy, and tourism. “My students are beginning English language learners,” says Serio. “I teach what the class is interested in, like American pop culture, because they rarely meet a native English speaker.” During outings with her students, they ask about a wide range of topics. “There are many topics that I would not have thought to cover if it were not for time spent outside of the classroom,” says Serio. “Some of those conversations became formal lessons, like the lesson on the three branches of the U. S. government.”

Serio appreciates her students’ curiosity. She tapped into her love of website development and design to improve her students’ confidence in writing and speaking English and prepare for their Maturita exam, a national high school exit exam. “Some of my students are helping me design a class webpage for them where I will showcase their class and post some of their practice writing in English,” says Serio. “These posts will include topics covered in the Maturita exam, information about their school, and answers to questions about Slovakia.”

Serio’s mentor Maria Veršova, head of the English department, is her motivation. She guides her through lesson planning, class schedules, and the challenges of relocating to a new country. “When my original housing plans fell through, Maria found housing for me five minutes from her house,” says Serio. “She helped me find health insurance and open a bank account. Her husband set up my internet.” They have welcomed Serio almost daily into their home for dinner, tea, coffee, or wine. Serio is a gracious guest and lent her graphic design expertise to help Veršova design invitation cards for her 50th birthday party. Veršova tells Serio she will always have a place to stay in Žilina.

Fulbright: The next generation

Teaching has defined the last decade for **Tiffany Powell**, a master’s student in UMBC’s TESOL program, a passion she invested in as an English language learner teacher in Seoul and in Miryang City, South Korea, for five years, and in Florida this past year. Now, she is in Iași, Romania, southwest of Ukraine, at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University teaching American studies. Powell is committed to bridging culture, community, and belonging by bringing technology into the classroom.

Powell also decided to bring the research and cultural understanding closer to home by partnering with Romanian teachers to develop a five-part series on African American women’s history. “We talked about Black women in science in the context of the movie *Hidden Figures* and discussed Hollywood’s portrayal of Black life,” says Powell. The class is now creating a series on Romanian women. Helping students better understand the similarities and differences between U.S. and Romanian cultures has been an eye-opening experience for Powell.



Tiffany Powell, far right, with her American studies class at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, Romania.


She sees the impact of a country formerly under communism. In Iași, sometimes the internet doesn’t work and, in her school, there are no clubs or student organizations to gain the skills needed to earn a Fulbright award. “My students have given me a new perspective. You may want to come in and make changes, but you must understand where they’re coming from. There is a saying in Iași, ‘It’s not impossible. It’s just difficult,’” says Powell. She is trying to help with the difficult part by leading Fulbright application and leadership workshops.

Powell, like the other Fulbrighters, will bring her experiences home with her and wherever she ends up teaching English next. When their Fulbright year ends, these Retriever ambassadors will find themselves as emissaries yet again, returning to their hometowns, sharing the good news of ajvar made in community, the freedom of a scooter ride along a Taiwanese beach, or the correct stroke order for writing the Mandarin number five. The lessons their students and host families passed along—including pausing to take a breath and appreciate their international successes small and large—will continue to form and shape the way they see the world.

“Having a flexible mindset and understanding the historical context of your placement is key,” says Powell. “I carry myself as a U.S. representative. Living abroad teaches humility, adaptability, and open-mindedness to press on through challenging times.”



Sianna Serio at Bojnice Castle, a medieval castle in Bojnice, Slovakia.



On PACE
To Unravel
Earth's M

Mysteries



By Anne Wainscott-Sargent

The third time's the charm. Against a calm and crisp dark night sky on Florida's Cape Canaveral on February 8, 2024, just after 1:30 a.m., the Plankton, Aerosol, Cloud, ocean Ecosystem (PACE) spacecraft rocketed to orbit carrying on board Hyper-Angular Rainbow Polarimeter (HARP2)—UMBC's wide-angle imaging polarimeter. The launch marked the first time NASA deployed a university payload on a large operational Earth science space mission.

Following two scrubbed night launches the two previous nights due to strong winds, the successful takeoff was well worth the wait for the core team of UMBC Earth and Space Institute researchers, graduate students, and their families and friends who journeyed from Baltimore to watch the historic launch.

Arriving by bus a little before midnight to the Banana Creek Launch Viewing Area at Kennedy Space Center, just over six miles from Space Launch Complex-40, the close-knit UMBC entourage huddled together waiting for the final countdown.

When it came, they—along with hundreds of other space launch watchers—held their breath and then yelled and clapped as SpaceX’s Falcon 9 rocket blasted off and propelled PACE 400 miles above Earth into sun-synchronous orbit. Minutes later the Falcon 9’s first stage—SpaceX’s reusable rocket booster—successfully landed at Landing Zone 1. The crowd gasped audibly at the sonic boom, caused when the spacecraft broke the sound barrier.

“It still doesn’t quite feel real,” said **Noah Christian Sienkiewicz**, a calibration scientist who earned his master’s degree in atmospheric physics from UMBC in 2019 and expects to complete his physics doctorate this summer. “I grew up watching Carl Sagan and dreamed of going



Left to right: Margo Young, Dominik Cieslak, Magdalena Kuzmicz-Cieslak, and Vanderlei Martins stand in front of the PACE spacecraft the day before its launch. Photo credit: Margo Young

into astrophysics. I never thought I’d be the person making the instruments that will go up and do the measurements.”

“It’s so exciting—I’m going to cry,” uttered **Margo Young** from the upper bleacher. “I don’t always see the pieces and parts put together, so this is really historic.”

Young serves as UMBC’s HARP program administrator, where she has overseen procurement and other back-end support for HARP since the program’s inception in 2013. “I get to see students come full circle—working in the lab and then graduating and becoming civil servants where they continue to be involved because it’s such an amazing project,” she said.

On the path to PACE

The UMBC HARP team’s remarkable journey from idea to mission reality spanned more than 15 years and involved countless hours of design, modeling, testing, and validation. Earlier iterations of HARP flew first on private aircraft over the Maryland countryside, and then an award-winning “cubesat” version launched into orbit from the International Space Station (ISS)—all stepping stones on the path to PACE.

For the three multidisciplinary HARP2 physics, optics, and research engineering leads, **Vanderlei Martins**, **Roberto Borda**, and **Dominik Cieslak**, HARP2’s launch represents a career-defining moment that at times seemed against all odds for a mid-size public university. UMBC’s strong partnerships with NASA, such as the Goddard Earth Science Technology and Research (GESTAR) Center II that supports Borda’s and Cieslak’s roles, help enable milestones like this.

“I feel like I’m still dreaming,” said a visibly emotional Cieslak, research

engineer, who captured the launch on his long-range camera.

Transfixed by the sight of live satellite footage of the PACE spacecraft heading to orbit, he added, “This is the last time we will physically see it [HARP2],” before hugging Borda, his long-time colleague.

“We’re very proud to have UMBC in space,” added Martins, professor of physics, who watched the big moment from a VIP viewing area three miles from the launch site. “We dreamed big from the beginning. The team persevered and just kept going.”

Always more to do

“I never despaired of having HARP2 on the PACE satellite,” admitted UMBC’s HARP2 manager, **Lorraine Remer**, research professor in the Joint Center for Earth Systems Technology. Her bigger worry wasn’t HARP2’s viability but whether PACE would ever launch. “PACE was canceled four times and reinstated four times,” she recalled, noting that the program “survived a lengthy government shutdown and a global pandemic that destroyed our supply chains.”

Immediately after launch, Remer had to return to Maryland and the Goddard Space Flight Center to oversee HARP2 being turned on within 36 hours of launch. “It would be nice to bask in the successful launch, but I haven’t had much time to contemplate the success. There is just more work to do all the time,” she said.

Remer and the rest of the team would soon be relieved to learn that HARP2 had successfully begun its operations and was transmitting data back to Earth as designed. The first data, known as “first light,” from HARP2 and the other instruments on PACE arrived as planned, and NASA released the first wave of data on April 11. All of the data from PACE



Members of the HARP team eagerly await the PACE launch at Kennedy Space Center's Banana Creek Launch Viewing Area before the final countdown. Top, left to right: Yomiyu Fekadu, Ian Decker, Ben Cramer, Noah Sienkiewicz, Dominik Cieslak. Bottom, left to right: Margo Young, Lorraine Remer, Roberto Borda. Photo credit: Anne Wainscott-Sargent

will be free to access and completely public, allowing anyone to conduct their own analyses and contribute to our understanding of Earth's complex systems.

An international effort

NASA's PACE mission clears the path for revolutionary new measurements of Earth's oceans and atmosphere. HARP2 measures aerosol particles and clouds as well as properties of land and water surfaces. By analyzing particles of dust, wildfire smoke, or urban pollution, the science community gains deeper insights into air quality as well as global warming and its impacts.

A second polarimeter on PACE, the Spectro-polarimeter for Planetary Exploration (SPEXone), was developed through a Dutch consortium consisting of the SRON Netherlands Institute for Space Research and Airbus Defence and Space Netherlands, and will measure sunlight reflected from Earth's atmosphere, land surface, and ocean.

These two companion polarimeter instruments are important because the interaction between aerosols and clouds is the biggest unknown factor in atmospheric temperature change, according to reports from the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

"I have watched Dr. Martins and his team work toward this moment for about a decade and have been aware of the trials and tribulations along the way. Seeing the smiles on their faces in the control station after the launch made it all worthwhile," shared UMBC Vice President for Research **Karl V. Steiner**. "The HARP2 mission as an integral part of PACE is making all of us proud here on the UMBC campus. We cannot wait to see the science that will come from this engineering masterpiece conceptualized and created right here in Maryland."

Waiting game

In the days leading up to the PACE launch, the HARP2 team knew there might be delays because of the weather, so they rented a large Airbnb in neighboring Cocoa Beach for the full week. Earlier in the week, over grilled food at the shared house, the team reflected on their journey.

According to Martins, a key strategy was bringing together engineering and physics students and giving them the tools to communicate across disciplines.

"We introduced engineering students to the physics students and made them work together very quickly so they spoke the same language," he said, crediting this multidisciplinary collaboration to the team's ability to rapidly iterate and problem solve.

Borda, senior research engineer overseeing HARP2's optical design, said a key technical challenge was determining how to best compensate for the effects of polarized light waves inside the instrument.



*PACE atop Space X's Falcon 9 rocket
in the raised to launch position.
Photo credit: NASA*

“It’s continuous work, and you cannot do it alone. We needed a fantastic team with not only the staff but also students working at different levels,” Borda said. “There are undergraduate students and Ph.D.s integrated into the team who put in a lot of effort to make this real. We’re really thankful for the environment at this university—we’re able to work with students who find a career in this industry and field of research.”

Nurturing future career scientists

Martins echoed Borda’s pride in the broad level of participation in the HARP program, from high school students to senior scientists.

“We’ve had people from our team who now work in all levels of industry—at NASA, at [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], or in private industry. We’ve even had some students start their own companies.”

Young, the program administrator, estimates that the cooperative agreements between UMBC and NASA have resulted in 20 UMBC graduates finding roles with NASA.

UMBC alumna **Elissa Ogburn** is one such graduate. She began working on HARP2 as a computer science major, tasked with creating a database that supported ground communications so that researchers could communicate with the instrument when it was in space.

After graduating from UMBC in 2021, Ogburn joined NASA on the PACE project as a test conductor—responsible for integrating and testing the instruments on the PACE spacecraft. During launch, she was one of five test conductors in the PACE Control Room in Titusville, Florida, who powered up the spacecraft for the last time and configured it for launch.

“I never imagined having a job at NASA or working with people who were this smart, helpful, and kind. Every single person I’ve worked with was so fun. It’s also cool to have seen the whole process beginning as a student at UMBC. PACE is my first mission, so I’m learning everything as I go,” Ogburn said.

Close collaboration

The partnership between NASA and UMBC goes back over two decades. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and UMBC are located just up the road from one another.

Jeremy Werdell, PACE project scientist at Goddard, recalled how initial calls to industry and academia for a polarimetry instrument for PACE were not promising due to cost and other factors.

“There are undergraduate students and Ph.D.s integrated into the team who put in a lot of effort to make this real. We’re really thankful for the environment at this university—we’re able to work with students who find a career in this industry and field of research.” – Roberto Borda

However, Martins immediately suggested to Werdell that his lab develop a polarimeter, given his team’s experience with airborne instruments and the HARP cubesat, and the rest is history. In the end, NASA selected two polarimeters—HARP2 and SPEXone. Each instrument measures polarization differently: HARP2 is multispectral (measuring only four wavelengths of light) and hyperangular, so it looks at the same piece of real estate multiple times from dozens of different viewing

directions. Its wide swath of coverage means HARP2 will cover the globe every two days. SPEXone, on the other hand, is hyperspectral (measuring a continuous spectrum of light from the ultraviolet to near-infrared) but only views Earth at five angles. It has a narrower swath, meaning it will take almost a month to cover the globe.

“They are small and mighty and miraculously complement each other very, very well,” said Werdell. “Having multi-band, multi-angle polarimetry is going to open up a lot of really interesting opportunities for discovery because we can see clouds and aerosols in very different ways.”

HARP2 provides daily views that will help scientists understand how aerosols and clouds interact and their roles in warming and cooling in the atmosphere.

“Understanding where aerosols are, how they’re transported, how they interact with clouds, and whether they absorb or reflect radiation is important to everybody because those characteristics are what drive warming of the atmosphere,” Werdell said.

Better air quality models

Onsite at the cape for the first launch attempts, **Nirandi Jayasinghe** and **Rachel Smith**, both physics graduate

research assistants at UMBC, shared their excitement for the PACE mission and HARP2's potential to help modelers predict air quality, rain, or if the atmosphere is warming or cooling.

Jayasinghe is a data modeler who comes up with different methods to retrieve information from HARP2. Originally from Sri Lanka, Jayasinghe notes that her hometown used to be one of her country's cleanest cities, and now due to development in Sri Lanka's dominant neighbor, India, the air quality is extremely bad. She said HARP2 can help close the gap that exists in understanding the twilight zone—where a cloud starts and where it stops—by providing more accurate measurements.

Smith adds that this will go a long way in understanding cloud-formation processes, weather patterns, forecasting, and climate

modeling—information important for agriculture, transportation, disaster preparedness, and infrastructure planning.

“Even simple things like weather forecasting are impacted by how much dust is in the air,” said Smith, a 2026 doctoral candidate who earned her M.S. in atmospheric physics from UMBC in 2023. HARP2 will help address whether clouds have a net cooling effect or a net warming effect, which will allow for more accurate models of where Earth's climate is headed. Smith notes that during events like the Canadian wildfires in 2023, no one could accurately predict rainfall because the forecasting models were not accounting for the number of airborne aerosols.

“I'm really excited to see what new science questions come out of the instruments that we're putting up in space,” she concluded.

Bouncing back from disaster

The HARP2 team has come a long way from initial concept to PACE. What impresses Werdell the most is the UMBC team's resilience in the face of setbacks.

The most devastating moment came in February 2022, one month before the team was set to deliver HARP2 to NASA for integration on the spacecraft. As the instrument was in the last few seconds of vibration tests, the bonding on one of the prisms loosened and shattered.

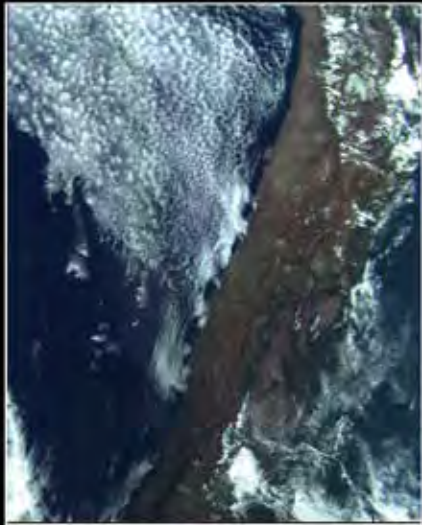
“It tactically put us to point zero,” recalled Cieslak, who was shocked and humbled when so many NASA scientists volunteered their time and expertise to help the HARP2 team get back on track.

“We got an extension, and within two months we had built a new engineering

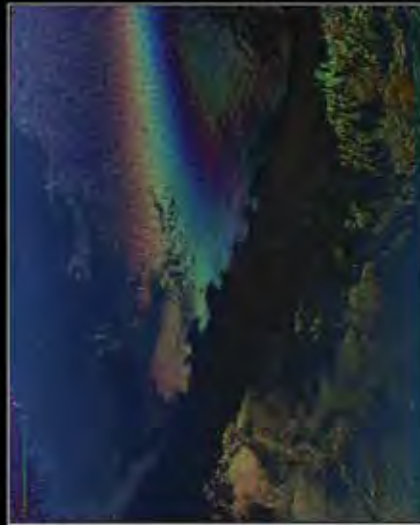
*HARP2 calibration testing at Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland, before the instrument was delivered to NASA.
Photo Credit: Katherine Mellos/NASA*



True Color Image



Polarization



The first images from PACE’s HARP2 polarimeter captured data on clouds over the west coast of South America on March 11, 2024. The view of polarized light that the polarimeter “sees” (on the right) can help scientists better understand the droplets that make up the cloudbow—a rainbow produced by sunlight reflected from cloud droplets instead of rain droplets—which can reveal how the clouds respond to pollution and other particles in the atmosphere.

Photo Credit: UMBC

“It was everything I could have asked for. No other place would have let me be involved in the entire process, including making parts for HARP2 in the machine shop. Not only did I get to do hands-on stuff, but I also was part of the design and saw it all come together on a NASA mission.”

– Yomiyu Fekadu ’20, M.S. ’23



*Artistic rendering of the PACE Spacecraft.
Photo Credit: NASA GSFC*

model and were able to prove the new solution worked. By September, we were back to where we were before the incident,” he added.

First-time NASA launch attendee **Yomiyu Fekadu** ’20, mechanical engineering, M.S. ’23, engineering management, recalled that time well, as

he helped assemble HARP2 as an intern under **Benjamin Cramer** ’17, M.S. ’20, mechanical engineer on the program.

“Especially after the failure, and the review board assessment, I helped put everything back together and do the test plans for construction and other documentation so NASA could give us the go-ahead to move on,” Fekadu said.

The experience was pivotal to his career. “It was everything I could have asked for,” said Fekadu, now a systems engineer at Northrop Grumman. “No other place would have let me be involved in the entire process, including making parts for HARP2 in the machine shop. Not only did I get to do hands-on stuff, but I also was part of the design and saw it all come together on a NASA mission.”

As the HARP2 group left the viewing platform to line up for bus rides back to the Space Center, the smiles and easy camaraderie conveyed a collective sense of pride, relief, and excitement.


“I’m now just eager to see the first bytes of data,” said Cieslak, echoing the feeling of his colleagues.

In addition to the HARP team, several additional UMBC GESTAR II scientists and engineers were instrumental in their contributions to the overall PACE mission, including Ivona Cetinić, Andrew Sayer, Violeta Sanjuan Calzado, Bridget Seegers, Susanne Craig, Dirk Aurin, Meng Gao, and Ian Carroll.

THE SENIOR CLASS

By SUSAN THORNTON HOBBY





Retrievers for life—that’s UMBC’s promise. And a group of residents at Charlestown’s senior living community are keeping their end of the bargain. Located two miles away from UMBC’s Catonsville campus, 60 or so retired and current faculty, staff, alumni, and friends at Charlestown are enjoying the ongoing cultural and educational perks of the two institutions. Several of these “Friends of UMBC” are laying the groundwork for continued exchange and connection—jazz concerts, classes about gender and sexuality, high-profile speakers—leaving a legacy for future generations to follow.



Art Johnson, professor emeritus, enjoys a jazz concert at Charlestown.

Around the café tables, heads are bobbing in rhythm tonight.

A duo of UMBC jazz students—**Henry Smith** '24, on alto saxophone, and **Leo Hickman** '27, on electric mandolin—are deep into their own takes on jazz standards. “Caravan,” “Misty,” and “There is No Greater Love” pour jauntily from their instruments.

The seniors here at Charlestown Senior Living know those tunes. Every song the UMBC jazz duo played was composed long before the student musicians were born, just in the sweet spot for the audience.

In the café where many have just eaten their crab soup and burgers for dinner, more than 100 Charlestown residents, including at least six who have tight connections to UMBC, clap for the efforts of the young jazz players.

After the two finished playing “All of Me,” the crowd erupted in applause.

“That was ‘All of Me,’” Smith said into the microphone. “I feel like lots of you know that one. We’re having a great time playing for you. This is super fun!”

By 8 p.m. the crowd was stuffing dollar bills and fivers into the musicians’ tip jar by the mic and in paper bags held by volunteers at each exit. Then the seniors headed back to their apartments at the end of long corridors and in different buildings, very much like college dorms for older folks.

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

A dedicated group of nearly 60 retired and current faculty and staff, alumni, or relatives have formed to promote connections between UMBC and Charlestown, a sprawling senior community with 2,000 residents. Thanks to their efforts, UMBC professors are teaching classes at the senior

living community and Charlestown residents are traveling to UMBC for events and helping the senior community’s restaurant staff with scholarship applications, funded by Charlestown residents, to UMBC and other Maryland colleges.

“That’s what I’m trying to do here, make connections,” says **Art Johnson**, provost emeritus who retired in 2019 from his position as political science professor and director of the Sondheim Scholars program. He moved to Charlestown in 2022 and since then, like a first-year student in search of college social groups, he has been indefatigably recruiting residents to join the Friends of UMBC at Charlestown.

“It helps maintain my connection to UMBC and lets me brag a little bit about UMBC,” Johnson said, laughing. “I meet people I wouldn’t have met otherwise. As provost, I used to promote UMBC all over. This is just an extension of that.”

Johnson met Lucy McKean on the bocce court, learned one of her kids went to UMBC, and reeled her into the group.

“Any connection will do,” Johnson said. “That’s how you build a long mailing list.”

Sitting at a dinner table on the Charlestown campus, McKean and Johnson laughed together. Thanks to the Friends of UMBC group, she’s now attending jazz concerts, which she never thought she would do.

The idea for a formal-ish group sprang from a walk that Johnson and **Sam Lomonaco**, computer science and electrical engineering professor, took around Charlestown in the fall of 2022. They wanted to create a web of connections between UMBC and Charlestown.

Lomonaco, who has lived at Charlestown for three years, still teaches at UMBC. His commute is nicely short, he said, and having a partnership between UMBC and Charlestown offers “a good chance to do things together. I meet a lot

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“It helps maintain my connection and lets me brag a little bit about UMBC. I meet people I wouldn’t have met otherwise. As provost, I used to promote UMBC all over. This is just an extension of that.”

— Art Johnson

”

of interesting people I would not have met otherwise. And,” he said with a grin, “I’ve gotten interested in jazz.”

Johnson and Lomonaco started small, with a social for UMBC-connected folks at Charlestown. They’ve grown to arrange trips to programs by UMBC’s arts and culture departments as well as the Wisdom Institute (the association for retired UMBC faculty and staff) and those monthly jazz concerts. As well, Johnson and others publish a newsletter and are recruiting UMBC faculty to teach courses at Charlestown through ELLIC (Elderhostel’s Lifelong Learning Institute at Charlestown), including classes on galaxies, genes, and gender.

“Art has been a binder, keeping us together,” said **Bernice De Bels** ’76, English, the first Black honors graduate at UMBC, who later worked in the foreign language department and now lives at Charlestown. “With UMBC we should explore what we have to offer them and what they have to offer us.”

KEEPING MEMORY ALIVE

Of the many courses offered at Charlestown’s ELLIC program, nine are taught by UMBC faculty. That’s not a coincidence. Though the connections between Charlestown and UMBC have been sporadic, the institutions do have history.

John Erickson, who founded Erickson Living, which owns Charlestown, has long worked with UMBC to promote the study of getting older. Through joint efforts of Erickson and then-president **Freeman Hrabowski**, in 2004 the state funded the Erickson School of Aging Studies at UMBC, and Erickson Living donated \$5 million for the school’s development.

Jeff Watson, who is on the faculty for the Erickson School of Aging Studies and serves as Erickson’s director of operations, also researches geriatric cognition.

“The literature and growing academic consensus is that whatever is good for the heart is good for the lungs is good for the brain,” Watson said. “Thus a healthy lifestyle, reducing inflammation and injury

while increasing physical and cognitive strength and engaging in life, builds better brain health.”

Erickson researchers have published a study in the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* testing UCLA Longevity Center researchers’ findings about memory fitness on two of Erickson’s campuses, Riderwood and Oak Crest. Watson said they found that “eating wisely, exercising daily, learning consistently, relaxing meaningfully, and connecting socially” is optimal for a healthy lifestyle for seniors.

The Friends of UMBC are all about learning and socializing while they’re matchmaking between UMBC and Charlestown. For years, Johnson said, UMBC talked about collaborating with Charlestown, but it never really manifested to the extent they envisioned.

“One of our long-term goals is to try to bring the two institutions closer together,” Johnson said. “We could cooperate on issues: sustainability, local transportation, good health care...We talked about it years ago when I was at UMBC, but it never happened.”



Diane Lee hugs Pamela Morgan, the former director of the Office of Field Experiences and Clinical Practice in UMBC’s education department and a Wisdom Institute Board Member.

SAME GOALS, FROM DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS

UMBC's Wisdom Institute is trying to accomplish the same community-building as the UMBC group at the senior village. And now, they're working together.

Johnson, who serves on the Wisdom Institute's board, is the hub, said **Diane Lee**, director of the UMBC organization for retirees.

"He brilliantly brought people together," Lee said. "What a wonderful way to reconnect with these folks."

The Wisdom Institute is printing extra copies of its newsletters for distribution at Charlestown, and for a recent event, the institute rented out the Charlestown bus to bring UMBC-curious residents to a lunch and keynote by WJZ-TV anchor Denise Koch. The institute plans to invite Charlestown residents to other events, including observatory tours in UMBC's Physics Building, monthly lunches, discussions, and concerts.

"We really want to forge this tie," Lee said. "We like the idea of reciprocity."

For 30 years, Lee taught at UMBC in the education department and worked in the administration. "I came as a visiting assistant professor with no intention of

staying. But it was an exciting place and an exciting time to be there."

She, like many of the longtime UMBC staff and faculty who now live at Charlestown, helped build UMBC from the ground up into the institution it is today.

"It's a wonderful place to be," Lee said. The work was demanding but energizing, she said. "And people cared. We're trying to capture the spirit, to continue that sense of self and community and the kind of work we did together. UMBC was not just a campus. We talked about one another as family."

DREAM STUDENTS

Kate Drabinski, principal lecturer in gender and women's and sexuality studies, has visited Charlestown eight times over three years to teach. She jokes that if she teaches two more classes, she'll earn a punch card for a free meal at Charlestown's restaurant.

"It's been some of the most valuable teaching I've done," Drabinski said of the senior students learning through the ELLIC program, "They enjoy the Lifelong Learning in Charlestown program. They are rapt, they take notes, they ask questions. It's a dream setup."

On a spring Tuesday, Drabinski brought UMBC students who identify as gay, transgender, and nonbinary to the senior living community to tell their coming out stories, along with their struggles and joys around gender and sexuality.

"It's been really moving for us, and also for the residents, to make these connections," Drabinski said.

One student, who performs in drag shows, grew up on the same block as one of the residents, Drabinski said.

The resident stood up and said she was proud of the student, Drabinski said, "for being brave and sharing her story."

At least one of the Charlestown residents has a nonbinary grandchild,

Art Johnson, Diane Lee, and Denise Koch chat with community members at the Wisdom Institute's Signature Event in April 2024.

Drabinski said. "They probably feel uncomfortable asking their grandchild these questions," she continued, but were curious and asked many questions of the students without the fear of rejection from a family member.

And she asked the students a question in front of the residents: "What do you wish your grandparents had said to you when you told them your coming out story? They said, 'I want you to be part of my life—I trust you and this is a gift I'm giving.'"

They also discussed the generational misunderstandings, Drabinski said, "hot-button issues." One resident asked why drag queens were reading stories at libraries. Students were worried about the question, but Drabinski said she maneuvered the fear in the room and, ultimately, they had a "fantastic discussion, the kind of discussion you only have when you have dedicated intergenerational space."

“
“We’re trying to capture the spirit, to continue that sense of self and community and the kind of work we did together. UMBC was not just a campus. We talked about one another as family.”

— Diane Lee



Pat Bettridge, who came to UMBC in 1966 and did graduate work in English, was married to English professor **William Bettridge**, and remembers UMBC in the 1960s as “a hole in the ground.” Bettridge, who has lived at Charlestown for 11 years, helped bring UMBC artists, dancers and theatre productions to the senior living community over the years.

“It’s a good idea to get us together, to continue what we started 10 years ago,” Bettridge said.

Sebastian Petix, organizer of Charlestown’s jazz club and a friend of the Friends of UMBC, has worked with **Matt Belzer**, senior lecturer in jazz studies at UMBC, to bring the jazz groups to Charlestown. Petix, who played piano and trumpet and organized concert series before retirement, formed the Charlestown Jazz Club and quickly signed onto the idea of bringing Retriever musicians onto Charlestown’s campus.

“The audiences have really loved them,” Petix said. His jazz club, including some UMBC members, are planning a trip to see the UMBC semester’s final jazz recitals.

Valerie Woolston, whose husband Charles started as UMBC’s admissions director in 1968, helps edit the Friends of UMBC newsletter. She’s attended every jazz concert.

“They’re terrific,” Woolston said, nodding at the duo warming up in front of the crowd. “It’s really great to see how young people develop. They write their own music,” she said, almost as proud as a grandparent.

“I’m really pulled to UMBC,” said Woolston. “I’m really proud of it.”

Then she settled down with friends to watch the students play old, familiar tunes in a new way.

Drabinski said her students came away from the interaction enriched. “Just because people are old doesn’t mean they are hostile. It was a huge benefit to students to get to practice telling their stories, to build confidence, and to learn from the questions the seniors are asking. It was a really positive experience.”

FAMILIAR TUNES IN A NEW WAY

Now that he’s retired, Johnson has time to fulfill the goal of bringing UMBC and Charlestown closer together.

One evening before the jazz concert, Johnson pulled together members of his group of UMBC folks to chat in the atrium of one of Charlestown’s buildings.



Donna Martin, Kate Drabinski, and students Marcus Ross, Sage Zoz, and August Wichman pose together after a class about gender and sexuality through the Enjoy Lifelong Learning in Charlestown program. Photo courtesy of Drabinski.

HOW TO STAY IN TOUCH

With Winona Caesar '09, American studies and history



As a first-year student—before classes had even started—Winona Caesar '09, American studies and history, took to heart some advice she heard at Welcome Week: Keep in touch with your loved ones. So she started writing to her grandfather who lived a few miles down the road in Baltimore City. And then, two years into their correspondence, he passed away. “His letters were amazing,” says Caesar, “a wealth of knowledge.”

Around that same time—halfway through her time at UMBC—Caesar’s older friends began graduating and moving around the country. She kept in touch with a few of them through letters, occasionally splurging on stickers to be extra thoughtful. Now she spends a good portion of her free time corresponding regularly with 16 established pen pals, although she’s written back and forth with more than 50 interlocutors in the past two decades.

For Caesar, a sergeant in the Baltimore City Police, it’s a creative outlet. Whether hand writing a letter or using one of her seven typewriters, Caesar says the process slows her down and connects her to individuals all over the globe. As the world grows increasingly more digitized, Caesar and her pen pals are saving the lost art of keeping in touch.

Tools of the Trade

1. A writing implement
2. Paper or postcard
3. Stamps
4. Envelope (handmade, if you’re serious about this)
5. A collection of stickers or ephemera to share

Step 1

FIND A WILLING PEN PAL (OR SEVERAL)

For Caesar, her letter-writing career started as a natural offshoot of keeping in touch with loved ones, but she has since joined two professional letter writing societies that connect new pen pals and charge a very small fee to screen participants.

Caesar says that not all matches work out, but letter exchanges that hit a good groove sometimes go on indefinitely. One of her first matches was with Amy in Tennessee. After seven years of corresponding, while on vacation in Tennessee, Caesar and Amy met up. Caesar says her pen pal was exactly like her letter-writing persona. “Reading her writing and meeting her in person, it was like we were best of friends. It worked,” says Caesar.



Right: Caesar in a photo booth series with her pen pal, Amy from Tennessee. Across top: Caesar writes on one of her seven typewriters. Across bottom: a collection of letters Caesar’s received with different stamps.



Step 2

TAP INTO YOUR CREATIVITY

Caesar has been writing and sending letters long enough that she can hand make an envelope with her eyes closed, she says. In her writing nook in her apartment, Caesar keeps clear boxes stacked on each other—each organized by the correspondent's name and send date—with thousands of letters filed inside. Nearby are her collection of typewriters, her stash of pens, her paper supplies, her stamp options, colorful washi tape, old magazines and paper samples for envelopes, so many stickers, and other fun items to include in her letters.

Seated in a command-center-like swivel chair in the middle of her supplies and the sun streaming past her collection of succulents on the window nearby, Caesar will spend as long as she needs to (and as much energy as her job leaves her) replying to friends and new acquaintances near and far.

She says she doesn't plan out her responses in advance. "I try to react directly to the letter and then add any extra stuff that's coming up in my life, like, 'Oh, I got a future trip,' or 'This is how I'm feeling.'" With some correspondents, she plays on-going games of hangman, scavenger hunts, mystery games, or Pictionary.

Step 3

SHARE AS MUCH AS YOU WANT ABOUT YOURSELF

One of Caesar's regular pen pals, Sam, is a student from Belgium, who often sends her two letters a week, densely written on graph paper. His tight cursive isn't easy to skim, but Caesar has grown accustomed to his handwriting over the past four years. "He's more prolific than most," says Caesar, and in addition to his own letters, Sam has also connected her to his mom, Christine. "Her letters were much more colorful and had lively stickers and things in them, while his are utilitarian."

After three or four years of letter writing with Christine, Caesar received a note this past December saying she wanted to end the correspondence. "I was sad," Caesar said, "so I reached out to my letter writing groups and asked, 'How do you feel when this happens?'"

Pen pal relationships have many of the same ups and downs as in-person friendships, so Caesar shares certain parts of her life more or less with some writers, but all of them know about her love of tea and the Marvel universe. Oftentimes, she'll receive gifts of specialty tea flavors or themed-stamps, and she attempts to keep her correspondence and gifts focused on the recipients' interests.

Step 4

GIVE IT YOUR STAMP OF APPROVAL

Getting your letter (or in Caesar's case, sometimes dozens of letters at a time) out the door is the final step. When Caesar travels, she makes it a point to ask the local post office to add its own unique cancel stamp to her postcards or letters so that the recipients can see where she's visited.

Once, a pen pal from New Hampshire sent Caesar a letter stamped from Valentine Station in Loveland, Colorado. Caesar was confused until she learned about a service that will send your mail through interesting named locations for a small fee.

Thoughtful touches like these are part-and-parcel being a good pen pal, but they're not necessary to get started writing letters. "This really does fulfill my creative spirit," says Caesar, "especially since I don't get to do this in my daily life—but actually this is my daily life."

For aspiring pen pals, Caesar says, start by writing to someone you already know and love. Who knows where your letters will take you after that.

— *Randianne Leysbon '09*



ALUMNI ESSAY

Stepping Up to the Plate to Preserve UMBC History

*When the Fort McHenry Tunnel opened, drivers could thank **Richard “Rock” Soracoe** ’71, economics, for helping them see as they drove under the harbor. Soracoe spent 50-plus years in the lighting industry and helped source the original 8,870 8-ft light fixtures that lined the road. In retirement, he’s helping shed a different type of light. Soracoe and other members of the founding four classes at UMBC are putting their collective memories to work to assist in identifying people and events in UMBC’s archival material to help complete our history. One event—UMBC’s first intercollegiate athletics win—is a story Soracoe loves to tell.*

I have the game ball in my hand. The red stitches feel familiar, and the leather sits in my palm like it was made to fit. I’m not on the mound winding up to pitch, however; I’m standing in the basement of the Albin O. Kuhn Library. It’s been 57 years since I last touched this baseball when UMBC won its first intercollegiate victory.

In 1967, UMBC’s inaugural fall sports season, the teams didn’t win a single game (as a member of the UMBC soccer team at the time, I was well aware of this), so it fell to baseball or lacrosse, the spring sports, to come through with the first win. While the details of that ballgame (a 3-2 win) are fuzzy now—all that remains officially is a 28-word write up in the *Baltimore Sun* archives—the game deserves its place of honor in the relatively short history of our institution. The budding campus newspaper, *The Retriever Weekly*, didn’t cover the game (although they did cover our loss to the same team the following week) and the box score is immortalized only as pen scratched onto the game ball’s leather.

Despite the lack of thorough archival material, in its own way, the game has

certainly gone on to define aspects of my own life. **Ken Diehl**—the pitcher of the losing team, Catonsville Community College—would go on to transfer to UMBC the next year. We bonded over our shared Retriever spirit and also from our shared memories as roommates on UMBC’s first mini-mester trip to Europe in 1968. But it’s my Founding Four membership that drives me to keep memories like the first intercollegiate win alive.

As graduates of the first four classes at UMBC, we feel excited but also responsible for helping archive and catalog memories that might be unique to us. It’s one of the reasons we wrote *This Belongs to Us*, and it’s the reason we meet at the library to help the university archivists put appropriate names and metadata on early university yearbooks called *Skipjack* and other historical materials.

When we were students here—walking around on plywood sidewalks on top of muddy construction sites—we weren’t thinking about creating the history of UMBC. We referred to the college as “high school plus one.” So our yearbooks rarely include captions or names and it’s up



to us now to identify those people so that they’re not lost to history.

Some things have been lost to history. **Louie Sowers** [’70, American studies], a fellow classmate and student-athlete, stood up for Retriever women to have equal representation in university sports well before Title IX made it mandatory. She, along with Athletic Director **Dick Watts**, formed the women’s field hockey, basketball, and volleyball teams for the 1967–1968 academic year. Unfortunately, those records have been lost to time, so on paper, officially, women’s varsity sports only started in 1973.

I reached out to some teammates to see if they could help me fill in the missing blanks of that game in April 1967. We played at Banneker Field in Catonsville (referred to as the “loser’s field” in the *Sun* write up) because UMBC did not have its own field yet. It was a low-scoring game; CCC got the first two runs in the game in the bottom of the 7th inning. The top of

the 8th would be our key to victory. After one runner already came in, my teammate **Bill Rust** [’71, history] remembers players on second and third. He was at bat, and lined our then-opponent Ken’s pitch into left center field for what would become the game-winning RBIs.

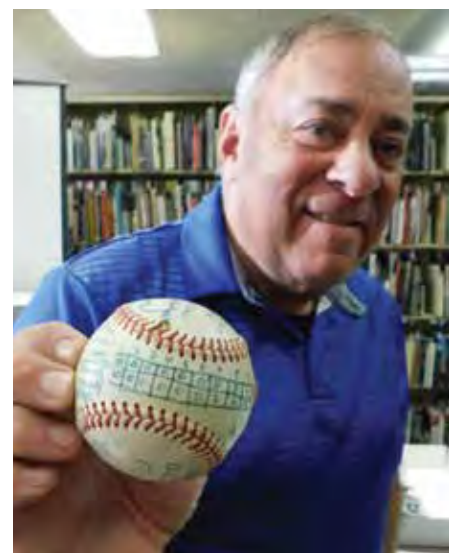
What I remember is pitching the whole game (90 pitches according to Bill’s memory), and being so grateful when Ken [’70, psychology] joined our team the next year as an additional pitcher. And over the years, I’ve grown comfortable with the idea that the individual details don’t matter as much as the whole picture. Stepping back to see the shape of my career, my marriage, and my friends, I can see how they’ve all been defined by my UMBC experience.

UMBC was as welcoming as you wanted it to be, and still is today. My professors taught me the power of critical thinking and my coaches taught me the power of mental and physical discipline—which helped me in my job and my 36-year career as a high school and college soccer referee. I am very proud to say that I am a UMBC graduate and happy to see the tremendous achievement the university has attained from humble beginnings to worldwide status.

“Over the years, I’ve grown comfortable with the idea that the individual details don’t matter as much as the whole picture. Stepping back to see the shape of my career, my marriage, and my friends, I can see how they’ve all been defined by my UMBC experience.”

— Richard “Rock” Soracoe ’71

Opposite page: Rock Soracoe ’71 pops over to campus on a regular basis to watch UMBC’s athletic teams compete. Clockwise: Soracoe in the black jersey also played on UMBC’s men’s soccer team; in Special Collections, Soracoe holds up the first game-winning ball with the box score drawn on; the 1969 baseball team photo.



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 April 15, 2024.

How to Submit Class Notes

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

1970

Dale E. Gough, American studies, was inducted into The Association for International Credential Evaluation Professionals “Hall of Acclaim” in 2023, based on outstanding contributions to international credential evaluation.

1972

Bruce Lippman, social work, received a Lifetime Service Award from the California Wrestling Hall of Fame in June 2024. He was the co-captain/MVP of UMBC’s first wrestling team from 1971 to 1972. He spent most of his career as a vocational psychologist in private practice, and a high school special education teacher, as well as an athletic coach in the Fresno Unified School District.

1976

Mary Lynn Perry, history, is the chair of the board of directors at Directors of Volunteers in Agencies (DOVIA), Sacramento. In October 2023, she earned an Impact Award from the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement in the exemplary leader category, for DOVIA’s efforts to provide quality volunteer engagement programs.

1978

John W. Dorsey, psychology, is a 2024 listee in *Marquis Who’s Who* for his career as a school counselor and aging care manager. Previously he was honored in *Who’s Who* in the East for his work with at-risk youth and families. Overall, his career in human services spanned more than 42 years.

Robert W. Hartge, history, is now retired but keeping busy. After a career working as a court reporter and note reader, a substitute teacher, and positions at Johns Hopkins University, Hartge is now continuing his personal interest in weather and climate change research.

1980

Michael Zollicoffer, biological sciences, is a pediatric medicine specialist in Baltimore, Maryland, with over 38 years of experience in the medical field. He was named as one of “25 Black Marylanders to Watch” for 2024 by the *Baltimore Sun*.

1981

Howard Siskind, M.A. ’85, psychology, performed with his band, Stillwaters, at the AMFM Christmas Show at Rams Head on Stage in Annapolis in December 2023. He released his 15th original single, “Eyes from Orion,” in January 2024. He also signed a publishing contract for his second children’s book, *Honabeats Says: Crazy Words 2!* which will be available in late 2024.

1983

Christine Langr, visual and performing arts, completed a graduate certificate program in historic preservation in December of 2023 at the University of Delaware School of Public Policy and Administration. She previously earned an M.F.A. in photography from MICA in 1986.

1984

Shon Katzenberger, mathematics, was a lead on the team that developed Power Fx, a new low-code programming language from Microsoft.

Lorrie Liang, health science and policy, was selected in April 2024 through a nationwide search to be the president of Wellstar Kennestone Regional Medical Center. Liang will work to lead the growing Marietta, Georgia, hospital.

Stephanie Reel, information systems management, joined the board of directors for the Kennedy Krieger Institute in January 2024. She is the former chief information officer for all divisions of the Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Health System and retired in 2021.

1985

Karine Armen, social work, retired in June 2023 after teaching for 32 years. She was inspired by social impact photographer Lewis Hines (whose collection is housed in the AOK Library’s Special Collections) and used her camera to capture the issues with unhoused people. She has had several photo exhibitions and is now a freelance photographer and writer who has had the opportunity to travel the world.

1987

Matt Tormollen, information systems management, the CEO of energy software company POWWR, was featured in *Power Engineering International* in early 2024, writing as an expert about energy genealogy.

1990

Gustavo Matheus, biological sciences, joined Feldesman Leifer LLP as a partner in January 2024. Bringing over 25 years of experience to the firm, Matheus is a seasoned healthcare attorney.

SHARING THE BEAT OF HIS OWN DRUM

Connor LeFevre '23, music technology



On a chilly February night, some of the most dedicated local music fans pile in for a floor show at a small grunge venue, Baltimore's Ottobar. When the first band, Lean Tee, takes the floor and begins playing, the mood of the room shifts from anticipation to excitement. **Connor LeFevre '23**, music technology, sits behind the drum kit in the center. Lean Tee's music is full of hard-hitting drum beats, but LeFevre easily supports the rhythms of the guitar and bass without overshadowing either. His sticks complement the unmodulated and fervent sounds of the vocals.

This show and this energy represent a pretty typical night for LeFevre, as he has centered his life around music—a career move, he said, made possible by his major at UMBC, which gave him full-time access to recording spaces and instructors who remain active in their musical fields.

Originally from New Jersey, LeFevre had to do some groundwork to find his way into the Baltimore music scene. He is currently a drummer for multiple local Baltimore bands—he wields his sticks for Lean Tee (indie rock), Love For Strangers (prog rock), and Curver (shoegaze), to name a few. He also works at a Hampden, Baltimore, music studio, The Moose House, as a junior engineer.

A deciding factor for LeFevre in attending the music technology program at UMBC was the studio space provided for students. "You have 24-hour access to the studio and you can use it for anything you want once you reach a certain year," LeFevre says, and this alone made it worth it to come out of state.

LeFevre credits UMBC for making multiple connections for him. For one, he met all of the original members of Love For Strangers at UMBC. He says, "When lockdown started loosening up, I

wanted to start a band, and I saw **Jeff Hirshman** during a Zoom class—he was practicing during class—and I was like, 'Oh, that's the person I want to be in a band with!' Because they don't care about anything but music, obviously."

Hirshman, now the band's main songwriter, recalls their encounter similarly. "I would practice guitar in class, and he thought I seemed like a good rock guitarist. So he DM'ed me, and we met with a bassist and jammed, and we started writing music right away," says Hirshman '24, music technology.

During his time at UMBC, LeFevre appreciated the styles and output of many of his music technology professors. "**Eric Taft, Alan Wonneberger, and Greg Kalember**—all three of them had works that I really respected. Eric made a lot of records that had a big impact on me as a kid growing up," says LeFevre "And then, Greg did things like the Pokémon movie soundtrack. So, a lot of the things they'd done, I had heard in my life without even knowing."

Along with his professional accomplishments, LeFevre found it helpful that Kalember brought a broad view of the industry into the classroom. "There are all sorts of lessons to be learned about networking, being part of a collaboration, putting together a project and seeing it through, trying to convince other people to get on board with your vision, and setting your personal opinions aside in order to realize someone else's creative vision," says Kalember. "These are all key skills that I believe students need when trying to go out into the music industry."

The music technology program gave LeFevre the ability to combine his outside projects with what he was learning in the classroom. For his senior project, he recorded a live video for his

band Love For Strangers. "We recorded that at school," he says, "and then the album that we've been sitting on, I also recorded that at UMBC."

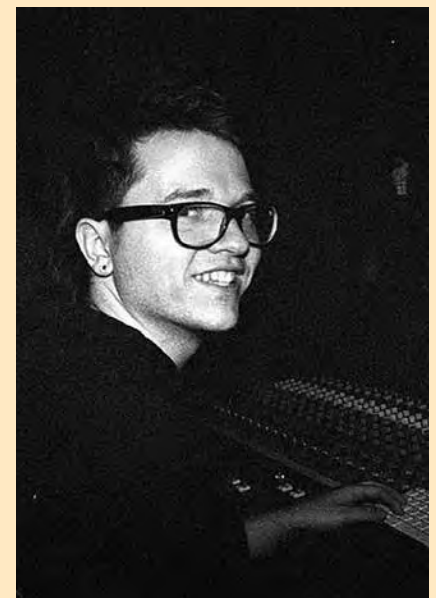
Kalember emphasizes the hands-on opportunities UMBC provides, "Students have access to multiple studio spaces—each with its own quirks and advantages—our concert hall, networked performance spaces throughout the building, and an amazing collection of instruments," he explains. Kalember is also delighted to see all that LeFevre has accomplished. "I can say that I've seen tremendous progress in his drumming," says Kalember.

Since graduating, LeFevre has been able to utilize his degree and the connections he's made at UMBC in many ways. **Tom Lagana**, LeFevre's guitar professor, helped him to get into a wedding group called Bachelor Boys Band. But aside from playing shows in a multitude of bands and working at The Moose House, he also enjoys teaching recording and drums as well as doing electronic repairs.

Back at the Ottobar, for the entirety of Lean Tee's set, it's evident how much precision and control LeFevre commands over the kit, a skill that becomes even more apparent as the final notes linger in the air. After a second's pause following the last beat, the audience applauds.

— Cristina Reid '24

LeFevre, top, playing drums in one of his bands. Photo by Angelo Limentani. Below, LeFevre at the mixing board. Photo by Chris Dequino.



CLASS NOTES



Ahmed Eissa '16 and Rachel Cohen '16 tied the knot in October 2023 at the Heron Room in Baltimore. This photo, filled with Retrievers, was taken by their wedding photographer, also an alum, Brad Nguyen '16.

1993

Kimberly Ellison-Taylor, information systems, was elected to Marathon Petroleum Corp's board of directors, effective March 1. Ellison-Taylor is a former global leader at Oracle Corp, where she held roles directing strategy and thought leadership for the company's financial services practice.

1994

Takisha Cannon, biological sciences, was highlighted by the Fairfax County, Virginia, government's website as one of their 2024 Women's History Month honorees. Cannon's leadership in Fairfax County's Department of Public Works and Environmental Services underscores her commitment to ensuring diverse voices are heard in environmental decision-making.

Lisa Respers France, English, was highlighted in *Atlanta Magazine* for her work as a senior entertainment writer for CNN Digital in Atlanta. Her writing looks past the guilty pleasure of pop culture to reveal the deeply serious stories at the intersection of national politics and justice. She is a 15-year veteran of CNN's entertainment team and got her start in journalism in 1994 at the *Los Angeles Times*.

1995

Ginina A. Jackson-Stevenson, Afro-American studies, was appointed by Governor Wes Moore as Anne Arundel County Circuit Court judge in November of 2023.

Brad Medairy, information systems, was named as a top cybersecurity consultant and leader of 2023 by *The Consulting Report*.

1996

Damon Tweedy, biological sciences, a *New York Times*-bestselling author, recently published his latest book, *Facing the Unseen: The Struggle to Center Mental Health in Medicine*.

1997

Lekelia Jenkins, biological sciences, is an associate professor in the School for the Future of Innovation in Society at Arizona State University. In January 2024, she was named a fellow of the International Science Council—the council's highest honor—for her dedication to furthering her engagement and understanding of science.

Jolene Lauria, political science, was appointed assistant attorney general for administration in the U.S. Department of Justice in December 2023. She also serves as the chief financial officer and top ethics official at a sprawling federal agency with more than 115,000 employees spread across all 50 states.

1998

Steven Fischer, visual and performing arts, a two-time Emmy-nominated producer and cartoonist, received a Fulbright Specialist Award to complete a cartoon storytelling workshop at the University of Tokyo, Japan, from October to November 2023.

Amy Poff, American studies, opened Hallowed Ground Gardens, a new garden center, nursery, and classroom in early 2024 in historic Ellicott City, Maryland.

1999

Sabrina Poole, M.S. '04, information systems, celebrated 20 years in business as CEO of the IT company SERDI LLC, which she started in 2003. She is now living in West Africa and is the queen of Nyankpala and Oyibi in Ghana, doing a number of humanitarian projects for her nonprofit Go Help Africa.

2000

Michael R. Boivin, biological sciences, sociology, and psychology, the command surgeon for the 20th CBRNE Command, (U.S. Army headquarters for defense against Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and high-yield Explosives) was selected for the "A" Proficiency Designator award, the highest award the Army Medical Department can bestow to those who have demonstrated professional expertise, exceptional ability, and outstanding achievements in both clinical and academic medicine.

2001

Alexis McKittrick, chemical engineering, hosted a November 2023 episode of the SWE (Society of Women Engineers) *Diverse* podcast, which analyzes the latest data on women's representation in STEM.

2002

Keith T. Elder, Ph.D., policy sciences, became the 21st president of Saint Xavier University in Chicago, Illinois, on March 1. He previously served as provost and executive vice president of Mississippi College and has over 20 years of service in higher education.

Elizabeth Shearer, psychology, was named chief human capital officer at the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) in March 2024. In this role, Shearer will plan and implement the human resources systems and oversee the policies and procedures that guide GPO's human resources operation.

2003

Brooke Coley, chemical engineering, was the guest lecturer at the University of Arkansas College of Engineering's Black History Month discussion, "Standing on Greatness: Leveraging History to Propel Black Futures in Engineering," in February 2024. Coley is assistant professor of engineering at Arizona State University and the founding executive director of the Center for Research Advancing Racial Equity, Justice, and Sociotechnical Innovation Centered in Engineering.

Bill Schneider, M.A., policy sciences, was named vice president of system effectiveness for the North Carolina Community College System in October 2023.

2004

Delali Dzirasa, computer engineering, CEO of the software company Fearless, was named one of "25 Black Marylanders to Watch" for 2024 by the *Baltimore Sun*.

Katie Rouse, philosophy, was the inaugural speaker at the UMBC Department of Philosophy's alumni speaker series in March 2024. She spoke on the value of philosophy in her career as executive director of On Our Own of Maryland Inc., a statewide peer-operated behavioral health advocacy and education organization that promotes equality, justice, autonomy, and choice about life decisions for individuals with mental-health and substance-use needs.

Elisa Watson, visual arts, partnered with Jessica Gill in March 2024 to open Sunny Side Creative, a creative agency specializing in branding, content and design, strategic marketing and communications, and websites.

Alicia Wilson, political science, was the keynote speaker for the University of Baltimore School of Law's Fannie Angelos Gala in April 2024 at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore. Wilson is the managing director and global head of philanthropy for the North America region for JPMorgan Chase, where she helps to steward the \$2 billion philanthropic commitment as part of the firm's broader racial equity commitment.

2005

Matt McGloin, acting, made his *Law & Order* debut on season 23, episode 6. The episode aired February 29 on NBC.

Eugene Young, information systems and sociology, is the current director of the Delaware State Housing Authority. He was selected by Governor John Carney in 2021 and has worked on increasing renters' rights and providing down payment assistance for homebuyers.

2006

Kelley Bell, M.F.A., imaging and digital arts, an associate professor of visual arts at UMBC, is among the finalists for the prestigious 2024 Baker Artist Award in the interdisciplinary category.

Lauren Buckler, mechanical engineering, has been deputy director of the Baltimore County Department of Public Works and Transportation since 2021. Prior to joining

the Baltimore County government, Buckler held several senior leadership positions with the Maryland Department of General Services. She is a graduate of Leadership Maryland and was recognized by *The Daily Record* as a Leading Women winner.

Ryan Kennedy, political science, was promoted to the position of partner at Dunlap Bennett & Ludwig, a veteran-owned law firm, in January 2024. He regularly appears before the district and circuit courts of Maryland and Virginia in a variety of real estate and commercial disputes.

Michael Trail, financial economics, is the principal and CIO of MCB Real Estate and was named to the *Baltimore Business Journal's* 2023 "40 Under 40" list, honoring up-and-coming business leaders in the Baltimore region.

2007

Sarah Butts, social work, was selected by the Biden-Harris administration in October 2023 to serve on a Student Loan Relief Committee, organized by the Department of Education, that will engage in negotiated rulemaking to prepare proposed regulations related to modification, waiver, release, or compromise of federal student loans.

Elisa Watson '04 opened Sunny Side Creative with a partner in March 2024.



CLASS NOTES



Sabrina Poole '99, M.S. '04, has run her own IT company in Ghana for 20 years and is now doing a number of humanitarian projects for her nonprofit Go Help Africa.

McKenzie Chinn, acting, is a development recipient of the 2023 SFFILM Rainin Grant, which includes funding and professional support for narrative projects. Chinn will use the \$25,000 grant for screenwriting and development, post-production, and a two-month residency at FilmHouse, SFFILM's premier artist residency space, for her feature film, *A Real One*.

Wayne Rose, Afro-American studies, M.A. '10, history, was the keynote speaker for the 9th National Rastafari Conference in March 2024 at the Arts Centre in Accra, Ghana. He spoke on "Political Consciousness: A Key Requirement for National Development." Rose is a lecturer on American history, African diaspora history, and Afro-Caribbean spirituality at Morgan State University.

Jen White-Johnson, visual arts, was featured in an article by *The 19th*, an independent, nonprofit newsroom reporting on gender, politics and policy, in February 2024 as part of Black History Month. She discussed zinemaking, parenting, solidarity, and the role of art in the disability justice movement.

2009

Kristina R. Gaddy, history, modern languages and linguistics, is the author of *Well of Souls: Uncovering the Banjo's Hidden History*. She spoke at the "Writers Series" event hosted by Sweet Briar College in October 2023 about creating narratives from historical documents.

2010

Charonda Woods-Boone, M.S., information systems, coauthored a theological essay with her husband, Preston Boone, entitled "Black Marriage as Social Justice." The essay was featured in the *Haymanot Journal Volume 3*, released in 2023.

2011

Yewande Dayo, biological sciences, an infectious diseases pharmacist at Ochsner Health in New Orleans, was featured in an article on the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists website, describing her career path.

Sean Mercer, music technology, is currently touring with country artist Jackson Dean as his drummer. In the past, he's performed at prestigious venues like the Grand Ole Opry, the Ryman Auditorium, and Royal Albert Hall.

2012

Garrett DeSimone, mathematics, was the keynote speaker of QuantVision 2024, Fordham University's Quantitative Conference, in April 2024. DeSimone is the head of quantitative research at OptionMetrics LLC. He graduated with his Ph.D. in financial economics from the University of Delaware, where he served as an adjunct lecturer in finance and economics.

Katie Hileman, acting, a general associate in UMBC's Department of Theatre, is among the finalists for the prestigious 2024 Baker Artist Award in the performance category. Hileman is a teacher, writer, director, actor, and intimacy choreographer. She is also the founding artistic director of Interobang Productions. Her play, "I Will Eat You Alive," was performed at Baltimore's The Voxel performing arts theatre in early 2024 and is now streaming on-demand.

Daniel Jones, M.S., Ph.D. '16, physics, a staff physicist at the Army Research Laboratory, spoke at the Inside Quantum Technology The Hague conference in April 2024.

Stefanie Mavronis, political science and media and communications studies, was

appointed by Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott as the permanent director of the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement in January 2024. She was the keynote speaker at UMBC's spring 2024 Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement Day.

2013

David Hoffman, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, is a contributing writer of the e-book *The Place Collaboratory: Higher Education, Community Engagement, and the Public Humanities*. Hoffman is featured in the book along with UMBC and the Center for Democracy and Civic Life.

Schillica Howard, gender and women's studies, just finished her first semester as an assistant professor of museum studies at The George Washington University, where she leads the collections management concentration of the M.A. program.

Robbin Lee, visual arts, was named director of partnerships and mobilization for UpSurge Baltimore in March 2024. UpSurge Baltimore is building a tech ecosystem for innovators, founders, and talent by mobilizing regional and national assets around Baltimore startups.

K. W. Onley, psychology, has joined the advisory board of The Gertrude Conference, a nonprofit literary and screenwriting writers' conference. A former teacher, Onley teaches and mentors writers through her nonprofit, the MetroWest Writers' Guild, and is an instructor at GrubStreet in Boston.

2014

Marlyn Argueta, history, coached his former high school, South River High School in Edgewater, Maryland, to its first soccer state championship in 36 years. In November 2023, the boy's soccer team won 5-1 over Towson High School.

2015

Mustafa Al-Adhami, M.S., Ph.D. '20, mechanical engineering, is the founder and CEO of Astek Diagnostics, a diagnostic

device company. The company secured \$3.1 million in venture capitalist funding in August of 2023 and is working on raising another \$1.4 million in funding.

Stephanie Beauté, M.S., information systems, was named to the board of directors of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island in October 2023.

Emerald Christopher, Ph.D., language, literacy, and culture, was welcomed by the City of Alexandria, Virginia, as its new race and social equity officer in February 2024. Christopher will direct the city government's race and social equity programs and continue to build a framework to ensure policy decisions advance race and social equity for all residents.

2016

Ahmed Eissa, political science, a Sondheim Scholar, and **Rachel Cohen**, computer science, a Cyber Scholar, tied the knot in October 2023 surrounded by fellow Retrievers.

Shira Singelberg, history, will serve as the first rabbinic intern at the Shir Hadash Reconstructionist Community in St. Louis, Missouri.

2018

Mollye Bendell, **Jeffery Gangwisch**, and **Christopher Kojzar**, all M.F.A. graduates of the imaging and digital arts program, and members of the collective art group *strikeWare*, presented "Unrested" in the Julio Fine Arts Gallery at Loyola University Maryland in early 2024.

2019

Jacob Dennis, economics, along with former Division I basketball player Charles Carrington, have founded Maelstrom Sports and Entertainment. They are currently on the hunt for investors to fund a new semi-professional basketball team called Baltimore Venom in hopes of filling the void left by the departure of the Baltimore Bullets to Washington, D.C., in the 1970s.

FINDING GOLD ON THE WATER

Mark Couwenhoven '20, biological sciences



Push, pull, push, pull. On goes this routine of synchronized oar movements as rowers—nestled in long, tapered boats—move through the water with precision and speed. It seems as if the trim boats glide through the water effortlessly, and as a child, **Mark Couwenhoven** found himself entranced.

Nearly two decades later—and after countless pre-dawn hours on the water—his childhood dreams of competitive rowing came true when Couwenhoven '20, biological sciences, landed a spot on the 2019 and 2023 USRowing national teams. "I was excited to represent the United States and UMBC," shares Couwenhoven. "When you race, practice, and put in so much work and hard training—medaling at the games and seeing the rewards of that training makes it all worth it."

But Couwenhoven's journey to the top echelons of the sport hasn't come without its challenges. The sport, and life along the way, came with its difficulties, but Couwenhoven found support at UMBC and in other areas as he pursued his podium and personal goals.

Couwenhoven originally rowed at the University of Delaware, helping the varsity lightweight eight team secure a victory at the Dad Vail Regatta, the largest regular intercollegiate rowing event in the country. However, Couwenhoven's athletic pursuits took a back seat when his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2017.

Couwenhoven moved back to the Baltimore area to help her through the illness and started the process of transferring to UMBC in 2018. "Being at UMBC allowed me to be close to my mother, focus on my academics, and find a way back to rowing."

During his time as a Retriever, Couwenhoven recommitted himself to rowing and began competing as an American Collegiate Rowing

Association (ACRA) rower, winning the single scull (solo) event at the 2018 and 2019 ACRA National Championship Regatta. He also went on to represent UMBC at the 2019 Dad Vail Regatta, winning first place in the men's single event wearing black and gold stripes and Old Bay-themed socks.

Couwenhoven and his doubles partner then finished in 10th place at the 2019 World Rowing Under 23 Championships—the best the U.S. team had done in the doubles category since U23 became an event.

When joining the USRowing team, Couwenhoven set his sights on competing amongst the top rowers from around the world and earned a spot on the 2023 Pan American Games team.

His determination, combined with endless hours of training in the water, culminated in Couwenhoven winning a gold medal in the mixed eight rowing event and a bronze medal in the men's double sculls event at the 2023 Pan American Games, held in Santiago, Chile. Couwenhoven's victories contributed to the team's 10 total medals, the U.S. team's best rowing performance at the Pan American Games since 1999.

While his ascension in rowing continued during his time at UMBC, Couwenhoven remained dedicated to his academic career and credits much of his success in balancing his life as a student-athlete to his advisor, **Esther Fleischmann**, senior lecturer in biology. "Fleischmann was absolutely invaluable. Her advising really helped me build that balance that I needed to focus on my academic and athletic goals," says Couwenhoven.

Couwenhoven currently shadows the oral and maxillofacial surgery team at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) as he pursues a degree in dentistry. He also volunteers at CHOP as a nursing companion for children undergoing treatment. Couwenhoven's mother, who has now been in remission for five years, inspired his motivation to volunteer as a nursing companion, he said.

While advancing his career interests, Couwenhoven hasn't lost his passion for being out on the water. "Waking up early in the morning and getting to the boat house, seeing the rays of light as the sun rises makes it all worth it," he says. "When I'm in the water, it's about getting that really good stroke and I'm reminded all over again that I'm doing something that I love."

— *Adriana Fraser*

Couwenhoven poses after representing UMBC and winning first place in the men's single event at the 2019 Dad Vail Regatta. Photo courtesy of Couwenhoven.

CLASS NOTES

2020

Anna Staats, computer science, came in first as the fastest female runner in the 48th Marine Corps Marathon 50K in October 2023.

Olabode Pedro, computer science, the founder and CEO of Casava, a licensed Insurtech solution, is a new board member of United Way Greater Nigeria. Pedro is a fellow at the Nigeria Leadership Initiative and a Global Shaper of the World Economic Forum.

2021

Alice Chou, Ph.D., biological sciences, was chosen as a participant for the Nautilus expedition season as a science communication fellow, by the Ocean Exploration Trust. Chou is currently the lead community scientist for BioBus, a not-for-profit science outreach organization and mobile laboratory.

Mark Couwenhoven, biological sciences, is a member of the U.S. Men's Rowing team and came in fourth in the quadruple sculls at the 2023 Pan American Games.

Rylee Kennedy, geography and environmental studies, has completed her first season as an NFL cheerleader for the Philadelphia Eagles. Kennedy formerly served as captain for the UMBC Dance Team.

Jalon Payton, theatre, is one of five stage managers receiving the 2024 Charlie Blackwell Symposium Scholarship from the Broadway Stage Management Symposium. Payton will have the opportunity to join the professional development and networking conference, featuring Broadway's stage managers.

2022

Vincent Cannizzaro, Ph.D., public policy, is a founding director of York College's Arthur J. Glatfelter Institute for Public Policy, and the master of public policy and administration program. He will serve as the new executive director for the organization based in York, Pennsylvania.

2023

Bradley Absher, M.A., education, was surprised at the school where he teaches in Pasadena, Maryland, with a \$25,000 Milken Educator Award in April 2024. The award, referred to as the "Oscars of Teaching," recognizes exceptional dedication and excellence to the field of education throughout the country.

Friends We Will Miss

Michael John Buckhout-White '04, visual arts, a devoted father of two, died following a battle with recurrent brain cancer on December 29, 2023. His family and friends knew him as a musician, photographer, artist, fitness enthusiast, and an avid DIYer.

Stanley Feldstein passed away on March 10. He served on the faculty as a professor of psychology at UMBC for 35 years, until retiring and taking emeritus status in 2006. During that time Feldstein served as principal investigator and co-principal investigator on numerous research grants; published seven books in his field, 17 chapters in other collections, and 78 articles in academic journals; and presented papers at hundreds of conferences. He taught research methods and statistics and was an important mentor to many graduate students.

Dave Freeman '89, computer science, died on January 27. Freeman started working in UMBC's Department of Information Technology as a student and then was hired on as a staff member to continue his role as a vendor management system administrator. He would later work on early Windows servers and UMBC's first usage of Blackboard. After being diagnosed with cancer, Freeman retired in 2019. His colleagues remember him throughout this time remaining upbeat and focused on the positive in his life.

David H. Greenberg died on March 4. Greenberg joined the faculty at UMBC in 1982 and served as professor of economics until his retirement in 2002. Prior to joining UMBC, Greenberg worked for many years for the RAND Corp. and for the Office of Income Security, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Between 1968 and 1969, he served on the President's Commission on Income Maintenance Programs.

Margaret F. Ingram '72, education, a retired supervisor with the federal Health Care Financing Administration in Woodlawn, died February 17, at Oak Crest, a senior living community in Parkville, Baltimore County. According to her family, a turning point in Ingram's life was when she decided to go to college, in her late 30s, encouraged by her husband to attend UMBC.

Steve Miller passed away on February 20. He was the founding curator of the Rosenfeld Science Fiction Research Collection in the Albin O. Kuhn Library's Special Collections from about 1973 until 1976. **Thomas Beck**, the library's chief curator, emeritus, reports that Miller worked in the library as a student assistant while attending UMBC. Miller was the editor of a short-lived UMBC Library publication titled "SF Bibliod," and Special Collections holds several of his books coauthored with his spouse, Sharon Lee: *Carpe Diem*, *Conflict of Honors*, and *Agent of Change*.

W. Edward (Ed) Orser died on January 8. Orser was a beloved professor and researcher in the Department of American Studies at UMBC for over forty years. Upon his retirement in 2010, and in his honor, the Orser Center for the Study of Community, Place, and Culture was established at UMBC to foster innovative collaborations among scholars, students, and local community organizations across the disciplines whose research and teaching explore place-based study, especially focused on the Baltimore region.

Shawn Parker passed away on January 17. He was the library's administration services manager and head of the accounting and receiving department. A proud veteran of the Army, Parker started his role at UMBC in 2014. Parker is remembered for having a zest for life and an insatiable curiosity.

Patricia C. "Patty" Waldman '73, English, whose concern for abused, neglected and abandoned children led to a more than four-decade career as an attorney with Maryland Legal Aid, died suddenly on March 28, at Luminis Health Anne Arundel Medical Center.

FINDING YOUR FOREVER HOME AT UMBC

Kisha Parker '00, biological sciences and psychology



Kisha Parker '00, biological sciences and psychology, grew up in Baltimore County, so UMBC always felt familiar to her, but once she came here, she says, she found her family. First she found it in a supportive set of roommates, then in fellowship with other campus organization leaders, next within the Lambda Kappa Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., and eventually she met her future husband, **Kevin Parker '99**, mechanical engineering. Now the alumni power couple have three children and regularly take their kids to athletic games on campus as well as the Homecoming carnival and other events. Parker calls UMBC their forever home.

Q: What is your WHY? What brought you to UMBC?

A: What led me to UMBC was the size of the classes, academic reputation, and affordability. The bonus was the amazing avenues of support and opportunities to grow once I became a student. My experience at UMBC has led to an amazing circle of friendships, partnerships, resources, and career opportunities.

Q: How did you decide to combine biology and psychology?

A: I'd love to say that I had this long-loved dream of studying biology, but it really was organic how it came about. I was interested in forensics or possibly being a doctor and I knew I would need the sciences for either of those. So biology served as a starter block for the things I was interested in. It was only by taking psychology as an elective that I realized I enjoyed that as well and could add another degree. So one thing was about following my passion and the next was about exploring new interests that popped up. I've worked as a scientist for the biodefense industry for almost 25 years now, so my majors have paid off.

Q: What's your favorite part of being a part of Retriever Nation?

A: Retriever nation is diverse and multifaceted. I love bragging about our chess team and mock trial championships just as much as sports and academic entities. I love celebrating the wide net of accomplishments our alumni are achieving around the world and the history we are making with our UMBC roots.

Q: Where have you found support in the UMBC community?

A: I had a mentor in **LaMont Toliver** of the Meyerhoff Program; I lived with inspiring, smart and motivated roommates as consistent models of achievement; and then I became a part of a legacy of like-minded, multifaceted women in my sorority that have led to many experiences (too numerous to count...and still ongoing!) that helped me grow mentally, academically, professionally, and as a public service enthusiast.

Q: How did you and Kevin know you were meant for each other?

A: Many say our love story was brewing before we knew it. In fact, at our wedding, that was pointed out in just about every speech! We were the last to realize it among our friends. We both were campus leaders in our respective organizations. Kevin was the president of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Nu Kappa Chapter. I was the president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc, Lambda Kappa Chapter. We both were members of the executive board for the Student Government Association. Somewhere in all the planning of joint events, fundraisers, parties, and public service events, the foundation of a deep friendship with very common interests was laid. All the years post-graduation, we always

found ourselves at the same events and places, including the same trip to Ghana, West Africa! Not too long after that lifetime of a trip, we decided to make "us" a lifetime, as the quiet love and compatibility was undeniable.

Q: What drives you to support UMBC?

A: I am a member of the Board of Directors of the UMBC Alumni Association, and one scholarship I always make sure to support is the Alumni Endowed Scholarship Fund. It allows an avenue for the Alumni Association to award current deserving students an opportunity to continue their education in ways they need. I have been able to see the impact of these scholarships through personal testimonies of the recipients and witness the process in awarding, and I am confident that this donation (and many others!) is going to good and immediate use.

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

A: UMBC has a bit of everything. While strong academic programming is already established, our inclusive culture is invaluable. Whether it is in the form of day-one-ready mentorships, financial support opportunities, well thought-out facilities to enhance the student experience and future studies, administrative planning led with the student, staff, and alumni alike in mind—the support to be successful is here and in multiple forms.



Parker takes a selfie with other members of UMBC's Alumni Association Board of Directors at the 2023 Alumni Awards ceremony.

Kisha and Kevin before they were married at the student organization fair on UC plaza in fall 1998.

THEN & NOW

Striking a Chord

It may be coincidental that UMBC was founded in the midst of rock n' roll's most revolutionary years, but early Retrievers made sure to create spaces to bring live music to the campus, in intimate settings and on much bigger stages.

Since then, iconic bands and artists such as Frank Zappa, the Goo Goo Dolls, Alanis Morissette, All-American Rejects, the Strokes, Foo Fighters, Yellowcard, My Chemical Romance, and more have all played shows on campus. But while UMBC has a rich history of hosting renowned artists, student artists have also found venues to shine.

Back on September 21, 1968, the Collage, an on-campus weekend coffee house, was first opened. The Collage was one of the first notable instances of live music on campus, often drawing in a large crowd, and was the go-to place to check out the best student performers.

Although the Collage is no more, today, the Students Events Board (seb) frequently hosts open-mic nights where students can sing, play an instrument, and present poetry or spoken word. In recent years, (seb) seems to have drawn on a similar ethos to the Collage, with its Coffee House: Open Mic Night Edition. Yearly events like Quadmania and newly revived campus radio station WMBC and the Retriever Music Society's (RMS) music festival provide a chance to showcase student artists—the turnout for these events shows how tuned in Retrievers still are to good music.

WMBC's station manager **Sean Jilek '25**, computer science, says, "We have so much great music being made on campus and we really want to highlight that when we can. This year we made it a goal to have a UMBC band headline the festival."

Off-campus, OCA Mocha, the UMBC student-founded coffee shop, provides a venue for UMBC's student musicians, including jam sessions hosted by RMS, classical music from UMBC's Cello Group, and performances by UMBC's jazz groups. Jilek says, "I think this last semester has shown that small shows are something that people are interested in seeing on campus."

By Cristina Reid '24

Below: Students congregate outside the library in 1969.

Across: A student group plays at OCA Mocha. Photo by Erin Bennett '25.





WILD CARD

The Sweetest Hobby

Beware of crushes. Especially as a 10-year-old in 1995. They might lead to a lifelong hobby, rooms of your house dedicated to your collection, a quirky and supportive community, and even a spot in an Emmy-winning documentary. **Katie Chrzanowski**, however, has no regrets. After a brief crush on someone who collected PEZ, and thinking that starting her own collection would be a fun competition, she's now the proud owner of more than several thousand PEZ dispensers, the host of the Maryland PEZ Gathering, and an extra on the set of *The Pez Outlaw*. But Chrzanowski '07, visual arts, doesn't just collect PEZ paraphernalia for the fame and glory.

She started her collection with a pumpkin head and a snowman, gifts she held onto before knowing they would snowball into a collection requiring dozens of professional plexiglass PEZ dispenser displays. ("Otherwise, they just fall over like dominos.") Chrzanowski, who is a senior web experience/digital designer for commonvision, UMBC's student-facing print and design shop, attributes her long connection with the fanciful candy company to the community. When she began collecting, PEZheads (as they call themselves) were already active on the nascent internet. In addition to being active on the online forum, in the mid-1990s she signed up for a monthly print newsletter, which she still receives. "Everyone was so welcoming and engaging. It's been amazing to be a part of for so many years."

Like the animation major she was, Chrzanowski has a sweet system for organizing her collection, starting with the studio the licensed dispenser is from—Pixar, Disney, Blue Sky, and so on. "Then I organize it by franchise release date and then oldest on the left and newer on the right." The result is a meticulous, museum-worthy, 360-degree PEZ accumulation that lets Chrzanowski show off her almost 30-year hobby.

For anyone interested in joining Chrzanowski, she says, "Start with what you love. Whatever makes you happy—there's no right or wrong way to collect."

—Radianne Leysbon '09



Chrzanowski holds a 2024 PEZZY Award for Best Gathering. She was hard pressed to give just one response when asked about her favorite PEZ but eventually decided on her vintage Dopey dispenser, a beloved Disney character. Photo courtesy of Chrzanowski.

Your Generosity Supports Student Success

UMBC is the renowned public research institution it is today because of the generosity of alumni and donors, like you. Philanthropy plays such an important role in everything we do but, most importantly, in how we support students like Ria, Kevin, Jessica, and so many more.



"This grant makes it possible for me to study abroad and make the most of my undergrad experience.

I really appreciate how the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences is showing real commitment to the value of international exposure."

Ria M. '25

Recipient, CAHSS Dean's Study Abroad Grant



"Being a first-generation college student navigating college and the real world by yourself is

pretty hard. The support system and tight-knit community is one of the main reasons I chose UMBC."

Kevin C. '23

Recipient, John W. Jeffries Dean's List Award



"Thanks to you, I can focus on my education and career goals rather than financial burdens.

I am very grateful for your generosity to me and the other students here at UMBC."

Jessica T. '24

Recipient, Alumni Endowed Scholarship



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SAVE THE DATE

Homecoming: October 25 – 27

Mark your calendars for Homecoming and Family Weekend, October 25 – 27, when UMBC Retrievers, family, friends, and community members are invited to celebrate all things black and gold (and perhaps a little ghostly)!



UMBC Homecoming and Family Weekend 2024 is a time to reconnect and celebrate your Retriever pride—come enjoy the carnival, puppy costume parade, painting pumpkins, reuniting with fellow alumni, men's and women's soccer games, monster dash 5k, and GRIT-X, and more.

Check homecoming.umbc.edu for updated information.



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