

Women's Center

at UMBC



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Annual Report 2013-2014

Loyal. Constant. Strong and Resilient. Season to Season. Survival. Growth.

These are just some of the many qualities of the Wye Oak Tree—Maryland's state tree—and so many of the same qualities we find in the Women's Center at UMBC. For some, a tree provides shade to rest under on a hot summer day. To others it provides leaves that fall to the ground to play in on a crisp autumn day. In the winter months, we look at trees covered in frost and snow with wonder and awe until we finally see the earliest buds come to life once again on the first days of spring.

The tree is many things to many people, just like the Women's Center is to the UMBC community.

We are a place to find comfort, a listening ear, and friendship. Much like the tree, we seek to be strong but flexible, loyal but open to growth, courageous to challenges but loving with support. Our roots dig deep into the grounds of feminism and our many limbs reach further towards social justice, activism, and the honoring all of our intersecting identities.

Our new logo reflects our ongoing growth and evolution as a women's center which is grounded in our steady core values and reliable strengths so many UMBC community members have come to know and love. As always, and much like the great Wye Oak beckons, all are welcomed in our space, so long as they respect each other, their stories, their experiences, their potential.



Executive Summary

The Women's Center exists to assist all women in achieving their full potential in education, career, and personal life through academic and intellectual growth, professional development, and personal empowerment. The Women's Center serves as a key resource for women seeking support and advocacy and for all individuals wishing to learn about and engage with women's and gender issues. The Women's Center seeks to provide a space and community for all UMBC members to be fully valued in the spirit of wholeness, respect, and social justice. *All are welcome so long as they respect women, their experiences, their stories, and their potential.*

The Women's Center had a strong year in terms of space usage, with approximately 9,080 visits between July 2013 and June 2014. The great majority of visitors were undergraduate women, though we continue to see more undergraduate men and transgender students using our space, specifically due to the presence of the



Rebuilding Manhood program and Spectrum, the new student group for trans* students. The space also continues to be used by faculty and staff – many of whom benefit through the partnerships the Center has built with other departments on campus who use our space for programming, such as Human Resources' Peaceful Meditation group. Moreover, by converting two part-time positions into one full-time staff position, the Women's Center was able to provide additional one-on-one support for students needing some form of counseling or personal guidance. Having two full-time professional staff members also increased the Women's Center's ability to provide more group

experiences and offer more programming. Visitors consistently identified the Women's Center as a safe and welcoming environment that helped them feel supported and valued.

As a unit of the Division of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, the Women's Center continues to provide a distinctive undergraduate education and contribute to the academic goals of the University. Through the Returning Women Students Scholarship program, specialized discussion groups and workshops, and the

inaugural year of Critical Social Justice, students gain greater awareness and education regarding women and gender issues that complement their learning inside the classroom. Students frequently used the Center's space for studying alone or in groups and often took advantage of the available computer and library.

Additionally, the Women's Center supported academic learning through our student internships in partnership with the Honors College and Gender + Women's Studies.



Community members also used the Women's Center for relaxing and socializing, with the space often serving as a home away from home for many students who identify as commuters. In a survey, one student shared, "the Women's Center was an important space for me in finding my 'home' at UMBC, and it is a great support center and area to have stimulating, interesting conversations with a diverse group of individuals." Group meetings play a notable role in the community building that happens in the Women's Center space, with a total of 21 different student organizations and departments using the lounge for meetings throughout the year. By meeting in the Center, these groups often serve as a gateway for members to learn about the Women's Center services and come back again on their own.



The Women's Center continued to offer services to support the various identities that intersect with gender. Services and programming for non-traditional (returning) students, women of color, mothers, and the LGBTQ community continue to draw people into our space. Two new groups were offered this year: Women of Color Coalition and Spectrum, which serves the needs of trans* or gender variant students. Efforts to support UMBC parents also took place throughout the year with a special group meeting for expectant mothers and a workshop related to school selection. With the closing of the childcare center on campus in September 2013, the Women's Center stepped up as a key resource in supporting parents and families directly impacted by the closure. As a result, the Women's Center hosted several meetings for parents throughout the year to provide parents space to network with each other and build coalitions together to help advocate for the campus childcare issue. Finally, through representation on both the Sexual Assault Relationship Violence and Response Team

Executive Summary, Continued

and the Relationship Violence Awareness Prevention program, the Women's Center continued to be an important resource for survivors of interpersonal violence. The Women's Center, along with our UHS partners, led the way in creating and facilitating events and programs for Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Relationship Violence Awareness Month. Through our commitment to serving various underrepresented or marginalized populations, the Center plays a significant role in supporting student retention and graduation.



Collaborative partnerships in 2013-14 resulted in significant community events and services. While the Women's Center staff feel fortunate to call many campus departments partners and allies, key partners for the 2013-14 academic year included: Student Life's Mosaic Center, University Health Services, Gender + Women's Studies (GWST), Women Involved in Learning and Leadership (WILL), Honors College, Greek Life, and the Division of Student Affairs. Critical Social Justice (highlighted in more depth on page 10) also provided us with a network of partners and co-sponsors to include: Student Life's Mosaic Center, Residential Life, President's Commission for Women, Dresher Center for the Humanities, BreakingGround, CAHSS, Honors College, WILL, Interdisciplinary Studies, GWST, Sociology & Anthropology, American Studies, Media and Communication Studies, Africana Studies, and the Language, Literacy, and Culture Program. Through the Healthy Masculinity Campus Conversation event, we had the opportunity to work with Men Can Stop Rape and the Verizon Foundation. We also acknowledge we have valuable relationships with many more departments, organizations, and individuals, including those in the Office of Undergraduate Education as well as various student groups who all enrich our community and strengthen our networks.

A strong group of seven student staff and student interns assisted the two full-time professional staff in providing service to Women's Center community members. With the guidance of professional staff, the student staff and interns demonstrated leadership and dedication by creating and/or facilitating meaningful programs and events throughout the year. Examples of student-driven programming and events include: Critical Social Justice; discussions related to self-care, pop culture, and media; and workshops about healthy sexuality. Student staff members were essential in the daily operation of the Center; they enabled the Center to stay open until seven in the evening Monday through Thursday during the semester, provided critical connections to community members when professional staff members were available, and did outreach to their peers at campus fairs and tabling events. In a Women's Center community survey, the staff was commended for fostering a welcoming environment, with one respondent commenting, "I never feel like a stranger when I am in the center."



With the recent Academic Program Review of the Division of Undergraduate Academic Affairs, it has become more critical for staff and board members to reflect on the future of the Women's Center and its mission and vision. Greater emphasis on assessment and evaluation was integrated into our daily practice. We conducted surveys related to membership in Women's Center groups and an overall assessment of the Women's Center services. We participated in Residential Life's EBI Survey again and also collected feedback from The Commons' EBI survey. We also took additional measures to reach out to other Women's Centers across the nation to continuing informing our work and dedication to national best practices and standards. With much reflection, staff moved forward with creating a new Women's Center logo to better exemplify the values and commitments the Women's Center seeks to advocate within the UMBC community. The logo of the Wye Oak tree symbolizes the Women's Center's commitment to growth and resiliency while maintaining firm roots within feminism and social justice. With the launch of the new logo, the Women's Center staff and Advisory Board also began to explore questions related to our current mission statement and institutional priorities with the goal of updating these over the upcoming academic year.

We believe the value and impact of the Women's Center cannot easily be measured through numbers and summaries alone. This annual report serves as a snapshot of our daily interactions and relationships, commitment to gender equity and women's issues, and role in delivering a distinctive academic experience to the UMBC community.

The Women's Center By the Numbers

A total of **9,080*** visits to the Women's Center occurred from **July 2012 through June 2013:**

- ◆ Community members receiving one-on-one support related to sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual harassment: **19**** (*total only counts individuals, not number of visits*)
- ◆ Community members receiving one-on-one support related to various other needs (including mental health issues, transgender/transitioning support, pregnancy, daycare, eating disorders, finances, and access to community resources): **20** (*total only counts individuals, not number of visits*)
- ◆ Use of the lactation room: **321 visits**
- ◆ Use of the meditation room: **62 visits**
- ◆ Community members dropping in for our "free" supplies (feminine products, contraceptives): **798**
- ◆ Community members visiting the Women's Center for group meetings: **1,912**
- ◆ Community members using our space for community-building: **4,104**
- ◆ Community members checked out over **35** books during the course of the year.
- ◆ The Women's Center engaged with approximately **1,194** community members through programs, events, outreach, or class visits outside of the Women's Center space.

**Yearly average may be lower than normal due to 7 campus closure days this year*

The Women's Center sponsored **8** recurring group meetings throughout the year (e.g. Between Women, Mothers Group, etc.) which totaled **112** meetings for the year. Over **41** events and **3** film series/discussions were created and/or facilitated by Women's Center staff. Approximately **88** events or meetings hosted by other campus groups (e.g., Peaceful Meditation, WILL) were held in the Women's Center throughout the year. Support for Women's Center programming and services came through the **7** Women's Center student staff and interns, the Women's Center Advisory Board with a total of **21** members, and **1** male UMBC staff member serving as the Rebuilding Manhood staff facilitator.

The Women's Center provided programming and services to **19** non-traditional students who received scholarships through the Women's Center. A total of **\$54,380** was awarded during the 2013-2014 academic year through the Newcombe Scholarship, Bryson-Neville Scholarship, and the AEGON scholarship. Of the 19 scholars, **11** participated in the pilot year of a peer-to-peer mentoring experience.

Additionally, the Women's Center continued to engage a large number of constituents through online methods:

- ◆ Women's Center Community Blog
- ◆ myUMBC Women's Center group members: **525**
- ◆ Women's Center Facebook followers via "likes": **625**
- ◆ Women's Center Twitter followers: **413**
- ◆ The Women's Center also hosts various other Facebook pages related to our programs and services, including Rebuilding Manhood, Returning Women Forum, Women of Color Coalition, and Critical Social Justice, which yield additional Facebook followers: **450+**
- ◆ Women's Center listservs membership: **1,443**
- ◆ UMBC Moms and Parents myUMBC group: **99**

During the 2013-2014 academic year, the Women's Center had **1** full-time director, **1** full-time coordinator, **5** student staff members, **1** Honors College intern, and **1** high school student intern. In the fall of 2013, we also supported **1** internship opportunity for a UMBC SUCCESS student.

The Women's Center's total state budget for the 2013-2014 fiscal year was **\$92,041** with **\$4,619** designated for operating expenses. The Women's Center ended the fiscal year with **\$5,151** in our USM Foundation account. An estimated total of **\$16,000** in co-sponsorships, work study awards, campus grants, and in-kind donations supported programming, services, and professional development and travel expenses.

***Please note that this number exceeds the number of official reports of sexual violence as many of the victims are reporting incidents that may have occurred in the past and/or that are not required to be reported under the Clery Act.*

Highlights from Various Women's Center Surveys

This year the Women's Center was dedicated to assessing our services and programs more effectively. With the help of the Women's Center Advisory Board, we designed an assessment tool to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from community members who participated in one or more of our groups in the fall of 2013. A survey was also sent to the Women's Center community in the spring of 2014 to help assess our overall impact. This data was collected to not only receive feedback about the Women's Center as a whole, but also to provide insight that addressed our contribution to the mission of the Division of Undergraduate Academic Affairs.

When asked, **"I value the Women's Center and its contribution to the UMBC campus,"** 73 out of 74 respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement.

When prompted to consider **the ways the Women's Center group membership has influenced their academic success,** respondents replied in the following ways:

- 26%: Connected me with a learning community outside of the classroom
- 19%: Taught me how to deal with difficult situations or conversations in the classroom
- 18%: Exposed me to new subject matter or ideas that I can apply to my classroom learning or assignments
- 14%: Supported my ability to contribute to classroom discussion
- 12%: Taught me how to access an academic resource(s)

"To me, the Women's Center is like the basement at my childhood best friend's house: safe, familiar, & comfortable but still unknown enough that I won't get bored."

In regards to what respondents **personally gained from membership in a Women's Center group,** they replied in the following ways:

The Women's Center is "one of the only places I'm 100% out!"

- 22%: A place where my experiences/feelings are understood
- 21%: Friendship and/or personal connections
- 19%: New ideas or insights
- 12%: A better understanding of myself
- 13%: Motivation to participate in other UMBC student organizations, events, or experiences

Finally, when asked to consider the **ways group membership influenced their professional life,** respondents agreed in the following ways:

- 28%: Provided me with networking opportunities or connections
- 24%: Exposed me to role models or mentors
- 18%: Helped me to develop new professional goals
- 17%: Increased my self confidence

The Women's Center creates "so many phenomenal small and big impacts that have a ripple effect on the UMBC community."

This year marked our second year of hosting **Take Back the Night** after a multi-year hiatus. For all those who attended, the energy, enthusiasm, and compassion clearly demonstrated the event's importance to our campus community. The feedback from the survey sent to event attendees confirmed its success and solidified the priority of hosting this yearly event at UMBC.

- 100% of respondents shared they felt more comfortable in helping/supporting a friend who has experienced sexual assault as a result of TBTN.
- 68% of respondents reported becoming more aware of campus and/or community resources for sexual assault as a result of TBTN.

"This is one of the most powerful events that I have ever been to... I am so glad this issue is being explored publicly in this way, for me and for all of those affected directly by it. It is a great model for how to address any painful issue of social justice."

"Coming from someone who has been sexually assaulted, hearing other people share their stories made me feel like I was not alone...I felt like I had an entire network of people supporting me."

Women's Center Programs, Events & Partnerships

Women's Center Groups and Programs

The majority of the Women's Center's efforts related to programming are dedicated to our recurring group meetings. These groups exist to provide special attention and support to various identities that intersect with gender, such as race, sexual orientation, or motherhood. Additionally, they complement academic learning, create conscious-raising opportunities, and provide safe spaces to explore social justice and feminist issues. The Women's Center was proud to offer the following groups and programs over the course of the 2013-14 academic year:

Between Women: A group for women who love women, think they might, or support those who do, Between Women meets weekly in the Women's Center throughout the academic year. A favorite topic includes sharing coming out stories at the Milk, Cookies, and Coming Out Stories meeting each semester.



Mothers Group: This group helps UMBC mothers and parents connect with each other in-person and online and it has been integral in helping build the Women's Center's childcare information resources. This group was essential in helping provide childcare options and solutions when the campus childcare closed in September 2013. Many members have also been a part of the ongoing conversations related to childcare advocacy at UMBC. To better meet the needs of UMBC parents, the Women's Center created a myUMBC group for moms and parents on campus to provide childcare and other parenting information and resources.

Rebuilding Manhood: In an effort to create safe spaces for men to explore masculinity and define multiple versions of health masculinity, the Women's Center launched a 11-week program just for male-identified students. The program met both semesters with 20 male-identified students participating over the year. Male staff members facilitated the dialogues to ensure an authentic male-only space. A program review of the first semester was conducted and is available by request.



Returning Women's Community and Forum: This community is for women students over the age of 25 returning to college to complete their undergraduate degree. Biweekly meetings allowed for women to connect with each other and share their struggles and successes. Scholarships are also provided for this group and the application process is run by Women's Center staff. This year a Returning Women Students Peer-to-Peer Mentor Program was launched as a pilot program for the Returning Women Student Scholars. By pairing returning students together as peer mentors this program offered mutual dedication and flexibility that non-traditional students often need to build personal connections with each other. The program included additional meetings and social gatherings.



Spectrum: When some students questioned why the Women's Center has a group space for men and women but not trans* students we moved into action. Through the vision of some invested students, the Women's Center in partnership with the Mosaic Center's LGBTQ programming launched Spectrum in the fall of 2013. This group offered social space and support for UMBC community members who identify as trans*, gender non-conforming, or those questioning their gender identity. The group met weekly and was led by graduate student who identified with the community along with support from Women's Center and Mosaic Center staff.

Women of Color Coalition: This new group provides a supportive space for increasing visibility, advocacy, and engagement for undergraduate and graduate women of color on campus. This group meets biweekly and recently became an officially recognized student organization. Facilitation is led by Megan Tagle Adams with additional support from Lisa Gray from Student Life's Mosaic Center. For more details, see page 9 of this report.

Women's Center Programs, Events & Partnerships

Highlighted Events From the Year

The Women's Center Fall Film Series: Before it began its spring hiatus, the Women's Center film series offered three different film screenings and discussions throughout the fall semester. For the third year in a row Women's Center Advisory Board member Dr. Poggio led our film series and discussion for Hispanic Heritage Month. The featured film *Morir de Pie* was co-sponsored by the Hispanic and Latino Faculty Association, Modern Languages and Linguistics, and the Mosaic Center. The October film, co-sponsored by WILL, was *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, which presented thought-provoking conversations during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The series was wrapped up in November with a screening of *Invisible War* and important discussions related to sexual assault in the military.



The Clothesline Project: For Relationship Violence Awareness Month (in October) and Sexual Assault Awareness Month (in April) the Center displayed the Clothesline Project. Prior to the display, UMBC community members are invited to decorate shirts over the course of several days to be displayed in the project. This year we offered a reflection and discussion following both of the CLPs in order to provide additional space for survivors to share their experiences and stories. A smaller CLP was displayed at Take Back the Night and again in Harbor Hall for Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Women of Color Reception: This event helped launch the Women of Color Coalition and had a turnout of about 30 women of color students, faculty, and staff who met and mingled over dinner in the Women's Center. The time served as an opportunity to celebrate and support the achievements and ambitions of women of color in the UMBC community in addition to being a cheerful reunion of sorts for many faculty and staff.

Beyond "Man Up": A Healthy Masculinity Campus Conversation: What does it mean to be a man? What defines a good man? How does masculinity impact your life? What does it mean to go beyond "Man Up?" These are just some of the questions delved into at the HMCC in February 2014. Through the partnership with Men Can Stop Rape, Verizon Foundation, UMBC's Student Judicial Programs and the Relationship Violence Awareness & Prevention Program, over 75 UMBC community members came together to engage in honest and meaningful conversation about healthy and unhealthy masculinity and its impact on our community through the art of storytelling. The conversation was kicked off by a powerful opening story from President Hrabowski, followed by four student, faculty and staff storytellers.



Policing Bodies & Beings: The Politics of Black Womanhood Roundtable Discussion: In recognition of Black History Month, the Women's Center hosted a discussion on body politics, respectability politics, and the experiences of Black women. Three doctoral students from the Language, Literacy, and Culture Program shared their perspectives to a turnout of over 45 community members who squeezed themselves into the lounge before opening up to a powerful and rich dialogue with other attendees. This event was co-sponsored by: Language, Literacy, and Culture Program, Gender + Women's Studies, Africana Studies, Women of Color Coalition, and the Mosaic Center.

Women's History Month: In honor of Women's History Month, the Center hosted several different events throughout the month of March. The month kicked off with **Critical Social Justice** (see page 10 for more details) and included events for Women's International Day as well. We also used social media to create online space dedicated to Women's History with weekly spotlights of CWIT students featured on myUMBC to promote women in STEM and video testimonials dedicated to student leadership posted on myUMBC in partnership with the Office of Student Life's Leadership Development.



Take Back the Night: Back for a second year in the row, this year's TBTN saw huge participation rates and a 20+ person speak-out—this was despite the terrible cold, rain, and even snow! Many survivors spoke to the importance of last year's TBTN giving them the courage to heal and the bravery to speak out at this year's event. Our event was also featured in the American Association of University Women's Blog: www.aauw.org/2014/05/22/campus-sexual-assault-programs. More information can be found on page 5.

DIY: Self-Care Boxes: This event was held at the end of both the fall and spring semesters to help students gear up for exam week with a little help from do-it-yourself self-care boxes. The Women's Center provided materials for students to customize, as well as the goodies intended to help with de-stressing and calming of nerves to fill it with. Best practices related to self-care were shared with each other for this turnout of over 20+ students for each event.

Women's Center Representation & Service to UMBC and the Community

Committee Representation from Women's Center Staff Members:

- ◆ Sexual Assault & Relationship Violence Response Team
- ◆ Relationship Violence Awareness and Prevention Advocate Advisor
- ◆ Presidents Commission for Women—*Director chaired childcare committee*
- ◆ Gender + Women's Studies Coordinating Committee
- ◆ LGBTQ Climate Task Force
- ◆ Safe Zone Facilitator
- ◆ Consent Education Committee
- ◆ UMBC Celebrates Diversity Planning Committee
- ◆ UMBC Suits You Clothing Drive Committee
- ◆ STRIVE - *Director served as May 2014 coach*
- ◆ National Conference for College Women Student Leaders Steering Committee—*Director served on pre-conference subcommittee*



Trainings/Workshop Presentations Presented to UMBC and Greater Communities:

- ◆ The Unspoken on College Campuses: Relationship Violence, Stalking, and Sexual Assault for UHS Peer Class (September 2013 and April 2014)
- ◆ Microaggressions, Gender, and Why It Matters for UMBC (multiple: UHS Peers; 2 IHU courses; CSJ)
- ◆ Résumé and Career-Building Workshop for Non-Traditional Women Students (October 2013 and April 2014)
- ◆ Relationships: The Healthy and Unhealthy presentation for PHED201 class (October 2013)
- ◆ Skill-Building Workshop: Addressing Privilege, Oppression, and Bias in the Classroom (November 2013)
- ◆ Relationship Violence presentation and training to Counseling Center interns (December 2013)
- ◆ B-More Proud LGBTQ Leadership Summit workshops —Between Women Leadership & Be More You: Intersecting Identities (March 2013)
- ◆ Rape Culture 101— A Sexual Assault Awareness Kick-Off workshop (April 2014)
- ◆ Kink Teaches Consent: Communicating Consent workshop (April 2014)
- ◆ Lean Over: Women's Leadership Across Identities workshop for National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (June 2013)

General Outreach:

- ◆ Childcare advocacy and support with closure of campus childcare facility
- ◆ New Student and Transfer Student Orientations
- ◆ Graduate Student Orientation (Fall and Spring)
- ◆ Retriever Fest (August 2013) and Involvement Fest (Fall and Spring)
- ◆ Various other campus fairs: Retriever Wellness Expo, Luvapoluza, Commuter Fair, UMBC Celebrates Diversity Fairs

Accolades:

The Women's Center was proud to be honored as the Allied Office/Department of the Year for our notable allyship to the LGBTQ campus community at UMBC's first annual Lavender Celebration.

Trainings and Conferences Attended by Staff for Professional Development:

- Professional Staff Senate Mentoring Program (year-long)
- Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault's Women of Color Network Conference (October 2013)
- National Women's Students Association Conference and Women's Center Pre-Conference (November 2013)
- National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (June 2014)



Women of Color Coalition

In the fall of 2013, the Women’s Center, through the oversight of Coordinator Megan Tagle Adams, created the Women of Color Coalition, an affinity group intended to provide a safe and supportive space for self-identified women of color to share their experiences and discuss the intersections of race, gender, and other aspects of identity.



The formation of the new group was met with an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response from the UMBC community. For their kick-off event, the group hosted the inaugural Women of Color Reception in October, a celebration that drew faculty, staff, and students from across campus. Attendees expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to socialize and network with other women of color, which reaffirmed the motivation behind the establishment of the group.

The WoC Coalition also cosponsored the Women’s Center’s February program “Policing Bodies & Beings: The Politics of Black Womanhood,” a roundtable discussion led by three doctoral students from the Language, Literacy, and Culture Program. This well-attended event generated lively conversation about body politics, respectability politics, and the experiences of Black women.



Through intersectional programming and consciousness-raising, the Women of Color Coalition aims to promote empowerment, visibility, and leadership among women of color at UMBC.

Through thoughtfully addressing the myriad differences in identity among women of color, the WoC Coalition makes intersectionality central in their work toward empowerment, education, and social justice. By becoming an officially recognized student organization, the group intends to initiate more campus-wide programming in addition to their biweekly meetings, which center on open conversations and consciousness raising. The Women of Color Coalition has become a central part of the Women’s Center’s work in advocating for meaningful reflection and critical engagement around race, gender, inequality, and activism.

Women of Color Coalition was featured on UMBC’s BreakingGround blog:
umbcbreakingground.wordpress.com/2013/09/10/new-women-of-color-student-group
www.facebook.com/womenofcolorcoalition my.umbc.edu/groups/womenofcolorcoalition



—The Women's Center with—
Student Life's Mosaic Center
Present



CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE



One of the many duties of the Women's Center is to create programming that engages the UMBC community in social justice dialogues. Taking this mission to heart, Honors College intern and Women's Center student staff member, Amelia Meman, began reimagining ways to expand the scope of our programming. Through her creativity and passion, she began brainstorming with Coordinator Megan Tagle Adams and developed the concept of the Critical Social Justice initiative. Throughout the fall semester, students, staff, and UMBC partners collaborated to bring this idea to fruition. Critical Social Justice is a multi-faceted, week-long program that strives to increase awareness of social justice issues, promotes collaboration between all types of campus and community individuals and organizations, and facilitates critical conversations to create change.

Through a BreakingGround grant that Amelia helped write, as well as partnerships with seventeen UMBC departments and student organizations, the Women's Center in collaboration with Student Life's Mosaic Center was able to coordinate an array of programs ranging a broad series of topics like accessibility on campus and allyship in the feminist community. Throughout the week, CSJ collaborators—including students, staff, faculty, and community members—hosted roundtable discussions, community crafting events, lectures, and an art gallery that saw a total attendance of over 170 community members. A keynote lecture delivered by renowned hip-hop critic Jay Smooth engaged a 200+ strong audience in a discussion on the intersections of race, gender, and pop culture and inspired students to work together to engage in productive dialogues about social justice activism.



The beauty of the Critical Social Justice initiative is that it is uniquely formed through the people's investment of passion, insight, and creativity. Participants were excited to present their work, share their experiences, and collaborate with others. It is this communal spirit that enlivens Critical Social Justice, cultivating an atmosphere that is open, optimistic, and dynamic.

"Critical Social Justice": it is open-ended and rich with possibility. It is sharp, but inclusive. It is radical, but it is relatable.

It is rife with appreciation for our capacity to learn more and do more for our community and for each other. Critical Social Justice is a move towards civic engagement and critical thinking that will energize our community to seek change in the world."

— "Why 'Critical Social Justice?'"
by Amelia Meman for BreakingGround

This inaugural Critical Social Justice campaign was an innovative and bold move to increase the UMBC community's engagement with social justice activism as an extension of the university's commitment to civic agency. Critical Social Justice empowers the community to get involved and take action, and we are excited to see what will blossom from the seeds sown in this first year of Critical Social Justice.

To read Amelia's BreakingGround post in its entirety, visit:
umbcbreakingground.wordpress.com/2014/02/10/why-critical-social-justice

Follow Critical Social Justice's blog and social media pages for more information:
critsocjustice.wordpress.com twitter.com/critsocjustice facebook.com/critsocjustice