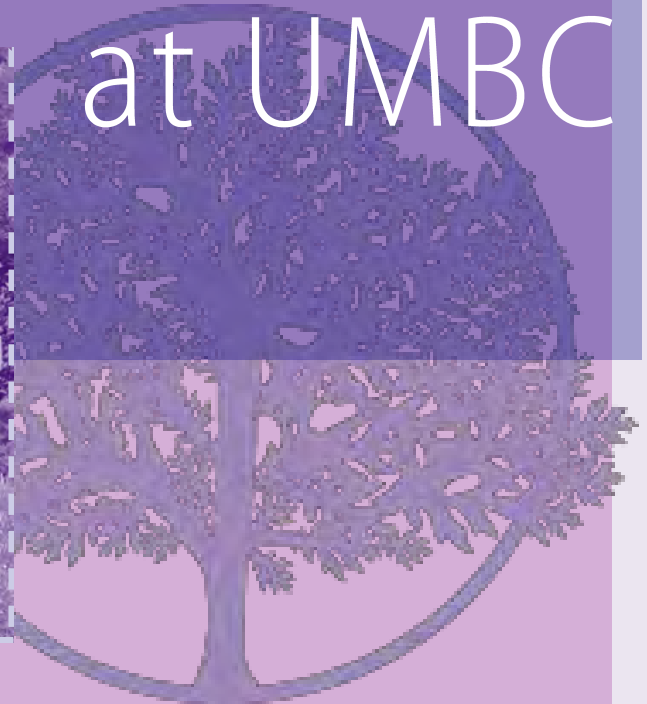


Women's Center at UMBC



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Annual Report
2014-2015

*All are welcome so long as they respect women.
Their experiences. Their stories. Their potential.*



WOMEN'S
CENTER
at UMBC

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 and other unrepresented populations 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. Their potential.*

The Women's Center had a strong year in terms of space usage, with approximately 10,493 visits between July 2014 and June 2015.

The great majority of visitors were undergraduate women, though we continue to see more undergraduate men and transgender and gender non-conforming students using our space, specifically due to the presence of the Rebuilding Manhood program and Spectrum, a discussion group for trans students. Critical Social Justice also provides a new platform for students to see social justice as a guiding principle of the Women's Center which has expanded the opportunity for others who had not formally engaged with the Women's Center



previously to see us as a home and community for them on campus. With the addition of a new private office space for the coordinator, the Women's Center has been able to expand its ability to meet with students in crisis or with sensitive concerns. The redesign of the Women's Center space also provides additional space for studying and community building. By introducing **Brave Space Guidelines** at the beginning of the spring semester, the Women's Center seeks to create space that is both safe and brave in engaging in difficult dialogues, reflecting on discomforts, and finding peace in being one's authentic self.

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 second annual year of Critical Social Justice, students gained greater awareness and education regarding women and gender issues that complemented 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 URCAD mentorships and student internships in partnership with the Honors College and Gender + Women's Studies. This year we were especially proud to support a student staff member in attending and presenting at the National Women's Studies Association annual conference.

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. Group meetings play a notable role in the community building that happens in the Women's Center space, with a total of **15** different student organizations and departments using the lounge for **62** meetings and events 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.



Executive Summary

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, survivors of sexual violence, and the LGBTQ community continue to draw people into our space.

Our Women's Center and Critical Social Justice blogs which are linked to myUMBC have also become an instrumental tool in providing additional space to tell our stories and validate marginalized experiences. Some of the most popular posts of the year included: "Gay Hair" (479+ views), "Don't Tell Me To Chill Out—Holding Our Friends Accountable & Saying No to Rape Culture" (401+), "Blackish: Telling My Story" (277+), and "Doing Critical Social Justice in Baltimore" (241+). The Women of Color Coalition Tumblr page has also been a growing resource to the community with one of its posts related to the Telling Our Stories initiative being reblogged 34,000+ times. The Women's Center, along with our UHS and VAV partners, also 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 aims to support student retention and graduation.

Collaborative partnerships in 2014-15 resulted in significant community events and services, most specifically in support of Critical Social Justice, Take Back the Night, and roundtable discussions.

While the Women's Center staff feel fortunate to call many campus departments partners and allies, key partners for the 2014-15 academic year included: Student Life's Mosaic Center, the Honors College, University Health Services, Voices Against Violence, LGBTQ Programs, Off Campus Student Services, Greek Life, & Gender + Women's Studies.

A strong group of 8 student staff assisted the two full-time professional staff in providing service to Women's Center community members. This year, we also offered more consistent volunteer opportunities for students who helped staff the Center. With the guidance of professional staff, the student staff, interns, and volunteers demonstrated leadership and dedication by creating and/or facilitating meaningful programs and events throughout the year. Examples of student-driven and executed programming and events include: Critical Social Justice, Telling Our Stories, various roundtable discussions, Rebuilding Manhood curriculum updates, and Self-Care Day. Student staff members were essential in the daily operation of the Center, provided critical connections to community members, and did outreach to their peers at campus fairs and tabling events.



As UMBC engages in strategic planning and preparing for Middle States, the Women's Center has captured this spirit of reflection and forward-thinking to explore and consider its own mission, vision, and commitment to institutional priorities. With the support of the Women's Center Advisory Board and several meetings with campus stakeholders and the Undergraduate Academic Affairs leadership team, we have begun drafting an updated Women's Center mission statement,

guiding principles, and priorities with a hopeful launch date of Fall 2015.

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

Despite reducing our semester hours of availability from 48 a week to 39.5 and remaining closed during winter term and spring break due to budget cuts, a total of 10,493* visits to the Women's Center space and events occurred from July 2014 through June 2015:

- ♦ Community members receiving one-on-one support related to sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual harassment: **21**** *(total only counts individuals, not number of visits)*
- ♦ Community members receiving one-on-one support related to various other needs (including mental health issues, racism, transgender/transitioning support, pregnancy, childcare, eating disorders, finances, and access to community resources): **50** *(total only counts individuals, not number of visits)*
- ♦ Returning Women Student Scholar and Affiliates individualized meetings: **52**
- ♦ Use of the lactation room: **367 visits**
- ♦ Use of the meditation room: **69 visits**
- ♦ Community members dropping in for our "free" supplies (feminine products, contraceptives): **653**
- ♦ Community members visiting the Women's Center for group meetings: **2,118**
- ♦ Community members using our space for community-building: **4,839**
- ♦ Community members checked out over **66** books during the course of the year.
- ♦ The Women's Center engaged with approximately **1,604** community members through programs, events, outreach, or class visits outside of the Women's Center space.



The Women's Center sponsored **5** recurring group meetings throughout the year (e.g. Between Women, Women of Color Coalition, etc.) which totaled **119** meetings for the year. Over **75** events and discussions were created and/or facilitated by Women's Center staff. Approximately **62** 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 total of **9** Women's Center student staff and interns, the Women's Center Advisory Board with a total of **17** members, and **2** male UMBC staff member serving as the Rebuilding Manhood staff facilitator.

The Women's Center provided programming and services to **24** non-traditional students who received scholarships through the Women's Center. A total of **\$55,000** was awarded during the 2014-2015 academic year through the Newcombe Scholarship, Bryson-Neville Scholarship, and the AEGON scholarship. All scholars participated and **4** affiliates in a peer-to-peer mentoring experience. Through a BreakingGround grant in the spring semester, we were able to offer an additional spring retreat, t-shirts, and a hugely successful networking event to the scholars and returning women students community.



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

- ♦ Women's Center Community and Critical Social Justice Blogs views: **12,694**
- ♦ myUMBC Women's Center group members: **623**
- ♦ Women's Center Facebook followers via "likes": **777**
- ♦ Women's Center Twitter followers: **602**
- ♦ UMBC Moms and Parents myUMBC group: **165**
- ♦ The Women's Center also hosts various other Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr pages related to our programs and services, including Returning Women Forum, Women of Color Coalition, and Critical Social Justice.

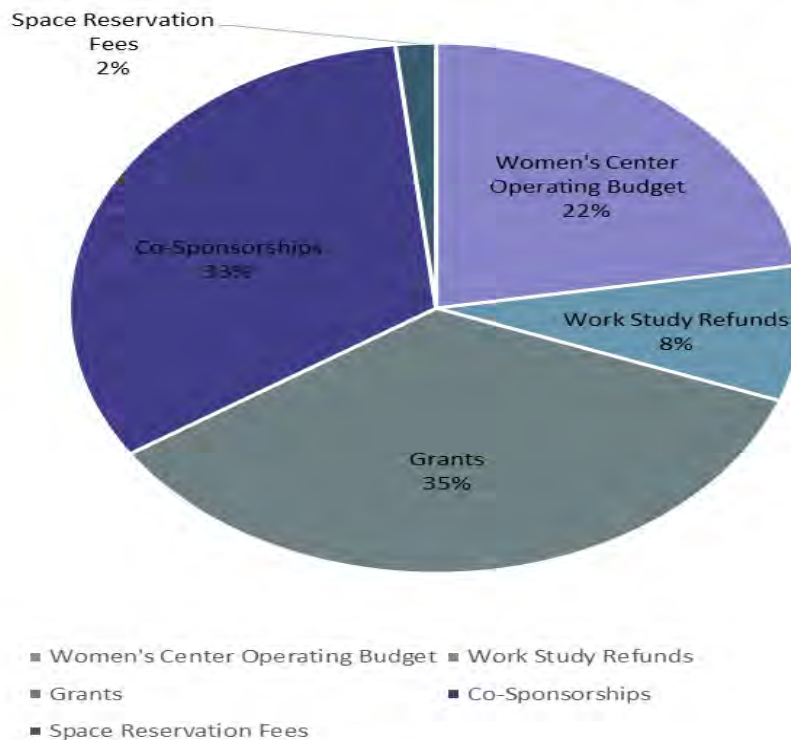
***Please note that this number exceeds the number of official University reports of sexual violence as many of the victims are reporting incidents that may have occurred in the past and/or that are not required to be reported under the Clery Act.*

The Women's Center Budget and Funding at a Glance

The Women's Center experienced an exceptional year of support from campus partners and external donors to help us in accomplishing both our programming goals and maintaining the daily operations of the Women's Center. With an operating budget of only \$4,469 and a student staff budget of \$3,706 the additional funding from grants, co-sponsorships, reservation fees, and work study is critical to the success of the Women's Center.

This year, we also began a GiveCorps online campaign through the support of the Alumni House to fundraise additional programming funds for the Returning Women Students Program. The Women's Center also has a \$5,563.28 USM Foundation account to help supplement programming and staffing needs.

Women's Center Funding FY15



Co-Sponsorships and Grant Funding



Highlights from Various Women's Center Surveys

The Women's Center is fortunate to often hear positive feedback from our visitors throughout the year. Comments like "We're so lucky to have a Women's Center. My friend's college doesn't have one." or "This is the only place I can truly be myself." are comments we hear regularly. There is a feeling of gratitude and pride for the Women's Center that will never quite be able to be captured in words, but through regular assessment, we've been able to capture a glimpse of what the Women's Center and our events and programming mean to students and the UMBC community.

"I come to the Women's Center because I know it is a safe space." -Spring 2015 survey

"I knew about the Women's Center but had never really known what goes on in there. I recently came across your blog and I was so impressed by all you do and stand for. The different posts were so heart felt and honest... Little did I know that the Women's Center consisted of such an empowering group of women." - UMBC junior via our blog

This year marked our third 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. The addition of adding community art projects and healing space at the conclusion of the march also proved to be a very welcomed change to the agenda of the evening.

I liked "The safe space that was created. It is amazing to be able to walk past that space in the Commons and remember that such an amazing event took place there, and that others felt safe enough to speak out against sexual assault by sharing their stories."

Take Back the Night "made the numbers seem real. I understand better now how many people are actually affected by [sexual assault]."

With additional funding this year, we were able to offer the **Networking Spectacular**, a networking event to the Returning Women Student Scholars and other UMBC returning women students. 21 students attended this event for the opportunity to "speed" networking with faculty and staff. A few students also participated in mock interviews. The event was hugely successful and everyone who attended asked for the event to return in the fall. Participant evaluations included:

"The Networking Spectacular was the best event of the semester. I was out of practice, and participating in this event increased my confidence."

"Exchanging with others was an amazing and exciting moment. From now on I truly feel more confident about networking skills."

The second annual **Critical Social Justice** with its theme of "Creating Brave Spaces" had great attendance rates and reception from the community. Event surveys from 143 participants concluded:

- ◆ **49.65%** attendees strongly agreed that CSJ events helped to improve their understanding of critical social justice. An additional **41.96%** agreed with that same statement.
- ◆ After attending a CSJ event, **48.95%** strongly agreed and **37.06%** agreed that they felt more empowered to create brave spaces at UMBC.

Women's Center Groups

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 2014-15 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 and a faculty/staff panel on "Out Life After College."

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 15 male-identified students participating over the year. Male staff members facilitated the dialogues to ensure an authentic male-identified-only space.



Returning Women's Students Scholars Program and Community: This community is for women students over the age of 25 returning to college to complete their undergraduate degree. This year the program was modified to include a new peer-to-peer mentoring component and monthly workshops. 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 opening orientations at the start of each semester and 1-1 mid-semester meetings with professional staff each semester. The success of the program was supported in the spring

semester by a BreakingGround grant and included a spring orientation, t-shirts, and a networking event.

Spectrum: This group offers social space and support for UMBC community members who identify as trans*, gender non-conforming, or those questioning their gender identity. Since the beginning of this group in September 2013, the group member has grown from a handful to a consistent attendance of 20-25 students each week. This group is run in partnership with Student Life's LGBTQ Programming.

Women of Color Coalition: This group provides a supportive space for increasing visibility, advocacy, and engagement for undergraduate and graduate women of color on campus. This year the group met weekly and also operated as an officially recognized student organization. Each year the group also hosts a Women of Color reception. In an effort to bring more attention to the experiences of women of color on campus, members of the WOCC also led the Telling Our Stories project during the spring semester under the guidance of coordinator, Megan Tagle Adams. For more on Telling Our Stories, see page 10.



Women's Center Highlighted Programs, Events & Partnerships

Community Safe Spaces for Ferguson and Baltimore Uprising: When the uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri first started happening in August of 2014 as a result of the murder of Michael Brown, the Women's Center in partnership with the Mosaic Center saw an opportunity to create intentional healing and supportive spaces for UMBC community members to process and share their thoughts, emotions, and reactions as they related to racism, institutionalized violence, and anti-blackness. Several of these safe spaces which were not framed to be discussions or debates were held in August and November related to the uprisings in Ferguson. In April, we hosted several more after the murder of Freddie Gray and the Baltimore uprisings.



Critical Social Justice (CSJ): The second annual CSJ's theme was inspired by the article "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces." Brave Spaces asks us to move beyond safe spaces and rather consider the necessity in taking risks and engaging in controversy to facilitate authentic learning experiences about social justice. Through the lens of this theme, events specifically organized by the Women's Center included CSJ 101: Creating Brave Spaces, The Women's Center Occupies Main Street, Social Justice Pedagogy: Tensions, Triggers & Teachable Moments faculty panel, a social justice themed art gallery, and the hugely successful keynote event featuring Franchesha Ramsey who is a comedian and social justice blogger spoke on "Your Powerful Online Voice: Social Media for Social Change."

We Hollaback! At UMBC Workshop: Over the past year, the Women's Center staff unfortunately experienced various levels of harassment from former and current students who frequented the lounge area outside of the Women's Center front entrance. In an effort to train staff and provide additional resources to the entire Women's Center community, the Women's Center teamed up with Off-Campus Student Services, Greek Life, and Voices Against Violence to bring this Hollaback Baltimore training on street harassment and individual and collective empowerment to the community.

Take Back the Night: TBTN has proven itself as a powerful and moving signature event for the Women's Center and its UHS and VAV collaborators. The survivor speak-out included 15 students sharing their experiences of sexual violence and the campus march violence took over 250 community members through True Grits dining hall and down academic row letting everyone know sexual violence must end. A new addition to TBTN included an art activism fair that allowed participants to make t-shirts for the Clothesline Project, write a Dear Survivor letter, or add a mini quilt square to Force's national Monument Project.

Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence: Cultivating a Survivor-Responsive Campus Workshops: As the conversation around campus sexual assault and Title IX has swelled nationwide, community members turned to the Women's Center asking for additional support on how to have important and affirming conversations with survivors of sexual assault. Staff said they know how to report an assault but what are best practices for listening? Students attending Take Back the Night asked for resources on how to support their friend who disclosed their assault at the speak-out. With these questions in mind, the Women's Center created a workshop which can be adapted for a faculty/staff or student audience. The workshop which was offered 9 times calls each of us to cultivate a campus that cares about survivors of sexual assault through providing a scope of the problem, debunking myths, building meaningful foundations to responding to survivors, and highlighting self-care practices.

Women's Center Roundtable Series: This series has been a successful replacement to what was becoming a tired and outdated film series. The roundtable series provides a critical lens on issues and various social identities as they intersect with gender. Through moderation from faculty members and staff and student panel members, all UMBC community members are invited into important conversations related to gender, identity, and social justice. This year's discussions included: "This is What a Latina Looks Like," "Beyond the Checkboxes: Intersections of Mixed-Race Identities," "Race and Body Politics" in recognition of Black History Month, and "In Between the Lines: Experiences of Immigrant and Undocumented Women in the US."



Women's Center Representation & Service to UMBC & Community

Committee Representation from Women's Center Professional Staff Members:

- ◆ Student Organization Advisors for: Women of Color Coalition, Critical Social Justice Student Alliance, More Than Men
- ◆ Sexual Assault & Relationship Violence Response Team
- ◆ Presidents Commission for Women
- ◆ Gender + Women's Studies Coordinating Committee
- ◆ LGBTQ Climate Task Force
- ◆ Safe Zone Facilitator
- ◆ Campus Childcare Task Force
- ◆ UMBC Celebrates Diversity Planning Committee
- ◆ National Conference for College Women Student Leaders Steering Committee
- ◆ National Women's Studies Association's Women's Center committee's Anti-Racism/Anti-White Supremacy working group



Trainings, Workshops, & Panel Presentations Presented to UMBC and Greater Communities:

- ◆ Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence: Cultivating a Survivor-Responsive Campus workshops for faculty/staff, students, and Greek Life community (multiple presentations to include a presentation at Shady Grove campus)
- ◆ Diversity and Intersecting Identity Training for CSI students (August 2014)
- ◆ Microaggressions, Gender, and Why It Matters for UMBC for new Engineering TAs (August 2014)
- ◆ Gender + Women's Studies 100 class visit on the history of women's centers (September 2014)
- ◆ Rape Culture 101 presentation for UHS Peer Health Educators (October 2014)
- ◆ Résumé and Career-Building Workshop for Non-Traditional Women Students (October 2014)
- ◆ Relationship Violence presentation and training to Counseling Center interns (October 2014)
- ◆ Diversity and Microaggression Workshop for Discovery Scholars (November 2014)
- ◆ National Women's Studies Association Conference, staff presented 4 breakout sessions (November 2014)
- ◆ University of Baltimore Law School's Sexual Assault and Title IX panel event (February 2015)
- ◆ B-More Proud LGBTQ Leadership Summit workshops: Be More You: Intersecting Identities & There's a Hashtag for That: LGBTQ Representation in Sexual Assault Response Activism (March 2015)
- ◆ John's Hopkins Sexual Assault Awareness Month Community Panel (April 2015)
- ◆ National Conference for College Women Student Leaders: Your Online Voice: Response Strategies in Sexual Assault Response Activism & Telling Our Stories CAP grant experience (May 2015)



General Outreach:

- ◆ New Student, Transfer Student, Graduate Student, Honors College, and New Faculty Orientations
- ◆ Various other campus fairs and events: Involvement Fest, Retriever Wellness Expo, Luvapoluza, Commuter Fair, UMBC Celebrates Diversity Fairs, and STRiVe consulting

Accolades:

The Women's Center's Between Women group was proud to be honored as the Outstanding LGBTQ Program of the Year at UMBC's Lavender Celebration. Women's Center staff members also received individual recognition at the celebration with student staff member, Amelia Meman, Outstanding Ally and Women's Center director receiving Faculty/Staff Ally of the Year. Several Women's Center staff members and community members were also recognized on UMBC's Class of 2015 website and at the commencement ceremony in May.

Trainings and Conferences Attended by Staff for Professional Development:

- Professional Staff Senate Mentoring Program (year-long)
- National Women's Students Association Conference and Women's Center Pre-Conference (November 2014)
- National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (May 2015)



Telling Our Stories

This spring semester we were awarded a \$5,000 Campus Action Project (CAP) grant from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) to fund a student-led project to fight stereotypes and biases. In addition to the AAUW CAP grant, we were also awarded a \$500 community project grant from BreakingGround to help support this ambitious campaign. Our project, called "Telling Our Stories: I'm Not/I Am," aimed to 1) raise awareness and reject stereotypes about women of color, and 2) create space for women of color voices and counternarratives to facilitate self-definition.



Following a series of consciousness-raising discussions over the past year, many of our students saw the need to promote visibility and community-building among WoC in order to stand in solidarity against racist and sexist microaggressions. By launching the project with the "I'm Not" poster campaign, we hoped to disrupt the misguided assumption that racialized gender stereotyping is not a problem for our campus community. The response was overwhelming: nearly 70 posters were created by UMBC women of color who rejected harmful labels, including terrorist, bad driver, model minority, ratchet, submissive, illegal, and many more. Our project received a tremendous outpouring of support on campus and online, with one of our posts going viral on [Tumblr](#).

The second phase of the project consisted of a series of creative skill-building workshops culminating in the "Telling Our Stories: I Am" showcase. We intended to go beyond challenging the misrepresentation of women of color and actually create a platform dedicated to their authentic self-representation. Workshop and discussion topics included: "Creating Brave Stages," music and poetry with local singer-songwriters QueenEarth and Hollywood Infinite, microaggressions and international students, self-expression and visual journaling, and feminist activism with leaders from the AAUW Baltimore Younger Women's Task Force.

Over **90** people attended the showcase event, which featured **25** performers from UMBC and the Baltimore community. The showcase celebrated the creative self-expression of women of color and empowered them to reclaim their own narratives. Performers used poetry, photography, dance, music, comedy, and art to talk about many topics impacting women of color, including Eurocentric beauty standards, sexual harassment, media representation, and police brutality.



"I don't want the conversation of women of color telling their stories to stay stagnant. I want this to continue because there are many "untold stories" in the woman of color sphere that need to be heard. These need to be heard so that they can help heal the multigenerational hurt that women of color have accrued." - Bree Best, TOS student organizer

This project was prominently featured on AAUW's Blog and can be accessed [here](#).