



*The Women's Center at UMBC* annual report 2018 - 2019

The Women's Center at UMBC  
*FY 2019 Annual Report*





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August 28, 2019: The Women's Center 2018-2019 staff pose for a group photo on Erickson Field.



We see you.  
We believe you.  
*You matter.*

I once read somewhere that the mere presence of a women's center at a college campus denotes that the university recognizes that sexism and gender inequity are present within the institution. And while sexism exists within all institutions, the ability to reckon and begin to address these disparities through campus resources like a women's center can demonstrate an institution's commitment to dismantle the status quo. Nonetheless, even when a campus resource is charged to name and work through challenging issues like sexism and gender-based inequities, **courage is still integral to the process of showing up and doing the work.**

And, if there's any one word or feeling I remember when I look back on this academic year, I hope it will always be that of **courage**. The courage of student activists who challenged our campus to wrestle with hard truths related to the experiences of survivors of sexual violence on our campus. The courage of LGBTQ campus members to push forward the need for equitable access to all-gender restrooms on our campus. The courage of Women's Center community members to take feedback and stay present throughout brave space conversations that stretch them outside their comfort zones. The courage it takes to know we can always be better and do better. The Women's Center is proud to be co-conspirators and advocates in this work.

The Women's Center always seeks to act with courage and this year was no exception. We were proud to expand our work of supporting survivors and addressing sexual violence not only through our little corner of the institution, but through the campus-wide initiative, Retriever Courage. Serving as a campus leader in this initiative not only enabled us to advocate for survivors of sexual violence, but provided the Women's Center a significantly more visible platform for our campus

*January 22, 2019: Women's Center Director, Jess Myers leading one of the dozen mandatory Title IX trainings for UMBC's faculty and staff. Thousands were trained on compassionate response practices and skills.*

to better understand the work we do for—and with—survivors of sexual violence. The number of students, faculty and staff reaching out to us for support increased by 69% (from FY 18 to FY 19) for a historic high. Additionally, we nearly quadrupled the amount of people reached through outreach, through the important work of training faculty, staff, and community members about best practices for supporting survivors of sexual violence. Throughout these significant increases, the Women's Center still strove to meet the needs and programming of our various other communities.

In recent years, "We see you. We believe you. You matter." is a tagline we frequently use in an effort to show solidarity with marginalized communities, particularly during moments in our world when those communities may be experiencing the threat of violence or erasure. Something critical that is left unsaid in that phrase, though, is the action of showing up and acting up. **I hope this year is evidence to our UMBC community that the Women's Center seeks to also show up and work with our communities—because we see you, because we believe you, because you so deeply matter to us.** We hope that our example will invite others in our UMBC community to feel courageous to do the same.

Thank you, as always, to our community and to our supporters for empowering us to act with courage.

Jess Myers

Jess Myers, Director

May 15, 2019: Jess and Marie Pessagno (standing right, left) laugh during the Returning Women Students' End-of-the-Year Celebration. During this annual event, the Women's Center takes time to celebrate the accomplishments of each of our graduating Returning Women Students, including Rachel Mansir (seated left) whose mom (seated far right) joined us.



**“ I don’t think it’s possible for me to think about my time at UMBC without thinking about the Women’s Center at UMBC.** I am grateful for the Women’s Center in so many ways; from providing a safe space to exist, do homework, engaging conversations, to hosting workshops and round tables... but the Women’s Center became more than a spot to eat lunch and complain about not wanting to get up off the couch to go to class. It became a space where I cultivated and nourished so many dear and important friendships, challenged myself and others to be better. It was, and is, a space to heal.

I remember attending my first Take Back the Night,  
I remember the first time I stood up at that mic and  
spoke my truth, and the healing that came after. I  
remember how truly and utterly terrified I was, but **I also  
felt safe, I felt loved. I felt supported.** ”

— *Juliette Seymour, GWST ‘14,  
Giving Day 2019*



# *Executive Summary*

## Women's Center Mission Statement

The Women's Center at UMBC advances gender equity from an intersectional feminist perspective through co-curricular programming, support services, and advocacy for marginalized individuals and communities. We prioritize critical social justice as our community value, with a deliberate focus on women, gender, anti-racism, and feminism.

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

### Guiding Principles

We will encourage authentic dialogues among students, faculty, and staff to facilitate consciousness-raising, transformative learning, and self-determination.

We will embody our commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and social justice in our operation, staffing, and programming.

We will operate from a holistic and non-hierarchical anti-violence framework.

We will challenge the barriers that reinforce inequity and oppression impacting our university and broader communities.

We will cultivate women's empowerment, involvement, and leadership in all aspects of university life.

### Leading Priorities

Advance gender equity and an inclusive campus climate.

Support student success and community well-being for women and marginalized people.

Sustain and strengthen social justice education and engagement.

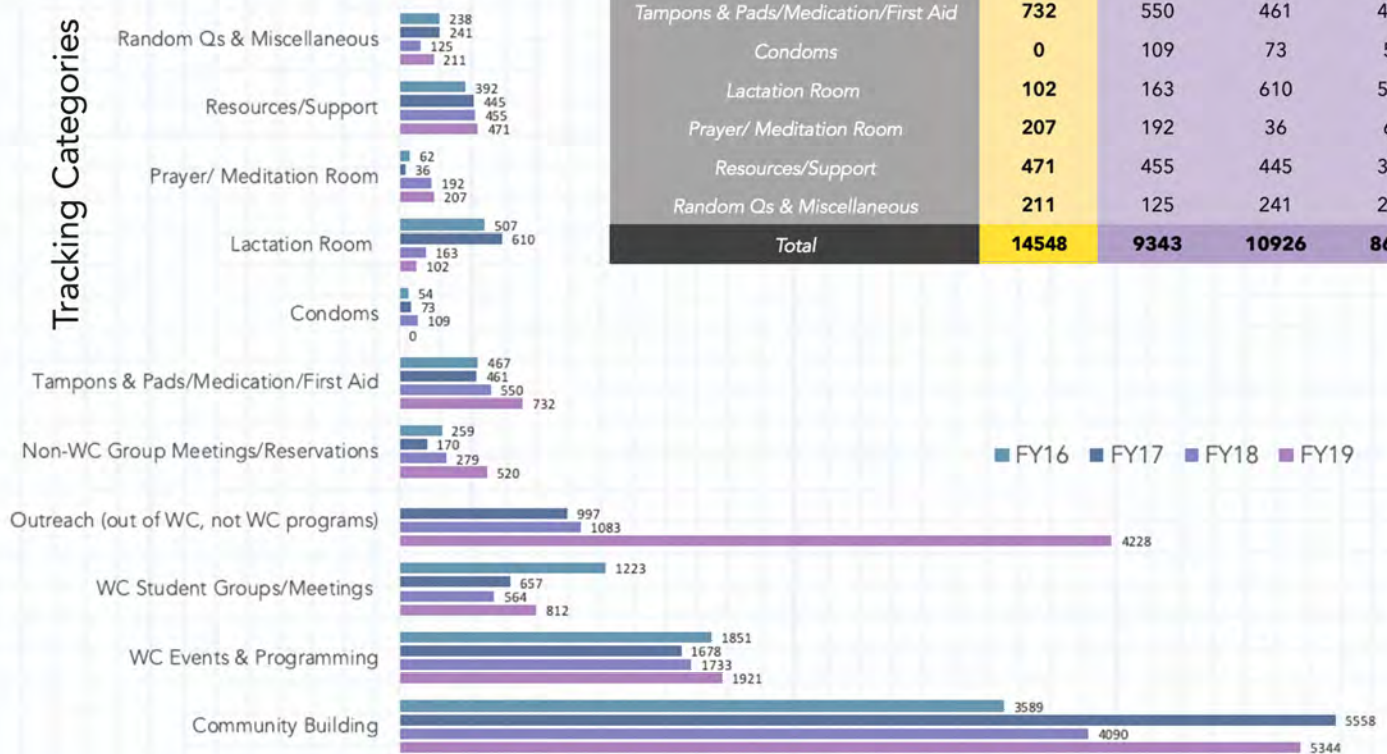
Cultivate a survivor-responsive campus as a means to address sexual violence.

*April 18, 2019: Student staff member, Morgan Mullings (leftmost at microphone) co-leads the introduction to Take Back the Night with Calista Ogburn (center) and Autumn Cook (right).*

*Photo courtesy of Winston Zhou for The Retriever.*

# chronological comparison of tracking data, FY 16 to FY 19

## Women's Center FY16:FY19 Tracking Data\*



\* **FY 16:** Outreach and WC Events/Programs were one combined set (n=1851)  
**FY 16 and FY 17:** Original data set made a distinction between categories of 1-1 Meetings and Support/Resources. For the purposes of comparison, these categories were combined.  
**FY 19:** Previously, categories of "Condoms" and "Tampons & Pads, etc.) were distinct. For FY 19, these two categories were combined and tracked accordingly (n=732).



# 1. Active Community Space

The Women's Center was an active community space and resource this year, with approximately **14,548 visits/contacts between July 2018 and June 2019**. The Women's Center lounge serves as a place of comfort and reprieve while also being a space for learning and friend-making with 5,344 community member visits over the course of the year. Our usage rates continue to include critical services unique to the rest of campus such as the lactation room (102 visits) and providing menstrual products to "save the day" during those unexpected moments (732 visits).

This year, we launched the Women's Center Scouts program in an effort to encourage community members to move outside of their Women's Center comfort zone by participating in a wider array of event and service offerings than they might normally by completing a series of challenges that ranged from attending various kinds of events, engaging in conversations with each other, and reading the Women's Center blog. Throughout both the fall and spring semesters a total of **46 community members participated with 15 completing the Scouts challenge**. Community members who completed the challenge earned the highly loved and sought after Women's Center t-shirt (pictured on p. 19) hand-designed by Amelia Meman with input from Women's Center community members.

In an effort to better understand the community members taking advantage of our lounge space, for the first time ever, we tracked lounge users every first week of the month during the spring semester by swiping campus ID cards. This practice enabled us to better visualize various communities who regularly use our space (CAHSS students; commuters) and where we would benefit from better outreach to populations (first-year students; COEIT students; and graduate students) who may be lacking in knowledge or understanding of the space and services the Women's Center offers. We hope this data will allow us to envision new and innovative ways to better support and serve students using the lounge while recommitting to a frequent message we share that the Women's Center is not just a space, but also an active place for learning, activism, and support.

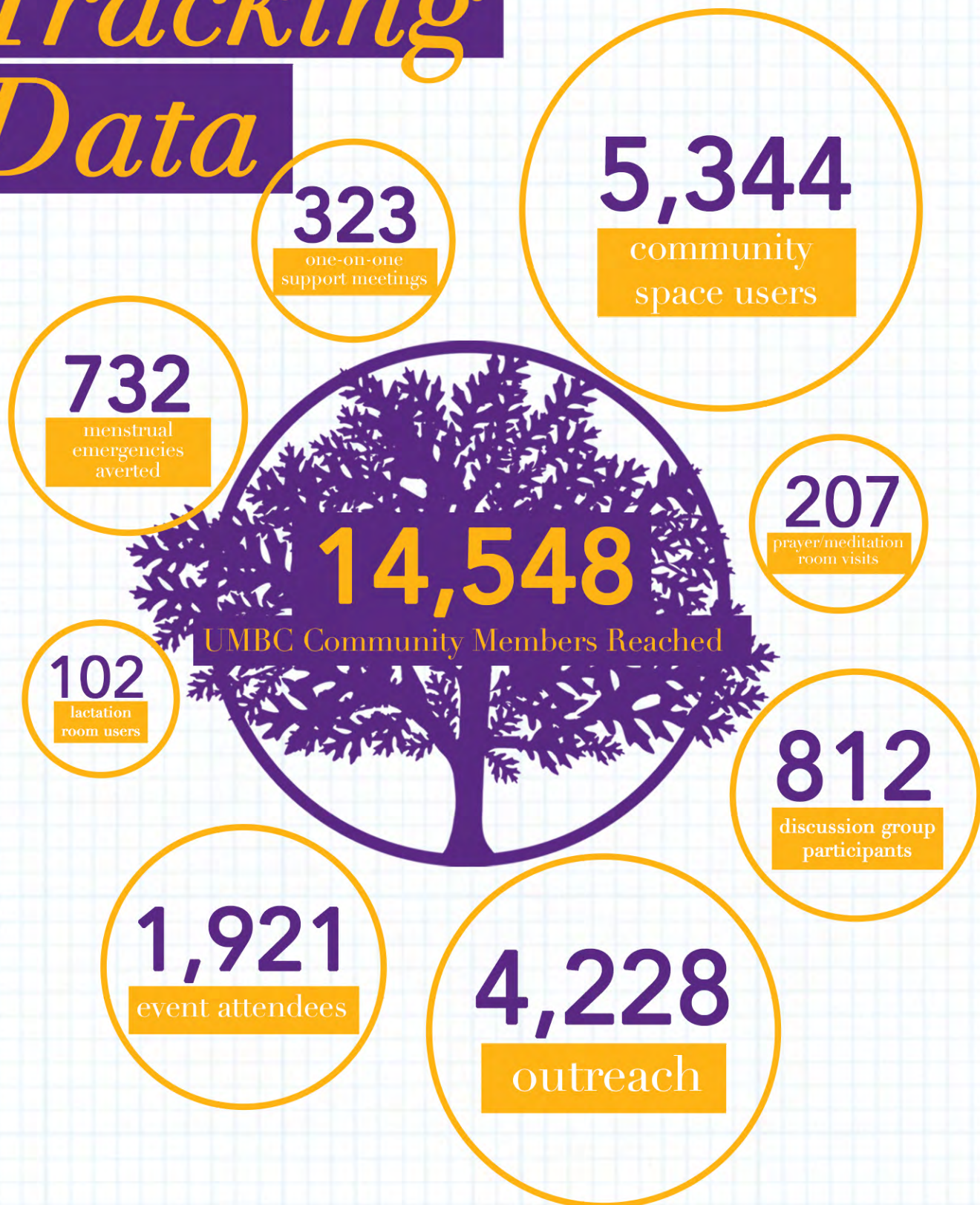
Additionally, the Women's Center was proud to support the Retriever Essentials Program. The Women's Center served as a pick-up location for bags of food, as well as the only other location (other than the Counseling Center) where students could secure "Save-A-Swipe" cards (free meal cards for the dining hall). **Women's Center provided support to 56 community members experiencing some level of food insecurity.**

*May 15, 2019: During the Returning Women Students' End-of-the-Year Celebration, scholars caught up with their community after a busy spring semester.*

*From left to right: Jenny Sage, Kiona Hines, Giovanna Carbonaro, and Lex Ashcroft.*

# FY19

## *Tracking Data*





## *2. Individualized Support*

This year was an unprecedented year in the level of individualized support the Women's Center provided to the UMBC community. **Overall, the Women's Center professional staff spent over 215 hours in 323 meetings with 167 unique students, faculty, and staff throughout the year.**

In the wake of campus protests and UMBC's reckoning with our own Me Too Movement, our largest increase in individualized meetings was supporting survivors and their allies concerns around sexual violence, relationship violence, harassment, stalking and various other Title IX issues. **Professional staff held space for 128 meetings over the course of the year, a 142% increase from last year (n = 53).**

Furthermore, through the new role of the Women's Center coordinator serving as the LGBTQ Student Union advisor, the ability for the Women's Center to support LGBTQ students expanded with our numbers of individualized support for this community more than doubling for a total of 46 individuals served. Other meetings addressed a variety of concerns, including: working with 45 community members experiencing sexism and gender inequity, connecting with returning women students 58 times (which includes required meetings with student scholars + affiliates); working with 65 students exploring ways to engage in activism and social justice, and supporting 68 community members experiencing mental health concerns. In addition to direct support, the Women's Center professional staff work to connect each of these UMBC community members in need with the appropriate resources making consistent referrals to University Health Services, the Counseling Center, the Title IX Coordinator, and other relevant resources both on- and off-campus. In our most recent assessment of our support services, consistent words used by community members who met with Women's Center staff for one-on-one support and/or crisis response included empathy, compassion, trust, and expertise.

*May 11, 2019: Marie Pessagno (center) laughs with Amelia Meman (left) and Jess Myers (right) in the Women's Center lounge. After graduating in 2018, Marie returned to the Women's Center staff as a Retiring Women Student Program Consultant while earning her Masters of Social Work at the University of Maryland, Baltimore.*

*Photo courtesy of Marlayna Demond for UMBC.*

# *visualizing growth* in our individualized support numbers

**FY18:** 191 meetings



From FY 2018 to FY 2019, there has been a

**69%**

rise in times professional  
staff met with a community  
member\* in need of  
individualized support  
services.

**FY19:** 323 meetings



**90%**

increase in hours  
devoted to 1-on-1 support  
[n(FY 19) = 215; n(FY 18) = 113]

**142%**

increase in support related to  
issues of sexual assault and/or  
relationship violence  
[n(FY 19) = 128; n(FY 18) = 52]

**142%**

increase in support  
related to LGBTQ identity  
[n(FY 19) = 46; n(FY 18) = 19]

\*As a department within the Division of  
Undergraduate Academic Affairs, our services are  
available for students, staff, and faculty.



### 3. *Social Justice Dialogues*

The Women's Center is committed to embodying an intersectional feminist approach in our daily support and programming, and social justice is a key aspect of our work. We host a variety of events that offer myriad ways for the UMBC community to engage in critical thought and social justice dialogues.

This year's Knowledge Exchange series first explored the intersection of gender and politics and then transitioned in the spring to topics on gender and mental health. Largely planned and implemented by our student staff members, Knowledge Exchange's continue to deepen dialogues at the Women's Center around many different feminist and social justice issues. Topics this year included:

#### **Fall 2018**

**Knowing your voting rights:** Exploring the privilege of enfranchisement

**Liking, following, voting:** Discussion with State Senator Mary Washington on technology and elections

**Embodied elections, embodied politics:** Post-election political involvement

#### **Spring 2019**

**The commodification of self-care:** Are face masks helping us or hurting our wallets?

**A herstory of hysteria:** On the history of pathology and gender

**Deconstructing the perfect victim:** A student leader panel on survivorship at the margins

Through post-event survey collected during the spring semester, **100% of participants (n = 48) agreed that "As a result of this knowledge exchange, I believe that I can engage in a conversation about why this is a social justice issue."**

With the success of last year's Pop-Culture Pop-Up series launch, Women's Center student staff continued this new programming component which lent itself an opportunity to be agile in having conversations about relevant and current issues without the significant planning that most other events and programs require. **Popular topics for this year's Pop-Culture Pop-Ups included: Serena Williams, Ariana Grande's Thank U Next single, and proposed Title IX regulations.**

**In its 6th year, Critical Social Justice (CSJ) continues to provide a significant platform for us to create spaces for students, faculty, and staff to engage with social justice issues on campus.** Critical Social Justice: Ignite focused on opportunities to bring our campus community together in the effort to spark innovative ideas, inspire creative inquiry, and begin new

“ My biggest takeaway from this event surrounded how Deanna told her story and what language she used. **She really focused on the parts of survivor's stories that we don't get to see** even with increased visibility from the #MeToo movement. The realness about how she left her abusive relationship because she was tired and how

*September 25, 2019: Panelists for the Women's Center and Mosaic's joint event, Trans and College, talk about both the challenges and the triumphs of expressing trans and non-binary gender identities during college.*

*From left to right: Kate Drabinski, Christa Lewis, Jules Rosskam, Ava Pipitone, Michael Jalloh-Jamboria, and Ngaire Rose Philip.*

it felt more like giving up than starting over. The fact that she never got less angry, only angrier. The “they won’t believe you” voice that is still there. **It was all so validating for my own experiences, and she helped me put language these parts of trauma that we tend to talk about the least.** ”

— *CSJ Keynote Attendee*

October 22, 2018: Before our Critical Social Justice keynote lecture by Deanna Zandt, Amelia (center) moderated a discussion on activism as an alum with Zee Hinz (left) and Yoo-Jin Kang (right).

collaborations. The week’s programming and events explored not only what unites us, but provided space to look at what separates us and how we can bridge those expanses in the spirit of inclusive excellence. **We used our theme of “ignite” to express how the same zeal and passion we might hold individually can and should be kindled in others.**

We took the spirit of this theme to heart and invested in ways we could invite various communities to CSJ who have historically felt disconnected by focusing on specific programming for the STEM and graduate student communities. This year, **our keynote speaker was Deanna Zandt, a media and technology expert** who collaborates with leaders in social change work to create clear and persuasive strategies. In the recent aftermath of UMBC’s own #MeToo moment, **Deanna adapted her keynote speech to focus on the feminist idea of, “the personal is political”** explored concepts of justice and healing for survivors of sexual violence and the intersection of privileged identities that makes some stories easier to share and he heard than others. Highlighted by many participants, was our introductory plenary to the keynote, a moderated discussion between alumni, Yoo-Jin Kang, INDS ’15, and Zee Hinz, GWST ’14. Moderated by our coordinator, Amelia Meman (GWST ’15), the three advocates discussed what critical social justice looks like outside of UMBC. **As activists and survivors who are also working on their own healing, Yoo-Jin and Zee illuminated some powerful lessons on demanding justice, but doing so in ways that honor your self, your needs, and the people around you.**

Data from post-event surveys indicated that **76% of event attendees (n=127) believe that Critical Social Justice is improving UMBC’s campus climate.** The overall theme from the program assessment was that CSJ participants firmly believed that CSJ is an important campus initiative which is also exemplified in the growing number of campus departments and partners excited to co-sponsor CSJ. This year, CSJ had a record number of 20 co-sponsors and partners. For more information about the week, a full recap can be found on our Critical Social Justice blog.

The Brave Space Guidelines continue to serve as our foundation in supporting our efforts to create space that is both safe and brave in engaging in difficult dialogues, reflecting on discomfort, and finding peace in being one’s authentic self. Additionally, through partnership and support of UMBC’s restorative practices community, the Women’s Center staff has helped facilitate brave space discussions between various communities using the model and spirit of restorative practices.

# & how to behave





# Spotlight: *Telling Our Stories* ZINE

Crafted, planned, executed, and including work from our student staff members Morgan Mullings and Shrijana Khanal, this Telling Our Stories revival project was a labor of love. Submissions to the zine came from all across campus, from all members of the community, and all from women of color. In celebration of the zine, the Women's Center hosted an open mic night.

Telling Our Stories was first launched in 2015 with the support of an American Association of University Women Campus Action grant. The aim of the project was to: (1) raise awareness and reject stereotypes about women of color and (2) create space for women of color voices and counternarratives. This year's zine began what we hope is a jumping off point for re-envisioning and continuing this project.



Varsha Vivekanandan

## UNTITLED

ALEAH MOHAMED

See what's happening now is like the older days  
I drink a bottle of wine and it swarmed around me like bees  
and could not like that nothing here  
I found numbers of the bottom like I always do  
But it's feeling different this time and I'm confused  
I can tell I'm accepting, so it's less gratifying  
I can tell I'm hiding, so it's less effective  
I can tell I'm pretending, and I'm less convinced  
Every minute I'm less convinced that I've finally pulled it together  
I've been trying to be better for you, you know  
And now in a while I'll have these days  
Where I forget or I get tired or I lose my collect  
And all of a sudden I'm back where I started  
Like a traveler crawling in circles under a thick black coat of sky  
I'd come crawling back to you but the only thing  
is I don't like when you see me like this  
You thought I was better because I fucked you  
And I'm sorry I had but here's the truth  
I don't my head under the bathroom and I hold my breath till my lungs catch fire  
I will smile and my throat burns  
And make myself sick with ungratefulness and entitlement  
I stare at my eyes in the finger-stained mirror and feel disdain  
There's a demon  
But she's there and she pulls me back under with her  
And she tells me drink until if you can't prove them wrong, prove them right  
So I do, and I do it when you're not looking  
And I'm sorry I had when I said I was better now

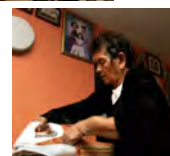


## DREAMING

ELISSA FERGUSON

when reality passes  
logic seems  
wild dreams and fantasies  
take over my head  
powerful bliss  
simple wonders,  
nothing matters,  
no numbers,  
no time, no space  
to fall in love,  
pure freedom, life,  
a short breath,  
the alarm clock rings and  
I forget again.

Images by Elissa Ferguson



Images by Idania Ramos

## FAIR & LOVELY

SAMIKSHA MANJANI

"Fair & Lovely,"  
The skin product  
Most beloved by the colored

It is as if the "&"  
Does not exist,  
And instead should be read as,  
"Fair is Lovely"

How paradoxical is it  
That the fair tan to be dark,  
And the dark bleach to be fair?

Why can't we both be lovely?

I asked my family,  
After countless summers  
Of being told that I am too dark  
And that I should stay out of the sun

How absurd it was to hear grown adults  
Stumbling to explain why  
my color had become a shame

My Father said,  
It was because fair women  
Get asked their hand  
In marriage more

My Mother said,  
That I would wrinkle  
And age years before  
My time

But neither realized  
That the reason came from a lifetime ago,  
When we were enslaved  
By the sons of the moon

Who were smart,  
To divide and conquer us  
We ceased to be one. Instead,  
We were fair or dark.

My people are still blind  
To the games of war,  
And continue to let ourselves  
Be enslaved

But I am not blind  
And I will not be a slave  
To lies,  
Color is lovely.

We use color to create art  
that we admire for centuries.  
We feel bad for those who are color blind,  
For they cannot see the true brilliance of the  
world

We appreciate the beauty in even a children's  
coloring book,  
So why can we not see beauty in ourselves?

How is this fair?

## CONSUMPTION AFFLICTS 5TH GRADERS

MORGAN MULLINGS

In the fifth grade Celeste Abernathy says "black people are ugly"

until she eats Mama J's spiced collards on Sunday. Plate. Licked. Clean.  
The collards, the chicken, mac n cheese, all made to be devoured. Do it for consumption.  
For the culture and the cotton fields and for Ciana Crawford, the only other black girl in the  
class. You're the good one for a time. Until you're not sums of a part but parts made whole  
and look she's black. Pick yourself back apart and be a good one again. And again. And  
again. Take out all that curry until you can hardly taste Saturday afternoons in your  
mother's kitchen. Until you can hardly taste home. Take out Big Nana's mortar and pestle.  
Break yourself apart from cinnamon sticks to whole peppercorns to fine grain salt and  
wonder if there's any whole part of you they can consume without choking. Your blackness  
is only beautiful when you're dark chocolate. Not from the cacao tree in the backyard back  
home.

Too bitter.

## AFFLICT: A SHARPIE TO CONSUMPTION AFFLICTS 5TH GRADERS

MORGAN MULLINGS

\_\_\_\_\_ afflicted \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ she \_\_\_\_\_ spiced \_\_\_\_\_ on Sunday. \_\_\_\_\_ Clean.  
\_\_\_\_\_ she \_\_\_\_\_ consumed \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ consumption \_\_\_\_\_ culture \_\_\_\_\_ cotton fields \_\_\_\_\_ only \_\_\_\_\_ black  
girl in the class.  
\_\_\_\_\_ the good one \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ you're not \_\_\_\_\_ whole \_\_\_\_\_ she's black.  
Pick yourself \_\_\_\_\_ apart \_\_\_\_\_ be good \_\_\_\_\_ again.  
\_\_\_\_\_ again.  
Take out all that \_\_\_\_\_ Saturday afternoons in your \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ you can hardly taste \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ mortar and pestle.  
Break yourself \_\_\_\_\_ cinnamon \_\_\_\_\_ pepper \_\_\_\_\_ salt \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ they \_\_\_\_\_ consume \_\_\_\_\_ choking \_\_\_\_\_ black \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ chocolate.  
\_\_\_\_\_ cacao \_\_\_\_\_ consume \_\_\_\_\_ back home.  
\_\_\_\_\_ bitter.



## *4. Learning & Engagement*

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 programming like the **Returning Women Students Scholars + Affiliates Program**, specialized discussion groups (including a new monthly discussion series focused on Women in STEM), workshops, and Critical Social Justice, students gained greater awareness and education regarding women and gender issues that complemented their learning inside the classroom. Students also frequently used the Center's space for studying, took advantage of the available computer, and borrowed books from our lending library.

Additionally, the Women's Center supported academic learning through internships in partnership with the Gender, Women's, + Sexuality Studies Department, Interdisciplinary Studies Department, and Media and Communication Studies.

Unique to this year, Women's Center professional staff engaged in student learning by serving as faculty mentor to Women's Center student staff member and INDS major, Alexia Petasis, on her senior capstone entitled "Dance as Advocacy for Survivors of Domestic Sex Trafficking in the United States." The accompanying choreographed piece called, "Becoming

*October 21, 2018: This year's Critical Social Justice 101 participants gather based on affinity and discuss their aspirations for the a more just world.*

Survivor," combines music, interviews, and dance to explore the life of a trafficking survivor. The Women's Center provided programming space for Alexia to engage in her scholarship through a performance and talk-back during Critical Social Justice and co-sponsoring a performance during Women's History Month. Alexia's motivation to transform theory into practice (and vice versa), as well as her creative approach to activism embody the spirit of Critical Social Justice.

Joining Alexia for the CSJ performance and talk-back event was Jennifer White-Johnson, Visual Arts '04, a graphic designer and social justice advocate whose most recent project, a zine called "Knox Rox," is a celebration of neurodiverse children of color like her son, Knox. As an artist and activist, Jennifer's work, although different in media from Alexia, perfectly combined with the goals of CSJ. **The ensuing art/activist practice talk-back provided an interesting commentary on the ways in which we can create and embolden new forms of knowledge through creative means.**

Additionally, the Women's Center's popular Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence workshop was adapted to lend practical expertise to the mandatory faculty and staff Title IX and Student Support training. **Over the course of school year, Jess co-led 21 trainings that reached 2,995 individuals. Survey responses were overwhelmingly positive in that providing space for faculty and staff to learn practical skills in supporting survivors was helpful to their roles at UMBC.**

*October 17, 2018: Alumna Jennifer White-Johnson presents during a Critical Social Justice event, "Art as Knowledge," on her latest project, a zine that celebrates and amplifies the power of neurodiversity and racial diversity. As a mother of a boy of color who is on the Autism spectrum, Jennifer has used her art practice to bring awareness to the agency and power of neurodivergent children of color.*





## 5. Unique & Critical Services

Services and programming for underrepresented and under-served populations like women adult learners (returning students), women of color, mothers, survivors of sexual violence, and the LGBTQ community continue to draw UMBC community members into our space.

The Women's Center continues to host various identity-based discussion groups including Women of Color Coalition, Between Women, and Spectrum. This year we also partnered with the student organization, We Believe You, to host a discussion group for survivors of sexual violence. This became a critical partnership throughout the year as students navigated the campus climate and work connected to Retriever Courage. Observation rubrics completed by facilitators consistently indicated that, **as a result of these groups, members demonstrated stronger senses of campus-based engagement, belonging, and/or empowerment.**

Through Spectrum programming, we hosted several events dedicated to experiences of transgender and gender non-binary people. The 2nd annual Trans and College, held at the kick-off of the fall semester, was dedicated to exploring the opportunities and challenges of the transgender people in higher education. In addition to this popular event, the Women's Center hosted two new programs: a Transgender Day of Visibility Film Screening and Talk-Back with Jules Roskam, faculty in Visual Arts and member of the LGBTQ Faculty and Staff Association; as well as a Clothing Swap where community members were free to drop into the Women's Center and donate clothing or find clothing that better fit their gender expression. **These events served as spaces of validation and networking opportunities for transgender community members** while also creating learning space for cisgender allies to learn about better ways they can show up and support the community.

Through program evaluation, the Returning Women Students Scholars + Affiliates program continues to be a unique and important service the Women's Center offers to women adult learners over the age of 25. **Over the course of the year, we supported a cohort of over 25 scholars and affiliates providing semester orientations, monthly programming curated to fit the needs of older students, and individualized meetings.** All returning women students at UMBC are invited to participate in the monthly events and are encouraged to join a closed Facebook group for networking and community-building opportunities. The 5th annual networking event continues to be a popular event that both students and the faculty + staff volunteers walk away from feeling energized and with new connections. Ultimately, through our commitment to serving various underrepresented or marginalized populations, the Women's Center aims to support student retention and graduation.

**“Thank you. I never thought I would find a community after what happened to me, but thank you for making this space. I really felt like it helped me.”**

— *We Believe You*  
Discussion Group  
Attendee

August 26, 2019: Our Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates cohort pose for a group photo with President Freeman Hrabowski, Dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs Katharine Cole, and some very special Future Retrievers.

# Spotlight:

## *Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates Program*



“ My biggest takeaway [from the RWS Scholars + Affiliates Program] is being involved in a community with supportive women.  
**The Women Center is my home away from home.** ”

— *Current Returning Women Student Scholar*

When Women's Center director, Jess Myers, was new to UMBC over 8 years ago, she remembers sitting in a meeting in which the efficacy of the various UMBC scholarship programs were being discussed. What research and anecdotal information told campus leaders about UMBC's scholars programs was that while funding was critically important to retaining students at campus, the affiliation with a scholars community including the support and identity that came with such affiliation was just as important. Upon hearing this information, Jess began to slowly transform the scholarships the Women's Center awarded to adult learners from simply a funding opportunity to an entire cohort experience. The scholars selected would be a part of the Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates Program—a community that would provide affinity and an enhanced connection to UMBC's campus.

Common characteristics of adult learners include being 25 years and older, delayed or interrupted entry to college, having dependents, full time employment, and attending school part time. Women adult learners are more likely than men to report experiencing conflict from familial obligations, work responsibilities and school demands. As a result, this student population, which often resides on the margins of higher education, benefits from intentional program and support curated for their particular experiences. This is the goal of the Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates program.

In this year's Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates exit survey, 85% of those who participated agreed or strongly agreed that their time as a scholar or affiliate provided practice or skill acquirement in professionalism, critical thinking, leadership, and teamwork. When promoted to identify something specific that was gained as a result of their time as a Returning Women Student Scholar or Affiliate, a theme in responses included belonging, support, and confidence.

Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates retention from Fall 2018 to Spring 2019 is 87% while other UMBC undergraduate women students 25 years and older returned at a overall rate of 70%.



## 6. Committed Staffing & Support

A group of 9 student staff and interns over the course of the academic year assisted the professional staff team in providing support services and programming to the Women's Center community.

Examples of student-driven programs include the Knowledge Exchange series, facilitation of identity-based discussion groups, the Pop-Culture Pop-Up discussions, and the Telling Our Stories Zine. With the significant increase of professional staff providing private individualized support meetings and serving on various Retriever Courage committees, **student staff members were more than ever this year essential in the daily operation of the Center, enhancing connections to community members, and leading outreach efforts at campus fairs and tabling events.** Our team of student staff and volunteers have been crucial to the successful execution of large-scale events like Critical Social Justice and Take Back the Night.

In addition to our staff, we are supported by **a dynamic team of volunteer Advisory Board members, comprised of faculty, staff and 1 graduate student representing 22 offices and departments from across the UMBC campus.** The Advisory Board is integral in helping the Women's Center professional staff focus on short- and long-term goals, as well as identifying the gaps in which we can provide better support and resources to women on campus. Advisory Board members also stepped up in substantial ways this year to support the Women's Center's efforts connected to the Retriever Courage initiative.

Of significant note, is the **additional contributions Advisory Board member Elle Everhart provided in the spring semester as part-time general associate.** Elle contributed much needed administrative support which allowed professional staff to focus more intently on providing direct services to students.

*January 24, 2019: The Women's Center staff pose for a picture on the steps of The Commons. Top row: Amelia Meman and Jess Myers. Middle row: Briscoe Turner, Samiksha Manjani, Alexia Petasis, Morgan Mullings. Bottom row: Harini Narayan, Shrijana Khanal, Dua Raja.*

**Between Women** also benefited from the astute dedication provided by **Beck Hertl**, Library Services Specialist, who served as the staff co-facilitator this year. In recognition of their stalwart work with **Between Women**, **Beck** also earned the **LGBTQ Service Award** at the **2019 Lavender Celebration**. Student Staff member, **Harini Narayan**, was also awarded the **Outstanding Allyship Award** for their work connected to **Between Women** and overall outreach to the LGBTQ community at UMBC.

Women's Center professional staff members supported student leaders through the **advisement of two student organizations: We Believe You and the LGBTQ Student Union**. Both student organizations saw tremendous increases this year in student involvement, recruitment, and campus activism.

Additionally, professional staff supported the Retriever Courage initiative by serving on its various committees including the Implementation Team, Procurement Committee, Training Implementation, and the Faculty and Staff Advisory Committee. **Over the course of 21 trainings to over 2,995 faculty and staff, our Women's Center director, Jess, also provided education and awareness** around the importance of supporting survivors of sexual violence as a co-facilitator of the mandatory Title IX trainings. Prior to the announcement of the mandatory Title IX trainings, Jess also provided 16 condensed Supporting Survivor workshops and relayed information about Retriever Courage efforts to several departments reaching 294 people.

August 28, 2018: The Women's Center student staff team begin their training with a team building activity called "Flip the Whale." The object of said activity? Flip a tablecloth completely over, while keeping the whole team standing on the tablecloth.





## Samiksha Manjani, POLI & SOCY '19

*If each of us invests only a fraction of our individual power to support just one other person, imagine the potential. Imagine how many people could transition from surviving to thriving... We have the power to create the world that we dream of, we just have to be brave enough to take each other by the hand and do it.*

These are the words of our student staff member Samiksha Manjani, who represented the Class of 2019 as one of two valedictorians. In her role as a student staff member, Samiksha was a dedicated and sensitive leader. She was largely responsible for planning and implementing signature programs like Take Back the Night and our Knowledge Exchanges. As returning staff, Samiksha made sure to share her experiences with newer staff members and was always ready for a challenge like the one presented by Retriever Courage. Samiksha plans to earn dual degrees in Law and Social Work, so that she may continue to protect the rights of those impacted by gender-based violence.

# Spotlight: *Stellar Student Staff Members*



## Alexia Petasis, INDS '19

Alexia joined the Women's Center staff by way of a (very enthusiastic) invitation from professional staff. During her junior year, she had worked with the Women's Center and We Believe You to produce an event that combined her stunning choreographic talents and an informative discussion with survivor advocates. This event built on the Women's Center's work to create survivor-responsive communities, and provided a springboard for dynamic conversations about art and social justice. With the success of this event and her unique ability to use dance as a medium for understanding stories of gender-based violence, the Women's Center invited her onto our team as an intern through the Individualized Study Program. With the Women's Center, Alexia was able to further develop her theory and practice as she was a key organizer for Critical Social Justice: Ignite. She also played a significant part in organizing the Women's Center's programming for inter-personal violence prevention. Alexia graduated with honors this year, and will be continuing her journey as an artist activist in Europe.

“ I remember my time at UMBC and finding a space was so challenging in the beginning. Then I was directed to the **Women’s Center at UMBC and up until that moment I had never felt so heard, understood and safe.** ”

— *Jaye Yarbrough, GWST ‘13,  
Giving Day 2019*



## 7. Financials

We continue to feel immense gratitude for our campus partners' and external donors' financial support to help us accomplish our programming goals while also maintaining the daily operations of the Women's Center. With a base operating budget of \$4,648 and a student staff budget of \$4,448 the additional one-time funding from the Provost Office for general operations and Retriever Courage efforts, carry-forward funds, co-sponsorships, in-kind donations, federal work study reimbursements, and for-credit internships have been essential to our continued operation. Signature events for the Women's Center like Critical Social Justice and Take Back the Night are solely possible through the generosity of campus partners financial co-sponsorships.

The Women's Center continues to be successful in our crowd-funding campaigns run through the GritStarter platform. This year, we were honored to have our page highlighted on UMBC's Giving Day page which allowed for greater visibility during this special day intended not only to raise funds for UMBC's department and programs, but also to generate excitement, pride and (re)connection from alum and friends. As you will note throughout this report, alum not only generously provided financial contributions to the Women's Center during Giving Day, but also shared special memories and reflections of what the Women's Center meant to them (and still does!) during their time as UMBC students. **A total of 86 gifts were made to the Women's Center during Giving Day for a total of \$3,085.**

**Overall, a total of 123 gifts from 102 donors contributed \$4,877 to the Women's Center Foundation over the course of the fiscal year.**

*May 15, 2019: Every May, the Returning Women Student Scholars + Affiliates come together to celebrate the spring graduates. Each graduate receives a Returning Women Scholars lapel pin and a yellow rose. The group above represents our Returning Women Scholars Class of 2019.*

“ The sense of community that you have cultivated and supported among our social justice-minded students, staff, [and] faculty over the years with programming like this {Critical Social Justice}... **it's amazing to witness and be part of.** ”

— *UMBC Staff Member*



# Spotlight: *Retriever Courage in Action*

“Is it my fault?”

“What just happened?”

“Is it rape?”

“Am I just making a big deal out of this?”\*

These are the questions we hear on a daily basis in the Women’s Center. UMBC community members — whether current students, alumni, faculty, or staff — tell us their truths, despite their own misgivings about the efficacy of that truth.

This self-doubt is common among survivors of sexual violence. And, so we tell them: We believe you. We see you. You matter.

In the wake of trauma and abuses of power, many question the veracity of their experiences and the impact that it has had on them. Whether a person has faced emotional, physical, psychological, social, or economic abuse, we see the impact clearly in the fear and misplaced self-doubt that surround them like dark clouds. Sometimes, coming to the Women’s Center is the first time a student feels believed or validated. Even as we work through resources meant to help and guide people towards healing, these misgivings continue interrupting every aspect of recovery.

And this work is complex.

Our community is not just made up of survivors puzzling through their experiences for the first time. Healing is not, as much as we may want it to be, linear. And, so we also support survivors as they face instances of re-traumatization, as they navigate the frustrating and often disappointing process of seeking justice, and as they practice coping skills in a culture that often does not lend itself to healing.

Our job in the Women’s Center is to create space for truth-telling. This has been our role since our founding in 1991 as a small, volunteer-led operation. We were born

*April 18, 2019: A new tradition included in Take Back the Night, marchers gather around the statue of True Grit outside of the Administration Building. With survivors in the middle and allies on the outside, everyone chants messages of support.*

*Photo courtesy of Winston Zhou for The Retriever.*

There is power in naming our experiences and truths as a shared collective and this is what we have been called to do in this moment on our campus. As UMBC wrestles with the reality of a civil lawsuit that has forced us to examine the ways we listen to and support survivors of sexual violence, we are given a renewed opportunity to bring a light to truth and help foster a campus that is survivor-centered.

“ There is power in naming our experiences and truths as a shared collective and this is what we have been called to do in this moment on our campus. ”

\* This piece originally appeared in *UMBC Magazine's* Moments of Truth feature as "Moment #5. Creating Safe Spaces: Seen and Believed." Published December 13, 2018.



## *Final Thoughts*

“ When I dare to be powerful, to use  
my strength in the service of my vision,  
then it becomes less and less important  
whether I am afraid. ” — *Audre Lorde*

Throughout these pages, we demonstrated the Women's Center's courage in action and our efforts to encourage those who find a home in the Women's Center to dare to be powerful. The challenges of this year provided the Women's Center the ability to grow and stretch in ways that enabled us to serve our UMBC community in unprecedented ways.

We hope that both the challenges and highlights of this year serve as constant reminders to why the Women's Center exists and matters to our campus community and climate. As the impact of our work continues to grow, we stay loyal to our mission statement centering the intersectional feminist work we do as a campus-based women's center committed to student development & retention, inclusive excellence, and support for the entire campus community.

**This is courage in action. This is the work of the Women's Center.**

*April 18, 2019: During the Take Back the Night march, a line of over 200 people with rally signs cross outside of the iconic Albin O. Kuhn Library.*

*Photo courtesy of Winston Zhou for The Retriever.*



# Acknowledgements

## Women's Center FY19 Donors

Anonymous  
Deborah L. Bandalos  
Frank D. Barron '79  
Cean'E Batten  
Reese Beyers  
Beverly A. Bickel '94 '05  
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Dinah Winnick  
Jessica Wyatt  
Sahand Yazdanyar '15

*September 5, 2018: For Welcome Week, the Women's Center hosted an event for students and community members interested in social justice to get to know one another. We also had a photo booth!*

# Women's Center Advisory Board 2018-19

Cynthia Wagner, Department of Biological Sciences  
Danielle Pettigrew, Student Conduct and Community Standards  
Dinah Winnick, Office of Institutional Advancement  
Doha Chibani, Counseling Center  
Elle Everhart, Department of Gender, Women's, + Sexuality Studies  
Erica D'Eramo, Center for Women in Technology  
Isabel Garrido, Graduate School  
Jennifer Harrison, Faculty Development Center  
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Joanna Gadsby, Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery  
Laura Mack, Residential Life

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Marie Lilly, Office of Institutional Advancement  
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Tiffany Gierasch  
Vickie Williams  
Vrinda Deshpande  
Wafa Raja  
Yoo-Jin Kang  
Yvette Mozie-Ross  
Zee Hinz

*August 6, 2019: The Women's Center Advisory Board gathers as a whole before the fall semester to set intentions and work as a team to envision the Women's Center's role over the next school year.*



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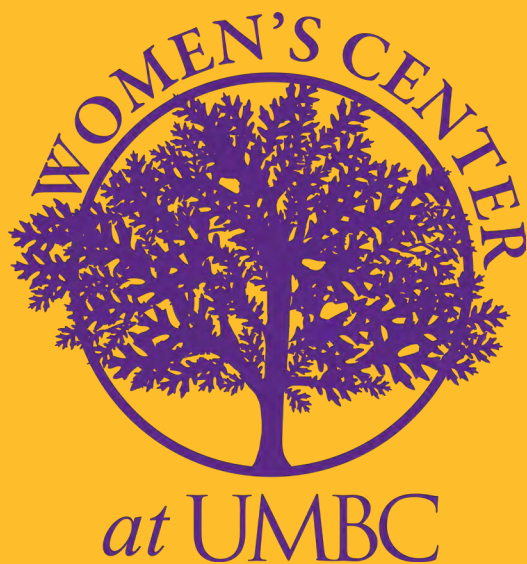
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Dua Raja  
Hannah Wilcove  
Harini Narayan  
Marie Pessagno

Morgan Mullings  
Samiksha Manjani  
Shrijana Khanal  
Amelia Meman  
Jess Myers

*May 8, 2019: To showcase our first run of Women's Center t-shirts (and the Scouts who earned them!), we hosted a Women's Center Pride Day and invited everyone to where their shirts in celebration. Some folks couldn't make it to the actual photo, but we bet you can't tell who was photoshopped in...*





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## Fall & Spring Semester Hours

Monday through Thursday: 9:30 am to 6 pm

Friday: 9:30 am to 4 pm

## Social Media

*Facebook:* [/womenscenterumbc](https://www.facebook.com/womenscenterumbc)

*Instagram:* [@womencenterumbc](https://www.instagram.com/womencenterumbc)

*myUMBC:* [groups/womenscenter](https://groups.umbc.edu/womenscenter)

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