



UMBC

CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY  
AND CIVIC LIFE

# Voter Friendly Campus Engagement Plan

(Updated November 2022)

University of  
Maryland,  
Baltimore County  
2022-2025





# I. Executive Summary

For many years, the **University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC)** has pursued innovative approaches to civic learning and democratic engagement that have foregrounded students' capacity as agents and co-creators of their communities and democracy. These approaches orient students to democracy as a way of life enacted both in formal political processes and in everyday settings such as neighborhoods, workplaces, student organizations, and classrooms. Our work has both informed and been inspired by the [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change](#), of which members of our Center for Democracy and Civic Life team are co-creators.

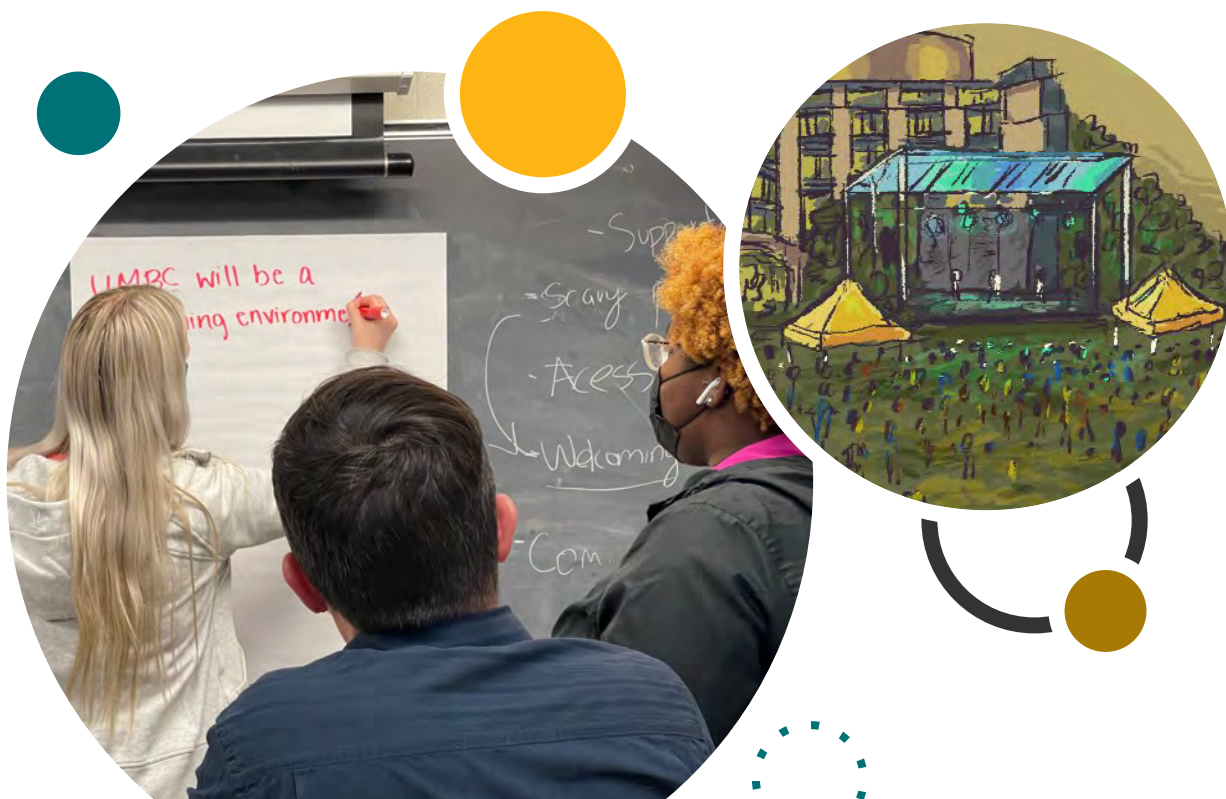
Our work builds from John Dewey's idea that democracy is a way of life enacted in everyday settings and relationships. We believe preparing students to build and contribute to thriving communities entails supporting civic learning and democratic engagement across their experiences in and beyond classrooms. Accordingly, we approach civic learning and democratic engagement holistically through academic courses, public programs, and empowering campus practices. Our BreakingGround initiative has seeded dozens of courses and community projects that have afforded students opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to contribute to a thriving democracy. Our Shriver Center has supported students' sustained engagement in Baltimore communities, helping them build meaningful connections with stakeholders addressing a variety of issues and challenges. Our STRiVE leadership for social impact program prepares students to think critically about the cultural scripts (social norms and expectations) operating in their everyday environments and how they can be changed through collective action. Our Alternative Spring Break program involves exploring both the human and systemic dimensions of social issues affecting Baltimore communities, and positions students for sustained involvement in work for positive change. Our approach to communication and decision-making on campus foregrounds relationship-building, collaboration, restorative practices, and shared governance. We host numerous programs emphasizing dialogue, reflection, and community engagement.

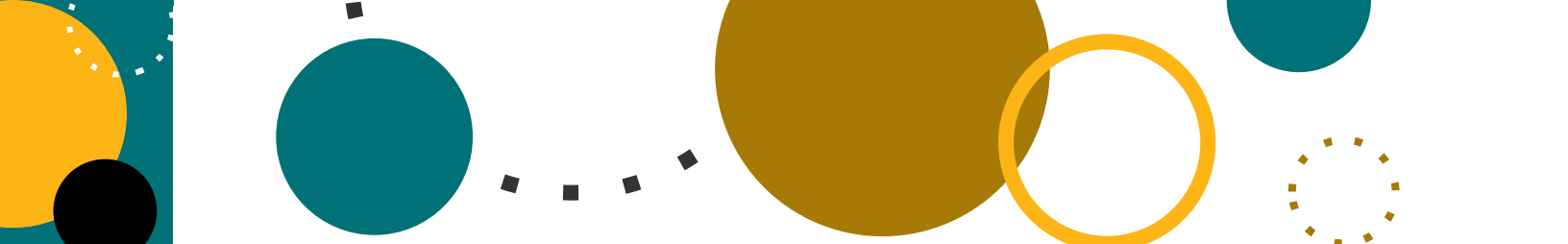
In the closing months of the 2019-2020 academic year, three overlapping national crises emerged: the COVID-19 pandemic; outrage and conflict over longstanding systemic injustices in the wake of George Floyd's death; and the continuing erosion of democratic norms and the rule of law. We were certain that in this time of profound challenges and social distancing, we would need additional opportunities for people to build connections, reflect on current events, share and listen to each other's stories, and make plans to shape our world together. So we developed several series of virtual guided conversation programs, each facilitated by students trained by the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and open to all members of the UMBC community. They include: Dinners with Friends, in which participants engage in civil dialogue about issues important to members of the UMBC community; Change Makers Dinners, in which participants meet with local leaders to discuss how to address important issues together; Changing Maryland programs, which prepare participants for active participation in Maryland's General Assembly's legislative process; and Together Beyond, which trains members of the UMBC community to organize and guide conversations within their networks in the aftermath of divisive events. These programs have been important connection points for members of our campus and wider communities, and have helped to sustain and deepen the sense of being present for each other in a challenging time. They also have reinforced one of the most important insights behind our work: Democracy and social progress hinge on trust, not just in elected officials or voting systems, but in each other. All of us need to be together in spaces that help us communicate across our different identities, experiences, and roles; see and share our authentic selves; and discover our common humanity.



We view the work of building and sustaining an ethos of deep engagement as a shared responsibility, not the work of a single department or center. In 2018, UMBC launched its Center for Democracy and Civic Life to support the infusion of civic learning and democratic engagement opportunities and democratic practices in every corner of our institution. Beyond organizing some of the initiatives mentioned above, the Center works with faculty, staff, and student leaders to help them create inclusive and empowering environments. Its work has involved collaboration with staff and student leaders in Athletics; the Career Center; the Center for Social Science Scholarship; the Counseling Center; the Graduate Student Association; the Honors College; Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging; Off-Campus Student Services; the Student Government Association; Residential Life; the Resident Student Association; scholars programs; the Shriver Center; Student Conduct and Community Standards; and many others.

In the context of this overarching concern for the development of civic agency and skills in every setting, voter engagement means orienting students to the importance of informed participation in elections while challenging aspects of our broader U.S. civic culture that reduce citizenship to consumer participation and voting to a transaction. Our hope is to foster a sense of civic involvement as an everyday, lifelong commitment rather than episodic fulfillment of civic duties. The Center for Democracy and Civic Life created the Cast Your Whole Vote campaign to help reach this goal and support all UMBC community members' political engagement. In the run up to Election 2020, the campaign featured debate watch events and other campus programs that brought members of the UMBC community together for conversations about the issues that affect us. As part of our voter engagement effort, President Freeman Hrabowski signed the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge's [Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation](#), pledging to pursue 100% participation in Election 2020 by members of the UMBC community eligible to vote. Center staff members also worked with many campus leaders, including President Hrabowski and students affiliated with a variety of campus organizations, to record and disseminate videos in which they shared the reasons they would be "casting their whole vote" in the 2020 election. In addition, the Center created a social media toolkit that enabled any member of the campus community to share important messages about voting and engagement. UMBC finished in 9th place on the ALL-IN Campus Democracy Challenge Voter Pledge Competition's national leaderboard.





The Center for Democracy and Civic Life team has coordinated and authored this Campus Plan, but enacting it over the next several years (2022-2025) will be a collective endeavor. Building on the coalition that enacted our previous (2020-2023) plan through collaborative work, we will weave in new voices, particularly those of faculty members from the STEM disciplines, alumni, and student leaders from additional organizations. As is set forth in the body of this document, our short-term plan includes:

- convening the Political Engagement Working Group weekly to galvanize and coordinate UMBC's voter engagement efforts, with particular emphasis on strategies to increase voter turnout among graduate students and students enrolled in selected STEM fields;
- sending periodic campus-wide emails and use banners and posts on myUMBC (UMBC's online hub) to promote voting and voter registration volunteer training;
- conducting voter registration drives sponsored by student organizations with a variety of constituencies;
- using a new [Civic Nation Voter Registration Portal](#) as a central component of our communication strategy;
- working with the Maryland State Board of Elections to locate a ballot dropoff box on the UMBC campus for the first time;
- hosting a program in our Change Makers Dinner civic dialogue series focused on protecting voting rights for all eligible Americans;
- organizing debate watch programs and post-debate reflections;
- hosting a town hall event featuring candidates for state and local offices;
- continuing to develop and share civic dialogue facilitation tools and host Together Beyond-style training programs;
- continuing to organize and support an array of dialogue programs themed around the idea of Cast[ing] Your Whole Vote;
- hosting an Election Night festival (Election Night Extravaganza); and
- continuing longstanding but newly energized work to confront and dismantle structural racism, which is a barrier to the full participation of all Americans in creating a thriving democracy in what Langston Hughes called "the land that never has been yet, and yet must be."

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life will organize campus stakeholders to review and update this plan in spring 2024, incorporating the new insights we will have gained in the intervening two years about how best to foster inclusive and inspiring civic learning and democratic engagement at UMBC.

## II. Leadership

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life (David Hoffman, director; Tess McRae, coordinator for civic design), a department in UMBC's Division of Student Affairs, coordinates civic learning and democratic engagement efforts with many campus partners in various combinations. The network of participants in this work includes leaders from:

- the **Center for Social Science Scholarship** (Christine Mallinson, director; Felipe Filomeno, associate director), which hosts speakers and programs focused on current events to foster informed discussion of civic issues;
- the **Division of Information Technology** (Jack Suess, vice president for information technology and chief information officer), which supports UMBC's technology infrastructure, including platforms for sharing political engagement resources widely and effectively;
- the **Environmental Sustainability office** (Ryan Kmetz, director; Claire Runquist, coordinator), which helps members of the UMBC community recognize and embrace opportunities to live and act sustainably, individually and collectively;
- the **Honors College** (Simon Stacey, director; Jodi Kelber-Kaye, associate director; Julie Oakes, assistant director of curriculum and retention), which promotes community engagement and social commitment;
- the **Global Studies program** (Brigid Starkey, director), which supports global civic literacy and community engagement;
- the **Graduate Student Association** (Ethan Post, president), which represents and engages UMBC's graduate students through its Senate, Legislative Concerns Committee, and participation in shared governance;
- the **Grand Challenges Scholars Program** (Maria Sanchez, director), which prepares students from all majors to help solve problems facing society;
- **Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging** (Jasmine Lee, director; Ciara Christian, associate director), a department in UMBC's Division of Student Affairs that creates opportunities for students to build their awareness and knowledge of diverse people, cultures, and belief systems;
- the **Language, Literacy, and Culture doctoral program** (Craig Saper, interim director), which promotes socio-cultural and linguistic diversity in research, practice, and policy, with special emphasis on social justice, change, equity, power, and identity;
- the **Media and Communications Studies department** (Rebecca Adelman, chair), which promotes critical media literacy and prepares students to navigate and reshape dynamic media environments;
- **OCA Mocha** (Michael Berardi, general manager), an off-campus coffee house run by UMBC alumni with a civic mission: uniting the campus with its surrounding community;

- the **Office of Institutional Advancement** (Greg Simmons, vice president for institutional advancement; Lisa Akchin, associate vice president, engagement), which supports the development and dissemination of messages encouraging active engagement in communities and democracy;
- the **Political Science department** (Brian Grodsky, chair), which promotes engagement with public issues and supports voter registration efforts;
- the **Provost's Office** (Philip Rous, provost), sponsor of the BreakingGround initiative, a grant program that has supported the creation or redesign of more than 40 courses and 30 community programs fostering civic agency and engagement;
- **Residential Life** (John Fox, director), which builds community through restorative practices and prepares Resident Assistants to facilitate civic learning;
- the **Resident Student Association** (Aj Ogunsanya, president), which represents and engages students who live on the UMBC campus;
- **The Retriever** (Isabel Taylor, editor-in-chief), UMBC's student newspaper, which has sponsored programs aimed at helping students know their rights and use their voice;
- the **Sherman STEM Teacher Scholars Program** (Rehana Shafi, director), which supports students' development as culturally responsive STEM teachers;
- the **Shriver Center** (Eric Ford, interim director), which has supported students' sustained engagement in Baltimore communities for more than 25 years;
- the **Student Government Association** (Ayra Hussain, president; Shubhi Saxena, executive vice president), which supports legislative advocacy and voter engagement initiatives and engages undergraduate students as co-creators of the UMBC community;
- the **Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program** (Laura Antkowiak, director; Jessica Cook, associate director), which supports undergraduates aspiring to public service careers.

Participants in this network approach civic engagement initiatives collaboratively, and most involve students and/or external community partners in framing and enacting their work. Their collaborations include enduring partnerships focused on civic learning and democratic engagement, including:

- the **BreakingGround Working Group**, consisting of leaders from the Center for Democracy and Civic Life (David Hoffman), Center for Social Science Scholarship (Felipe Filomeno), Grand Challenges Scholars Program (Maria Sanchez), and Shriver Center, which administers grants that promote civic agency through creation and redesign of courses and the development of community projects;
- the **Political Engagement Network**, consisting of leaders from the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and students with a variety of departmental and organizational affiliations, including organizations representing students from minoritized identity groups (those invited include College Democrats, College Republicans, Honors College, Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program, Student Events Board, cultural organizations, gender and sexuality organizations, and religion and belief organizations), which envisions, supports, and promotes political engagement programming in the run up to biennial elections;



- the **Political Engagement Working Group**, consisting of leaders from the Center for Democracy and Civic Life (David Hoffman, director; Tess McRae, coordinator for civic design; Meghna Chandrasekaran, political engagement intern), Graduate Student Association (Zane Poffenberger, chair, legislative concerns), Resident Student Association, and Student Government Association (Musa Jafri, director of civic engagement), which coordinates UMBC's Cast Your Whole Vote campaign;
- the **Together Beyond group**, consisting of leaders from the Center for Democracy and Civic Life (David Hoffman, director; Tess McRae, coordinator for civic design), Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging (Jasmine Lee, director; Ciara Christian, associate director), and Retriever Integrated Health (Bruce Herman, director) along with campus experts in restorative practices (Jeff Cullen, director of Student Conduct and Community Standards; Davonya Hall, associate Director of Student Conduct and Community Standards), which organizes and prepares campus leaders to facilitate conversations about potentially traumatizing and divisive events (e.g., the aftermath of Election 2020; the January 6 insurrection).

These networks and the collaborative work undertaken by campus partners committed to civic learning and democratic engagement have been well supported at the highest levels of institutional leadership, as is reflected in the commitments and initiatives we share in other sections of this plan. Our commitment to a collaborative, inclusive approach to engagement across the institution helped to earn UMBC the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2020.

The composition of all of these groups and networks have reflected UMBC's strengths and ongoing areas of growth when it comes to the diversity of its students, staff, and faculty. The compositional diversity of UMBC's student body is extraordinary, and our civic engagement work has supported students who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in playing key leadership roles on campus. Student leaders and participants in the Center for Democracy and Civic Life's Alternative Spring Break and STRIVE leadership for social impact programs learn about interpersonal and intercultural communication, restorative practices, and history relating to structural racism and systemic oppression. They also share and listen to each other's life stories and work together to make meaning of their experiences. The Center's workshops on topics such as civic identity, civic professionalism, and civic courage help orient students to their capacity to make meaningful contributions to their communities on campus and beyond. Students participating in those programs build the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help steer UMBC's civic engagement efforts and deepen the institution's civic ethos. BIPOC students have opted into these programs in numbers even greater than their representation in the student body as a whole.

Faculty and staff representation has been somewhat less diverse than student representation, mostly because the people in leadership positions in departments with the clearest stake in civic learning and democratic engagement are less diverse as a group. But we have made important gains over the past two years, in part by making our commitments to equity and inclusion visibly inseparable from our commitments to civic learning and democratic engagement. Candace Dodson-Reed, UMBC's chief of staff and former executive director of the Office of Equity and Inclusion, has become a key leader and strategist in our civic work. New members of the BreakingGround Working Group have increased both its compositional diversity and its reach across disciplines. The Center for Democracy and Civic Life has worked with Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging on programming that fosters inclusive and respectful dialogue across differences. Center for Democracy and Civic Life leaders organized an interactive plenary session at the 2020 Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Meeting hosted by the American Democracy Project and NASPA exploring new possibilities for linking civic learning and democratic engagement with work for justice and inclusive excellence.



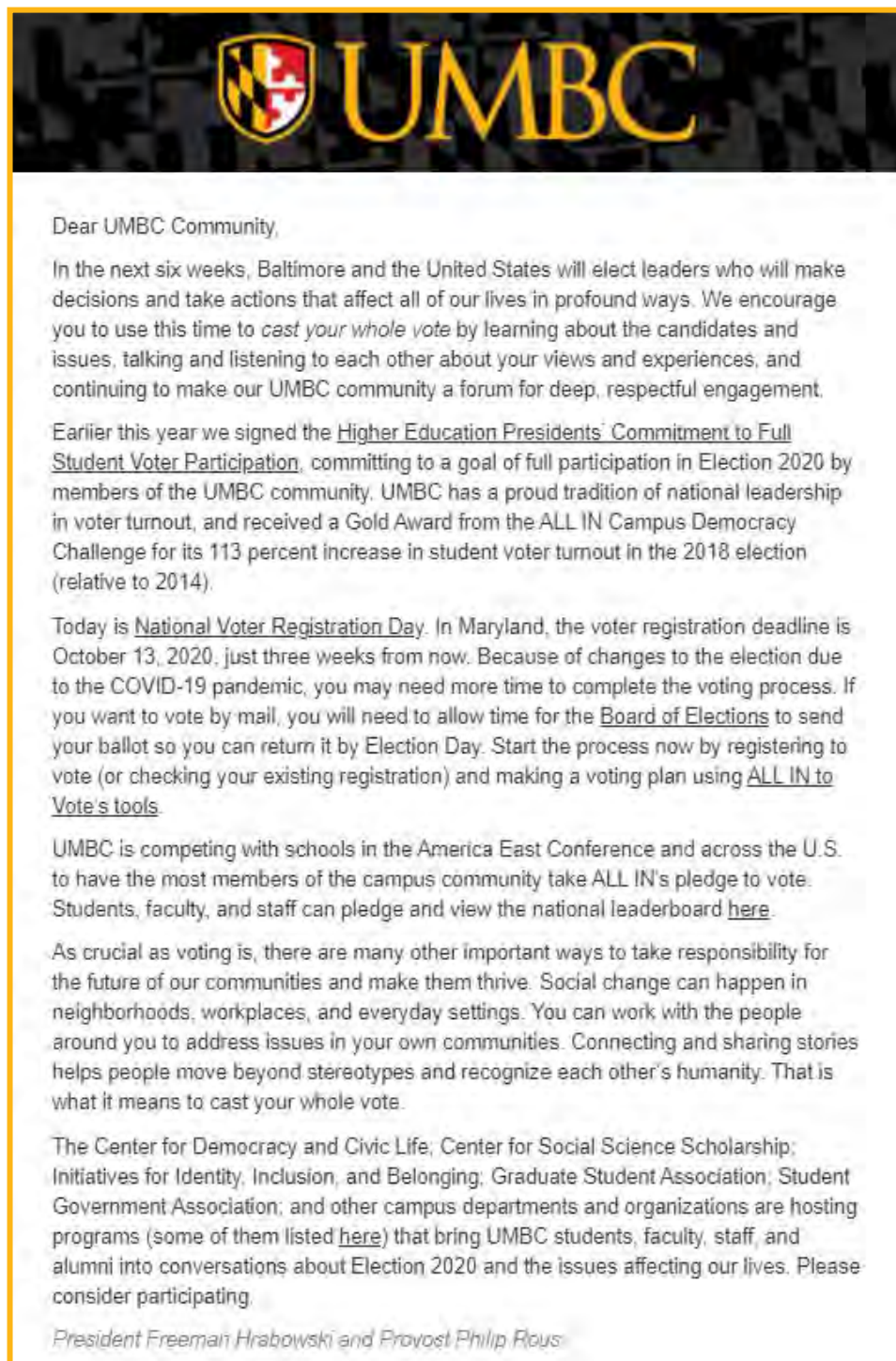
In addition to fostering and participating in these collaborations among campus leaders, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life works with off-campus partners to promote political engagement. They include:

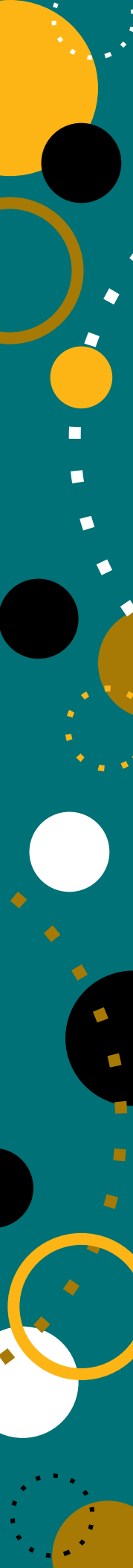
- the **Maryland State and Baltimore County Boards of Elections** (Ruie Lavoie, chair, Baltimore County Board of Elections), with whom we have worked to lay the foundation for locating a ballot dropoff box on campus for Election 2022, and to encourage students to serve as poll workers;
- the **University System of Maryland** (Nancy Shapiro, associate vice chancellor for education and outreach) which has organized a Student Civic Leaders Committee (of which student members of the Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff have served as co-chair for 2021-22 and 2022-23);
- **state and local elected officials**, who have participated in our Changing Maryland and Change Makers Dinner civic dialogue program series and met with students in our Alternative Spring Break program; and
- **nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations** such as the League of Conservation Voters and Centro SOL, leaders of which have headlined our Change Makers Dinner programs and met with students in our Alternative Spring Break program.



### III. Commitment

UMBC is deeply committed to civic learning and democratic engagement. Campus leaders have consistently named the importance of preparing students to participate effectively in civic life and build just and inclusive communities, and have backed up this commitment with action. Beyond signing the [Higher Education Presidents' Commitment to Full Student Voter Participation](#) ahead of Election 2020, UMBC **president emeritus Freeman Hrabowski** made countless public statements encouraging members of the UMBC community to view participation in civic life as a personal responsibility and a core UMBC value. As an example, he and **provost Philip Rous** sent this message to the campus community on National Voter Registration Day in 2020:



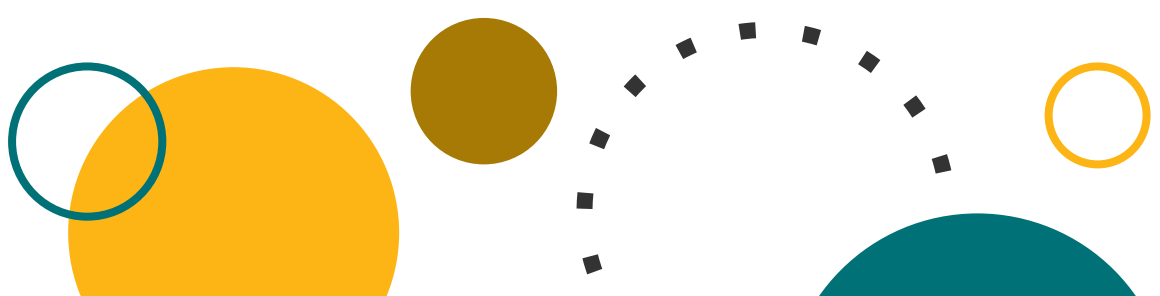


UMBC's deep commitment to civic learning and democratic engagement is evident in its [vision statement](#): "Our UMBC community redefines excellence in higher education through an inclusive culture that connects innovative teaching and learning, research across disciplines, and civic engagement. We will advance knowledge, economic prosperity, and social justice by welcoming and inspiring inquisitive minds from all backgrounds." In addition, among the principal goals named in UMBC's [Strategic Plan](#) are:

- Elevate UMBC as a nationally and internationally recognized research university strongly connected with the economic and civic life of the Baltimore region and the State of Maryland" (p. 8), and
- Create vibrant, exceptional, and comprehensive undergraduate and graduate student experiences that integrate in- and out-of-classroom learning to prepare graduates for meaningful careers and civic and personal lives" (p. 7).

The **Division of Student Affairs** similarly identifies "preparing students for work, civic engagement, and leadership" among its [Divisional Priorities](#). The Division established the [Center for Democracy and Civic Life](#) in 2018 to infuse civic learning and democratic engagement everywhere in the university. Its [mission](#): "The Center produces, inspires, and shares innovations in civic and democratic engagement, and supports collaborative activity that helps to build thriving civic cultures at UMBC and in communities involved in the Center's work."

These aspirations have been fulfilled through years of collaborative work that has produced a palpable ethos of engagement at UMBC. The Center for Democracy and Civic Life has helped to infuse civic learning and democratic engagement across the university and influenced practices at institutions across the U.S. by:

- **Coordinating election efforts:** The Center is responsible for coordinating UMBC's voter registration and engagement efforts and ensuring that UMBC fulfills all of its election-related legal responsibilities. In addition to offering election programming, staff provide guidance and support to student leaders as they organize voter registration drives and voter education programs. For Election 2020, the Center worked with campus partners to develop and enact the Cast Your Whole Vote campaign, featuring campus messaging, debate watch parties, post-debate forums, issues-focused dialogues, and a well-attended Election Night celebration. Center staff also work with faculty and staff who are looking for ways to support students' political engagement through their classes and living learning communities.
  - **Building a student leadership culture through immersive programs:** The Center hosts annual immersive programs in which students reflect on their civic identities and aspirations, share personal stories, develop relationships with each other, and learn techniques for building strong communities and pursuing positive social change. Aside from building the participants' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions, these programs prepare them to lead inclusively and collaboratively. A great many student organizations officers, resident assistants, and commuter assistants have participated in these programs, which often have been their entry point to leadership.
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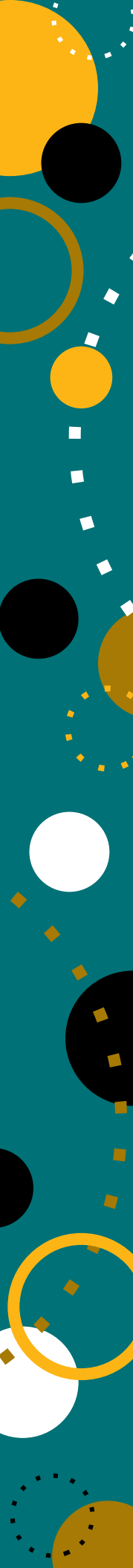
- **Providing civic innovation grants:** The Center hosts the BreakingGround grant program, which supports civic innovations at UMBC, including courses, community events, and forums for sharing and deliberation. The crux of BreakingGround's strategy is recognizing, integrating, and building upon existing strengths in UMBC's personnel, programs and culture by stimulating discussion and creative action around themes of civic innovation, social responsibility, applied learning, and the public purposes of higher education. Since its launch, BreakingGround has supported the development of dozens of courses across the curriculum and more than 30 campus and community engagement projects.
- **Conducting research:** During the past two years, Center staff have served as principal investigators on several grants and contracted projects aimed at developing practices and pedagogies that can empower students as civic actors. These initiatives have included:
  - Tools for Students' Civic Empowerment, a project funded through a **Bringing Theory to Practice** Multi-Institutional Innovation Grant. Center staff worked with colleagues from **Grand Valley State University** and **Kent State University** to develop and pilot tools for teaching and inspiring "civic courage," one of the capacities necessary to a thriving democracy identified in the [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change](#).
  - The [Baltimore PLACE Project](#), part of a three year, multi-campus collaborative initiative of **Bringing Theory to Practice** funded by the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. As part of an effort to illuminate and build momentum to address community-identified issues in Baltimore's Brooklyn neighborhood, Center staff worked with eight undergraduate PLACE Fellows, engaging them in community-building activities and providing training in community-based research methods and organizing techniques.
  - Civic Professionalism and Meaning-Making by UMBC Center for Democracy and Civic Life Alumni, a project supported by the **Kettering Foundation**. Center staff interviewed alumni to learn about how they had developed the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to approach their careers as civic professionals: people whose approach to professional life involves interacting with colleagues and clients in ways that are mutually empowering and working with communities to identify and address challenges collectively.
- **Training and guiding the ConnectionCorps:** In fall 2021, the Center launched the ConnectionCorps, an initiative through which UMBC students learn to foster democratic participation and authentic connection among participants in the Center's workshops and programs (e.g., Change Makers Dinners, Changing Maryland programs, Dinners with Friends). ConnectionCorps facilitators participate in bi-weekly and ad-hoc training sessions to build community, develop skills, and prepare to facilitate.
- **Developing and facilitating workshops:** The Center's workshops, often led by ConnectionCorps facilitators, provide participants opportunities to reflect on their own civic pathways and possibilities, identify approaches to addressing challenges and working on change projects, and build community among workshop attendees. Partners across the institution, including staff directing scholars programs, student organization officers, and faculty groups, request these workshops.

- Teaching civic courses:** Center staff teach Talking Democracy (a 200-level seminar) and Be Your Best Self in Real Life (a 300-level seminar), both offered through UMBC's Honors College. In Talking Democracy, students become critically aware of the interplay among communication styles and techniques, democratic values, and the civic health of communities. They reflect on their own values, hopes, experiences, and approaches to communication; build skills that can help them initiate and enact positive social change; and emerge with greater confidence and clarity about how to move forward as a contributor to collective problem-solving and community-building. In Be Your Best Self in Real Life students investigate how people can collectively and individually thrive within institutions, and how they must sometimes change institutions in order to do so. (Note: There are civic courses offered by many UMBC departments, as we explain in more detail in the Landscape section, below).
- Working with national higher education networks:** Center staff coordinate UMBC's [NASPA LEAD Initiative](#) and [American Democracy Project](#) (ADP) participation. Staff members have served in the past two years as ADP Civic Scholars, Chair and Immediate Past Chair of the ADP Steering Committee, and National Advisory Board member for Imagining America. In addition, staff members have served on the planning committee for the annual [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Meeting](#).
- Organizing conference delegations:** Infusing new thinking about civic learning and democratic engagement across an institution requires the participation of many stakeholders. The Center brings diverse delegations composed of UMBC administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners to the annual Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement meeting and the annual Imagining America national gathering to develop shared experiences and knowledge that supports our collective work back on campus.
- Sharing innovations through publications:** Center staff have authored and co-authored magazine and journal articles, book chapters, and blog posts focused on civic learning and democratic engagement. They include:
  - [“Tools for living democracy: Putting the CLDE Theory of Change into practice”](#)** (coauthored by Romy Hübler and David Hoffman; eJournal of Public Affairs 9(1)). This article tells the story of national innovations in civic learning and democratic engagement that have been informed and inspired by work at UMBC.
  - [“Reimagining student affairs practice by enacting the CLDE Theory of Change”](#)** (coauthored by David Hoffman and Romy Hübler; 2020 NASPA Knowledge Community Publication, pg. 28-31). This article connects the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Theory of Change with ACPA and NASPA Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators, and identifies specific steps student affairs professionals can take to support students' engagement.
  - [“Infusing CLDE Theory of Change into student affairs: New thinking about civic learning and democratic engagement”](#)** (coauthored by Romy Hübler and David Hoffman; Leadership Exchange 17(3), pg. 18-23). This magazine article outlines what higher education leaders can do to support students' development as agents and architects of a democracy in which everyone can thrive.





- **“Talking democracy”** (coauthored by David Hoffman and Romy Hübler; in *Creating space for democracy: A primer on dialogue and deliberation in higher education* edited by Nick Longo and Tim Shaffer, pg. 184-190). This book chapter focuses on dialogue and deliberative pedagogy in higher education and describes how democratic teaching practices have fostered agency and authentic connections in a course Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff teach in UMBC’s Honors College.
- **“Why should college students—or anyone else—bother voting?”** (coauthored by David Hoffman and Romy Hübler; Forbes CivicNation Voice). This blog post outlines why voting matters not only for college students but for everyone.
- **“Higher education’s role in enacting a thriving democracy: Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change”** (coauthored by David Hoffman; American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ American Democracy Project, NASPA LEAD Initiative, and The Democracy Commitment). This collection of five essays constitutes the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change, which outlines the kind of practices necessary for higher education professionals to foster a thriving democracy.
- **“Ethos matters: Inspiring students as democracy’s co-creators”** (authored by David Hoffman; NASPA). This blog post describes how to orient students to lives of agency and deep engagement in their communities, including their university.
- **“Fostering civic agency by making education (and ourselves) real”** (authored by David Hoffman; in *Democracy’s education: Public work, citizenship and the future of colleges and universities* edited by Harry Boyte, pg. 154-160). This book chapter describes UMBC’s approach to developing a civic ethos that inspires individual and collective agency.



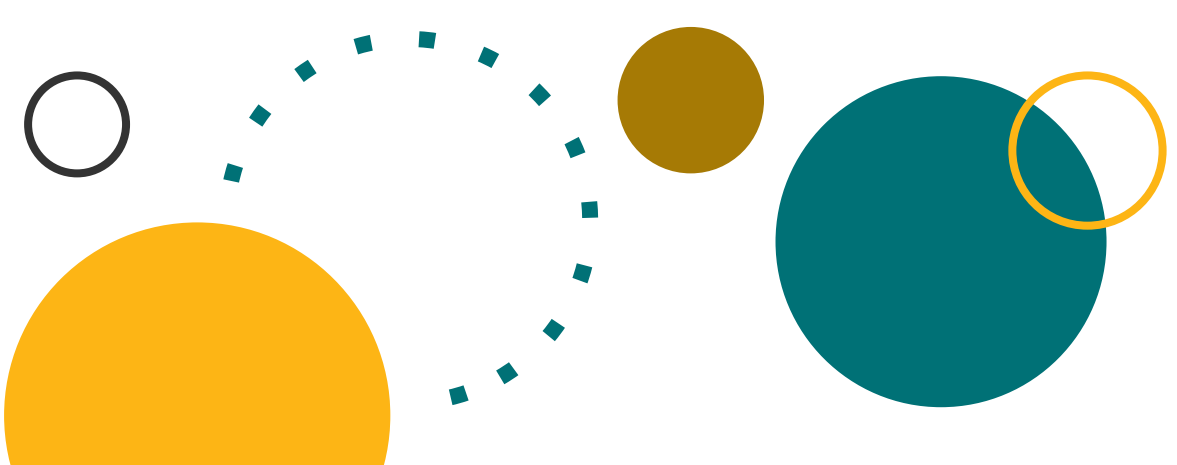
In addition to the Center for Democracy and Civic Life's infusion of civic learning and democratic engagement across the university and nationally, UMBC's commitment to this work is evident in the work of departments across campus. A few examples:

The [Shriver Center](#), UMBC's community engagement center, is also committed to advancing civic learning and democratic engagement through service-learning experiences in which students address critical social challenges. The Shriver Center's work has positioned UMBC as a national leader in applied learning, community engagement, and community-based service delivery. Among its many programs, the Shriver Center coordinates [Public Service Scholars fellowship programs](#) on behalf of the state of Maryland, including the Governor's Summer Internship Program, the Sondheim Public Service Law Program, and the Sondheim Nonprofit Leadership Program. The Shriver Center received funding from the **American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU)** to create a Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Campus Center, and works to dismantle white supremacy by implementing and promoting anti-racist practices.

The department of **Residential Life** identifies its [mission](#) as preparing residents "to be active and responsible citizens within the UMBC community and beyond." Where Residential Life once took a reactive, punitive approach to maintaining community standards, in recent years it has adopted a learning-centered approach focused on restorative practices. As Residential Life leaders wrote in a post on the [ACPA Commission for Housing and Residential Life blog](#): "We have found that this approach allows us to be both educators and co-creators of community and the student experience. We are starting to realize that if we want to reach outcomes around community engagement, social justice, civic engagement, and global citizenship, we may need to radically rethink our approach to learning and community within residential environments." All residential assistants are trained to foster thriving communities in which residents are active participants.

The [mission](#) of the department of **Student Conduct and Community Standards** includes "facilitat[ing] student and community developmental and ethical growth opportunities promoting personal integrity, civility, self-responsibility, citizenship and appreciation for diversity." The department takes a restorative approach in its work in order to repair harm, restore relationships, resolve conflicts, and work with students in order for them to flourish and create thriving civic communities.

Residential Life and Student Conduct and Community Standards also spearhead a [campus-wide effort](#) to foster a culture grounded in restorative practices, which they understand as a form of democratic dialogue and a way to "strengthen relationships between individuals as well as social connections within our community leading to increased well being, active, participatory learning, community building, decision-making, greater safety, and a sense of belonging." The departments have trained dozens of UMBC faculty, staff, and students in restorative practices.

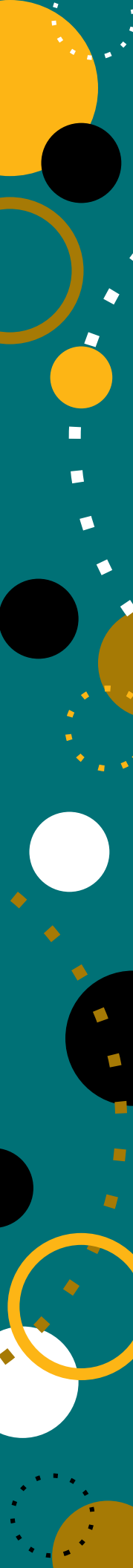


## IV. Landscape

UMBC's student body is extraordinarily diverse, especially with respect to race and ethnicity. As of November 1, 2022, its composition (including undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education students) was:

Race / Ethnicity	Number of students	Percentage of student body
American Indian	11	0%
Asian	2,708	19%
Black	2,753	20%
Hispanic	1,118	8%
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	8	0%
Not specified	236	2%
Two or more races or ethnicities	681	5%
White	4,313	31%
International	2,261	16%

UMBC's new **president Valerie Sheares Ashby** is deeply committed to inclusive excellence. One of her first acts as president (in August 2022) was to announce the establishment of a new senior leadership position, vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion, to consolidate and extend UMBC's efforts in this area. Her predecessor **Freeman Hrabowski**, who served as president for 30 years, marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963 to oppose systemic racism. UMBC was the first public university established in Maryland after the end of legal segregation. Under Dr. Hrabowski's leadership, UMBC became a national model for inclusive excellence as well as a hub of civic learning and action for justice. As **provost Philip Rous** has said in describing UMBC's civic culture, "We are all here because we want to make a difference, and we do."



The [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change](#), which has been at the heart of national efforts by AASCU's American Democracy Project and NASPA to promote civic engagement, draws extensively on experiences of building a strong civic culture at UMBC, and UMBC Center for Democracy and Civic Life director David Hoffman was the lead author. The Theory of Change proposes that higher education's civic work should do more than prepare students for participation in democracy; it must enable them to help create "the thriving democracy we have not yet achieved, but can build together." The Theory of Change identifies the following values as being at the heart of a thriving democracy:

- **Dignity:** respect for the intrinsic moral equality of all persons
  - **Humanity:** embracing environments and interactions that are generative and organic; rejecting objectification, and the marginalization of people based on aspects of their identities
  - **Decency:** acting with humility and graciousness; rejecting domination for its own sake
  - **Honesty:** frankness with civility; congruence between stated values and actions; avoidance of deceit, evasions, and manipulative conduct
  - **Curiosity:** eagerness to learn, have new experiences, and tap the wisdom of other people)
  - **Imagination:** creativity and vision, including with respect to possible futures in which all of these values have become more central to our society and institutions
  - **Wisdom:** discernment; comfort with complexity; nonmanipulability
  - **Courage:** fortitude to act with integrity even when there is a cost; capacity to thrive in the midst of ambiguity, uncertainty, and change; willingness to acknowledge vulnerability
  - **Community:** belief that advancing the general welfare requires organized, collective work, enacted through relationships, partnerships, and networks, leveraging the diverse perspectives and talents of many people in order to produce benefits greater than the sum of their individual contributions
  - **Participation:** action with other people to develop and achieve shared visions of the common good
  - **Stewardship:** responsibility to act individually and collectively in ways that support others' well-being, and the preservation and cultivation of resources, including norms and processes, necessary for all to thrive
  - **Resourcefulness:** capacity to improvise, seek and gain knowledge, solve problems, and develop productive public relationships and partnerships
  - **Hope:** belief in the power of people to bring about desired transformations; tenacity
- 

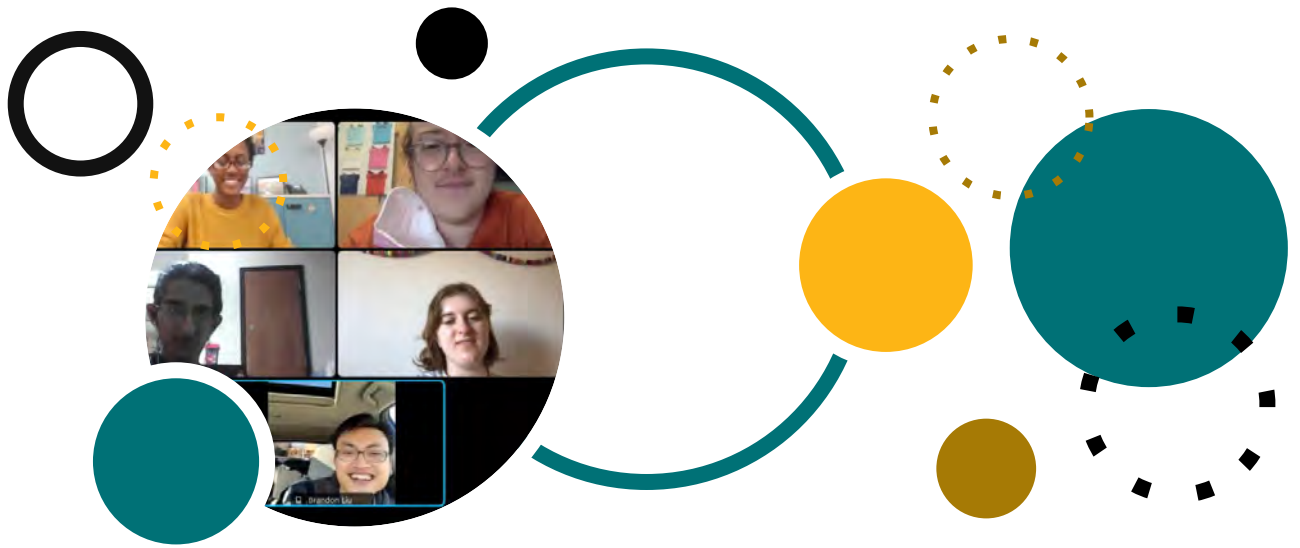


Those values resonate strongly with (and their framing was inspired by) UMBC's campus culture. While measuring this resonance is a challenge, a UMBC campus climate survey from fall 2021 reveals that students experience UMBC as supportive of diverse identities and perspectives, and of community and political engagement. When asked about the degree to which UMBC is diverse with respect to gender, race, socio-economic class, age, sexual orientation, disability, immigration status, accent ethnicity, and national origin, 76% of respondents characterized UMBC as very diverse, 22% as somewhat diverse. 95% rate UMBC as very or somewhat inclusive (where inclusion is defined as access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized). 95% strongly or somewhat agree that diversity enhances their experiences as UMBC students.

Perhaps most tellingly, the 820 respondents expressed a strong orientation to inclusive and democratic values:

**"Please rate your perceived level of importance of the following value statements, with values defined as general beliefs that motivate action and serve as guiding principles for deciding how to act."**

	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not important at all
<b>Valuing human dignity and human rights</b>	776 students (94.63% of respondents)	39 students (4.76% of respondents)	4 students (0.49% of respondents)	1 student (0.12% of respondents)
<b>Valuing cultural diversity</b>	693 students (84.51% of respondents)	107 students (13.05% of respondents)	13 students (1.59% of respondents)	7 students (0.85% of respondents)
<b>Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality, and the rule of law</b>	718 students (87.56% of respondents)	93 students (11.34% of respondents)	8 students (0.98% of respondents)	1 student (0.12% of respondents)



UMBC's commitments to inclusive excellence and social action described in the Commitments section of this plan section extend to every corner of the institution, encompassing departments, organizations, and individuals. They include voter education, voter turnout, engagement around public policy issues, service-learning and community engagement, and active participation in students' own communities and institutions. These commitments and their visibility on campus have grown significantly in the past few years, spurred in part by the success of the BreakingGround organizing process and the establishment of the Center for Democracy and Civic Life, but also by recent crises in U.S. society, including renewed attention to systemic racism in the aftermath of the killings of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, George Floyd in Minneapolis, and other black men and women.

Many of UMBC's courses that focus on civic learning and democratic engagement can be found in social science programs such as **Public Administration and Policy** (certificate), **World Politics** (minor), **Law and Justice** (minor), **Practical Policy and Politics** (minor), **Political Science** (B.A.), **Public History** (M.A.), and **Public Policy** (M.P.P., Ph.D.). However, consistent with the idea that every career can contribute to fostering a thriving democracy, there are many other courses with civic components. Faculty members have created or redesigned more than 40 such courses across the disciplines with support from [BreakingGround](#), a grant program funded by the **Provost's Office** and administered by the **Center for Democracy and Civic Life**. They have included:

- **Critically Engaging with Heritage Ideas and Issues in Critical Heritages Studies** (American Studies 420). Students explore the complexities of heritage-related issues at the local, national and international levels by participating in discussions about readings regarding cultural landscapes, international cultural policy and community outreach and cultural representation and meeting with local heritage professionals.
- **Understanding Factors Influencing Literacy in Baltimore Communities** (English 100P/281). Students work with the Reading Partners Program, a tutoring intervention, to collect data about factors influencing literacy achievement for elementary level students. Students also think critically and reflect on the role of the community in increasing literacy rates in Baltimore City.
- **Environmental Justice** (Geography and Environmental Systems 424/624). Students learn about the ways race, class, gender and geography have shaped communities' experiences of the physical environment in the U.S. by directly interacting with Baltimore residents about diverse perceptions of the environment and will develop GIS mapping skills through assisting in the identification and geolocation of amenities and hazards in the community.

- **Studies in Feminist Activism** (Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies 200). This course focuses on the history and present of feminist activist movements. Students produce digital stories about local activist movements as well as their own activist projects at UMBC and in the surrounding community, creating an archive of what it means to do activism here at UMBC and beyond.
- **Baltimore City Water Supply Aging Infrastructure** (Mechanical Engineering 220H). Students learn how to use their technical engineering knowledge to improve their communities specifically related to critical water treatment issues in Baltimore City.
- **Civil Discord** (Music 308). Students in this course create an artistic performance that engages its Linehan Concert Hall audience in reflecting on and discussing the current polarization in America.
- **Social Action in Baltimore** (Social Work 200). In this course students explore civic engagement in the Baltimore area in relation to the practice of social work, including issues of poverty, hunger, health care or homelessness.
- **Putting the Sociological Imagination Into Practice Locally** (Sociology 698). This course offers students the opportunity to conduct action research with local communities on access to healthy food. Student research projects sit at the intersection of local social inequalities, public health issues, and social change.

For a complete list of BreakingGround-funded courses and projects, follow [this link](#).

Civic learning and democratic engagement is central to UMBC's co-curricular activities as well. In addition to the BreakingGround funded projects linked previously, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life works with campus partners across the Divisions of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs on programs that orient students to recognize and harness their civic agency and lead a life of active participation. Center for Democracy and Civic Life immersive programs with a civic mission include [Alternative Spring Break](#) and [STRiVE](#), which develops students' skills in leadership for social impact. In addition, the Center offers dozens of workshops annually to help students and colleagues explore the civic dimensions of their majors or professional roles. These workshops guide participants through the process of co-creating their communities and addressing challenges to a thriving democracy. As is described in the Leadership section, the Center also works with the Student Government Association and several student organizations, including College Democrats and College Republicans, to plan and host election-related programs and events. These programs include voter registration drives, debate watch parties, conversation programs about important campaign issues, and an election night festival. Hundreds of students attend these programs.





We have a good deal of information about the impact of particular courses and programs on students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, but continue to refine our approaches to assessment. In addition, with leadership from the directors of the **Shriver Center, Honors College, and Individualized Study** program, UMBC has undertaken [a campus-wide effort spanning nearly a decade](#), funded initially with a BreakingGround grant, to develop a list of affective functional competencies that can guide applied learning experiences and provide a framework for their assessment. The [affective functional competencies](#) that have emerged from this process include "Social Responsibility and Community-Minded Action," which encompasses the following outcomes:

- Examines the implications of one's actions/behavior/decisions/beliefs
- Acknowledges mistakes, learning from them, and adjusting over time
- Follows through on commitments
- Acts with interest of the larger community in mind
- Commits to social justice; takes informed and responsible action to address ethical, social, and environmental challenges to global systems and evaluates the local and broader consequences of individual and collective interventions
- Engages deeply with others both through learning and working with others
- Demonstrates sympathy and empathy for others
- Develops personal and civic responsibility with respect to global issues
- Develops solutions to global challenges using interdisciplinary perspectives
- Aligns personal values with civic actions
- Takes initiative to encourage and support others in their development of personal responsibility
- Creates positive bonds with people and social institutions
- Effectively addresses significant issues in the natural and human world based on articulating one's identity in a global context

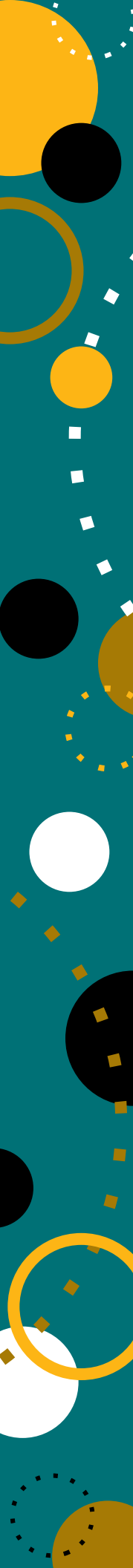


Another affective functional competency with important civic dimensions is “Shared Humanness and Transformational Action,” which encompasses these outcomes:

- Aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself
- Views one’s own needs as interconnected with the needs of a broader society; motivated by then needs and feelings of others
- Listens attentively to others to gain perspective on positions while reading nonverbal communication and signals; attuned to a wide range of emotional signals, sensing felt but unspoken emotions in a person or a group
- Interprets intercultural experience from the perspective of own and more than one worldview
- Demonstrates supportive manner recognizing the feelings and perspectives of others
- Demonstrates sympathy and empathy for others
- Demonstrates commitment to social justice
- Analyzes how cultural norms and values affect one’s interaction with others
- Recognizes the commonalities and differences that exist among people and cultures and how these factors affect one’s identity and identities of others
- Engages with people and ideas from other cultures with courage, sensitivity, openness, and curiosity

The affective functional competencies project was slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also disrupted many applied learning experiences. However, its continuing development eventually may provide additional clarity and consistency in UMBC’s approach to assessing civic learning and democratic engagement.





We also are developing new ways to measure the holistic impact of our cultural, programmatic, and pedagogical commitments to inclusive excellence, civic learning, and democratic engagement. How do experiences in courses and programs shape students' subsequent meaning-making and decision-making? How do students make sense of UMBC's culture beyond its manifestations in specific courses and programs? We have begun exploring these questions through Kettering Foundation-supported qualitative research involving alumni who have experienced UMBC's civic courses, programs, and culture (see the Commitment section), and believe this to be a very promising approach. In addition, Laura Antkowiak, associate professor of Political Science, organized her spring 2022 research methods course (POLI 301) around the challenge of gauging the outcomes of some of UMBC's civic initiatives, and is developing recommendations for enhancing quantitative and qualitative measures.

UMBC's National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) results provide yet another window on the impact of some of our civic learning and democratic engagement work. In the 2020 presidential election, UMBC's turnout rate was 69.2% (up from 63.6% in 2016), above the national average of 66.0%. In the 2018 midterm elections, the national average turnout among students who were eligible to vote was 39.1% (up from 19.7% in 2014); at UMBC that figure was 49.2% (up from 23.1% in 2014).

In addition, data relating to the use of UMBC's [Civic Nation Voter Registration Portal](#), launched in 2022, will provide further insights about the impact of our voter registration efforts, including which approaches are most successful in encouraging students to register.

While civic learning and democratic engagement have broad and deep support at UMBC, there remains considerable room to grow. Many of the programs and resources we have described elsewhere in this report, including the BreakingGround initiative, the affective functional competencies project, and the partnerships described in the Commitment section, have relied on people voluntarily taking on tasks beyond their formal roles. The informal character of these collaborations has helped them to feel organic and liberating, but their sustained success requires infrastructure beyond what UMBC has been able to provide, especially at a time when issues such as sustaining operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting students' health and well-being have required urgent attention and resources. The Center for Democracy and Civic Life continues to operate with a small staff that is stretched very thin, a modest budget, and inadequate office space.

Also, while we have made significant gains in diversifying faculty and staff representation in UMBC's civic learning and democratic engagement work, it remains less diverse than student representation. Additional personnel and funding for civic learning and democratic engagement as well as a more diverse faculty and staff representation would allow UMBC to provide more opportunities for student engagement and ensure that these opportunities are relevant and meaningful.

As we mentioned in our 2020-2023 Voter Friendly Campus Plan, one challenge that frustrated UMBC for years was the absence of an on-campus voting location. While the closest polling station is adjacent to campus, there is no safe walking path. However, in recent months, our work with the State Board of Elections has borne fruit. While UMBC has determined that it does not have the infrastructure to serve as a polling location, we were able to work out an agreement to locate a ballot dropoff box in The Commons (student services building) for the 2022 primary and general elections.

# V. Goals

## Vision

At UMBC, we aspire to prepare and position students as co-creators of the thriving democracy America has not yet fully achieved. In the spirit of John Dewey's (1937) injunction that democracy must be "enacted anew in every generation, in every year and day, in the living relations of person to person in all social forms and institutions," we seek to orient students to democratic possibilities and responsibilities both on Election Day and in the everyday settings in which they will spend most of their lives.

In alignment with the [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change](#) of which leaders of our Center for Democracy and Civic Life have been developers and champions, we want every UMBC graduate to have developed the following civic capacities:

- **Civic Literacy and Discernment:** encompassing individual and collective knowledge of democracy's principles, contested features, history, and expressions in the U.S. and around the world; knowledge of the philosophical and practical dimensions of public policy issues, and understanding of different perspectives on those issues; and the capacity to distinguish factual claims made credibly and in good faith from error and propaganda.
- **Civic Agency:** encompassing individuals' self-conception as active agents shaping their world, as well as their capacities to recognize cultural practices, navigate complex institutions and undemocratic environments, imagine alternative arrangements and futures, and develop strategies for effective individual and collective action; and the collective capacities to develop a vision for our common life, recognize and respond to problems, make decisions generally accepted as legitimate, and foster the ongoing development of all of these capacities.
- **Real Communication:** encompassing individual and collective capacities to engage in civil, unscripted, honest communication grounded in our common humanity, including about issues in connection with which individuals disagree based on their different stakes, life experiences, values, and aspirations; and the sensitivity and situational awareness to listen well and communicate authentically and effectively with different audiences.
- **Critical Solidarity:** encompassing individual and collective recognition of the intrinsic worth and equality of all human beings, capacity to envision and identify with each other's journeys and struggles, and disposition to work for the full participation (Strum, Eatman, Saltmarsh & Bush, 2011) of all Americans in our democratic life and against violations of people's agency and equality.
- **Civic Courage:** encompassing individuals' willingness to risk position, reputation, and the comforts of stability in order to pursue justice and remove barriers to full participation in democratic life, openness to learning from others, including people with less formal training, positional power, and social status, and resilience in the face of adversity; and the collective capacity to embrace changes in cultural practices and institutional arrangements when such changes promote the general welfare and full participation in democratic life.



- **Integrity and Congruence:** encompassing individual and collective capacities and commitments to enact democratic values in our everyday interactions, professional roles, cultural practices, institutional arrangements, public decisions, policies, and laws.

(Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change, page 11).

This framework is a step beyond civic education paradigms that conceptualize civics as a realm apart from everyday life, encompassed in government, elections, and voluntary service projects. We aspire to help and prepare students to take responsible, effective action in every setting, on and beyond Election Day, to reckon with and dismantle systems that oppress and exclude people based on their social identities, foster individual and collective agency and solidarity, and create conditions in which everyone can thrive.

In addition, the framework departs from approaches to civic education that develop individual capacities but not collective capacities. Our vision is not only that every UMBC graduate develops the individual capacities identified above, but that our UMBC community becomes more inclusive, cohesive, and capable of collective action, and adopts practices ever more congruent with our democratic values.



## Long-Term Goals (2+ years)

We plan to continue infusing civic learning opportunities aligned with the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change in UMBC courses, programs, and organizations. Our approach will continue to be organic and inclusive, so that faculty, staff, and students are true co-creators of the effort.

This approach makes it difficult to express some of our longer-term goals in concrete, measurable, time-bound terms, because that expectation is in tension with the transformative (and, to date, highly successful) process in which we are actually engaged. For the most part, rather than deploying campus resources in a manner calculated to achieve specific, measurable targets identified in advance, we work to deepen relationships, cultivate a shared sense of responsibility, and tease out the civic dimensions of people's campus roles. In our approach, quantifiable, transactional "wins" flow from the co-creative process rather than driving it.

That said, our long-term goals include the following:

- By **May 2024**, faculty and staff members playing leadership roles in UMBC's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts will collectively reflect the compositional diversity of UMBC's student body.
- By **November 2024**, UMBC will achieve a more effective and complete integration of our civic learning and democratic engagement efforts with campus initiatives to address structural racism and promote social justice, so that students experience civic engagement as intrinsically connected with anti-racist work.
- By **November 2024**, UMBC will increase the voter registration rate among students to 90% (it was 82.5% as of the 2020 election), and the voting rate (the percentage of eligible students who vote on Election Day) to 72% (it was 69.2% in 2020).
- By **November 2024**, UMBC will increase the voting rate among graduate students to 60% (it was 54% in 2020).
- By **November 2024**, each STEM field of study at UMBC will have a voting rate of at least 65% (the lowest voting rate in a STEM field was 56% in 2020).
- By **May 2025**, training and tools developed by the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and its partners to implement the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change will be widely available and frequently used by UMBC faculty members, program leaders, and student organization officers. The training and tools will help them to build relationships and community in what might otherwise be transactional contexts, and to develop students' civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- By **May 2025**, every incoming UMBC undergraduate student will experience programming that emphasizes and integrates the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, civic learning, and democratic engagement as a part of their orientation to the campus.



## Short-Term Goals ( $\leq 1$ year)

- By **June 2022**, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life will complete the process of securing a commitment from the Maryland Board of Elections to locate a ballot dropoff box on the UMBC campus for Election 2022.
- By **July 2022**, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life will add a full-time staff member to expand its programming and develop creative and inclusive messaging to promote democratic engagement.
- By **September 2022**, the Center will double the size of its intern team focused on voter registration and political engagement.
- By **November 2022**, UMBC will increase the voter registration rate among students to above 85% (it was 82.5% as of the 2020 election), and the midterm election voting rate (the percentage of eligible students who vote on Election Day) to 50% (it was 46.8% in 2018).
- By **May 2023**, UMBC will host a Change Makers Dinner featuring special guests and opportunities for large- and small-group conversations focused on threats to voting rights and approaches to protecting them.
- By **May 2023**, UMBC will establish and constitute a board structure to help guide and extend the Center for Democracy and Civic Life's work. The board will include students, faculty, staff, and external partners who can make meaningful, nonpartisan contributions to students' civic learning and democratic engagement. The board will reflect the compositional diversity of UMBC's student body.
- By **May 2023**, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and the Career Center will develop joint programming available to all students to help them pursue meaningful careers as civic professionals.
- By **May 2023**, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life will launch an alumni network to support members and students as they envision and pursue careers as civic professionals. The alumni network will reflect the compositional diversity of UMBC's student body.
- By **May 2023**, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life will work with Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging, the Office of Equity and Inclusion, and other campus partners to develop communication strategies and tools reflecting the convergence of civic learning, democratic engagement, and the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## VI. Strategy

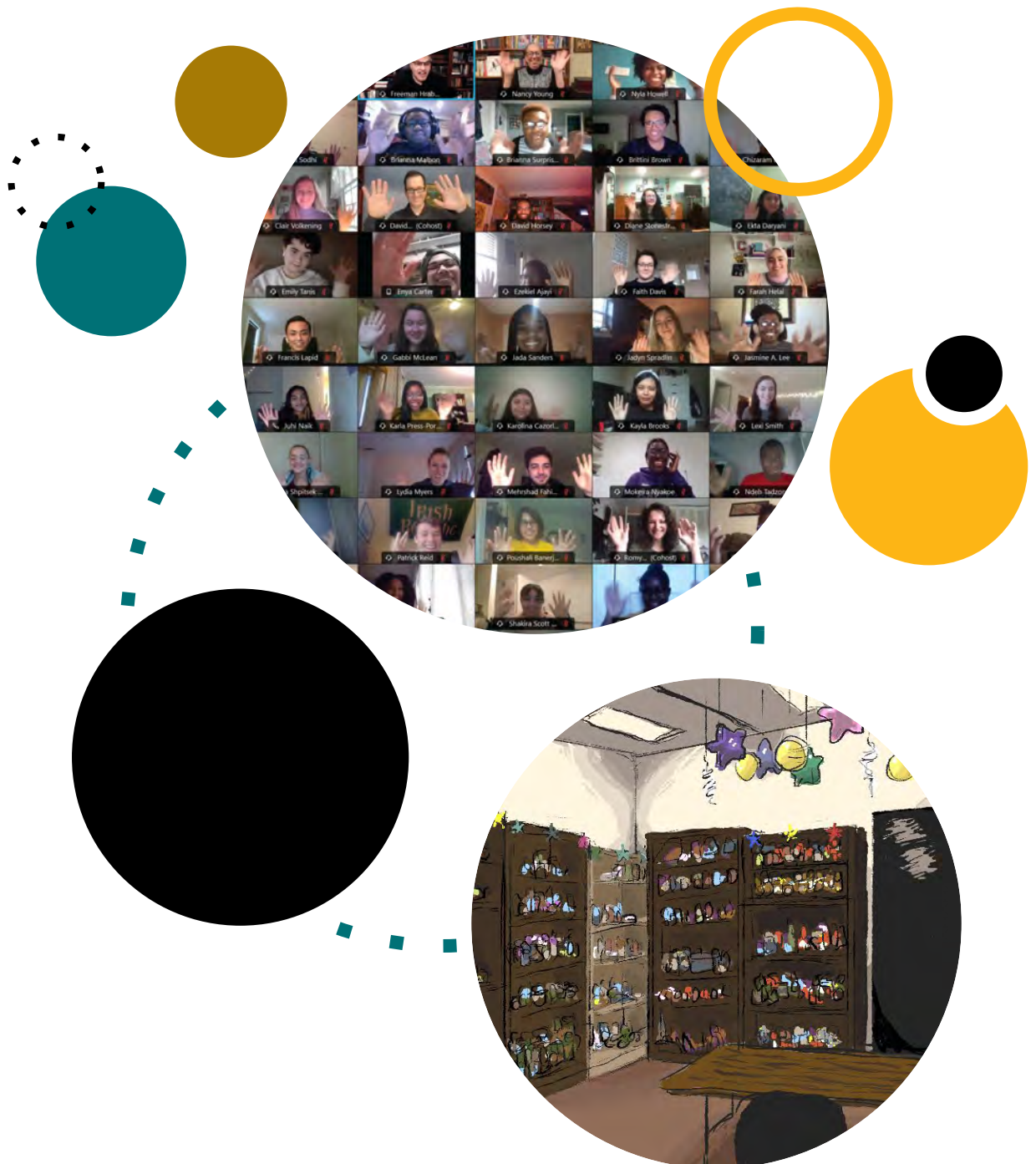
UMBC's successes in civic learning and democratic engagement have benefited greatly from leaders at all levels committed to every aspect of the institution's vision statement. In their understanding and in their actions, the pursuit of "an inclusive culture that connects innovative teaching and learning, research across disciplines, and civic engagement" has been part and parcel of our collective work to "advance ... social justice by welcoming and inspiring inquisitive minds from all backgrounds." Civic engagement and social justice are not separate goals; they are one and the same, because building a thriving democracy means ensuring that everyone can participate fully, and that we enact values like dignity, humanity, decency, and honesty in every setting. When she was named as UMBC's president in 2022 following the 30-year tenure of civil rights champion Freeman Hrabowski, Valerie Sheares Ashby said, "It is an incredible honor to be asked to lead a university that has excelled in so many ways that are essential both nationally and to me personally – particularly in regards to foregrounding inclusive excellence."

Beyond reflecting the commitments of its leaders, UMBC's work for inclusive engagement has resulted from grassroots organizing that has taken place over many years. Achieving our long-term vision—that every UMBC undergraduate will develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in the [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change](#) as essential to a thriving democracy—will require that we maintain the grassroots character of our organizing process even as we continue to institutionalize its outcomes. The strategic insights in the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement Theory of Change, which is based on our work, will continue to be our guide. Specifically, we will continue to support partners across the institution in identifying and developing opportunities to support students' civic engagement through their courses and programs by:

- **Sharing responsibility and control** between educators and students.
- **Enabling spontaneity** by affording students more flexibility and space to improvise and respond to situations as they are unfolding.
- **Embracing vulnerability** by approaching courses, programs, and everyday campus interactions with humility and openness, so that students are more likely to experience faculty, staff, themselves, and each other as human beings who are fully present and engaged in collective work within a community of learners.
- **Fostering authentic, mutual, and reciprocal relationships** among students, with faculty and staff members, and with community partners.
- **Building collective civic capacity** among members of our campus community, not just individuals' knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- **Choosing empowering language**, avoiding common uses of "institution voice," as when "we" or "us" (meaning, the institution) shares information with "you" (students, who are symbolically reduced to customers, implicitly excluded from "we" and "us").

- **Providing support for learning from everyday interactions**, including unstructured experiences of navigating everyday politics, on campus and beyond, so that students become increasingly resilient and sophisticated.
- **Transcending categories and boundaries** by applying the foregoing strategies in every learning context at UMBC (not just the ones traditionally recognized as forums for civic learning): orientation sessions, student organization meetings, faculty office hours, commencement exercises, and more.

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life is responsible for working with campus departments, programs, and organizations to adapt and apply these strategies. This work continues to take the form of collaboration in designing and implementing courses and programs; guidance in connection with BreakingGround grants; and informal consultation.





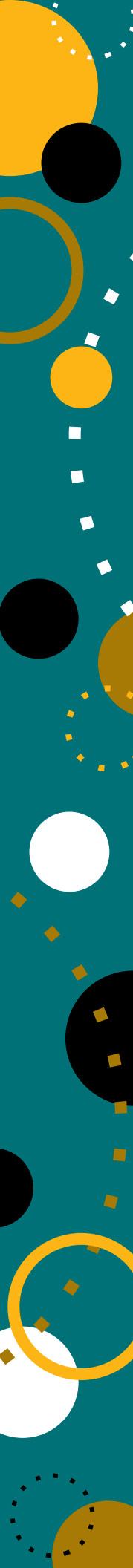


As for the specific goals identified in the Goals section of this plan, the work of achieving them will involve the Center for Democracy and Civic Life collaborating with established and new partners:

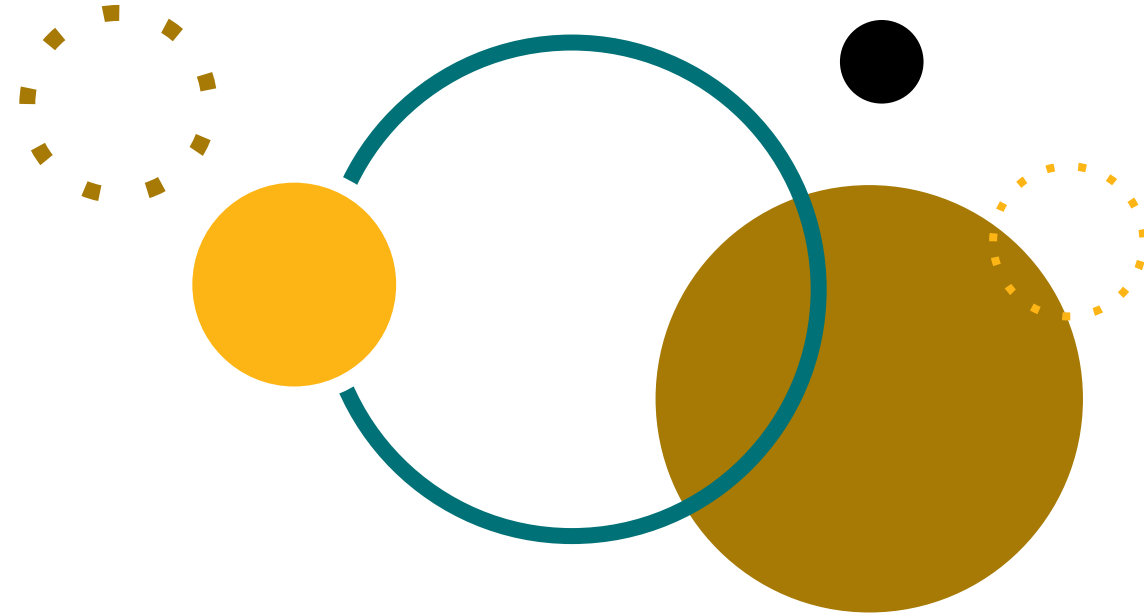
- Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff members will take the lead in securing and managing the resources needed to increase staff commitments to voter engagement; finalizing an agreement with the Maryland Board of Elections to locate a ballot dropoff box on the UMBC campus; and launching an alumni network to foster and support civic professionalism.
- Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff members will take the lead in organizing a diverse board to guide and support the Center's initiatives, and in working with colleagues to continue increasing the compositional diversity of faculty and staff leadership in UMBC's civic learning and democratic engagement efforts.
- The Political Engagement Working Group will develop and implement voter engagement initiatives in the run up to Elections 2022 and 2024, co-creating programs and messaging and leading grassroots, peer-to-peer efforts to register, inform, and motivate student voters. These voter engagement initiatives will leverage NSLVE data relating to turnout among students enrolled in UMBC's various academic programs, and will include organizing to solicit and disseminate messages from academic leaders and peers that will especially resonate with students in particular majors and graduate programs.
- The Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff will continue working with campus partners to host guided conversation programs about issues and opportunities for engagement, including Dinners with Friends (focused on issues at UMBC), Change Makers Dinners (focused on issues affecting people in the Baltimore region), and Changing Maryland programs (focused on the state legislative process).
- Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff and Career Center staff already are exploring the development of joint offerings that can help students achieve clarity about their civic values, identify opportunities to enact those values in career settings, and pursue careers as civic professionals. We will continue to collaborate in order to make such programming available to all students.

- The Center for Democracy and Civic Life already works with campus partners to develop messages that support students' civic identity development and agency. For example, we worked with UMBC's Honors College and prestigious scholarship programs to develop the [Co-Create UMBC Virtual Tour](#), an introduction to features of UMBC co-created by students, and shared it with incoming students at the 2020 and 2021 Honors Orientations. The Center for Democracy and Civic Life will work to develop similar partnerships with other campus departments and organizations, including Off-Campus Student Services, Residential Life, the College of Engineering and Information Technology, the Graduate School, and the College of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, in order to develop and share more such messages and infuse them into orientation sessions and other programs for all students.
- Student leaders and staff from the Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging, the Office of Equity and Inclusion, and the Women's Center will work to more fully integrate and align our efforts to address structural racism, promote social justice, and foster civic learning and democratic engagement.
- Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff will continue developing and sharing civic tools and hosting Together Beyond November-style training programs through which faculty, staff, and student leaders will learn to facilitate programs with and within their own departments and organizations.





In the short term, UMBC will employ all of the following strategies to encourage students to register and vote in 2022:

- Through campus-wide emails, social media posts, banners and posts on myUMBC (UMBC's online hub), promote UMBC's [Civic Nation Voter Registration Portal](#); the opportunity to be trained as a voter registration volunteer by the Maryland Board of Elections; the opportunity to be trained and serve as a poll worker; and the availability and convenience of the on-campus ballot drop box (Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Division of Information Technology, Institutional Advancement).
  - Conduct in-person and virtual voter registration drives (Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Student Government Association, and other campus departments and organizations coordinated and supported by the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and Political Engagement Working Group).
  - Make voter registration materials available at high-traffic locations on campus (Center for Democracy and Civic Life).
  - Participate in the ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge voter pledge competition. UMBC finished 9th in the nation in 2020 (Political Engagement Working Group).
  - Host a variety of roundtable discussions about public issues (Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Initiatives for Identity, Inclusion & Belonging, Student Government Association, Women's Center, and other campus departments and organizations).
  - Support members of the faculty and staff seeking to inform and engage students in connection with the 2022 election by providing resources and facilitation (Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Student Government Association).
  - Host town hall events for candidates for state and local offices (Office of Institutional Advancement, Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Graduate Student Association, Student Government Association, other student organizations).
  - Host UMBC's traditional Election Night Extravaganza program to promote awareness of the 2022 election and bring our campus community together to watch the returns (Center for Democracy and Civic Life, Student Government Association).
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## VII. NSLVE

UMBC has participated in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) starting with the 2016 national election, and has used the data it has provided to set goals as described in the Goals section of this report.

Here are UMBC's NSLVE reports from [2016](#), [2018](#), and [2020](#).

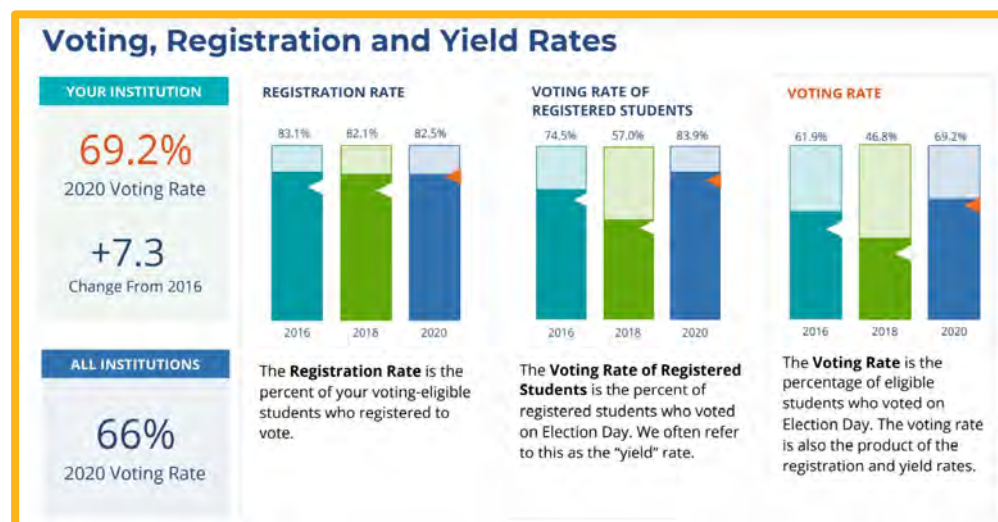
As with colleges and universities across the U.S., UMBC saw its voting rate increase from 2016 (when 61.9% of eligible students voted) to 2020 (when 69.2% of eligible students voted). UMBC's 2020 voting rate of 69.2% compared favorably to the national average of 66%. The total number of eligible UMBC student voters increased by 46 from 2016 to 2020 (from 11,948 to 11,994), but the number of students who cast votes increased by 904 (from 7,393 to 8,296).

UMBC increased its voting rate in every age group other than 30-39 (decreased by 1%, from 57% to 56%) and 50+ (decreased by 2%, from 83% to 81%). The largest increases occurred in the 18-21 age group (from 58% to 66%) and in the 22-24 age group (from 56% to 64%). In addition, the voting rate among undergraduate students increased more significantly, from 58% to 66%, in comparison with graduate students (from 53% to 54%).

Almost all fields of study saw an increase or no change in voting rates from 2016 to 2020. Two fields of study with relatively small enrollment, History and Philosophy and Religious Studies experienced a 3% and 7% decrease respectively. Several STEM fields, including Biological Sciences (63%), Computer and Information Sciences (56%), Engineering and Engineering Technologies (61%), Mathematics and Statistics (61%), and Physical Sciences (59%) continue to have voting rates below UMBC's average.

UMBC does not share race and gender information with NSLVE.

As we shared in the Goals section of this plan, we will work to increase the voter registration rate among students from 82.5% in 2020 to 85% in 2022 and 90% in 2024, with our long-term goal being 100% registration, in part by increasing voter registration rates among graduate students and students in STEM disciplines. And we will work to increase the voting rate to 50% in 2022 (up from 46.8% in 2018), and to 72% in 2024 (up from 69.2% in 2020), with our long-term goal being a 100% voting rate.





## VIII. Reporting

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life will share this plan with university leaders and with the stakeholders identified in the Leadership section for whom it will serve as a guide. The Center also will post the plan on its website.

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life is the entity at UMBC that receives the NSLVE report. Staff have shared that data with the institution's President's Council and with the campus community at voter engagement events; in the Center's annual report; and on the Center's [website](#). Center staff will continue to share NSLVE report data, as well as other relevant data, in these forums.

In addition, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life will proactively and widely distribute:

- NSLVE data,
- this plan, and
- a report on the success of the strategies contained herein and gaps to address as we prepare for future elections.

Distribution methods will include:

- email messages to all UMBC students (note: students can choose to opt out of these emails);
- emails to lists of faculty, staff, and student leader stakeholders, including senior university leaders and every staff member in the Division of Student Affairs;
- postings in the Center for Democracy and Civic Life group on MyUMBC and on the Center for Democracy and Civic Life's website;
- emails to community partners, including the Maryland State and Baltimore County Board of Elections and the University System of Maryland chancellor's office.



## IX. Evaluation

As we have described, UMBC has taken a community organizing approach to infusing civic learning and democratic engagement across our institution. Over the past 12 years, we have fostered a deep and powerful civic ethos by teasing out the civic dimensions of people's roles, building relationships among them, and supporting organic, collective work, guided by a common philosophy, in which the operational details have been co-created by the participants. This approach has worked well because it aligns with our aspiration to embed our civic values in our courses, programs, and everyday practices, so that students have countless opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support a thriving democracy.

As a result, many of the goals we have identified are process goals: partnerships we intend to pursue and forums we plan to create. For those goals—including, for example, developing new programs focused on meaningful careers and civic professionalism through a partnership between the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and the Career Center, and hosting Dinner with Friends and Change Makers programs—the principal measure of our success will be that the processes play out as we envision. We will gauge the impact on participants through evaluation forms and surveys, and will use the results to inform our program designs, but it is the relationships and the infusion of civic commitments across our campus culture that matter most.

We have conducted and will continue to pursue research studies approved by UMBC's Institutional Review Board to understand the impact of our civic learning and democratic engagement strategies. One such study (conducted in 2020-21) explored the impact of our Together Beyond November facilitator training program. Staff members in the Center for Democracy and Civic Life and Student Conduct and Community Standards conducted and analyzed 18 qualitative interviews with program participants. The findings included:

- Participants were comforted by the revelation that they were not alone in working through complex feelings about Election 2020.
- Participants felt more connected to each other.
- Participants were able to identify with feelings expressed by other participants who played different roles (students vs. staff vs. faculty) at UMBC.
- Participants felt better prepared for the uncertainty that would follow Election 2020.
- Participants recognized connections among what are often talked about as distinct bodies of work, often divided into different departments: mental health promotion, restorative practices, equity and inclusion work, and democratic practices.
- Participants developed skills that they have been able to apply, not just in hosting post-Election dialogues but in other settings as well.



We shared these findings at the Division of Student Affairs' annual assessment conference. We will act on the findings by taking the advice of the Together Beyond November participants about how to continue to foster empowering connections among members of the UMBC community. Those steps will include:

- continuing to create spaces in which faculty and staff members can process current events;
- sustaining and expanding the Together Beyond facilitator network;
- working with colleagues and student leaders to create more spaces at UMBC that connect students, faculty, and staff; and
- developing and implementing strategies for engaging people who do not jump at the chance to participate in civil dialogues.

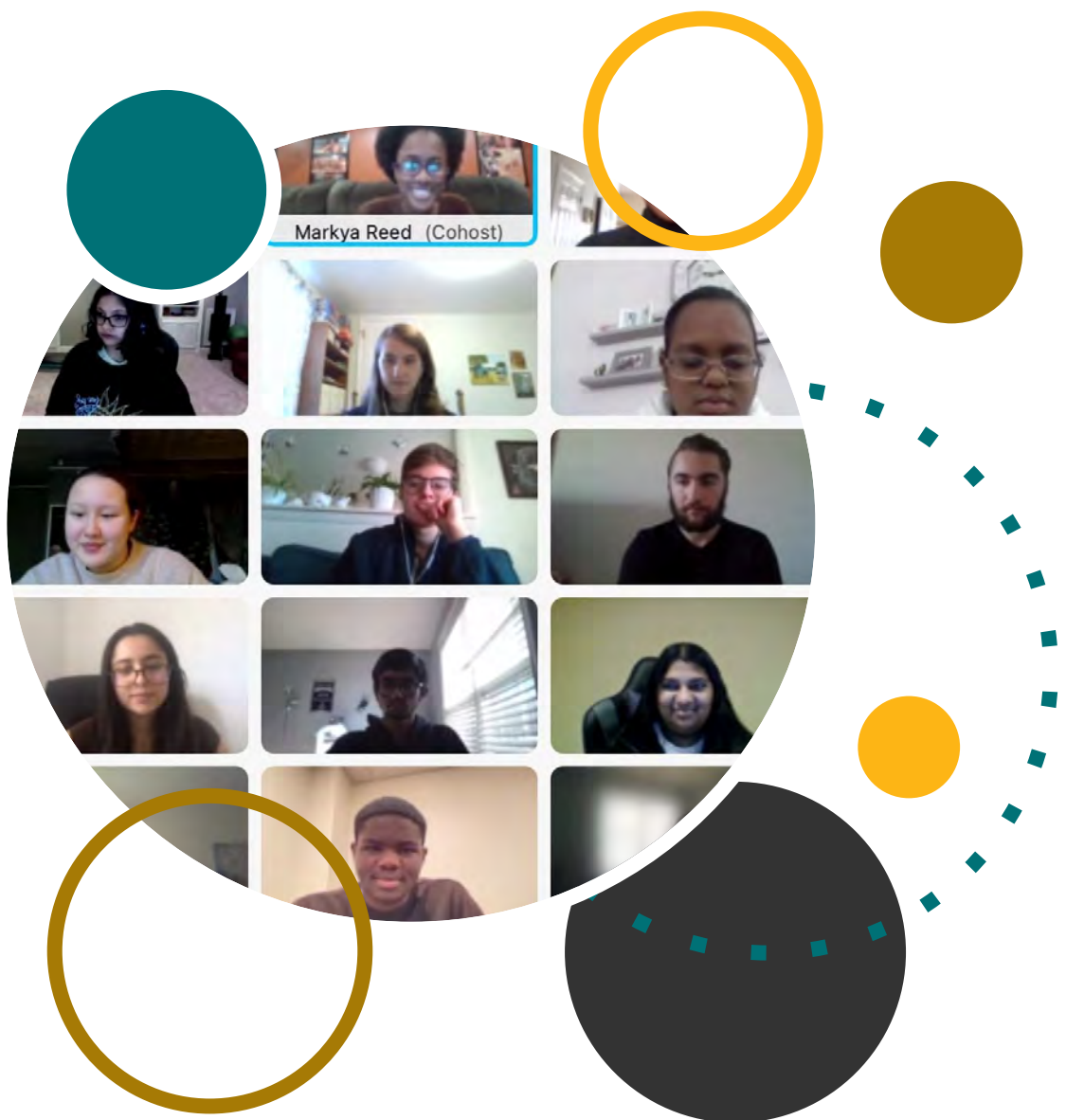
A second study explored how alumni make meaning of their experiences with UMBC's programs and initiatives to construct empowered civic identities. Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff interviewed 13 UMBC alumni. Among the findings:

- Participants described the learning experiences that altered their views about leadership and participation in a democracy as reflective, real, and holistic. These aspects of the nature and structure of the experiences were as important as any explicit messaging or information-sharing in helping them begin to view themselves as capable of shaping their circumstances and seeing possibilities for co-creation in any setting.
- Some of the participants' perspective-altering experiences occurred beyond the scope of discrete courses and programs. They were products of a campus culture that supported mutual and reciprocal relationships and empowered students as co-creators.
- Participants described developing a stronger sense of agency and the belief that they (or anyone) can be co-creators of their environments. They learned to see spaces as fluid and open rather than static or fixed.
- Participants learned about the importance of relationships to the process of co-creation. They identified storytelling, reflection, participatory practices, and cultural script analysis as important tools for their learning.

The findings from this study challenge us to continue to build an institutional culture at UMBC that supports students' holistic civic development.

Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff are planning another study to assess the long-term impacts of students' exposure to UMBC's approach to civic learning and democratic engagement. This study will investigate the paths students take after foundational programmatic leadership and engagement experiences, tracing their subsequent campus and community engagement.

In order to assess our success with respect to our voter engagement goals, UMBC will continue to participate in NSLVE, and will continue to share NSLVE data with campus partners and the public. UMBC will also utilize voter registration data gathered through its [Civic Nation Voter Registration Portal](#) to identify approaches that are most successful in getting students to register to vote. In addition, Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff will work with campus partners in the Department of Information Technology to gather data on the proliferation of campus-wide election and voter related messages. Center staff will continue to measure the effectiveness of their civic tools through program evaluations at the conclusion of each program. The Center for Democracy and Civic Life team will analyze the data and share it with the Political Engagement Working Group to inform our voter engagement strategy and tactics.





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