

# COMMUNITY MATTERS

AUGUST 2021

*A newsletter of the Center for Democracy and Civic Life at UMBC*

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## NOTE FROM THE STAFF



The fall semester is about to begin. Some of us are returning to work, live, or study on campus after almost a year and a half. Some of us are new to the UMBC community and may be making our very first visits to campus. And many of us, to varying degrees, will continue to connect remotely.

At the heart of the Center for Democracy and Civic Life's work is the idea that all of us can be agents and architects of our shared destiny, welcoming and empowering each other to co-create the futures we want to see. That idea is especially relevant as we navigate this time of transition individually and collectively. The challenges posed since the beginning of the pandemic have made clear that we 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. As we adjust to the changes the coming weeks and months will bring, we look forward to sustaining and deepening civic proximity at UMBC and beyond.

Recently, members of our 2021-2022 staff team were able to meet in person for the first time (pictured) and facilitate an in-person program together. We look forward to welcoming Caleb Ruck and Faith Davis to the team in mid-August, and to seeing all of you soon.

Best,

David Hoffman, Romy Hübler, Markya Reed, and Tess McRae  
*Center for Democracy and Civic Life Staff*

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## FEATURED NEWS

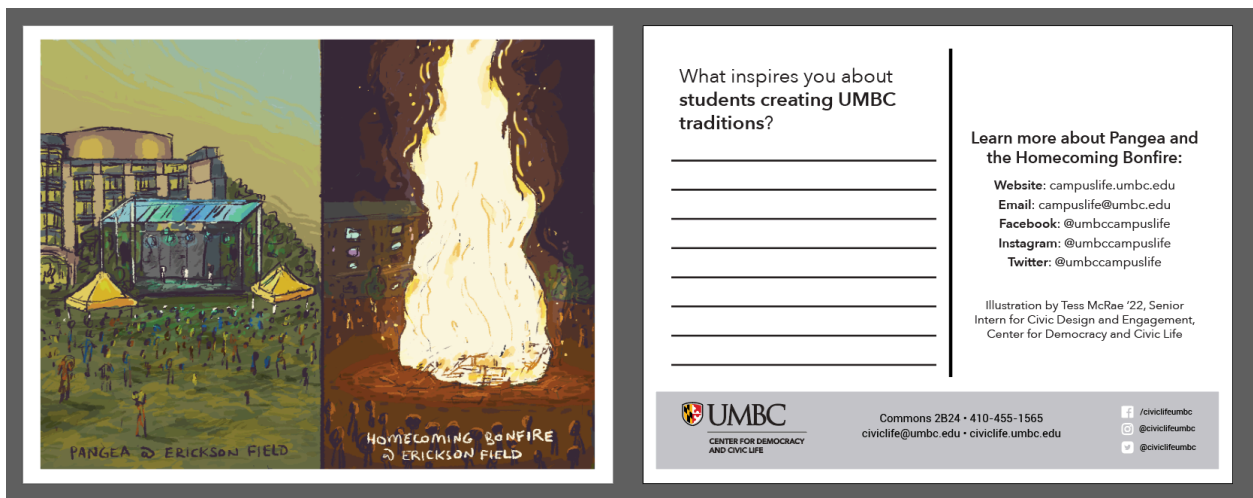
### Inspiring Incoming Students to Co-Create UMBC



The Center for Democracy and Civic Life hosted an in-person orientation session on July 15th with support from Undergraduate Admissions and Orientation. More than 30 incoming students took our Co-Create UMBC Tour, which highlights features of UMBC created entirely or partly by students as well as resources for student co-creators.



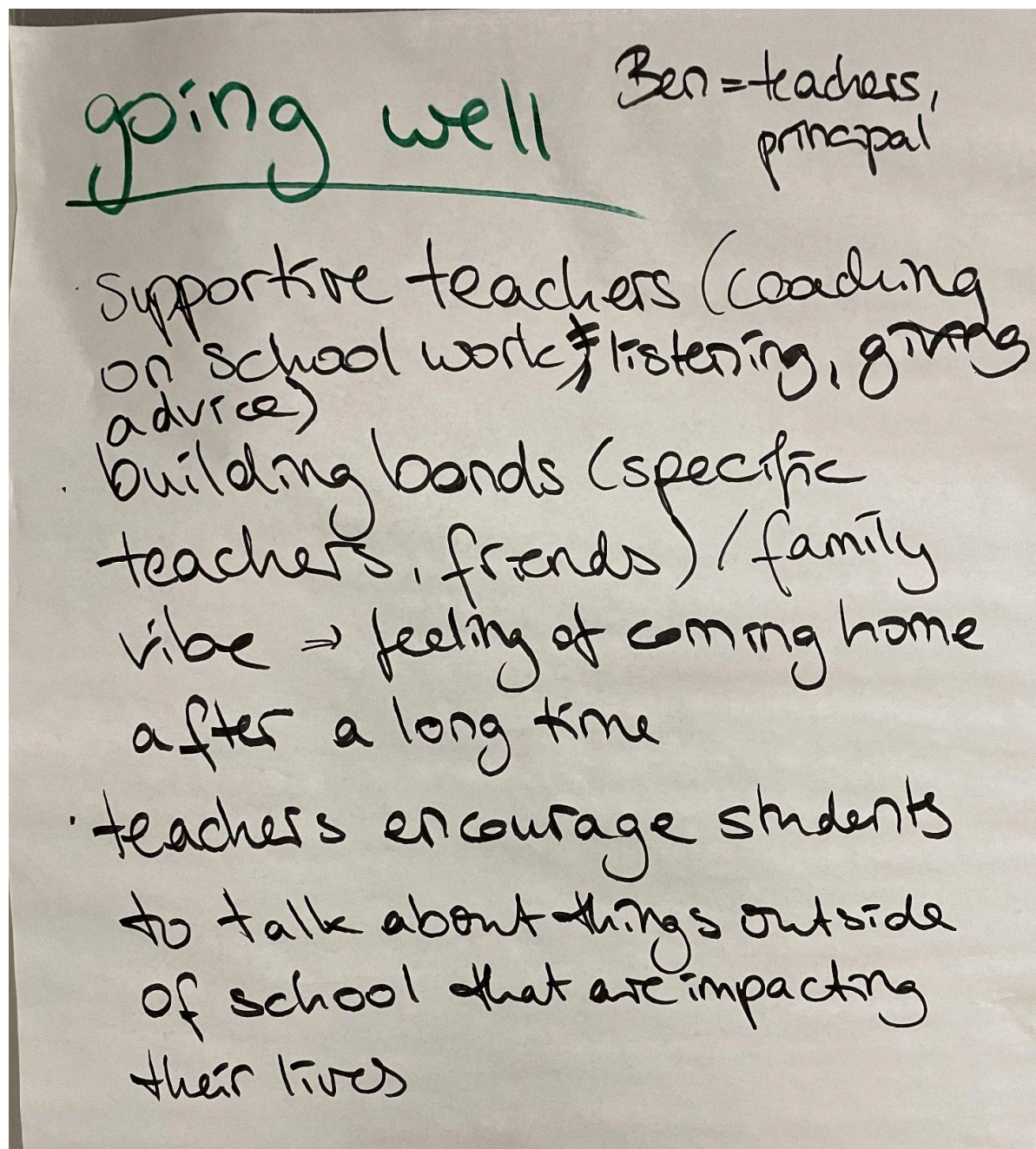
After completing the tour, participants responded to reflection prompts on postcards depicting the stops that most inspired them. They were able to keep the postcards as inspirational souvenirs to remind them of their ability to co-create UMBC.



Members of the Center for Democracy and Civic Life staff facilitated the session along with Brianna Malbon, C. Lai, Caleb Ruck, Faith Davis, James Bieri, Logan Lineburg, Mokeira Nyakoe, and Sonia Jarral. Michael Berardi '19, General Manager of OCA Mocha, was a guest speaker.



Earlier in the summer, the Center for Democracy and Civic Life hosted a virtual version of the Co-Create UMBC Tour for nearly 200 incoming Honors College and Scholars Program students. Click [here](#) for the tour video.



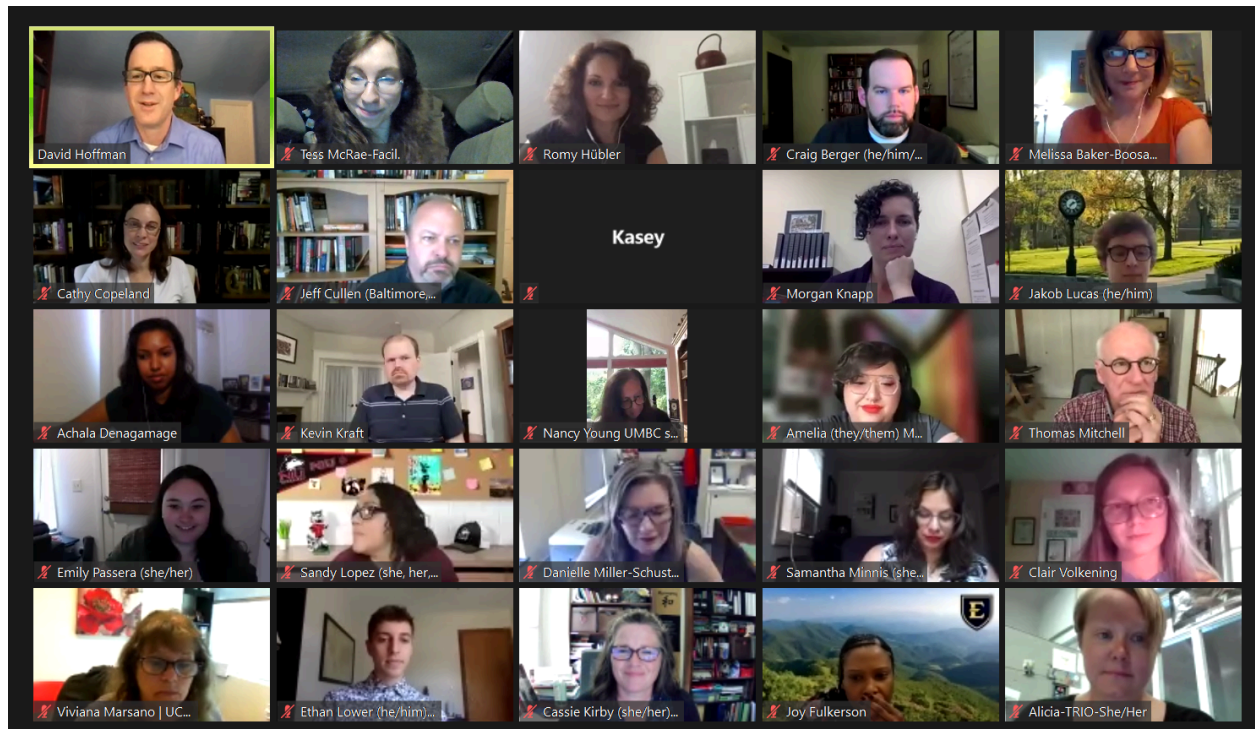
[Partnerships for Listening and Action by Communities and Educators \(PLACE\)](#) is a three-year, multi-campus collaborative initiative of Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. PLACE brings together a network of academic-community partnerships involving eleven colleges and universities in four communities, including UMBC in Baltimore. Each local project applies humanities methods to develop action plans grounded in community voice and enabled by academic-community partnership. The larger Collaboratory

distills best practices for such partnerships, models the role of engaged humanities in sustaining them, and uses networked collaboration to disseminate these practices and models across higher education.

The UMBC project team has been meeting this summer to create a multimedia community narrative focusing on Ben Franklin High School (BFHS) located in the South Baltimore neighborhood of Brooklyn/Curtis Bay. In the coming months, the group will develop an action plan to outline steps to address challenges experienced by BFHS students and staff.

Romy Hübler is a co-Principal Investigator and David Hoffman is a Consultant for the PLACE Project at UMBC. Other members of the UMBC project team are co-PI Felipe Filomeno (UMBC Department of Political Science and Global Studies Program); Consultants Alexis Stone '21, Emily Paul '21, Kendra Summers (community leader), Nic Nemec '21, Shannon Cheek '21, and Steve Bradley (UMBC Department of Visual Arts); and Community Fellows Ethan Gonzales (BFHS staff), Kevin Cuatianquis (BFHS student), Mekhiyah Spell (BFHS alum), and Stephanie Estep (BFHS alum).

## Tools for Students' Civic Empowerment Project



The Center for Democracy and Civic Life recently completed the Tools for Students' Civic Empowerment project, funded by a Multi-Institutional Innovation Grant from BTtoP. This collaborative effort supported faculty, staff, and student leaders at colleges and universities in aligning their courses, programs, organizations, and institutional practices with the Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (CLDE) Theory of Change. Over the past two years, members of the Center staff collaborated with Craig Berger (Community Engaged Learning, Kent State University) and Melissa Baker-Boosamra (Community Service Learning Center, Grand Valley State University) to develop tools focused on "civic courage," one of the characteristics of a thriving democracy outlined in the CLDE Theory of Change. The team led a dozen workshops in which more than 300 students, staff, and faculty participated; organized a joint Civic Empowerment Symposium for more than 50 participants from the three institutions; and hosted a three-hour workshop for about 70 participants at the 2021 CLDE conference.



Participants in the Civic Courage Workshops have reported that they have gained insights about the value of strategic thinking, the uses of foresight, and the importance of building a shared sense of purpose within teams. Participants in the Civic Empowerment Symposium and the CLDE conference session valued spending time with other people who are thinking about systemic inequities. They particularly appreciated the opportunity to be in spaces in which listening, reflecting, and storytelling were central, as it allowed them to connect meaningfully with other attendees across roles and institutions. They identified such opportunities as important to social and institutional change. Participants also developed a heightened understanding that anyone, regardless of title or role, can make civic contributions.

While the grant period has ended, the team will continue collaborating on the larger cultural and institutional project of supporting participants in higher education in contributing to a thriving democracy.

## BreakingGround Grant Applications Are Open

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life's [BreakingGround grant program](#) awards up to \$2,000 to UMBC faculty, staff, and students to implement educational and community-building courses, programs, and projects that foster civic agency: the capacity to initiate and make meaningful contributions to social change. Since its launch, BreakingGround has supported the development of more than 40 courses across the curriculum and more than 30 campus and community engagement projects.

[Click here for more information and the application link.](#)

The Center for Democracy and Civic Life is available to help applicants at all stages of their proposal writing process. The Center can help applicants with brainstorming (for those who are early in their planning processes) and refining proposal drafts. If you are interested in getting support, please email the Center at [civiclif@umbc.edu](mailto:civiclif@umbc.edu).

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## RETRIEVER TALES



The Center for Democracy and Civic Life will release new Retriever Tales episodes early in the 2021-2022 academic year. Keep an eye out for those episodes in future newsletters. In the meantime, you can listen to existing episodes [here](#).

What experiences come to your mind as you listen to these stories? Let us know at [civiclif@umbc.edu](mailto:civiclif@umbc.edu).

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# UPCOMING OPPORTUNITIES & PROGRAMS

## Changing Maryland: Legislative Session Preview (Virtual)

*Wednesday, September 15, 2021 · 5 - 7 p.m. · Webex*

Join a conversation with state leaders about how UMBC students, faculty, staff, and alumni can get involved in shaping legislation in Annapolis to address pressing issues. Part of this program will take place in small groups where participants will have a chance to interact with state leaders and each other.

This event is hosted by the UMBC's Center for Democracy and Civic Life in partnership with the Student Government Association and Graduate Student Association.

RSVP is required. Follow this [link](#) to RSVP.

Changing Maryland: A Conversation with State Leaders is part of a program series, with an additional gathering planned for the Spring 2022 semester. The series will prepare members of the UMBC community for active participation in the 2022 legislative session.

## Civic Courage Journaling Project Gathering (In Person)



*Friday, September 24, 2021 · 3:15 - 4:45 p.m. · Commons 318*

The Civic Courage Journaling Project creates opportunities for individual reflection and group conversations about personal experiences that have important, often hidden civic dimensions. Civic Courage, identified by the [Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement \(CLDE\) Theory of Change](#) as one of the capacities necessary for active and engaged citizenship, encompasses the ability to take risks, work through tension, be patient in the face of challenges, stay open and engaged, take responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of one's actions, face changes bravely, and act in accordance with one's core values and beliefs.

UMBC student, faculty, staff, and alumni journal bearers respond to prompts from the Center for Democracy and Civic Life by creating entries in their journals. We share the prompt via email and our [myUMBC page](#) during the week of each gathering. If you'd like to be involved with the Civic Courage Journaling Project, send us an email: [civiclif@umbc.edu](mailto:civiclif@umbc.edu).

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To contact the Center for Democracy and Civic Life, email [civiclif@umbc.edu](mailto:civiclif@umbc.edu).



# UMBC

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