Serving the Spectrum
Interdisciplinary Approaches to Treating Autism Spectrum Disorders

Also inside this issue:
• Extreme Research
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BSOS faculty and students go to great lengths to conduct innovative research. See story page 2.

BSOS alumni Francis Smith (left) and Tom Foster founded Diamondback Brewery in Baltimore. See story page 12.

Cover illustration by Chris Campbell
Dear Friends,

On campus, across our nation and around the world, this academic year has been a fascinating time of transition and change. Through engagement and activism—whether in the classroom, in the streets, or online—our students are increasingly involved in dialogue and in social movements. While I know that some of this activity is driven by anxiety and concern, it is extraordinarily rewarding as an educator to see so many of our passionate young scholars working in concert with our faculty to be the solution to the world’s great challenges.

In these pages, you will learn about just a few of the many activities and recent accomplishments here in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Maryland. We’re excited to highlight some of the “extreme research” conducted by faculty and students—these researchers are exploring the unknown, and going to surprising places. You’ll also learn about how BSOS is a campus leader in autism research; we’re investigating autism spectrum disorders from multidisciplinary angles. And you’ll meet some of our extremely talented BSOS entrepreneurs, who leverage their social sciences background in their successful business ventures.

I also want to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who donated to BSOS on UMD Giving Day, March 8. Overall, Maryland raised a record-high $2.2 million. Once again, you helped BSOS to secure the most gifts of any unit on campus during this 24-hour fundraising challenge. Our college brought home more than $14,000 in matching funds by winning hourly competitions and by meeting challenge goals. In all, the college received 611 gifts and $83,602.

This level of giving shows our students, faculty and staff that our alumni and donors are truly invested in their success. Thank you again for supporting the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences—on Giving Day, and every day.

We invite you to read more at bsos.umd.edu, and to keep up with us via social media. And we want to hear from you! Please send your updates and feedback to bsosalumni@umd.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gregory F. Ball
Dean and Professor, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences
University of Maryland
BSOS students and faculty cross boundaries to gain insights into our world
While a good deal of studying, learning, teaching and research happens inside classrooms, libraries and labs, students and faculty in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences are no strangers to adventure. Whether examining environmental phenomena in remote locations, or finding new ways to understand human behavior, the BSOS community engages in “extreme research.”
Understanding wildfires and the effects they have on ecosystems is critical work for researchers in the Department of Geographical Sciences and for their colleagues at NASA. The largest fires in the United States occur in remote and inaccessible regions.

While satellite and remote sensing technologies have expanded fire detection capabilities for researchers, the images and models they produce are only a small part of the big picture. To truly understand how fires affect the environment, researchers must link satellite observations to ecosystem processes through extensive field work, and must turn their observations into usable data.

Associate Professor Tatiana Loboda works extensively with satellites, conducting remote sensing research on boreal forests and tundra biomes—studying fires, biodiversity and climate change. In the summer of 2016, Loboda worked with GEOG graduate student Dong Chen and Michigan Tech researcher Liza Jenkins in Alaska’s tundra for 16 days to examine the aftermath of frequent fires in this sensitive ecosystem. They measured soil conditions, depth of permafrost and rates of vegetation regrowth within numerous burns in the Noatak National Preserve. This work is part of NASA’s Arctic-Boreal Vulnerability Experiment—ABoVE—for which Loboda is the principal investigator and a science team member.

“With the rapid warming of the Arctic, tundra ecosystems and their fire regimes are changing. On this trip, we collected data that will help us understand fire impacts of permafrost, soils and vegetation. Most of the fires we examined in Noatak are presumed to be started by lightning and are part of the natural ecosystem functioning in this region. However, we do see an increase in fire in other tundra regions where, historically, fires have been very rare. That is most likely caused by climate change,” Loboda said.

This wasn’t typical field work. Loboda, Chen and their team traveled well above the tree line, dropped by bush planes into remote tundra locations with no roads. They rafted down the Noatak River for more than 100 miles and bush-whacked over 35 miles of wilderness, checking in with a safety officer once every 24 hours via satellite phone.

The team moved quickly, studying as many burn scars (areas affected by fires) as they could, doing their sampling and analyses as efficiently as possible. Then, with samples and data in hand, they began the important work of comparing what they saw on the ground with what the satellite technology is showing from space.

“It’s almost like we were gathering information from a parallel universe; the views are so different on the ground,” Loboda said. “We now are working to link the satellite information and the field data into updated models. We can extrapolate what we learned from limited areas to get a broader sense of larger masses of land. We hope to be able to use these models to replicate and predict when and where fires occur and how they will change the area in the future.”
During WWII, a military aircraft carrying U.S. service members crashed in the Eastern Alps near Linz, Austria. The crew members were never identified. Now, thanks to an innovative summer program in the Department of Anthropology, UMD students will play an important role in providing long-awaited answers to the descendants of these fallen soldiers.

In July, “Methods in Archaeology: Forensic Aviation Archaeology” will be led by Marilyn London, a forensic anthropologist. London is an expert in analyzing and documenting human skeletal remains, and has responded to several mass disasters—including the United Airlines Flight 93 crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. Program Co-Director Adam Fracchia, Ph.D. ’14, is an anthropologist and archaeologist who has taught courses and directed field schools for the university since 2008.

London created this new summer program at the request of a colleague at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), which finds, recovers and identifies the remains of U.S. service members missing-in-action from all the wars of the 20th century. According to DPAA, 83,000 Americans remain missing from past conflicts, more than 70,000 of whom were from WWII.

The summer program will mark the first strategic partnership between a university and the DPAA to assist in recovering remains. Students accepted into the program will participate in an archaeological field school where they will painstakingly map, document, excavate and collect artifacts at the crash site in Austria.

Ultimately, the artifacts recovered will be sent to a DPAA laboratory to be examined by a group of specialists who will attempt to make an identification and return the remains to the families of the service members. The UMD group will be working alongside students and faculty from the University of Vienna, and will also go on excursions to learn more about the history of the period and the region. The group will visit local archaeological sites, landmarks, museums and the Mauthausen-Gusen WWII concentration camp. The program will continue in the summer of 2018.
Playing an online game might seem like a frivolous—and solitary—pursuit. But UMD researchers are using a virtual world to study how human behavior is influenced by identity and institutions.

Johanna Birnir, an associate professor in the Department of Government and Politics, is working with David M. Waguespack of the Robert H. Smith School of Business to assemble empirical data from a massive multi-player online role-playing game called EVE Online, which was developed in 2003 by a team in Iceland.

EVE takes players into an interstellar backdrop where individuals mine resources, barter and trade, compete over territory, and wage battles. More than 6.5 million players from 200 nations have played the game, and its current user base stands at about 500,000 individuals.

The wealth of data that this virtual world offers the research team is unprecedented: virtual worlds maintain a perfect record of all in-game activity. As all player information is recorded, the researchers can observe a player’s entrance and exit from groups, evolution of behavior over time, and degree of cooperation and conflict.

Three components of the competitive logic of EVE make it a good analog for real-world behavior. First, the environment is market-based, which requires resources to be mobilized. Second, the game pivots off collective action. Third, the environment offers a realistic approximation of risk.

In 2015, Birnir and Waguespack received a National Science Foundation Advance grant from BSOS to set up the EVE data collection. They are currently finishing two papers that showcase this work.

The first paper, co-written with GVPT graduate student Eric Dunford, seeks to determine whether cross-national cultural norms influence decisions about the decentralization of authority within new firms. In other words—do cultural norms related to trust in a firm founder’s home country influence the way she sets up her company wherever she sets up her company?

“Current findings suggest that founders residing in nations with more predictable and transparent institutions delegate more authority within the firms they create,” Birnir said.

The second paper examines how sex and gender influence self-directed behavior. The researchers are employing data from EVE to observe difference in risk-seeking behavior across both sex and gender. They are able to do so because EVE has a unique feature wherein players can gender-switch at will.

“When either males or females play characters of the opposite gender, the effects of norms can be isolated from the effects of biology on behavior,” Birnir said. “Preliminary findings suggest both men and women adhere more closely to typical gender norms when playing characters of the opposite sex than when playing characters congruent with their sex.”
MD researchers are looking to the sky to understand how villages in Belize sustainably manage shared natural resources using sometimes controversial “slash-and-burn” agricultural practices. Assistant Professor of Anthropology Sean Downey and Jacob Moschler, an engineer with UMD’s Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Test Site, used a pair of FireFLY 6 drones to scan 10,000 acres in and around the Q’eqchi’ Maya village of Crique Sarco in Belize’s Toledo District. Mounted Micasense Red Edge multispectral cameras captured a total of 31,000 images in five discrete wavelengths.

It was the second aerial scan of the region in less than 12 months, and the first time a UAS Test Site operator has flown using only instrumentation and onboard cameras. With clearance from the Belize Department of Civil Aviation, Moschler scanned the jungle more than four miles away from a makeshift ground control station from an altitude of 1,500 feet. Those same cameras, along with first-person view goggles, also allowed community members to see live aerial images of their village and community forests for the first time.

“Ultimately, this project is about understanding how communities like these have learned over time to sustainably manage their local forests and natural resources,” said Downey, who received a $500,000 grant through the National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development Program in 2015 for this five-year project. “Not only do we need local help to safely conduct this kind of research, but we need input on the kinds of information to collect and the right questions to ask. Some community members assisted with ground operations, while others with extensive knowledge of local forests are helping to collect information that will eventually be used to cross-check the aerial imagery.”

Downey and his research team will spend the next several months stitching the recent images together into landscape-scale maps they will use to analyze social and ecological dynamics related to swidden—also known as slash-and-burn—agriculture.

Q’eqchi’ Maya farmers commonly cut a swath of forest with axes and machetes before burning the vegetation to release nutrients in the soil. After several years of cultivating corn and root crops, native plants are allowed to regrow to restore fertility. The result is a dynamic patchwork of fallow and burgeoning plots that the researchers expect to harbor unexpectedly high levels of biodiversity.

The team will also use surveys, interviews and other ethnographic methods, as well as those used in experimental behavioral economics, to understand how social dynamics relate to the observed swidden pattern.

A third round of mapping is slated for spring 2018, and Moschler hopes to make that operation fully autonomous—from the first takeoff of the day to the final landing. He and UMD systems engineer John S. Baras will spend the next year working to develop optimized scan patterns to make that goal a reality.
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In a crowded setting, it would be easy to overlook senior cell biology major James Williams—he’s sitting on the sidelines, observing quietly, and not drawing attention to himself.

“Group work in class is not so much a problem,” Williams explained. “If I’m talking with someone and there’s a purpose to our conversation and we’re just trying to communicate information, I don’t really have a problem with that. But starting a conversation and just thinking of something to say is the hardest part for me.”

As a student on the autism spectrum, Williams is often daunted by the social component of campus life. Difficulty with social interactions is one of the most common symptoms associated with autism spectrum disorders.
In the fall of 2015, the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences (HESP) launched a new program designed to help make life easier for Terps like Williams: the Social Interaction Group Network for Students with Autism, or SIGNA. It was created by Kathy Dow-Burger, an associate clinical professor in HESP and the associate director of the University of Maryland Autism Research Consortium.

“We want to give our students a chance to connect, because they’re pretty amazing once you get to know them,” Dow-Burger said. “It’s not that they don’t want to make friends, it’s just that they often don’t know how.”

In SIGNA, students develop communication skills through several “tiers.” This involves group sessions that bring together other students on the spectrum, as well as graduate and undergraduate hearing and speech student coaches who receive credit for their participation. SIGNA students also work one-on-one with a HESP graduate student and are paired up with an undergraduate student who serves as a peer mentor.

HESP senior Jessica Nolasco has been meeting with Williams weekly since the beginning of February as a peer mentor. The two catch up over coffee or play games at Board and Brew on Baltimore Avenue.

“A lot of these students want to become more social,” said Nolasco, who also has a younger sister on the spectrum. “They want to be involved in these different environments, but they need more tools to be able to do it in a way where they feel more comfortable. So being able to provide that for someone is very redeeming.”

For Williams, meeting with Nolasco every week gives him a chance to practice some of the skills and strategies he’s been learning through SIGNA. So far, he said, it seems to be helping.

Bridging the Gap

In its first year, SIGNA served 10 UMD students out of approximately 25 in the student body who self-reported as having an autism spectrum disorder. Dow-Burger said it’s difficult to estimate the total number of UMD students on the spectrum, but that the total must be significantly higher than 25.

After working with UMD students on the spectrum, as well as their families, Dow-Burger and colleagues realized they needed to reach students sooner—before their arrival on campus—to help ease the transition to life at a university.

Dow-Burger discovered the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills—PEERS®—originally developed by a UCLA researcher to help teenagers and young adults on the autism spectrum improve their social and communication skills. She tailored the program to specifically work with area high school students on the spectrum who are planning to attend a two- or four-year college. The first PEERS® cohort at UMD started in the fall of 2016.

Seventeen-year-old Elie, who asked that his last name be withheld, was accepted into the UMD Scholars program for the fall of 2017, and is currently enrolled in PEERS® at the university. An aspiring meteorologist, he isn’t one to shy away from conversation, but struggles with finding the right context.

“With having autism, I’ll sometimes say things that normal people would find to be offensive; sometimes, I might start talking about something personal when I really shouldn’t be talking about that when I first meet someone,” Elie said. “I want to be more social, and I want other people to think better of me. I don’t want to say things that might give people negative impressions of me.”

Dow-Burger, bottom left, meets with PEERS® mentors.
After a student on the autism spectrum turns 18, his or her family experiences what's known as the service cliff: when tax-payer funded programs are no longer available.

“That’s the scariest thing for me,” said Elie’s mother, who did not want to be named. “If he fails in high school or does poorly, there are people to help pick him up. But if he does poorly in college for whatever reason, who’s there to help pick him up?”

Both Elie and his mother were happy to learn of the SIGNA program that can help him make connections on campus and reinforce the social skills he’s learning through PEERS®. Dow-Burger hopes both the SIGNA and PEERS® programs can grow to give more students like Elie the tools and confidence to be successful at a university like Maryland.

“Without these support systems, I think we could lose a lot of very smart students,” Dow-Burger said. “We’re not valuing their intellect. We’re missing out on what they can contribute to the university and to society.”

Pinpointing the Pathways

As HESP faculty are working to help students with autism spectrum disorders overcome difficulties with social interactions, researchers in the Department of Psychology are seeking to discover what is happening in the brain to account for those difficulties.

Assistant Professor Elizabeth Redcay received a $2.6 million grant from the National Institutes of Mental Health to investigate whether certain brain pathways in children with autism spectrum disorders make social interaction more difficult than for typically developing children. Redcay and her team will use an innovative, interactive approach to examine how brain circuits change during social interactions in real-time while children are undergoing a functional MRI scan.

Over the next five years, both typically developing children and children with autism spectrum disorders between the ages of 7 and 14 will visit UMD to complete activities and games in the Developmental Social Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, and then to undergo a brain scan at the Maryland Neuroimaging Center.

Researchers will spend a significant amount of time prior to the scans getting to know the children and making them comfortable with the process by having them practice lying still inside a mock scanner decorated to resemble a spaceship. Once inside the real machine, children will be able to hear and see an experimenter through an image projected onto a mirror. As the experimenter and child engage in back-and-forth conversation and go through various scenarios, researchers will be watching for changes in various areas of the brain.

Gaining a better understanding of the systems underlying social interaction could lead to the development of new strategies to help children on the autism spectrum overcome social challenges, which may improve other aspects of their lives.

“The amount that a child shares with others and that motivation to engage with others in social settings is important to forming friendships and close personal relationships; but it’s much more than that, too,” Redcay said. “It’s directly related to how many words a child learns, and how good they are at understanding people even years later. That fundamental ability of being able to engage in social interactions successfully is really important early in development in autism, and continues to be important throughout the life span.”

The University of Maryland Autism Research Consortium (UMARC) is an interdisciplinary group of researchers in the Departments of Hearing and Speech Sciences, Psychology, Human Development, Linguistics, Kinesiology, and Special Education. UMARC advances the understanding of autism spectrum disorders in children and adults, and contributes to the development of effective treatments and interventions.

Through its Community-wide Learning about Autism Speaker Series (CLASS), UMARC helps members of the local community to address challenges faced by individuals with autism and their families. Lectures have covered financial planning for children with special needs, current brain research, and ways parents can foster their children’s language development. Each CLASS session features informative speakers and faculty who take the time to answer questions during audience-led discussions. Learn more at autism.umd.edu.
From the innovative company Javazen—which sells a hybrid beverage combining the energy of coffee with the health benefits of tea—to the national nonprofit Food Recovery Network, which drastically reduces food waste, numerous BSOS students and alumni are engaged in entrepreneurship.

While they develop and rely on business sense in the creation and operation of their ventures, BSOS Terps find interesting ways to apply their social sciences education to their startups.
In a small house near campus, Tom Foster, ECON ’13, and Francis Smith, ECON/Mechanical Engineering ’14, spent free time during their senior year brewing tiny batches of beer and experimenting with signature recipes. Just a few years later, the friends founded the Diamondback Brewing Company.

With their partners, Foster and Smith have transformed a garage-based operation into a rapidly expanding regional brand. Diamondback Brewing Company now owns a multi-million dollar facility and tasting room in Baltimore’s Locust Point neighborhood. That space serves as both the headquarters for the brewery and the manufacturing hub for a distribution network that spans every county in Maryland.

Foster and Smith met in high school, reconnected at Maryland and later discovered their passion for craft beers when Smith received a home-brewing kit on his 21st birthday. Moving on from a “terrible” first effort of an IPA, the duo continued to use their basic equipment and stovetop to brew small batches of beer for friends and family. They began gathering feedback, experimenting with techniques and building a portfolio of recipes.

Meanwhile, Foster was completing his degree in economics—a field he credits with providing a multi-dimensional foundation for his growth as an entrepreneur and as an executive.

“At its core, economics is a study of cause and effect. That couldn’t be more applicable in my current role, where I have so many responsibilities. The fundamental skills I developed in the classroom help me critically analyze each decision I make,” Foster said.

As Foster approached graduation, the partners began to research the local craft beer industry—tracking the development of relevant legislation and licensure requirements. Recognizing a clear opportunity in a burgeoning field, Foster and Smith joined with another high school friend, Colin Marshall, and launched their careers as entrepreneurs and professional brewers.

“In the beginning, we never imagined it would grow into a career. It was just a pipe dream; but the difference between having a pipe dream and achieving it is persistence,” Foster said. “Tons of people will tell you that the odds are against you. It’s all about blocking out that negativity and focusing on your goals.”

Foster and his partners elected to “contract brew” their beer for the first two years of operation, effectively leasing capacity from a large brewing facility with the ability to create, package and distribute Diamondback beers.

While the brewing was done elsewhere, Foster and his team were responsible for making sales, promoting the brand, and building the company toward their ultimate goal of opening a new facility. Despite the growing popularity of their products, Foster and his partners struggled to find support for their ambitious project.

“We didn’t have the financial backing that many large brewing outfits do. We were young guys with no collateral. I was looking for pocket change to back our loans and make payments on time,” Foster said.

Between Smith’s experience with construction project management, Foster’s experience in corporate real estate, and their collective brewing prowess, they managed to gather the resources and backing needed to launch the construction of their headquarters.

In November of 2016, Foster and his partners officially opened the Diamondback Brewing Company tasting room and brewing facility in Locust Point, Baltimore. The accomplishment represents a major milestone for the Terp entrepreneurs and their company. But Foster said success has been especially sweet because of the human factors.

“The brewery, and beer in general, is a great way to bring people together,” Foster said. “In college, it brought our friends together, and it’s the same today for the larger community surrounding our brewery.”
Mackenzie Burnett, GVPT/International Relations ’15, was named to Forbes’ “30 Under 30: Enterprise Technology” list for 2017—an index of the nation’s young innovators and change-makers. She was recognized along with fellow Terp Dan Gillespie for cofounding Redspread, a collaborative software development tool.

Redspread was acquired by CoreOS in October of 2016; Burnett now is head of product at the company, which is based in San Francisco. She also serves as executive director of Interact ATX, a nonprofit that helps connect young technologists.

While Burnett has succeeded in business just a short time after graduating from UMD, her entrepreneurial path is a natural extension of her student experience. Burnett came to Maryland as a Banneker Key scholar and quickly gravitated toward the technology startup scene on campus.

She became involved in the development of Startup Shell, UMD’s student-run co-working space and startup incubator, and connected with students from across campus with diverse talents and interests—all passionate about technology and entrepreneurship.

"After getting involved in the early days of Startup Shell, it seemed obvious that being an entrepreneur was not only a possible path, but a probable path for me," Burnett said.

Burnett served as Startup Shell’s executive director, and also co-founded Bitcamp—UMD’s national hackathon. While doing so, she helped bring visibility, funding and institutional support to the UMD entrepreneurial community.

Ken Ulman, GVPT ’97, the university’s chief strategy officer for economic development and former Howard County executive, credits Burnett with introducing him to the scope of the entrepreneurial talent and activity at their alma mater.

“She embodies someone who has all the skills needed to build a successful tech company," Ulman said. “The most impressive thing about Mackenzie is her commitment to the larger community. She brings people together around challenging projects. She’s an extraordinary influencer and organizer, and has a tremendous ability to execute.”

Burnett believes her dual degree in government and politics and international relations gave her valuable perspectives through which she could approach the entrepreneurial community.

“A big part of entrepreneurship is quickly understanding a market, or a system of people," Burnett said. “The courses I took in BSOS taught me how to think critically about political systems, which are essentially systems of power and people, and I applied that to how I approached the technology startup ecosystem.”

Burnett said she hopes to see fellow Terps continue to foster fearless ideas, especially in the tech field.

“You have to create the opportunities you want to pursue, instead of waiting for them to come along. Be bold. College students are capable of incredible things, if they’re given the space to accomplish them," Burnett said. “I’m proud that our work with Bitcamp and Startup Shell inspired new generations of Terps to found initiatives like Technica, which is now the largest all-female hackathon in the world.”

**“BE BOLD. COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE CAPABLE OF INCREDIBLE THINGS, IF THEY’RE GIVEN THE SPACE TO ACCOMPLISH THEM.”**
Dr. Oscar Barbarin, chair of the Department of African American Studies, has been involved in research on early childhood programs, with a specific emphasis on reductions in achievement gaps and on the socio-emotional adjustment of African-American boys.

He recently published findings from these efforts, in the form of a policy brief, “Eliminate Suspensions and Expulsions of Young Children through Training for Child Care Staff and Early Childhood Teachers.” The brief was co-written with Jennifer Hoffman of the Prince George’s Child Resource Center.

Through direct observations of multiple preschool classrooms across the country, Barbarin has found a systemic pattern of disparate discipline which has adversely affected African-American boys, and has often led to their exclusion from early childhood programming.

Disparate discipline is evidenced in the disproportionately high rates of suspensions and expulsions of African-American boys from early childhood classrooms.

“Despite the fact that this issue came to light as early as 2005, little progress has been made in moderating the adverse impact these disciplinary actions have on African-American boys,” Barbarin said.

Across the country, state legislatures are considering an outright ban on suspensions and expulsions. In a recent policy briefing, Barbarin said such legislation deserves support.

“However, if such a ban is to be an effective public policy, it must be associated with efforts to support teachers and parents as boys gain the ability to self-regulate their behavior,” Barbarin said.

Williams Center Fostering Timely Discussions

With support from the college and from the Department of African American Studies, the Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. Center for Education, Justice and Ethics launched in 2015 and has hosted and participated in a number of timely community dialogues.

The Williams Center researches, develops solutions for and provides a forum for discussing the prevailing issues facing underserved, minority communities. It especially focuses on: educational preparedness and bridging the achievement gap; justice and fairness in social, civic, economic, jurisprudential and media matters; and ethical guideposts for building integrity and community values.

The center is based in Prince George’s County, Maryland, close to campus. It was founded by the Honorable Judge Alexander Williams, Jr., who served for nearly 20 years as a federal judge on the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland in Greenbelt.

In October, the Center joined with the University of Baltimore School of Law and the Maryland State Bar Association to present a symposium on judicial elections in Maryland. Attendees heard perspectives from legal scholars and prominent members of the bench, bar and legislature on the controversial topic of contested judicial elections.

In January, Judge Williams delivered a keynote address at the City of College Park’s annual tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Ezekiel’s Wheel Ties African Spiritual Traditions to Christianity

At the site of a plantation where abolitionist Frederick Douglass once lived, UMD archaeologists uncovered striking evidence of how African and Christian religious beliefs blended and merged in the 19th century. The team dug up an intact set of objects that they interpret as religious symbols—traditional ones from Africa, but mixed with what they believe to be a Biblical image: a representation of Ezekiel’s Wheel.

“No one has found this combination before. It may give us a snapshot of the blending of religious symbols of a tenant farmer after 1865,” said Professor Mark P. Leone, who led the team. “Christianity had not erased traditional African spirit practices; it had merged with them to form a potent blend that still thrives today.”

From the late 18th century, Methodist Episcopal, and later African Methodist Episcopal preachers successfully ranged Maryland’s Eastern Shore carrying the Christian message, Leone explains. They converted African Americans to Christianity, in part, by giving new meaning to traditional symbols. A powerful West Central African spiritual symbol—the cosmogram, a circle with an X inside—may have fused with the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel’s blazing chariot wheel. Uniquely, the discovered array contains both.

“We call this the ‘emergent wheel’ because it shows the growing power of Christian imagery alongside the African,” Leone says. “It shows us a moment in time when these symbols literally lived side-by-side.”

This is the latest archaeological find from a decade-long excavation at Wye House, the site of a former plantation near Easton, Md. Douglass spent two years there as a child and wrote extensively about his experiences and observations. The new discovery helps flesh out these vivid descriptions of African-American life.

Two of Leone’s graduate students—Benjamin A. Skolnik and Elizabeth Pruitt—made the discovery and excavated the deposit. They found it intact just below the surface where a tenant farmer’s home once stood, and dated it to after 1865.

Examining the Well-Being of ‘DACAmented’ Immigrants

Assistant Professor of Anthropology Christina Getrich is leading research on the health and well-being of immigrants in Maryland who are affected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy.

DACA was established by the Obama administration in 2012 and has allowed about 750,000 undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as minors to receive a renewable, two-year period of deferred action from deportation, as well as eligibility for a work permit. While DACA recipients have reaped benefits from the program, they face exclusions in the realm of health care, particularly insurance exclusions. They are also likely to suffer from the health effects of growing up undocumented, including anxiety and depression.

Through immigrant interviews and surveys facilitated by graduate and undergraduate researchers, Getrich’s project investigates how receiving DACA has influenced recipients’ access to health care; whether DACA has improved recipients’ mental health and/or other chronic conditions; and how DACA has affected recipients’ overall well-being and sense of belonging in the United States.

This project is uniquely focused on health—previous external projects, Getrich said, focus more on gains in education and employment. The team has found that DACA recipients have to work hard for what health benefits they have. Even so, they are extremely grateful for the opportunities afforded by DACA status. Read more at go.umd.edu/dacamented.
As advancing technology allows people to email, shop and pay bills on smartphones, are users setting themselves up as easy targets for cybercrime attacks?

Researchers from the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice and the Fraunhofer Center for Experimental Software Engineering at UMD are working to determine which factors make smartphone users most vulnerable to cybercrime. The team was awarded a $500,000, two-year grant from the National Science Foundation to support scientific activity on this project.

“In the past, the ‘bad guys’ focused on targeting computer users because desktop and laptop computers were so prevalent,” said David Maimon, an associate professor of criminology and criminal justice, and one of the project’s Principal Investigators. “Nowadays, everybody has a smartphone, and so it seems the bad guys have found a new playground for their malicious activities.”

According to Maimon, people open themselves up to cyberattacks through their phones in four distinct ways: by visiting suspicious websites; by downloading applications that contain malicious software; by opening email attachments and by clicking on links sent through text messages from unknown senders; and by utilizing unsecure, public Wi-Fi networks to access personal information, such as a bank account.

To give the team better insight into common smartphone behaviors, research scientist Lucas Layman and his colleagues from the Fraunhofer Center developed an application that collects data from smartphone users who volunteer to participate in a study. The application will allow researchers to tell when, where and how often these smartphone users talk, text, email, listen to music, surf the internet and more. It also will provide information on what types of wireless networks users are accessing, how secure those connections are, and where they are being made.

After the smartphone data is collected, Maimon will pair the information with questionnaires completed by participants about their personal characteristics, as well as records from the U.S. Census Bureau and neighborhood maps provided by Google Street View. Ultimately, the researchers aim to make it safer for people to fully utilize their smartphones.

Professor Denise Gottfredson accepted the 2016 Vollmer Award from the American Society of Criminology at the organization’s annual meeting in New Orleans in November. This award honors individuals whose scholarship has made outstanding contributions to justice or the treatment/prevention of criminal and delinquent behavior.

Professor Brian D. Johnson was appointed as co-editor of Criminology, the flagship journal of the American Society of Criminology.

Professor and Chair James Lynch assumed the presidency of the American Society of Criminology, the principal professional association for criminologists.

Professor and Associate Chair Jean McGloin assumed the editorship of the Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency.

In October, Distinguished University Professor Lawrence W. Sherman will become the first criminologist to win Yale University’s Wilbur Cross Medal, the institution’s highest graduate school honor. The award will be conferred in October in a special ceremony at Yale’s campus in New Haven, Conn. In June of 2016, Sherman was appointed to a Swedish Knighthood by King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden in recognition for Sherman’s services to Sweden in helping to establish and lead the internationally renowned Stockholm Prize in Criminology, now in its eleventh year. Sherman was appointed to the Royal Order of the Polar Star as a commander.

“Nowadays, everybody has a smartphone, and so it seems the bad guys have found a new playground for their malicious activities.”
Alumna Brings Practical Perspective to the Housing Market

For Nela Richardson, ECON Ph.D. ’05, chief economist at online real estate brokerage firm Redfin, economics represents much more than just a profession. It’s a way of thinking about and viewing the world.

“It’s like the closet organizer of the social sciences,” Richardson said. “There’s a place for everything.”

In December, Richardson returned to her alma mater to speak to graduates at the BSOS winter commencement ceremony.

“I remember sitting in that seat and feeling really positive when I was graduating because the world was so open and new,” Richardson said. “But in the time since I’ve graduated, the world has changed quite a bit.”

Richardson’s career has afforded her a front-row seat to the roller coaster ride that is the national economy. She took her first job at mortgage giant Freddie Mac right as the housing market was about to hit its peak. In the aftermath of the crash, Richardson helped to craft policy and regulations intended to keep such a scenario from ever playing out again in the future.

Richardson has also worked at Bloomberg, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission and Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies. Now at Redfin, she leads a team of data scientists and the company’s housing research program. She also regularly provides insight for media outlets such as The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, CNBC and CNN.

“Everybody is really an economist by paying their bills, pumping their gas,” Richardson said. “But everybody’s view is different. Being able to relate what they’re seeing to a bigger picture is what I really love to do.”

Richardson lives in Washington, D.C., is married to a fellow economist and has two sons—whom she refers to as her “domestic policy team.”

Remembering Professor Thomas Schelling

Distinguished University Professor Thomas Schelling, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and a longtime faculty member in the Department of Economics and in the School of Public Policy, passed away on December 13, 2016 at the age of 95.

After serving for more than 20 years at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Schelling joined the University of Maryland community in 1990.

Fifteen years later, he won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences “for having enhanced our understanding of conflict and cooperation through game-theory analysis.” His theories had a tremendous impact on national and international policy, especially on American responses to the Cold War.

Schelling was the author of numerous groundbreaking works on economics and public policy; through these works, his teaching and influence extended beyond his students to readers around the world.

“Hiring Tom Schelling was one of the best things our department has ever done. He was not only a remarkable economist, but also a superb colleague and a great man,” said Distinguished University Professor Maureen Cropper, chair of the Department of Economics.
The Threat of Urban Expansion

A team of researchers from institutions around the world, including the University of Maryland, reveal that expanding urban areas will swallow up approximately 186,000 square miles of fertile cropland by the year 2030, adding pressure to an already strained global food system.

Researchers estimate the area of land that stands to be lost through urbanization—nearly twice the size of Florida—could produce enough food to provide 300 million people with 2,500 calories a day for an entire year.

Associate Professor Giovanni Baiocchi from the Department of Geographical Sciences contributed to the study, which was led by the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change located in Berlin.

“We are witnessing an unprecedented transition from predominantly rural to urban lifestyles,” Baiocchi said. “Rapid and unplanned urban growth is further threatening sustainable development. As rapidly urbanizing regions of the Global South are increasing their dependence on food imports, millions of people in poverty are becoming more vulnerable to world food market volatility, potentially exacerbating the problem of global income inequality.”

Results from the study were published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.* According to the research, global urbanization will take place on agricultural land that is almost twice as fertile as the world average, and the effects will be particularly severe in parts of Asia and Africa.

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Tracking the Final Wilderness Frontiers

Researchers from the Department of Geographical Sciences use satellite imagery to demonstrate that forest wildlands—forests least affected by human activity—are steadily shrinking, and are finding ways to help preserve these landscapes that are critically important to the health of the planet.

Led by Associate Research Professor Peter Potapov, the research team used Landsat satellite images from 2000 and 2013 to map intact forest landscapes (IFL) around the globe. Researchers defined IFLs as areas of forest and associated naturally treeless ecosystems spanning a minimum of 200 square miles with no remotely detected signs of human activity. They found that these forest wildlands decreased globally by 7.2% during this time period—amounting to nearly 355,000 square miles lost—primarily due to industrial logging, agricultural expansion, fire and mining/resource extraction. Their work was featured in a January issue of *Science Advances.*

“Forest wildlands have an extremely high conservation value, and are irreplaceable due to the range of ecosystem services they provide, such as harboring biological diversity, stabilizing carbon storage and regulating water flow,” Potapov said. “Furthermore, the size of the wildland matters: the larger the size, the higher the conservation value. That’s why we need to be concerned about losing any portion of these precious forest landscapes.”

Not only did researchers discover an overall reduction in IFLs worldwide, they found that the rate of reduction is increasing. The loss of tropical forest wildland tripled between 2011 and 2013 when compared to the period between 2001 and 2003.

During their analysis, researchers discovered that areas of forest wildland designated as legally protected areas were less likely to suffer a reduction in size. They advocate for the adoption of more national and international policies to preserve IFLs and their abundant contributions to the environment.
Dr. Frances Lee of the Department of Government and Politics was named a Distinguished Scholar-Teacher, a prestigious university-level award that recognizes select senior faculty members who go above and beyond in their work as educators.

Lee was honored at a ceremony in September and received a $5,000 honorarium to support her teaching and research.

“This is a wonderful award, in that it recognizes faculty for their achievement on both dimensions of what it means to be a good professor at a research university like the University of Maryland,” Lee said.

As part of the award, Lee delivered a lecture in September in McKeldin Library on her new book, *Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign* (University of Chicago Press). The timely work offers controversial new perspectives on the rise of congressional party conflict, showing how the shift in competitive circumstances has had a profound impact on how Democrats and Republicans interact. Lee has been a sought-after media expert in recent months, offering insights on the role and function of Congress in a tumultuous political climate.

In the fall of 2016, the Department of Government and Politics launched the International Relations Concentration, a formal course of study encompassing the foundations of international relations and comparative politics. The concentration can enhance a number of undergraduate majors.

“We have an extraordinary diversity of intellectual firepower in the department,” said Professor Irwin Morris, chair of the department. “This concentration allows students to leverage it to develop academically and professionally, then market their experience to employers and graduate programs more effectively.”

Students enrolled in the concentration take a series of core courses; choose five upper-level courses in international relations or comparative politics; complete at least five elective courses offered through other departments; and fulfill at least an intermediate foreign language requirement.

“The interdisciplinary and diverse curriculum ensures that students gain the scientific, cultural and communication skills necessary to succeed in their field,” said Associate Professor Scott Kastner, the department’s director of undergraduate studies. “The tendency of most international studies programs is to cater to generalists. We’re providing opportunities for students to go far deeper and to specialize in the field of international relations.”

The concentration is further supported by a number of campus partnerships that offer students a broad spectrum of academic and professional experiences. These programs, which include the Minor in International Development and Conflict Management, the Global Terrorism Minor, and the Global Fellows Program, make students more attractive to future employers or graduate schools.

“These are spectacular resume- and skill-building opportunities,” said Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education Katherine Russell. “Combined with this new concentration, they help our students compete for selective fellowships, grants, internships and scholarships around the world.”
It’s Not Your Ears, it’s Your Brain

“Could you repeat that?” The reason you may have to say something twice when talking to older family members at a gathering may not be because of their hearing. An interdisciplinary team of university researchers has determined that something is going on in the brains of typical older adults that causes them to struggle to follow speech amidst background noise, even when their hearing would be considered normal on a clinical assessment.

In a study published by the Journal of Neurophysiology, researchers found that adults aged 61–73 with normal hearing scored significantly worse on speech understanding in noisy environments than adults aged 18–30 with normal hearing. The researchers—Samira Anderson, an assistant professor in the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences (HESP), Jonathan Z. Simon, a professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and in the Department of Biology, and former HESP post-doc Alessandro Presacco—are all associated with UMD’s Brain and Behavior Initiative.

The study is part of ongoing research into the so-called cocktail party problem, or the brain’s ability to focus on and process a particular stream of speech in the middle of a noisy environment. This research brings together the fields of hearing and speech science, neuroscience and cognitive science, electrical engineering, biology, and systems science.

“The main message is that the older adults in our study have normal hearing as measured on an audiogram, yet they have difficulty understanding speech in noise because the timing aspects of the speech signal are not being accurately encoded,” Anderson said. “Because they have normal hearing, talking louder does not help. So if someone is having trouble understanding you in a noisy restaurant or in a crowded room, it is most important to speak clearly at a normal or slightly slower than normal rate. Your older loved ones will appreciate it!”

Studying the Socioeconomic Gap in Childhood Language Comprehension

Research led by Hearing and Speech Sciences Assistant Professor Yi Ting Huang tests a new theory about how a child’s socioeconomic status (SES) can impact his or her ability to learn and comprehend language early on in life.

Prior studies have found systematic relationships between how much caregivers talk to children and what they learn. On average, children from higher-SES families hear more language than their lower-SES peers, and it is commonly assumed that this provides a significant barrier to language learning. However, the results of this UMD-led research published in the journal Cognition suggest that SES differences are much more targeted.

“Our research tests the hypothesis that all children—regardless of socioeconomic status—learn grammatical structure with minimal input, but hearing more language allows children to retrieve their knowledge from memory more efficiently during comprehension,” Huang said. “This means the effect of socioeconomic status on development reflects not a failure to learn language, but challenges with recalling what has already been learned during communication.”

Researchers tested roughly 130 English-speaking 3- to 7-year-olds from various SES families on their comprehension of an infrequent grammatical structure (e.g., passive phrases, such as “The seal is eaten by it”). Relative to the higher-SES peers, children from lower-SES families had more difficulty understanding sentences that introduce high comprehension demands. Yet, when these demands were removed (e.g., “It was eaten by the seal”), no SES differences were found. These findings suggest that all children learned infrequent structures, but language experience may enable some to access this information more readily during later comprehension. Read more at go.umd.edu/seslanguage.
Stanley Presser Named as AAAS Fellow

The American Association for the Advancement of Science recently elected Distinguished University Professor Stanley Presser as an AAAS Fellow. The AAAS Council annually elects members whose “efforts on behalf of the advancement of science or its applications are scientifically or socially distinguished.”

Presser serves as a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology. He was recognized by AAAS for distinguished contributions to survey methodology, particularly for research that has shaped social scientists’ understanding of both measurement and non-measurement errors.

He was presented with a certificate and a rosette in Boston in February during the AAAS Fellows Forum, part of the association’s annual meeting.

Presser examines the interface between social psychology and survey measurement. His research focuses on questionnaire design and testing, the accuracy of survey responses, nonresponse, and ethical issues stemming from the use of human subjects.

His books include Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys (with Howard Schuman), Survey Questions (with Jean Converse), and Methods for Testing and Evaluating Survey Questionnaires (chief editor). Presser has served as editor of Public Opinion Quarterly, was president of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, and is an elected fellow of the American Statistical Association. He also served as director of the Maryland Survey Research Center from 1989 to 2000.

Presser joins the ranks of numerous AAAS Fellows across the university and within the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. These include Dean and Professor of Psychology Gregory Ball and Professor Nan Bernstein Ratner in the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences, who were honored in 2014, and Professor Emeritus of Sociology Jerald Hage, who was honored in 2015.

JPSM Offers Online Program

The new JPSM Online Graduate Degree Program provides post-baccalaureate training for individuals interested in broadening their knowledge and understanding of survey methodology within the context of the emerging field of data science. This study includes understanding the design and execution of sample surveys, as well as data management, statistical analysis, and practical applications of survey and big data in the current environment.

Students participate online, an ideal scenario for working professionals. Lectures are recorded and are accompanied by real-time online class discussions. Most courses are 1- or 2-credit courses and run for shorter time frames than the traditional full term.

Students can pursue an online master’s degree or certificate, or take courses on an individual basis.
Decision-making behaviors are extraordinarily complex. We look to cues in our environment to develop predictions about what consequences will follow our actions, and seek to improve these predictions over time. Our brain and its responses to changing circumstances, stress and stimuli all influence these predictions and, ultimately, the decisions we make. Understanding exactly how the brain gives rise to behavior is the goal of Associate Professor Matthew Roesch of the Department of Psychology.

Roesch and his team of researchers are exploring how different portions of the brain influence the predictions we make and the behavior that follows them.

“Decisions are largely based on our predictions and the rewards we seek to gain through our actions. The outcomes of these reward predictions are often better than or worse than we expect,” Roesch said. “We're looking at those prediction errors and their role as teaching signals that guide our behavior.”

Roesch’s lab studies this phenomenon in rats, whose brains share similar functional signals as in humans—including the role of dopamine as a key driver of reward prediction and behavior. Like humans, rats also prefer immediate over delayed reward, even when the delayed reward is much larger. This behavior is referred to as “impulsive choice” and becomes elevated in humans and rats exposed to drugs of abuse—a key factor related to changes in prediction-making.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse has recently renewed a major grant for Roesch to continue exploring how drug addiction impacts these reward-prediction and decision-making behaviors over time.

“Instead of focusing on the immediate impact that drugs of abuse have on decision making, we’re looking at how drug abuse alters brain signals after withdrawal during the period when relapse might occur,” Roesch said. “We know that human addicts, even years after drug use, exhibit poorer judgment than non-addicts on some tasks. We want to better understand these neurological changes, their impact on behavior, and whether or not we can help to fix the impacted areas of the brain.”

Researchers Awarded $2.2 Million to Study Social Impairment in Schizophrenia

Researchers from the Department of Psychology received a $2.2 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to study social impairment associated with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders.

The four-year grant will support Dr. Jack Blanchard, Joel and Kim Feller Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology, and collaborators in applying an innovative approach to determine factors that contribute to the profound social impairment and diminished social affiliation related to psychosis.

“People who suffer from these severe forms of mental illness often have significant difficulties functioning at work, in school and in their relationships with family and friends,” Blanchard said. “We don’t fully understand what is happening in the brain to contribute to these profound social difficulties that make living with schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders so debilitating.”

As part of the study, approximately 140 participants will undergo functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) brain scans that will allow researchers to examine brain responses to social contact and social reward. The research team will also conduct behavioral assessments and cognitive testing to evaluate how memory, learning difficulties and social skills may be related to social functioning.

The researchers hope their findings will increase the understanding of social dysfunction in psychosis, and ultimately inform the development of new treatments.
Strengthening Community Policing

As recent events around the country are casting a spotlight on the relationships between police officers and the communities they serve, two associate professors from the Department of Sociology are investigating the issue on multiple fronts.

Drs. Kris Marsh and Rashawn Ray have been partnering with the Prince George’s County Police Department (PGCPD) since early 2016 to conduct a series of implicit bias trainings for cadets. In 2018, Marsh and Ray will lead similar trainings for all 2,000 officers in the PGCPD.

During these intense workshops, which typically span two days, Marsh and Ray take the recruits through a series of exercises designed to help them recognize and confront the implicit biases that we all have.

“We say: ‘Instead of running away from those biases, instead of saying they don’t exist, how about you take them head-on?’” Ray said. “You do that by acknowledging that they exist, and then figuring out some of the things that you can do to keep them in check.”

The officer trainings will take place in the spring of 2018 on the College Park campus and will involve collaborations with other UMD units: The A. James Clark School of Engineering is helping design virtual reality scenarios for the officers to go through, and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center will assist with creating and providing space for role-playing exercises to support the training.

Additionally, Marsh and Ray are working with the PGCPD to evaluate the department’s body camera program, and are surveying Prince George’s County citizens to understand their interactions with police officers—all in an effort to improve the relationship between the department and the community.

“The Prince George’s County Police Department is to be commended for their proactive approach to improving community policy and counteracting implicit bias,” Marsh said. “We hope the programs and materials we are developing through our partnership with the PGCPD will serve as a model for other police departments around the country.”

Studying a Protest Movement

On January 21, as hundreds of thousands of people descended upon Washington, D.C. for the Women’s March, a group of UMD faculty and students were waiting with clipboards in hand.

“It’s very important to get there early, because that’s when people are willing to take a survey,” said Dana R. Fisher, professor of sociology and director of the Program for Society and the Environment.

When plans for the march became public, Fisher and her colleagues in the Department of Sociology—Associate Professor Rashawn Ray and Assistant Professor Dawn M. Dow—assembled a team of graduate and undergraduate students to go into the crowd and gather data about who the protesters were and what motivated them to participate.

“By going out and surveying and getting the information on the ground, we can speak in an accurate way to what’s going on. It’s so important right now,” said Amanda Dewey, a sociology Ph.D. candidate.

Ultimately, the team collected a random sample of 528 participants. After analyzing the data, the researchers discovered that 33 percent of people surveyed said the Women’s March marked the first time they’d ever participated in a protest, while 56 percent reported that it was the first time they’d attended a protest in more than five years. These are particularly high participation percentages compared to previous events studied by Fisher.

Additionally, the surveys revealed an intersectional crowd: While a majority of respondents listed women’s issues as a motivating factor for participating, more than a third said they were also inspired by other issues, including racial justice, LGBTQ rights and concerns for the environment. A fifth of all participants reported marching because of concerns about immigration rights.

Multiple large-scale protests were scheduled to take place in Washington, D.C. throughout the spring of 2017. Fisher and her team plan to survey as many as possible.
The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace advances interdisciplinary examination and discourse on global peace. While drawing certain initial insights from religion, the program aims to develop a sound scientific basis for knowledge and strategies that lead to the creation of a better world. Viewing humanity as a collective and organic whole, the Chair’s incumbent, Professor Hoda Mahmoudi, explores the role that social actors and structures play in removing obstacles and creating paths to peace. Central to this focus is creating a body of rigorously derived and tested knowledge that can be applied to foster the emergence of a just, secure and sustainable international order, one that addresses the social, material and spiritual progress of the global community.

Working with UMD entities such as the Critical Race Initiative, as well as universities nationwide and around the globe, the Bahá’í Chair has brought a number of innovative thought leaders to campus to discuss structural racism, and the intersection of race and politics. Speakers on these themes this academic year included Professor Rashawn Ray, who presented “Why Police Compliance Does Not Save Black Lives: Racial Bias and the Need to Restructure the U.S. Criminal Justice System.” A standing-room-only crowd in the Adele H. Stamp Student Union’s Colony Ballroom was fully engaged by “Understanding Race and Class in the 2016 Election.” This important event featured innovative presentations by Dr. Matthew W. Hughey of the University of Connecticut, and Dr. Paula Ioanide of Ithaca College.

“All of us who reside on this planet are a part of a unified whole. Unless we look for ways to eliminate the prejudices that pull us apart—unless we speak with candor and respect to one another about this critical issue—we will not have peaceful communities or nations,” Mahmoudi said. “We have to have civil conversations with one another, listen to one another, and work together to disentangle, at its roots, the centuries-old injustice of racial inequality. To the degree that we are successful, we will see the gradual emergence of a happier, more prosperous and peaceful nation.”

This fall, the Bahá’í Chair also focused on youth, holding an international conference that aimed to widen and deepen our understanding of childhood and youth in relation to the inequalities of nationality, gender, ethnicity/race, class, religion, and minority/majority belonging. It examined children in conflict and war, as objects of consumption, and as displaced and migrating populations.
A New Era for the Gibran Chair

Last spring, May Rihani—a pioneer in girls’ education and a tireless advocate of women’s rights—took the helm of the George and Lisa Zakhem Kahlil Gibran Chair for Values and Peace as director. In this role, she works to expand upon the legacy and foundation created by the Chair’s inaugural incumbent, Professor Suheil Bushrui, who passed away in September 2015.

Drawing inspiration from famous Lebanese poet and scholar Kahlil Gibran, the Gibran Chair strengthens understanding between Eastern and Western cultures in general, and the Arab ethos and American values in particular.

In September, Rihani delivered her inaugural lecture to more than 200 attendees at the College Park Marriott Hotel and Conference Center, including representatives from several embassies, universities, think-tanks, and international organizations. She outlined a step-by-step plan to help change the paradigm about world peace by creating a new mindset that “recognizes that which connects us, unifies us, and ultimately leads us to true and lasting peace.” She added that, despite its apparent elusiveness, “peace is something that humanity has continually yearned for.”

The proceedings will soon be published as a book. “May Rihani’s Inaugural Lecture is inspirational reading for all those working for peace, both within the academy and across society. Her theme—that the oneness of humanity is the path to peace—shines like a light on a restless sea,” said President Wallace D. Loh.

Among numerous other activities, the Gibran Chair also presented a groundbreaking international symposium in December. “The Contributions of Arab Women toward a Lasting Peace” was presented in collaboration with the University of California, Davis. Held in the Adele H. Stamp Student Union, the symposium was designed to shed light on the contributions of women in general toward peace-building processes, and on the contributions of Arab women in particular. Rihani gathered thought leaders and policy influencers from around the world for the daylong discussion of timely topics related to feminism, education, cultural exchange and female empowerment.
The Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development works to further the dialogue for peace in the Middle East and throughout the world; to bridge the gap that often occurs between the academic and policy worlds; and to maintain an active and rigorous research agenda. The Sadat Chair’s incumbent, Professor Shibley Telhami, is also a non-resident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, as well as an internationally renowned expert in the foreign policy arena.

Last year, the Sadat Chair and the Center for American Politics and Citizenship jointly created the University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll with Nielsen Scarborough. In the fall, the Critical Issues Poll conducted a poll before the U.S. presidential election that offered key insights into the election and the related socio-political climate. Telhami serves as the director of the UMD Critical Issues Poll, and Professor Stella Rouse serves as the associate director.

Released just ahead of the November election, a major poll conducted by the Critical Issues Poll showed that two thirds of the American people agreed with then-candidate Donald Trump’s assertions that our nation’s political system is “rigged” against people like them, and viewed Trump as the candidate most likely to bring change to the country.

On foreign policy issues, the poll probed American attitudes toward the Syrian conflict, the fight against the “Islamic State” (ISIS), and the degree to which Americans wanted to see Russian-American cooperation. While Americans indicated dislike for Russian President Vladimir Putin (and Democrats named him as the most disliked leader), they expressed the view that the United States government should put aside its differences with Russia and work more with it to defeat ISIS. At the same time, a majority of Americans did not support a large-scale deployment of ground troops in Iraq and Syria to defeat ISIS.

In the spring, Professor Telhami was frequently cited by and appeared on major news outlets, nationally and internationally, offering insight into a range of timely topics, including American attitudes toward Muslims, and how the election of Donald Trump has helped change Americans’ views toward Islam for the better.

The Sadat Chair also presented a popular event in the spring semester, the Sadat Forum featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning author Thomas L. Friedman. Professor Telhami hosted a lively discussion with Friedman about his new book, Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist’s Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations, and its implications for our times.
Global Communities Makes Connections through Portals Project

During the fall semester, Professor Virginia Haufler, director of the Global Communities Living-Learning Program, and her students engaged in face-to-face conversations with people in Rwanda, Honduras and Gaza—without setting foot outside the country. The experience was part of the Portals Project, a global public arts initiative by Shared_Studios that creates a remote interpersonal experience. The portal installation on the College Park campus was installed near the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

Portals are gold shipping containers outfitted with “immersive” audio and video technology inside. When students enter one, they have a full-body, on-screen encounter with someone in a distant Portal. They then converse as if in the same room. Participants sign up for 20-minute slots, and are given a simple starting prompt, such as “What would make today a good day for you?” The resulting international conversations are private and unfilmed.

“The Portals Project connects you with someone in another location in the world, for a conversation that spans borders. The Portal is life-size—not like Skyping. It’s really intriguing to have that random, delightful global experience,” Haufler said. ●

Washington Post–UMD Poll Captures Views on Timely Topics

UMD and The Washington Post teamed up to present an innovative poll in 2014. Washington Post–University of Maryland Polls have focused on Maryland elections, national elections, desired priorities for elected officials and topics of interest to voters.

The partnership combines the world-class reporting, polling and public engagement resources of The Post with rigorous academic analysis from the Department of Government and Politics. Professors Stella Rouse and Michael Hanmer, who lead the Center for American Politics and Citizenship (CAPC), work with students affiliated with the Center on the design of the poll questions and the analysis of its responses.

Latest Poll Shows Decline in Hogan’s Popularity

In March, the latest iteration of the poll found that Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan’s approval ratings have slipped in a tense political climate. Ahead of the presidential election, the Republican governor’s job-approval rating in September was 71 percent; this latest poll shows Hogan holding a 65 percent job-approval rating.

Among the full sample of respondents, 39 percent said they would support Hogan for reelection in 2018, while 36 percent said they would prefer a Democrat. Among registered voters, 41 percent said they support Hogan for reelection, and 37 percent said they would prefer a Democrat.

The poll results underscore Hogan’s challenge as a Republican governor leading a state that went for Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton in November.

“Hogan’s decision not to endorse Donald Trump earned him support, but any perceived ties to the president could complicate the governor’s chances at reelection,” Hanmer said. “His reelection is going to depend on who the Democrats put forward and how much they can attach Hogan to what’s going on in national politics.” ●
C-BERC Event Examines ‘Too Big to Jail’ Corporations

Before a standing-room-only crowd in Van Munching Hall in September, the Center for the Study of Business Ethics, Regulation & Crime (C-BERC) hosted a presentation by Brandon Garrett on Corporate Prosecutions and the Future of “Too Big to Jail.”

Garrett is the Justice Thurgood Marshall Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Virginia School of Law, and also is the author of *Too Big to Jail: How Prosecutors Compromise with Corporations*. The event was C-BERC’s inaugural Fishlinger Family Lecture, established through the generosity of Matthew Fishlinger, GVPT ’07, and William Fishlinger, GVPT ’71.

Garrett’s presentation was followed by a panel discussion featuring expert regulators, scholars and practitioners who explored what happens when big corporations are criminally charged. The panel highlighted some of the practical difficulties and challenges associated with prosecuting corporate crime cases, and talked about whether similar challenges exist for prosecutors pursuing charges against responsible top managers.

The panelists were Dr. Cindy Alexander of the Law and Economics Center at George Mason University; Bruce G. Dubinsky, Managing Director of Duff & Phelps; Professor Michael Greenberger of the University of Maryland Center for Health and Homeland Security; and Steve Kroll of the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board.

The discussion was moderated by Professor Sally S. Simpson, a faculty member in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice and director of C-BERC.

New Online Graduate Certificate of Professional Studies in Risk, Compliance and the Law

BSOS and C-BERC proudly present the new Graduate Certificate of Professional Studies in Risk, Compliance and the Law (GC-Risk), a 12-credit online program that provides training and knowledge in the interdisciplinary fields of business law, ethics, criminology and accounting.

GC-Risk focuses on forensic audit investigations, software utilization as applied to discerning potentially fraudulent activity, and a detailed understanding of businesses’ legal obligations and the origin and consequences of non-compliance. Graduates will be able to understand and effectively implement the latest developments in empirically supported compliance strategies, investigation and audit practices—including the use of sophisticated software packages and statistical analysis to identify reporting and data aberrations. They will also learn about corporate ethical and legal obligations, both domestically and internationally; strategies to meet and maintain compliance; how to conduct investigations; and attorney-client privilege.

The online learning environment benefits working professionals with flexibility, convenience and accessibility. GC-Risk can be completed in as little as 12 months while minimally disrupting personal and professional life. [go.umd.edu/gcrisk](http://go.umd.edu/gcrisk)
For a young Joel Feller, GVPT ’90, one basketball game in Cole Field House was enough to convince him that the University of Maryland was where he wanted to spend the next four years of his life.

Growing up in small-town Hazleton, Pennsylvania, Feller knew that he was looking for a big college atmosphere with an impressive athletic program. Today, he remembers being drawn to the look and feel of College Park’s campus.

After government and politics classes, making friends and an undergrad internship on Capitol Hill, Feller moved on to law school. He had a watershed moment during his second year at Widener University School of Law.

“I had the opportunity to observe a trial involving a young man who was catastrophically injured by a defective product—so much so that he was no longer able to take care of himself and his family,” Feller said. “I watched as his lawyer fought for him against this big corporation, and that’s when I knew that I wanted to stand up for and help people who couldn’t help themselves.”

Feller has devoted his legal career to helping injured individuals and their families in cases involving medical malpractice, defective products, birth injuries and brain and spinal cord injuries.

After earning his J.D. in 1993, Feller worked at a law firm for 13 years. There he met Robert Ross and Matt Casey, with whom he eventually co-founded Ross Feller Casey, LLP. Over the last 10 years, the Philadelphia-based firm has grown to include 16 lawyers and more than 50 employees.

“The lesson that I learned in starting this practice is that I enjoy practicing law much more than I like running a business,” Feller said with a laugh. “The ability to make a difference in the lives of my clients and their families is the most rewarding part of my job.”

One of Feller’s most noteworthy cases involved successfully representing seven young men who were sexually abused by Penn State University football coach Jerry Sandusky. Feller and his firm represented more victims than any other single firm.

“I have had the privilege of representing some of the most remarkable and inspiring people throughout my career—people who displayed courage in the face of life-changing adversity,” Feller said. “The young men I worked with in this case did so under the intense microscope of the media.”

In his rare free time, Feller enjoys golfing and traveling with his wife, Kim Feller, Marketing ’89, and their three children: Jordan, Emily and Cory.

He also enjoys returning to his alma mater for football games and other events, when his schedule allows, and reflecting on his campus experiences.

“Maryland certainly prepared me academically to pursue my law degree, but the most important lessons that I take away from my time at Maryland came from the social aspects of campus life,” Feller said. “You are constantly meeting and interacting with new people with whom you don’t always see eye to eye. Learning to communicate in these situations is a skill that I use every day as a trial lawyer.”

Feller and his wife make it a priority to give back to the university that meant so much to both of them. Since 2014, the couple has donated more than $1 million to support multiple areas within the college. In 2015, they established the Joel and Kim Feller Professorship, which helps BSOS recruit and retain top-notch faculty.

They also have funded a research professorship in the Department of Government and Politics, and an endowed lecture in the department. In recognition of his support for the college, Feller was named the 2016 College of Behavioral and Social Sciences Alumnus of the Year.

“My experience at Maryland gave me the foundation I needed to achieve success in my career, and largely shaped who I am today,” Feller said. “I give back so that I can give someone the same opportunity I had.”
UMD Giving Day Success

Thank you for supporting the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences on Giving Day, March 8. This annual 24-hour fundraising challenge features friendly competition between campus units for hourly prizes and challenge funds, and BSOS was the biggest winner of the day.

Overall, UMD raised $2.2 million on Giving Day!

Together, we raised $83,602, the most funds of any academic unit on campus. We were #1 in total number of gifts, with 611. We won four hourly challenges: Most School/College Gifts (10-11 a.m.), Most Alumni Gifts (2-3 p.m.), Most Faculty and Staff Gifts #2 (4-5 p.m.) and Most Alumni Gifts (7-8 p.m.) We were #4 in the Beat Our Best challenge, with a 234% increase in gifts made from the previous Giving Day.

When we received the 150th gift, BSOS donors unlocked $10,000 in challenge funds that were generously provided by Robert Satterfield, ECON '95.

The generosity of our donors and supporters allows us to support students, faculty and programs in ways that wouldn’t otherwise be possible: paying for an undergraduate’s registration to a national conference; funding state-of-the-art laboratory equipment; helping our departments and centers to bring internationally renowned speakers to campus; off-setting travel expenses for students and faculty doing fieldwork around the world; and much more.

Thank you for your support! We look forward to Giving Day 2018.

Fearless Ideas: The Campaign for Maryland

BSOS Terps, we hope you will stay tuned for information and invitations to events surrounding the university’s upcoming fundraising campaign.

In a changing world, we aim to empower the University of Maryland to drive progress on a worldwide scale in areas of policy, science, arts and technology—all areas of importance to the future well-being of society. Fearless Ideas: The Campaign for Maryland—which will be the most ambitious and comprehensive fundraising effort in the university’s history—will infuse new resources and targeted investments to expand our research enterprise, recruit and retain stellar students and ground-breaking faculty, and broaden and deepen our community impact.

Fearless Ideas: The Campaign for Maryland, will raise a record-breaking amount of funding to elevate and expand our mission of service, enhance academic distinction and bolster our leading-edge research enterprise, enabling us to address the great societal issues of our time.

To sustain excellence well into the future, Fearless Ideas will significantly grow the university endowment. In concert with UMD’s Strategic Plan, the campaign will elevate the University of Maryland to be “equal to the best” of all public research universities in the nation. This is our Fearless future.

Stay connected with your alma mater to learn more about this forthcoming campaign.
BSOS Points of Pride

BSOS is one of the largest colleges at the University of Maryland, and boasts several of UMDS most popular undergraduate majors: criminology and criminal justice, psychology, government and politics, and economics.

400+
BSOS majors participate in education abroad opportunities annually.

5,000+
Undergraduate and 800
Master's and doctoral students

Several of our graduate programs and areas of specialty are ranked among the best in the country, according to U.S. News & World Report:

No. 1
Criminology

No. 17
Audiology

No. 20
Speech-Language Pathology

No. 21
Economics

No. 24
Sociology

No. 29
Political Science

No. 31
Clinical Psychology

No. 39
Psychology

Three endowed peace chairs:
- Bahá’í Chair for World Peace
- George and Lisa Zakhem Khalil Gibrán Chair for Values and Peace
- Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development

Go.umd.edu/peacechairs

BSOS is home to four of UMDS highly praised living and learning programs for freshmen and sophomores from across campus, Global Communities is a two-year program in which students live with peers from different cultures: globalcommunities.umd.edu/civicus allows students seeking to become engaged citizens to live together and participate in unique courses, internships and community service projects: civicus.umd.edu. Justice & Legal Thought and International Studies are two programs led by BSOS faculty within College Park scholars; both feature intellectual challenges in an innovative, interdisciplinary residential community: scholars.umd.edu.

$62 million
In external research funding brought in annually by BSOS faculty and students from entities including the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, NASA and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.