



# SGA MONTHLY

SEPTEMBER 2020



*Fun Fact: Sea otters hold hands when they sleep so they don't drift away from each other!*

## Announcements!

### Call for First-Year Ambassadors!

If any freshmen are still interested in aiding SGA Officers in their respective departments, please email Zachary Kay ([zkay1@umbc.edu](mailto:zkay1@umbc.edu)). While the FYA application has closed, we would love to talk to anyone that is interested!

### New Community Updates at OCA Mocha!

Come check out OCA Mocha's new outdoor patio space and the art galleries + mural launching this month!

### Election Night Extravaganza Events!

Election Night Extravaganza will be soon underway! Check out [our catalogue of community events](#) leading up to the main one here:

### Want to be featured in this newsletter?

Every month, we feature a staff member & a student as a part of our community spotlights. Our "Retriever Reflections" section is also open for our community to anonymously contribute to the discussion of that month. Please visit us at [www.sga.umbc.edu/newsletter](http://www.sga.umbc.edu/newsletter) for more information!

**Follow SGA on Social Media for more updates!**

You can find us @umbcsga and **UMBC SGA** on Youtube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and myUMBC!



### IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

**SGA Branch News**

**Student Spotlight: Mehrshad Fahim Devin**

**Staff Spotlight: Dr. Nancy Young**

**Retriever Reflections: How are you doing?**

**Mental Health & Wellness: Resources**

**Around Campus: OCA Mocha**

## SGA BRANCH NEWS

### Executive Branch

#### Top Four

In September, we completed the confirmations of all SGA positions. We now have 33 First Year Ambassadors in our program, and anyone who is still interested is welcome! We have created an Expense Tracker spreadsheet to keep finances and the student activity fee budget organized. To make sure that the goings-on of SGA are as transparent as possible, we welcome the undergraduate community to [join our General space in Webex Teams!](#)

#### Department of Communications

This month, the Department of Communications kick-started social engagement within the UMBC community. To accomplish this, we focused on putting out content that is informative, unique, and interactive. We worked with our graphic designers on color schemes and palettes to help create more visually appealing designs. We have reposted informative content from other UMBC branches so it reaches more students and interested viewers, and have also worked to create content specific to SGA and community updates.

#### Department of Executive Initiatives

As the Department of Executive Initiatives, we have spent much of this month hard at work planning out Election Night Extravaganza! One of UMBC's most popular events, we have been planning and hosting a variety of panels and activities leading up to it. Check [out the catalogue](#) and [our social media toolkit!](#) We are also working on initiatives surrounding the topics of *mentoring programs, racial and social justice, and Greek life!*

#### Department of Extended Connections

This month, the Department of Extended Connections has been hard at work planning and carrying out initiatives to fulfill our main goal: to

create a sense of, and deepen already existing, communities within UMBC and its surrounding bodies. We are putting together this newsletter, SGA Monthly, to ensure that our community stays tightly knit and informed about the goings-on within it. We are also working on various initiatives such as long-term mentorship programs, improving accessibility, improving UMBC transit, involving the students' voices in important conversations, and deepening the relationship between UMBC, Catonsville, and Arbutus.

### SGA Senate

The Senate has passed 7 pieces of major legislation so far: among the seven, Juneteenth is now recognized as a university-wide holiday, and a legislation asking for the reformation of online camera and microphone policy. Currently, we are working on planning the following initiatives:

- Achieve college ambassadors, a representative member from each academic department
- A possible drive thru COVID-19 test site
- Possible social-distanced outdoor fitness program & collaboration with local YMCA
- Working on transit route efficiency with collaboration with UMBC Transit, student cultural organization awareness, and better student engagement between organizations
- Mental health awareness through Art in collaboration with OCA Mocha
- Enhancing USMSC's social media presence and increase engagement
- Creating a webpage to consolidate all UMBC resources for students in a more efficient manner

### SGA Finance Board

For all student organizations and entities within UMBC requesting budgets, we will only be taking requests for virtual events. Our new Secondary Ad-Hoc Allocation System, or SAHAS, will be

employed for all requests. Clubs must submit SAHAC requests to us for everything that they may need. We have already begun using this system this month, and will continue to do so throughout the semester.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

### Mehrshad Fahim Devin



by Milan Sulibhavi

Interviewing Mehrshad was an honor and a valuable experience. Mehrshad, our Student Government Association President is in his third year at UMBC, and is pursuing a Biology and Physics degree on the pre-med track. Needless to say, he has his hands full. His responsibilities as president of SGA include being a liaison for all undergraduate students, overseeing all the branches of SGA, and working as a point of contact and support. In simpler terms, as he put in our interview, he “brings things into fruition.”

Mehrshad started his career in SGA as a First Year Ambassador. When I asked him why he decided to seek out a role in SGA, he said “when I

had that avenue to work on my skills, I took that avenue.” I think that statement describes Mehrshad perfectly, because throughout our interview, he took me back to a very hard point in his life during his second semester freshman year. At that time, he was overwhelmed with his classes, did not have many friends, and as a result, he felt insecure. He had just joined his social fraternity and says he confided in an older brother who explained to him that the opportunities you take will only make you stronger or rather, as his fraternity brother put it, “no pressure, no diamonds.” This stuck with Mehrshad and it is evident in his work ethic. His logic is that as long as you’re challenging yourself in a healthy way, you are going to learn something from everything you do.

When Mehrshad moved to America from Iran, he was about 12 years old. He only knew a few conversational words in English; the rest of which he learned after he moved here. As a pre-teen in seventh grade, it’s intimidating to walk into a middle school not even knowing the language fully. But again, he saw this as an opportunity to grow and he excelled in doing so. His ambition is also evident in his career goals; Mehrshad is pre-med, and hopes to become a general surgeon. Although at first his parents pushed him to get into medicine, he later realized how amazing the actual science behind it is. When he dissected various organisms at school in Iran, the anatomy fascinated him. Mehrshad saw this as a puzzle. Everything made sense; it just connected. He says it’s true to this day that he sees how aspects of his majors connect to each other.

As our interview came to a close, I was interested to know that if there was one thing people should know about Mehrshad, what it would be. He quickly answered with the words, “I am here to serve.” He further explained that he will not stop till someone gets the guidance they need. I can attest to the fact that he goes above and beyond for anyone he meets in the most poised and professional way. Mehrshad’s perseverance in both his role as SGA president and in his own life is so admirable. It is safe to say that Mehrshad’s

ingenuity reflects the UMBC community in the best way possible.

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

### Dr. Nancy Young



by Wangui Nganga

**Question: What has been your most interesting encounter and how did it change the trajectory of your life/life choices?**

When Dr. Nancy Young was about six, she was in a devastating car accident which left her in a full body cast and needing to relearn how to walk. However, during that time, her immobility did not stop her from learning and traveling. Dr. Young explained that “all I could really do was read, and because of that, I advanced very quickly in my learning. I believe it’s what put me on the trajectory towards my PhD.” She also learned the power of a book to take her away from negative situations and put her in any place she wanted to be, saying “I could be in Singapore and even now I’m reading a book that’s taking me to South Africa.”

For Dr. Young, reading is not only for learning and curiosity, but to take us to places where we might not be able to go. “As a child who couldn’t travel very much, it was amazing. And once I became an adult and could travel, I felt like the world was already my own.”

In this time of limited mobility, isolation, and even loneliness, I think we can all resonate with Dr. Young’s encounter. Sure, not all of us have experienced this level of physical trauma, but I think the emotional and mental relatability is there. We all want to escape, be free from this quarantine and virus. Some of us may have had plans to travel and experience new and unfamiliar places in the world. Although we can’t go out physically, nothing is more powerful than our imagination, especially fostered by a good book. Like Dr. Young explained about her travels to Singapore from her bed, we are able to do the same. There’s no limit a book can take you, whether that’s real or fictional worlds. So, I encourage you all, find a good book. You’d be surprised how far it’ll take you!

*Fun Fact: When Dr. Young travels, she loves to learn and immerse herself where people live and work. She often takes the road less travelled and avoids the typical touristy areas.*

## RETRIEVER REFLECTIONS

### How are you doing?

In an effort to help us connect with each other, even when we can’t enjoy each other’s company on campus, we asked you: the student body, to anonymously let us know how you are doing. These were some of your responses:

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*“I miss in person classes and seeing everyone, online classes have been very helpful. I especially enjoy being able to rewatch lectures. Quarantining has been hard, but there was*

definitely so much room to grow during this time.”

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“Hopefully, things will be better in the Spring.”

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“I’m doing horribly, I sit in front of a computer all day and I feel like I’m going crazy.”

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“I miss campus a whole lot...the good thing is that at least I’m with my dogs all the time now.”

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“It’s a lot harder to stay focused and motivated.”

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“Staying home has been interesting...this is definitely a year that I will remember.”

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“It’s been a trip indeed, to say the least...I may not have the tan I wanted for the summer but I am more at peace with myself.”

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“I hate the pandemic and I miss living with my roommates. My professors have been really flexible though and I really appreciate it...Wishing everyone the best, we can get through this.”

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“I’m dealing with COVID-19 by learning new skills I can do by myself, and trying to be more engaging with my friends from a distance...Recently, I’ve been sitting outside and enjoying the fall weather.”

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“It’s still strange and surreal doing these classes online. I don’t know if they are harder or easier. I don’t know if I’m being lazy or the content seems thicker. I also worry about our eyes. Glued to the screen.”

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“At this point, I’m just pushing through.”

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“I am doing okay.”



## MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

### Resources

#### Counseling Center

The Counseling Center is offering new virtual Support Groups for this Fall semester! The current groups are as follows:

- Connecting While Apart: Undergraduate Support Group
- Connecting While Apart: Graduate Support Group
- UMBC Self-Help Book Club
- Women of Color Support Group
- Trans Support Group
- You’ve Got This Group

Visit [www.counseling.umbc.edu](http://www.counseling.umbc.edu) for more information such as dates, times, and how to register.

#### Contact Information for Student Resources

The following phone numbers are ways to contact resources for student support when it comes to wellness and safety.

**The Haven at UMBC** 855-806-4266

**University Health Services** 410-455-2542 & 410-455-3230 (after hours)

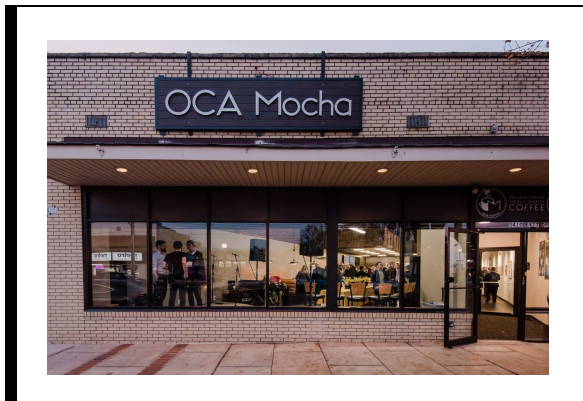
**Office of Equity and Inclusion** 410-455-1250

**The Women’s Center** 410-455-2714

**The Counseling Center** 410-455-2472 & 410-455-3230 (after hours)

## AROUND CAMPUS

### OCA Mocha



by Ekta Daryani

On a Tuesday evening, as the day turns into dusk, the lights from Arbutus' local shops and businesses begin to illuminate the world from inside. Through the windows of OCA Mocha, a group of students confidently sets up microphones. The woman ordering coffee at the counter is deeply in conversation with the cashier. You walk inside to be welcomed by snippets of friendly banter and the scent of warm, fresh coffee. To your right is a billboard of community announcements and advertisements; a Yoga Instructor has pinned their contact information on a tiny sheet of paper.

"Hey, is there any more information on this?" you ask the employee next to you -- you've been looking to start taking yoga classes for a while.

The employee smiles and starts to reply -- but just as they begin, the door opens and the employee is momentarily cut off, until they realize who just walked in: the same yoga instructor whose billboard posting is right next to you. The employee laughs and introduces the two of you to each other.

This might seem like an amusing occurrence; a small coincidence, compared to the grand scheme of things. **However, events like these are daily occurrences at OCA Mocha, the UMBC community coffee shop in downtown Arbutus.** With the goal of creating a "symbiotic college town" in mind, OCA Mocha is a space that fosters

connections between people through moments and conversations. Founded as an answer to the question, "How can we bridge the gap between our campus and the surrounding community?" OCA Mocha strives to achieve this goal through its events, openness to student voices, community art galleries, and, of course -- coffee!

In a normal semester, students as well as community members are able to book OCA Mocha's main space and meeting rooms to host events, through their website. Monthly art galleries bring people together through their themes, rooted in relevance and vulnerability. **In current circumstances, OCA Mocha is still available to work with people to plan and collaborate on virtual events.** This can be done through either using their space as a place to stream the event from, or through using OCA Mocha's resources that are relevant to the event. **People can still order coffee and encounter experiences at their new outdoor, socially distanced seating area** -- complete with a tent and extended WiFi.

With the COVID-19 Pandemic leaving most students taking virtual classes from their houses, and others from the confined spaces of their dorm rooms, things feel more separated than ever. **The meaning of connection has taken a new shape in our minds; something deeper, filled with more uncertainty, and imbued with a different type of longing.** OCA Mocha's aim to create a community space, no matter what, is needed more than ever -- and it stands just as strongly as it did before.

**TUNE IN NEXT MONTH  
FOR OUR SPOOKY  
OCTOBER ISSUE!!**

