



UMB Champions of Excellence

Creating Learning Opportunities for All



Flavius R. W. Lilly, PhD, MA, MPH | University of Maryland Graduate School

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If you want to see Flavius R. W. Lilly, PhD, MA, MPH, swell with pride, call him the Summer U mastermind. If you want to see him blush, call him an artist.

As senior associate dean at the University of Maryland Graduate School and associate vice president of academic affairs at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB), Lilly's professional pursuits lie in health care and academia. He leads the Graduate School's strategy to develop new degree programs in the health sciences, provides oversight for academic innovation and teaching excellence, and serves as a leader and visionary for a slew of academic and student services.

But looking at his ink drawings and watercolor paintings, you'd think his personal mentor was artist and TV host Bob Ross.

Inspired by Baltimore architecture and the bright, vibrant colors of his wife (and high school sweetheart) Carolina Vidal's native Barcelona, Spain, Lilly paints cityscapes and other scenery. His portfolio website, flaviuslilly.com, serves as a shrine for his pieces.

"It's one of those things I can do and sort of escape from everything else," Lilly says. "I lose track of time. You get so involved with it that you sort of lose awareness of everything around you, and that can be really stress relieving."

There was a moment when Lilly considered going to art school but he chose a “more practical” profession instead: biology. Still, he looked for opportunities to flex his creative muscles as an undergrad at Wright State University. When a photography job in the Division of Epidemiology at the Wright State’s Boonshoft School of Medicine opened up, he jumped at the chance to apply.

It turned out that “photographer” really meant “research assistant.” Lilly was responsible for photographing the tops of men’s heads to document male-pattern hair loss over time for a clinical study of a drug later called Propecia. It was part of the Fels Longitudinal Study that dated back to 1929 and studied child growth and development.

By chance, it also was his first exposure to research and aging-related issues, now part of Lilly’s professional life. The children in the study were followed through adulthood, and researchers were looking at all factors related to their aging. Lilly was hooked.

Today, his interests and teaching still lie in aging, but he’s also focused on the bigger picture of growth at UMB — developing new degree programs, new services for students, and improving existing ones.

In 2015, he helped to launch the master’s of science in health science program — the first entirely online degree program at the University.

Each fall, more than 60 students are admitted, mostly working professionals who get their degree in as little as 18 months. The program has grown to include multiple certifications and concentrations, including global health systems and services, aging and applied thanatology, and more.

Lilly is a vocal advocate for all UMB students, too, and has improved and built upon a number of Campus Life Services programs, including the Wellness Hub, the UM *shuttle*, the Writing Center, and mental health services.

A study published in *Nature Biotechnology* found that graduate and professional students are six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the general population. Social isolation, the often-abstract nature of the work, feelings of inadequacy, and struggle to find work-life balance are to blame.

“It’s not that surprising because these are stress-based disorders, and graduate and professional school is stressful and can trigger conditions that have been dormant,” Lilly says. “I’m concerned about the mental health of our students.”

Lilly is helping to spearhead mental health services at the University by renovating and opening a new space for a student counseling center.

Nearly six years ago, Lilly and Roger J. Ward, EdD, JD, MPA, senior vice president for operations and institutional effectiveness and vice dean of the Graduate School, also started the Emerging Leaders program, a yearlong leadership development experience.

“I’ve been really lucky that I’ve always had good mentors — Cameron Chumlea [PhD, at Wright State], folks in the hospital system, Roger Ward, and others here at UMB,” Lilly says. “I’ve always felt a responsibility to give back and take time to encourage, mentor, and meet with young professionals who want to develop themselves in leadership roles, too.”

Now in its sixth cohort, the Emerging Leaders program accepts 30 to 40 people each year — not just academic affairs staff, but folks from all across UMB. The program has recently started seeing faculty and higher-level managers apply, too. It’s a diverse group Universitywide, from housekeepers to fairly seasoned faculty members interested in taking on more leadership roles.

Another initiative Lilly is excited about is Summer U. What started as an idea over dinner between UMB President Jay A. Perman, MD, and Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh was piloted in summer 2017 and is expected to launch officially this summer.

It provides summer fun and learning for youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods like West Baltimore. At UMB, they enjoy recreational activities such as yoga, Zumba, swimming, and more, plus meals — all free of charge.

Lilly is especially proud of the initiative's ethical and social justice missions — its academic one, too. Young people in inner cities often lose any gains from the academic year because they're not as likely to be engaged educationally during the summer at camps and such as their higher-income peers.

So in addition to exercise, Summer U includes MANGO math, a reading list, several science field trips, visits to Pop Farm to conduct agricultural and nutrition-based experiments, and more.

The goal is to stabilize the third- to fifth-graders' learning and prepare them to enter the new school year ready to engage with the curriculum. They also get exposure to life on a college campus, a key element of the program, Lilly says.

“Take my kids, for instance,” he says — Gabe, 17, Zoe, 10, and Daphne, 8. “Being on a college campus is nothing new to them. They've always come with me to work and had camps on college campuses. When they decide to go to university, they won't be intimidated. They'll have had exposure and interacted with college students and professors. That's not always the case with disadvantaged kids in Baltimore.”

With the Summer U project, more kids get to visit UMB, and see that it's not intimidating but a place for them. Lilly says, “That simple act alone will mean something for them later on when they apply for college.”

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