



UMB News

UMB Unveils Renovated Student Affairs Suites

September 14, 2021 | By [Lou Cortina](#)

The [University of Maryland, Baltimore](#) (UMB) officially unveiled a renovated and reimagined space at the SMC Campus Center on Sept. 9 that's dedicated to student success, well-being, and inclusivity. The suites on the third floor include the Division of Student Affairs, Student Counseling Center, Intercultural Center, Student Food Pantry, and University Student Government Association (USGA).

"The vision statement for UMB Student Affairs is to advance the success of all students to be engaged and inclusive leaders," said **Patty Alvarez, PhD, MS**, assistant vice president, Student Affairs. "This renovation project has better positioned us to do just that."



Inside the newly expanded Student Counseling Center

UMB leaders, faculty, students, and staff gathered in the SMC Campus Center's second floor for the event, sitting in physically distanced chairs and wearing face coverings per University policy, before heading to the third floor for ceremonial ribbon cuttings and a tour of the redesigned suites.

President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, noted that it was good to be gathering in person as more of the UMB community returns to campus, "though we've still got to be cautious" because of the persistent COVID-19 pandemic. He praised the new space and noted that it included an expanded Student Counseling Center, which had been located in the Health Sciences and Human Services Library next door. He said the center's expansion was well-timed because the pandemic has magnified the need for mental health services.

"The mental health part of this pandemic has been quite remarkable," Jarrell said. "It's pointed out disparities, and it's pointed out vulnerabilities in all of us. I salute all of the services available in this beautiful new space. It's going to continue to play a

critical role in maintaining and improving the health and well-being of our students. UMB needs to be a community where we are all welcome, and this is another step in that direction."

Planning for the renovations began in May 2017, under Jarrell's predecessor as UMB president, **Jay A. Perman, MD**. Now the chancellor of the University System of Maryland, Perman sent congratulations via videotaped remarks, noting that the project proved prescient, considering the pandemic's health and economic challenges and the "racial reckoning" sparked by the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

"When I think of what these spaces contain — the Student Counseling Center, the Intercultural Center, the Student Food Pantry — it's like you had a lens on the last year and a half and knew what was coming," Perman said. "We knew we needed more counseling capacity, more food resources, more spaces for our underrepresented students, our vulnerable students.

The fact that you've come through for these students, that you have their backs, is something to be incredibly proud of."

A ribbon also was cut for the Intercultural Center, which launched in 2020 and is the byproduct of a task force created in 2018 based on feedback from [University of Maryland School of Social Work](#) students who advocated for support and resources for underrepresented students; undocumented students, faculty, and staff; and an increased focus on creating a more inclusive UMB community. The task force recommended UMB create a center to provide programming and resources that would enhance the campus climate for diversity .

“The Intercultural Center will serve as a field placement site for social work students focused on social identity dialogues, and it will drive education initiatives that address student food insecurity,” Alvarez said. “The physical space will allow for the hosting of social identity and community-building initiatives as well as facilitate dialogue, share resources, and provide a safe space for historically underrepresented students.”

The Intercultural Center has worked with the UMB Police Department this year on pop-up food pantries that provide 30-pound boxes of shelf-stable food; a [Student Food Insecurity Fund](#) was set up with the help of the Office of Philanthropy; and collaborations have been formed with Pompeian, Inc., and McCormick & Co. to supplement supplies received from the Maryland Food Bank, Alvarez said.

“We’ve steadily increased our understanding of food insecurity at UMB through committees and surveys,” she said. “And we’ve been responsive to those needs, providing additional resources and creating partnerships inside and outside of the institution.”

Aishwarya Iyer, a [University of Maryland School of Medicine](#) MD/PhD student and president of USGA, introduced Jarrell during the event and later thanked UMB and Student Affairs leaders for their commitment to student achievement and well-being, singling out Cyndi Rice, director of student development and leadership.

“I’m standing here today because of the dedication of individuals like Ms. Rice,” she said. “In their work, they continually prioritize the needs of students, which extended to ensuring that USGA maintained our dedicated space in the Student Affairs suite.

“Within this space, USGA holds small meetings between our officers, meets with students to discuss their ideas or concerns, and consistently thinks of ways to better advocate for students. And, more importantly, the dedicated space showcases the University’s commitment to fostering student leaders and listening to amplify their voices.”

Another speaker, **Flavius R.W. Lilly, PhD, MA, MPH**, vice provost, Academic and Student Affairs, and vice dean, University of Maryland Graduate School, said his primary purpose in coming to UMB was to focus on student well-being. Offering expanded mental health services at the Student Counseling Center is critical to that mission, he added.

“In 2010 when I arrived, nationally around 7 percent of college students reported having a depressive episode in the past year,” Lilly said. “Now that number is around 20 percent. That’s a dramatic increase, and it was occurring before the pandemic. So, this is an important step toward addressing not just depression, but anxiety issues as well.

“We have a lot of people to thank for creating this amazing new space. It’s going to mean a lot to our students. I’m certain of it.”

The final speaker, **Bill Crockett, MS, RCRSP**, executive director, Student Affairs, was a key player in the four-year project, helping to manage logistics and working with Quinn Evans Architects and Jeffrey Brown Contracting, among many other tasks.

“Just to create this space, the movement of people was phenomenal. We had something like 67 relocations — that’s moving people from one spot to another spot and then back into their current spot throughout the process,” said Crockett, who praised **Jimmy Heiner, MS**, associate director of operations, URecFit, and Anna Borgerding, PMP, director of operational excellence and sustainability, Facilities and Operations, for their support and work as part of the project’s leadership team.

Crockett thanked several UMB offices that aided the project — including Administration and Finance, Communications and Public Affairs, Design and Construction, Environmental Health and Safety, Facilities and Operations, the Center for Information Technology, and the Health and Human Services Library — as well as his Student Affairs colleagues.

“Every single member of our Student Affairs staff leaned into the project,” he said. “Their voice was heard, and their input was incorporated into this process.”

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