

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Outstanding UMB Staff Award



When Rosemary Ferreira, MEd, was a first-generation student of color attending a predominantly white college, she struggled to find a sense of belonging, questioned her capabilities, and experienced imposter syndrome and low self-esteem.

“Fortunately, I was able to develop relationships with other historically marginalized students and with supportive faculty and staff and understood that my college experience was not an individual pursuit, but a collective one,” said Ferreira, associate director of the University of Maryland, Baltimore’s (UMB) Intercultural Center.

“My college education also provided me with the language and critical thinking skills to make sense of my own lived experiences, including the ways I had internalized various forms of oppression. I became acutely aware of the ways in which my communities were often dehumanized through destructive narratives and policies that intentionally stripped poor and working-class communities of color from access to resources.”

This experience inspired her to dedicate her career to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues in higher education.

“My choice to work in EDI and in higher education is because I want to continue to disrupt these harmful narratives and create communities of support and well-being for students who have been continuously marginalized and excluded from higher education,” she said.

Ferreira, who collaborates across the University to advance and prioritize equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, leads comprehensive programs and initiatives at UMB that create and

maintain environments where students, faculty, staff, and community members can thrive, be their authentic selves, and build a sense of community with one another. Each year, she plans and executes about 40 events that honor and celebrate numerous identities and populations such as Latinx and Hispanic; LGBTQ+; trans and nonbinary; Black and African Diaspora; and first-generation students, such as she was.

For her efforts, Ferreira has been named the recipient of UMB’s 2024 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Recognition Award for outstanding staff member.

“Rosemary is a thoughtful and reflective leader who actively contributes to the mission and values of UMB,” said Courtney J. Jones Carney, DPA, MBA, executive director, Intercultural Leadership and Engagement, and director, Intercultural Center, who nominated Ferreira for the award. “Rosemary demonstrates leadership and inspiration to others directly through her role in the Intercultural Center and through participation in non-job-related opportunities that align with her values and interests. The programs and initiatives led, managed, and/or facilitated by Rosemary represent the majority of identity programming offered at UMB.”

Ferreira plans, writes, and co-hosts “The Table” podcast, which focuses on culture, norms, and current events. Since its launch in early 2021, the podcast has attracted more than 1,500 listeners for its 21 episodes, which have focused on topics such as anti-Asian racism, trans legislation in the United States, and supporting undocumented and DACA students in higher education.

“We choose topics that we believe raise critical awareness about social identities and social issues that are often erased or marginalized, especially in the context of higher education,” Ferreira said.

She said one of her most memorable guests on “The Table” was her mother, Maria Ferreira.

“The episode focused on social class and upward mobility and was organized as part-autobiography and part-interview with my mother, allowing us to reflect on our lives together, our dreams, and the impact of my college education,” she said. “What I believe is so valuable about ‘The Table’ is that we honor stories and lived experiences as valid forms of knowledge. Listening and learning from my mother, a working-class immigrant woman from the Dominican Republic, it is incumbent upon us all to have stories such as hers be uplifted.”

“The Table” recently was awarded the 2024 Joseph H. Benedict Jr. Social Change Award for Racial Justice from the Association of College Unions International.

First-Generation Students

Ferreira has not only created programs that celebrate First Generation Student Week, she also partnered with the University of Maryland School of Social Work to earn UMB the designation of a First-Gen Forward institution in spring 2021, recognizing its commitment to advancing first-generation student success.

“Rosemary is fully and wholly engaged in EDI work. Not only is this the focus of her job, but it is also connected to her ethos,” Jones Carney said. “While the identity/population-based initiatives pre-date her arrival to UMB, she continues to grow and enhance this offering by integrating it into the fiber of UMB. It is examples like this that illustrate her intentionality in establishing initiatives that can become institutionalized and maintained at UMB.”

In the fall, Ferreira developed an event called BMore for Baltimore to orient new and returning students to UMB and the city they are living, studying, and working in, learn from local community leaders involved in advancing racial and social justice in Baltimore, and engage in dialogue to unpack their perceptions about the city and any biases they may hold.

“BMore for Baltimore is a call for all UMB students, staff, and faculty to uphold our institutional core values of Equity and Justice by debunking harmful narratives about Baltimore and poor and working-class Black residents and by centering the knowledge and expertise of historically marginalized peoples into our practice,” she said of the project she did as an Interprofessional Program for Community Engagement fellow.

Last year, she received a Belonging, Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Innovation Grant from UMB’s Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion to develop the Critical Conversations Dialogue Program, an intergroup dialogue initiative. She also recently participated in the Center for Global Engagement’s UMB/Costa Rica Faculty Development Institute, gaining valuable insight on incorporating global learning practices into UMB’s programming.

She is currently working on a virtual microcredential and in-person symposium on migrant and refugee rights with Patty Alvarez, PhD, chief student affairs officer and associate vice president of student affairs. The program will be an opportunity for UMB students, staff, and faculty to learn about the migrant crisis, reflect on stories of migration, and gain practical skills in serving migrant populations in Baltimore.

Holding Steadfast to Equity and Justice

Ferreira said she is most inspired by Dr. King speaking against “the three major evils” of the world: racism, economic exploitation, and militarism.

“In his speech, ‘America’s Chief Moral Dilemma,’ Dr. King acknowledged these intersections and talked about how one issue cannot be divorced from the other if we are to address these forms of violence,” Ferreira said.

Dr. King said in the speech, “I’m not going to segregate my moral concerns. And we must know on some positions, cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expediency asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ Vanity asks the question, ‘Is it popular?’ But conscience asks the question, ‘Is it right?’ And there’re times when you must take a stand that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but you must do it because it is right.”

Ferreira said, “Dr. King’s words generate a deep hope that we can all work toward a courageous alignment of our conscience with our practices so that we may all take stands against injustice.”

She said she was honored and humbled to receive the Diversity Recognition Award.

“To truly honor the legacy of Dr. King at UMB, I believe we must hold steadfast to our commitment to our institutional core value of Equity and Justice in the face of rising anti-EDI rhetoric and policies across the country,” she said.

Ferreira thanked Jones Carney and her UMB Student Affairs colleagues and also praised UMB’s students.

“I am so incredibly fortunate and proud to work alongside such intelligent, passionate, and caring students,” said Ferreira, who also serves as an academic coach to several students each semester. “Thank you for entrusting me and the Intercultural Center with your stories and the work you’ve done to advance UMB’s commitment to justice and equity.”

— Jen Badie