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The Elm

ELM STORIES

2025 Founders Week Award Winners Announced

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UMB recognizes Dr. Andrea Morgan, Dr. Kyla Liggett-Creel, Dr. Kirsten Lyke, Dr. Rajabrata Sarkar, and student Danielle Basdekis for their outstanding achievements and contributions to the University.

*Every fall, we dedicate one week to commemorate the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) rich history and celebrate the future we're building together. Among the highlights of **Founders Week** is recognizing the extraordinary work of our faculty, staff, and students with awards that signify outstanding accomplishment in education, public service, research, entrepreneurship, and academics. Here are our 2025 Founders Week Awards recipients, who will be honored during the week of Oct. 20-23.*

EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Andrea Morgan, DDS, MS

Clinical Assistant Professor, Director of Student Advocacy and Cultural Affairs, and Director of Student Recruitment
School of Dentistry

Dr. Morgan has been a steady, guiding presence at the School of Dentistry (UMSOD) for more than two decades, shaping not only the academic journeys of its students but also their culture of care and support.

Morgan's influence begins at the outset of dental school. As course director for Dental Anatomy, she teaches the first course that dental students encounter. Morgan works closely with students to identify areas for growth and help them develop the skills and strategies they need to succeed academically.

As director of student advocacy and cultural affairs and director of student recruitment, she is a trusted mentor and advocate. She pairs students with faculty or peer mentors, provides academic support and guidance for students taking the National Board Dental Examination, and helps students access a range of on-campus services.

For 15 years, Morgan has been the faculty advisor to the UMSOD chapter of the Student National Dental Association, which promotes and supports dental students from underrepresented groups. The chapter has received multiple national honors for its fundraising, public service, and outreach efforts aimed at encouraging high school and undergraduate students in underrepresented populations to pursue careers in oral health.

She also has served on the UMB Diversity Advisory Council in various capacities, including chair of its Education and Awareness Committee. Her excellence has been recognized through numerous honors, including the Russell Gigliotti Award for Excellence in Teaching (twice) and induction into the International College of Dentists.

Morgan earned her Doctor of Dental Surgery degree from UMSOD in 1990 and a master's in biology while training in a general practice residency at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry in 1992. She received a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Michigan in 1985.

PUBLIC SERVANT OF THE YEAR

Kyla Liggett-Creel, PhD, LCSW-C

Executive Director, EMBRACE Initiative
UMB

Dr. Liggett-Creel is an accomplished leader with over 25 years of executive experience in philanthropy, nonprofit, and civic institutions in the city of Baltimore. She has worked on the UMB campus since 2008 in roles with the School of Medicine, the School of Social Work (UMSSW), and UMB.

In recent years, she has collaborated with UMB leadership, community stakeholders, and staff to develop the mission, vision, and strategy of the EMBRACE Initiative, which uses a multifaceted approach designed to increase the vibrancy of the greater UMB campus, boost the University's community impact in Baltimore, and strengthen UMB's profile with its internal and external constituencies.

EMBRACE leads efforts to decrease violence in the state of Maryland, transform systems to make them more equitable, and assist justice-impacted youth and adults with transitioning back into society. The initiative partners with the Department of Human Services, Department of Juvenile Services, and Department of Corrections and Public Safety to deliver coordinated, equity-based care for system-involved families, with case managers who have personal experience with these systems. EMBRACE also partners with grassroots and nonprofit organizations such as the Peace Team, HeartSmiles, and about 30 others around the state.

EMBRACE has facilitated community-building activities, conflict resolution, and direct support for those affected by violence. The impact of these efforts can be seen in the hundreds of community members who have accessed vital services, from housing and substance use treatment referrals to employment support and academic mentorship.



Liggett-Creel's commitment to system transformation has significantly improved outcomes for youth in foster care, youth development programs, and violence intervention efforts. Her initiatives have empowered front-line practitioners to deliver high-quality, trauma-informed services that meet the complex needs of the communities they serve.

Liggett-Creel earned a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies from the University of Maryland, College Park in 1998, a master's in social work from Smith College in 2000, and her PhD in social work from UMSSW in 2016.

RESEARCHER OF THE YEAR

Kirsten E. Lyke, MD

Professor, Department of Medicine
Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health
School of Medicine

Dr. Lyke has built an impactful career advancing the leading edge of translational research in infectious diseases immunology and vaccinology. Her work and her leadership are consistently highlighted in leading scientific journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *Lancet* as well as major national publications such as *The New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*.

Since joining the School of Medicine faculty in 2002, Lyke's work has informed global vaccine and public health policy, particularly through her pioneering research in emerging infections and human challenge models.

Her expertise focuses on infectious diseases, in particular malaria and dengue vaccine and immunology. Her research program in emerging infectious diseases is robust and well-funded through federal, foundation, and industry support. She has developed and led innovative research programs with colleagues at the Institute for Genome Sciences and the Institute of Human Virology. She currently serves as director of the Vector-borne Diseases and Challenge Unit at the Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health (CVD) and interim co-director of CVD's Malaria Research Program.

During the Ebola and Zika outbreaks and the COVID-19 pandemic, Lyke performed first-in-human studies on vaccines aimed at stopping the spread of these emerging threats. She co-led early phase studies on the Pfizer/BioNTech mRNA vaccine and proposed as well as served as co-chair of the "Mix and Match" COVID-19 booster study funded by the National Institutes of Health. This study was pivotal in recommending adults and teens receive booster COVID-19 shots of their choosing starting in fall 2021.

Among her many accolades, Lyke received Best Scientific Publication of 2022-2023 honors from the Infectious Diseases Clinical Research Consortium, and *The Daily Record* named her a "Health Care Hero" in 2022 and an "Influential Marylander" in 2025. She was inducted into the National Academy of Medicine in 2024.

Lyke earned a bachelor's degree in biology/physiology/anatomy from Cornell University in 1988 and her medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine in 1992.

DAVID J. RAMSAY ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

Rajabrata Sarkar, MD, PhD

Barbara Baur Dunlap Professor of Surgery and Physiology; Chief, Division of Vascular Surgery; and Executive Vice Chair, Department of Surgery
School of Medicine

Dr. Sarkar is an expert in treating blood vessel disorders and a nationally known researcher in blood vessel growth and resolution of deep vein thrombosis. He is a partner in the medical technology startup MDC Studio and a co-inventor of the MDC vascular access and automatic tourniquet devices and the EO2 emergency resuscitation device.

Sarkar also is the co-founder of Vascular Rescue, Inc., part of the MDC Studios portfolio. Vascular Rescue is developing a novel prototype device for semiautomated central venous cannulation and emergency arterial cannulation that has the potential to expedite emergency care and reduce complications in critically ill patients.

He is an inventor on four issued U.S. patents ranging from molecular therapy for vascular remodeling to novel emergency vascular devices. His device development work includes electroporation for repair of vascular injuries and wearable sensors for early detection of hemorrhage.

Sarkar came to the School of Medicine (UMSOM) in 2009 when he was named the Barbara Baur Dunlap Professor of Surgery and Physiology as well as chief of the Division of Vascular Surgery. In the Department of Surgery, Sarkar served as vice chair for clinical operations from 2015 to 2017 and interim chair from 2017 to 2019. Since 2022, he has been the department's executive vice chair.

Sarkar serves as co-chair of the University of Maryland Medical Center Innovation Challenge Program. His device development work in conjunction with the Robert E. Fischell Institute for Biomedical Devices has been funded by the TEDCO Maryland Innovation Initiative, the UMB Life Science Discovery program, and the Maryland Industrial Partnerships.

His clinical interests span the range of vascular disorders, with a particular emphasis on vascular compressive disorders, and his research interests include mechanisms of accelerating collateral artery development and thrombus resolution. His research has been supported by a National Institutes of Health/National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Mentored Career Development Award as well as R01 research grants.

Sarkar completed his undergraduate, medical, and doctorate degrees at the University Michigan. Before joining UMSOM, he was an associate professor of surgery at the University of California San Francisco.

STUDENT OF THE YEAR

Danielle D. Basdekis

JD Student, Class of 2026
Francis King Carey School of Law

Ms. Basdekis has distinguished herself as a student, scholar, and leader at the Francis King Carey School of Law, with her contributions significantly enriching the law school and advancing UMB's mission.

She entered Maryland Carey Law in 2023 after graduating from Florida State University with a double major in political science and women's studies. She joined the Student Bar Association (SBA) Executive Council, which acts as the student government for the school, and played a key part in organizing events associated with her class.

In Year 2, she served as SBA's executive vice president and is currently the executive president, presiding over the Executive Council, helping to interpret the SBA constitution and bylaws, and setting the agenda for the group's meetings.

Basdekis is a member of the board of the Maryland Public Interest Law Project, a student-run nonprofit that provides summer funding for students who want to engage in unpaid public interest internships. She has been the group's public relations chair and president and is serving as treasurer in the 2025-26 academic year.

Last spring, she worked as a graduate student consultant with the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia Law School in New York, engaging in coursework focused on education law and a project supporting citywide initiatives for a multilingualism program.

Over the past two years, she has served as an intern for the Baltimore firm Nathans & Ripke; the Baltimore City Public Schools' Office of the Legal Counsel; Judge Kathryn Grill Graeff of the Appellate Court of Maryland; and FreeState Justice, a Baltimore nonprofit that provides legal services to low-income LGBTQ+ Marylanders.

Basdekis also has been an editor for the *Maryland Law Review* and a research assistant to Paula Monopoli, JD, contributing to the Distinguished University Professor's scholarship on constitutional law and feminist theories. She also received a Rose Zetzer Fellowship, which is awarded to students who demonstrate a strong intellectual interest and commitment to women and leadership issues.

After graduating next spring, she will be a clerk for Justice Angela Eaves on the Supreme Court of Maryland.