We began this calendar year in anticipation of and preparation for a new name. It’s official! Beginning July 1, 2016, our school will no longer be called the School of The Arts and Professions (SAP). Our new name will be: School of Education, Social Sciences, and The Arts (SESA).

As part of the Academic Affairs strategic goal to restructure, SAP was charged with submitting names to UMES senior administration that better reflect the programs housed in this academic unit. The Name-Changing Committee, chaired by Dr. Lily Tsai and representatives from the five departments, was charged with this task. After committee deliberation, six possible names were submitted to the Dean and presented at a school-wide meeting. Three names were eventually selected and submitted to senior administration, each listing “Education” as the lead program in the school name. In addition to recognizing Education’s distinction as the only nationally accredited program in the school, the new name also more clearly recognizes and reflects the other programs within the school. Other selected updates and highlights for 2016 are presented below.

Several searches to fill vacant faculty and administrative positions are active. Most significant is the search to fill the vacant department chair’s position in criminal justice. The search committee has been successful in identifying outstanding candidates. Campus interviews have also been scheduled. We anticipate making a decision and employment offer by early spring. A search is also underway for the Dean’s administrative assistant. Ms. Jenni Price, who held this position for nearly three years, has accepted another position at UMES. She was an exceptional administrative assistant and will be missed. A search to replace Ms. Price was expected to be completed in February.

To engage, serve and provide a formal structure to involve students in the governance of the school, a six-member Student Advisory Council has been established. Students were selected by their department chairpersons for their leadership and ability to communicate and represent SAP students. Chairing this council is a Sociology major and aspiring attorney, Alisa Fornwald. Other members are Keona Crouell (Sociology), Nathecia Brooks (Criminal Justice), Lance Morris (English), Sharonne Tilghman (Counseling) and Jessa Whiting (Applied Design). The council is currently organizing several collaborative activities for spring 2016, including these: A meet-and-greet with faculty and administrators, a cookout-recruitment event during Springfest, and a 5-K run in collaboration with the SAP Executive Board.

Finally, the SAP Executive Board continues to be dynamic. During its Fall 2015 meeting, Ms. Darlene P. Richeson became the newest member. Richeson, president of M zie Global Solutions, is an expert in domestic and international government relations. She also has expertise in public policy and advocacy. Respectively, Richeson is collaborating with the social sciences department and organizational leadership program to enhance a public policy course and develop a certificate program. The executive board has also begun piloting a mentoring program. Currently, 20 juniors and seniors have been paired with board members, alumni and SAP faculty/administrators.
UMES graduate Karim González lives in England these days. He is in the midst of earning his master’s degree in war studies at King’s College London.

“I am focusing as much as possible on how intelligence works, what are its capabilities and limits. That, mixed with theoretical knowledge about warfare, is an ideal combination to know which sort of intelligence to gather and make better informed assessments and suggestions to policy makers and military committees,” he said.

His area of study comes as no surprise to his professors at UMES where he earned a bachelor’s degree in history, was an award winning athlete and graduated summa cum laude in 2012.

“Karim González has been fascinated by war since I’ve known him,” says Kathryn Barrett-Gaines, with whom he studied history as an undergraduate.

At King’s College, “We read, talk, study and breathe it all day, every day. Aside from my classes, guest speakers come every week to talk about current issues like dealing with ISIS, remote warfare or drones, the Ukraine crisis, nuclear deals, and the history of the British intelligence machinery,” González said. “These conferences are delivered by people who hold crucial roles in the handling of these issues, so the students get firsthand insight.”

González enjoys chatting informally with the guests to learn more about what they do and how they got there. “It opens a world of possibilities to consider for my future career,” he said.

However, he spends most of his time reading and researching materials for essays. “They have to be of the highest quality, so it does take a long time to even write a few thousand words,” he said.

González has researched the analysis and use of covert operations. He is starting to think about his dissertation topic on the relationship and cooperation between intelligence and the military.

In January, he was scheduled to take part in the inaugural International Model United Nations Conference at the University of Birmingham in England, a crisis simulation in which scholars form teams that represent countries or organizations. The scholars take the roles of heads of state, cabinet members and delegates. For three days, they simulate resolving an international crisis through international cooperation.

“The aim is to challenge us to use our analytical, critical and creative skills to come up with diplomatic solutions,” González says.

A college athlete and, later, a professional baseball player, González is staying active. “I play on the King’s College London handball team, competing against other London universities,” he said. Team travel takes him outside of London to play other British universities.

A native of Mexico, this is González’s first experience in Europe, so he is taking every opportunity to travel. He visited Scotland to see Loch Ness, Inverness, Glasgow and Edinburgh. He visited medieval castles and battle sites from the times of his childhood hero William Wallace in the thirteenth century.

“It’s a dream come true. I feel beyond happy and privileged for being here,” he said. “It’s already been one of the best experiences of my life, and I’m not even a third of the way there yet. I can’t wait for what lies ahead.”
Ta-Sha Watkins graduated from UMES in 2014 with a bachelor’s degree in education. Since graduation, Watkins taught children, Pre-K through Grade 4, in Southeast Washington D.C. She started applying for jobs in other states, looking for a change.

One day, she googled “teaching jobs in Africa.” She found an American school in Casablanca, George Washington Academy, hiring a Pre-K-Grade 4 teacher. It was a perfect fit. She applied, was invited for a couple of Skype interviews, and was hired in about two weeks.

Watkins left D.C. on January 2, arrived in Casablanca January 3 and started teaching on January 5.

She teaches 15 Moroccan 4-year-olds who are learning to read and write in French with a French teacher who comes in the mornings. The rest of the school day is conducted in English. The academy is a trilingual school; by the time they are seniors, the students will be fluent in French, English and Arabic.

Watkins signed a six month contract, so she will be coming home in mid-June. She was told that if she loves it there, she is welcome to sign another contract for the next school year. She is not ready to make that decision right now, but if things stay the way they are, Watkins says she will likely stay another year or two.
Joshua Wright has been planning his first trip to Africa for years. “This has been on my list of things to do since my teen years,” he said.

An assistant professor of history at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Wright spent ten October days in Ghana. He traveled with Sankofa, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building model villages with state of the art schools, promoting good health and living conditions, creating employment opportunities and enhancing quality of life.

The Sankofa group was diverse. “Some of us were first-timers; others were making their tenth trip. We were educators, small business owners, a Vietnam veteran, a preacher and retirees. We were also joined by some Ghanaian Sankofa staffers who stayed with us throughout the trip,” Wright said.

The group visited Assin Manso, a preserved slave market. They tried wood carving in Accra. They met with a chief in Kumasi in the Ashanti region.

Wright delivered a guest lecture on American history at a middle school in Odumasi, also in Ashanti. “I was struck by the challenges the children overcome to attend school,” he said.

He has longed to visit Ghana not just for his own education, but to enhance his teaching.

“Whether I am teaching about the Civil War, the Black Consciousness Movement, black religion, or the cultural roots of jazz and hip-hop in my courses, West Africa always plays a significant role,” he said. “Until now I have never been able to give students my own firsthand perspective on this information. Usually, I show video footage of the historic slave castles of Cape Coast, whose stony presence bears witness to desolation and diaspora and yearnings for freedom that are interwoven in the tapestry of an ancient, universal story of oppression.”

Finally, with his feet on the floor of the famous slave castles of Cape Coast, Dr. Wright was surprised at his reaction. “The slave castles did not get me so much because I had read so much about them and seen so many documentaries on them, but I was quite moved by the reactions of the older Americans as they walked through and heard for the first time the history of the slave castles,” he said.
At home in Egypt, Dalal ElGemei teaches English, but this year the tables are turned. She's on the Eastern Shore teaching Arabic. UMES welcomed her in August as a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence for the 2015-2016 academic year.

“Dr. ElGemei brings not only a wealth of experience to the classroom, but the rich history of Egypt and one of the world’s oldest universities—Al Azhar in Cairo—where she is a sitting department chair,” said Tammy Gharbi, activity director of the Foreign Language Instructional Center.

UMES has offered Arabic language instruction since 2008. ElGemei is teaching those courses this year, and she’s helping to develop additional related curriculum.

The teacher is also learning.

“The idea of extensive use of advanced technology – flipped classrooms, mobile applications, etc. – will, if properly incorporated, . . . be of great assistance,” she said. “Especially in Egyptian universities that suffer from packed, overcrowded classes.”

The Fulbright Program that brought ElGemei to UMES is sponsored by the U.S. government. It’s designed to increase mutual understanding between Americans and the people of other countries.

ElGemei looks for opportunities to increase cultural understanding in and out of the classroom. She was a featured speaker as part of the School of The Arts and Professions Lecture Series in October, discussing the political upheaval she witnessed during what’s known as the Arab Spring. She also invites the campus community to join her for lunch once a month so she can answer questions from the curious, and so that Arabic language students can get a chance to practice their skills in an informal setting.

Soon after ElGemei arrived in the U.S., anti-Muslim rhetoric by political candidates became headline news. She insists she has not experienced any prejudice during her stay.

“I have been overwhelmed by the warmth and kindness of everybody,” she said.

Gharbi sees the interaction between our Fulbright scholar and the campus community as educational for all.

“It is a considerable benefit to UMES and the campus community to have a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence,” she said. “Especially in today's world of turmoil and conflict, for two countries to collaborate to bring about understanding and cultural exchange is exactly what producing globally competent students is all about.”

ElGemei hopes she’ll be remembered by her UMES students once she heads home to Cairo. “I would love to be remembered as someone who cared and was keen to develop in them a sustained motivation in learning Arabic,” she said.
Celebrating Success

A Job Well Done

Faculty members gathered to salute the winter graduates of the School of the Arts and Professions (SAP) at a dinner hosted by Dean Ray Davis in the Henson Center ballroom on December 15.

There were more than 60 SAP undergraduates scheduled to earn their degree later that week, including Elizabeth Ranger, who became the first student in recent memory to double major, completing requirements for both history and English degrees. The event also celebrated seven master’s and six doctoral graduates from the Department of Education, one master’s student from criminal justice and ten students who completed the doctoral requirements in the Department of Social Sciences.

The featured speaker for the evening was Prince Attoh, the interim coordinator for the school’s organizational leadership program. He encouraged the assembled students to celebrate their accomplishment. “Do something crazy,” he said. “You’ve earned it.”
The UMES chapter, Gamma Omicron, was chartered in 2001 by its founding and continuing advisor, Emmanuel Onyeozili. He was honored with the Advisor of the Year award at the Orlando conference. Feliciano doubles as president of both the UMES chapter and the national organization.

Tatum Simpson were elected to a two year term as national student officers at the organization’s 2015 annual conference in Orlando, Florida.

It is the University of Maryland Eastern Shore’s second successive turn at the helm of the honor society. In 2013, UMES made history as the first historically black university to field a successful slate of candidates to serve as Alpha Phi Sigma national officers.

Many Gamma Omicron alumni have gone on to become attorneys or have secured employment with federal, state and local law enforcement-related agencies.

UMES criminal justice students remain the national leaders of Alpha Phi Sigma, the honor society created in 1942 to promote excellence in scholarly achievement in what was known then as police science.

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The Department of English and Modern Languages held its third student symposium in Wilson Hall in the final days of the fall 2015 semester. For the first time, the event included the induction of new members into the international English honor society, Sigma Tau Delta.

The conference panels featured 30 students who presented their work—in composition, literature, public speaking, creative writing and communications—to an audience of students and faculty members. The discussions were wide-ranging and included the art of diffusing racial tension through comedy, the power of a peaceful protest and how to take advantage of unexpected opportunities.

One of the conference organizers, faculty member Amy Hagenrater-Gooding, also serves as co-advisor to the English honor society. She suggested including the induction ceremony as part of the symposium in order to bring more attention to the academic achievements of its members.

Senior English majors Colleen Hendrickson and Danielle Jackson joined sophomore Lance Morris as the newest members of the UMES Psi Mu chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Their formal pledge to the organization includes a promise to “advance the study of the chief literary masterpieces, to encourage worthwhile reading, to promote the mastery of written expression and to foster a spirit of fellowship among students specializing in the English language and literature.”

Shauna-Kaye Jones, who was a member of the chapter before her graduation in 2014, served as the induction ceremony’s keynote speaker.
The Department of Fine Arts took a victory lap of sorts in late 2015, staging a campus exhibit which celebrated the success of the department's commercial photography concentration and its alumni.

From October 29 to November 19, the Mosely Art Gallery hosted the unique exhibition "NOW & THEN: UMES Commercial Photography Alumni 2002-2014." The show contained photographs of five alumni: Kristie Boyd, Megan Raymond, Desmond Smith, Arionne Carroll and Megan Powell. It featured work from both their student years and their current professional practice.

Photography professor Michel Demanche began the commercial photography program in 2002. She aims to prepare students with the critical technical skills and creative and analytical capabilities they will need to become successful in the field.

The program’s success was made evident by the photographers featured, whose careers range from wedding and portraits, to marketing and business, to formal government photos.

Boyd, an official photographer for the U.S. House of Representatives, submitted portraits of President Barack Obama, Pope Francis and retiring Speaker of the House John Boehner.

Demanche’s practice of swapping one of her photos for a favorite photo of her student artists has resulted in a rich private collection which she proudly displays in her home.

"With my very first student up to the present I have maintained a simple promise: you let me choose one photo you make and you can have any photo from my archive," she said. “So far, 28 students have gone on to graduate and make that deal.”

Viewing the earlier works of the five selected alumni next to their current photographs demon-
Celebrating Success

strates not only how far they have come, but also how their education has served them well both professionally and artistically.

The exhibit kicked off with a panel discussion, “The Role of Photography in a Changing Society,” featuring Demanche and two of her former students, Boyd and Raymond. They addressed an audience of current UMES photo and art students as well as members of the campus community and the general public.

The discussion covered the vast changes which have taken place in the field of photography, with Demanche’s emphasis on how, despite those changes, the fundamentals of the craft stay the same. Boyd brought a unique perspective on the rapid fire, quick decision world of documenting the events she covers on Capitol Hill, while Raymond explained the complexity of being at the correct point to capture the drama of sports.

In December, after the “NOW & THEN” Mosley Gallery exhibit closed, a smaller sampling of the photographs from the show were retained to be displayed at the university’s new downtown Princess Anne location, Hawk’s Corner. The space represents an opportunity to highlight the talents of UMES students and faculty and form bridges with the local community through art.

“We are the lucky recipients of the continued artistry of our alumni,” Demanche said. “We look forward to their future professional achievements.”

SAGE ADVICE

When Pulitzer Prize winning columnist Leonard Pitts came to UMES in early December as part of the School of The Arts and Professions (SAP) continuing lecture series, little did he know he’d be back in less than two weeks to address an even larger audience as the December 2015 commencement speaker.

Pitts’ SAP lecture on December 7 was a candid assessment of the realities facing young African Americans and an inspirational challenge to succeed despite the pitfalls.

“Not only was his discourse on race bold, salient and thought provoking,” said Dean Ray Davis, “but I was impressed with how he was able to engage the audience.”

Pitts is both a practiced and powerful speaker—and the father of Onjel Pitts, a graduating English major. So, a few days before graduation, when word came that the scheduled commencement speaker would be unable to travel to campus, he agreed to serve as the university’s featured speaker.

At the ceremony, Pitts took the opportunity to deliver a brief congratulatory shout-out to his youngest daughter who sat amidst the graduates, and he also acknowledged her infant daughter, Maya, a potential member of the UMES Class of 2037, wearing a tiny cap and gown in the audience.

His formal remarks, urging students to persevere in the face of adversity, drew a standing ovation from the assembled faculty. “Persist. Always persist,” he said. “When in doubt, persist. When you are not so sure what to do, persist.”

The SAP had an additional role in the success of the winter commencement ceremony. The graduate who delivered the student commentary was English major Tahja Cropper. A member of Richard A. Henson Honors Program, Cropper is a Princess Anne native who completed her degree in three and a half years.

She urged her colleagues to make a difference.

“Take your passion, your curiosity and your intelligence and direct it towards your responsibility to the world,” Cropper said. “Leave your mark.”
English students at UMES have the opportunity to read both the works of Shakespeare and modern dramatic masterpieces like Henrik Ibsen’s “Hedda Gabler” as part of their coursework, but how can students see Hamlet’s descent into madness or Hedda’s manipulative prowess within the walls of Wilson Hall? Professors Dean Cooledge and Amy Hagenrater-Gooding found an answer to that question within the community itself.

“Viewing live theatre provides such a rich experience. The written word is powerful on its own, but seeing a drama enacted the way it was meant to be seen takes the understanding of the work to a whole new level,” Hagenrater-Gooding said. “Students need to see how staging, sound and lighting really contribute to the work, not to mention the characterization given by the actors themselves.”

To that end, the two professors felt like they struck gold when they heard about the Brown Box Theatre Company. Founded by Kyler Taustin in 2009, the Brown Box Theatre set about to remedy a lack of professional theatre arts on the Delmarva Peninsula. Taustin utilized his theatre arts degree earned at Emerson College and his passion for live theatre to stage his first local Shakespeare production in 2011, and since that time, Brown Box Theatre has been going strong, not only showcasing new Shakespeare performances every fall, but also introducing contemporary shows into its repertoire.

The UMES professors took notice. Cooledge and Hagenrater-Gooding invited their drama classes and members of the English Honor Society, which they both co-advises, to the Brown Box Theatre performance of “Macbeth” in 2014. Since that inaugural performance, UMES students have attended “Taming of the Shrew” at the Teackle Mansion in Princess Anne and “Lab Rats,” an original production by Patrick Gabridge, at Headquarters Live in Salisbury.

UMES English major and honor society president Liz Ranger observed, “I read Hamlet, but it just didn’t resonate with me; but when I saw the actor actually portray Hamlet, I fell in love. It exceeded my expectations and completely blew my mind.” The professors maintain that’s the kind of cathartic emotive response drama should bring.

“We are looking forward to taking students to “Boxer Shorts II” in the spring and Shakespeare’s “Cymbeline” next fall,” Cooledge said.

The Shakespeare class will be reading the play next semester in preparation for seeing the performance.

Boxer Shorts II is an exploration of four Hispanic playwrights, Jose Rivera, Nilo Cruz, Maria Irene Fornes and Caridad Svich. Students were scheduled to see that production in March.
Fine arts professor Brad Hudson holds a permanent place in Star Wars history.

While accompanying a group of UMES students to the Wizard World Comic Convention in Philadelphia last year, Hudson was approached by an executive from The Topps Company, Inc.

The executive was keenly interested in Hudson’s work and offered him the opportunity to create “sketchcards” to coincide with the release of the seventh installment in the wildly popular Star Wars series, “Star Wars: The Force Awakens.”

Topps is the world’s leading producer of trading cards. While most widely known for cards that feature athletes, the company also sells collectible cards related to entertainment franchises.

Sketchcards are rare inserts which may be discovered in a pack of mostly photo trading cards. The odds of buying a pack that contains a sketchcard are very small, so they are highly sought after collectibles.

Originally Hudson was contracted to create 100 Star Wars sketchcards; so far he has drawn almost 300.

Since the cards have been released, he has been contacted by fans from across the United States who have received his drawings in their packs of Star Wars trading cards. The cards have also made him a local celebrity. He has been interviewed by the local newspaper and several of the area’s television stations.
Community Connections

Faculty members from the Department of Criminal Justice teamed up with a member of the Department of Education to help local middle school students solve a murder mystery on Halloween.

It wasn’t your typical college recruitment tool, but the fictional crime scene investigation was exactly that.

It was part of a Maryland Higher Education Commission grant secured by Michael Nugent, the education department’s special projects coordinator. The money is being used to underwrite “Science Saturday” programs in Wicomico and Dorchester counties.

The program targets kids who are potential first generation college students and is designed to make learning fun, exciting and challenging with the hope of instilling “going to college” as a reachable goal.

“We’re hoping kids will begin to see teaching as a viable career choice,” Nugent said. “If they have a good time learning from college professors, they just might consider becoming teachers themselves.”

Since one of the “Science Saturdays” fell on Halloween, Nugent recruited his colleagues Thomas Mosley and Daniel Dahlgren from the criminal justice department to stage a “C.S.I.”-like plot at the Fruitland Community Center.

Nugent has recruited other UMES faculty members, including experts in math, chemistry and photography, for additional Saturday presentations, so the youngsters who participate get a big picture view of what lies beyond middle and high school.

**Crime Solvers**

Often, when members of the local community want to know more about a subject, they turn to the UMES faculty.

History professor Kathryn Barrett-Gaines has noticed a recent resurgence of interest in Olympian Jesse Owens. “Maybe lots of people are reading the new book “Boys in the Boat” and recalling the 1936 Berlin Olympics but, for whatever reason, I have been invited to give three public presentations about Jesse Owens,” she said.

They included appearances at the Wicomico Public Library in Salisbury and the Somerset County Library in Princess Anne.

To educate herself, Barrett-Gaines read books by and about Jesse Owens. Her favorite is a detailed and a “fun to read” biography by William Baker, “Jesse Owens: An American Life.” In researching Jesse Owens’ life, Baker relied heavily on articles in black newspapers like the New York Amsterdam News, Cleveland Gazette, Baltimore Afro-American and many others.

“He is such a fan of the value of black newspapers; he told me that if he had a million bucks, he would deposit microfilms of black papers in every research library,” she said. These papers, along with oral interviews, helped Baker clarify some famous myths about Owens, like the myth that he was snubbed by Hitler.

“These myths often amount to the sum total of what most people know about Jesse Owens, so I highly recommend reading about him,” Barrett-Gaines said. “From Jesse Owens’ life experience, we can learn about segregation, integration, sharecropping, Northern migration, urbanization, world wars, amateur and professional sports. We can learn about choices and unintended consequences, and people making the best of situations beyond their choosing. This is what history is!”
Psychology professor Michael Patterson has developed an experimental course in the Department of Education called Mysteries of the Mind.

The catalog description of topics which may be covered is intriguing: the constructive nature of memory and eyewitness testimony; science vs. pseudoscience; psychopaths and the brain; nature vs. nurture and epigenetics; narcissism and entitlement; conversation disorder and social media; politics, racism and IQ; and plasticity and brain games.

While the concepts could sound intimidating to those who haven’t earned a Ph.D. in psychology, Patterson is constantly finding unique ways to engage his students and demonstrate complicated topics.

During the fall 2015 semester, the power of brain waves was on the agenda.

“Throughout the day, in your waking state, an electroencephalogram—an EEG—will display all five types of brain waves at the same time, i.e., Delta, Theta, Alpha, Beta, and Gamma,” he explained. “However, one particular brain wave will be dominant depending on the mental and emotional state, level of vigilance and degree of consciousness of a person. Brainwaves also alter in response to changes in environmental stimuli, such as music.”

To make the point, his students watched their EEGs while they listened to their own music selections.

“Students were curious to see how their minds responded to their least favorite song in comparison to their most favorite song,” Patterson said.

Using the EEG, students measured their brainwaves and discovered brainwaves that correlate with focus and attention were significantly more dominant while listening to their favorite songs.

Take away message? When a student wants to focus, they should make sure they have a playlist with their favorite songs. When they want to relax, just set it to shuffle.
Fans of comic book superheroes got a firsthand look at the work of one of the industry’s most well-known illustrators during a fall exhibit in the Department of Fine Arts’ Mosely Gallery. “Dynamic Lines: The Art of Mike Zeck” opened on September 28 and ran through October 22.

Michael Zeck has been drawing sequential art for the comic book industry for decades. During his career, he has worked on such iconic characters as Captain America, Batman and G.I. Joe.

The UMES exhibit showcased original art, drawings, paintings and preliminary sketches by this comic book icon.

Zeck’s earliest work for Marvel Comics, “Master of Kung Fu” began in 1977. In 1984, Zeck would illustrate the epic miniseries “Secret Wars.” This story incorporated all of the major characters from the Marvel Comics universe and would prove to be hugely popular. Later, Zeck would illustrate “The Punisher” miniseries for Marvel. His interpretation of this grim antihero remains a fan favorite.

Early sketches of the Punisher and newer commissions of this same character were part of the UMES exhibition. Also included were character illustrations for Scarecrow and Nomad from Marvel Universe, an ongoing, illustrated comic book database from the 1980s.

Zeck remains a favored artist in the comic book community. He continues to create cover illustrations for a variety of comics.
Lessons Learned 15

In my opinion, experiential—direct, hands-on—learning is the most practical and fulfilling form of enhancing one's knowledge and skills in a specific area. During my time as a student at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, I learned some of my greatest lessons that way.

The most revealing period came during the summer of 2015 when I decided to take on the momentous task of producing a documentary about my great grandfather, Benjamin Franklin Cropper, affectionately known as Pop Ben. I earned academic credit through an independent study which culminated in the creation of “Passing Through Quietly: The Man Benjamin Franklin Cropper.”

I began this journey knowing only three things about this man: He was my maternal grandmother’s father; he was a soldier in World War I; and he died in 1961 when my mother was 3-years-old.

Aside from a single photograph, a military headstone and a single account from a member of my immediate family, there isn’t much evidence left on Virginia’s Eastern Shore to prove the physical existence of the 120-year-old patriarch of the Cropper family.

During pre-production, my days were spent identifying and locating the few individuals left who could recall the days of Benjamin Cropper and researching public records using physical catalogs, microfilms and written requests to federal agencies such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Personnel Records Center.

While viewing records from the days gone by and recording my interviewees’ fond memories of the 1930s and 40s, I gained a more vivid perspective of who Pop Ben was and what life was like for him.

Benjamin Franklin Cropper, the son of Mary Cropper, was born on October 12, 1895, in Wattsville, Virginia and raised by his maternal grandparents. He was the oldest of 11 children. Following his service in World War I, Private Cropper of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps married Laurene Viola Tull in Princess Anne, Maryland on July 30, 1921. Their union produced four children, a son and three daughters. Pop Ben died of prostate cancer on September 24, 1961, at the Fort Howard Veterans Hospital in Maryland, just two and a half weeks shy of his 66th birthday.

Searching for my roots in the place I have been my whole life can only be described as a humbling and gratifying experience.

This opportunity gave me the practical experience of creating a documentary and propelled me to pursue this form of storytelling.

I found new relatives whom I am meeting for the first time, as well as people I have known my whole life but never knew we shared ancestry.

Because my mind was focused on the production, I didn’t realize how my work affected my family until I presented the documentary at a private premiere. As I turned the lights on following the screening, their eyes were filled with tears as they asked me to play it again. I lost count of how many times they watched it, but each time there was silence, and they watched as if it were the first time.

Editor’s Note: Tahja Cropper graduated cum laude in December. An Eastern Shore native, she earned her degree in English, with a minor in telecommunications, in three and a half years. The project she describes in this article inspired her to apply to Wake Forest University’s graduate program in documentary film making. She hopes to begin graduate school in September.
Thank You for Your Service

The former chair of the Department of Criminal Justice returned to UMES in November to lead a salute to American military veterans.

On campus, we remember Bob Harleston as the person who created the university’s criminal justice degree program; there are others who remember him as their commanding officer. Professor Harleston is also General Harleston.

Thirty years in the U.S. Army earned him the rank of brigadier general and a special place of honor at a gourmet dinner prepared by students in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management to celebrate Veterans Day.

That evening, Harleston orchestrated a series of toasts to each of the military services and to our commander-in-chief. Then he recited, by heart, “In Flander’s Field,” the poem written by a Canadian medical officer to honor those who died during the first world war.

He says he learned the poem in his seventh or eighth grade English class, long before he knew he would be a soldier. He told his audience at the UMES dinner, “Its message is as relevant to our challenges today in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan as it was to our challenges on the battlefields of World War I.”