

February 5, 2015

UMBC

AN HONORS UNIVERSITY IN MARYLAND

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To: UMBC Administration

Re: UMBC New Roots Garden

I am writing this letter with enthusiastic support for the proposed UMBC New Roots Garden, a project spearheaded by Professor Jill Wrigley and UMBC sophomore Sondheim Scholar Rosa Rada, in partnership with the International Rescue Committee (IRC). This project has the potential to benefit a variety of stakeholders, including UMBC students, faculty and staff, UMBC as an institution, and the immigrant and refugee community served by the IRC. By moving forward with this initiative, UMBC's actions will be aligned with its mission to be "a dynamic public research university integrating teaching, research and service to benefit the citizens of Maryland...dedicated to cultural and ethnic diversity, social responsibility and lifelong learning."

The UMBC New Roots Garden will be a vegetable and fruit garden, planted and maintained by immigrants and refugees served by the IRC. The IRC works with several Burmese refugee families who live within one mile of UMBC. Most of these families live in apartments, and they do not have access to outdoor space for gardening. Some of these families also come from agrarian backgrounds, and they are used to growing at least some of their own food. By providing space for immigrants and refugees to garden, UMBC will be inviting members of the broader community onto campus and giving them the opportunity to utilize space, teach and learn from members of the UMBC community.

UMBC students, staff and faculty involved with The Garden would also benefit from the New Roots Garden. The space proposed for the New Roots Garden is adjacent to The Garden. UMBC community members active in The Garden and immigrants and refugees will have opportunities for intercultural exchanges and working toward the shared purpose of growing and harvesting vegetables and fruit. Faculty members, including Professor Wrigley, can build work with the New Roots Garden into academic courses, and there may also be opportunities for students to intern with the New Roots Garden. In combination, The Garden and the New Roots Garden have the potential to become a venue rich with opportunities for cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, and innovative community-based learning and research.

Professor Wrigley and Rosa are both thoughtful individuals, dedicated to sustainable food systems, food security and building authentic community – campus connections. I hope in the future, the Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program will be able to involve Scholars in serving, conducting research, and participating in cultural exchange with members of the New Roots Garden. This project holds great potential for both the UMBC community and the immigrant and refugee community served by the IRC, and I hope the project can move forward during the Spring 2015 semester.

Sincerely,

Jessica R. Cook
Associate Director, Sondheim Public Affairs Scholars Program