

In Their Own Words

By James Damewood, chemistry '78

While I thoroughly enjoyed my time at UMBC, it was not until years later that I would realize how special my experience really was and what a significant influence it would ultimately have in my professional development.

Like many of my classmates, I was one of the first in my immediate family to go to college. UMBC offered a rich environment with caring, accessible faculty that, at the same time, made no compromises with regard to academic quality or expectations.

I didn't set out with the intention of majoring in chemistry, but in retrospect, it is easy to see that this was where I always belonged. I was fortunate to have the option of choosing between a variety of chemistry courses that left me as prepared as, or even more so than, the rest of my entering class in graduate school, despite the fact that many of them came from "big name" schools.

While the classes were exciting, what I remember most are my experiences outside of class. As a mid-year sophomore interested in organic chemistry, I asked Ralph Pollack, chemistry professor, if there were opportunities to work in his research labs. Not only was I welcomed into his labs, but was integrated as an active participant in his current research program.

Students working on projects with faculty were exposed, first hand, to the excitement and challenges of research, which fully enriched my overall experience at UMBC. This was a special experience for all of us. We soon learned that there were scientific questions that even the faculty, who had taught us so much, could not answer. Through countless discussions and examples, our mentors turned this into an eye-opening revelation. They taught us how to approach research and how we could begin to probe for the answers. I continued working with Pollack until graduation and will always remember what I gained through the experience.

There are many ways that each of us can help UMBC continue this tradition of excellence. We were given so much; now we can help others share these benefits through our support.

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With Damewood's support and encouragement, the Wilmington, Del., company he works for, AstraZeneca Pharmaceuticals LP, donated \$50,000 to establish the AstraZeneca Scholarship Fund and have contributed more than \$30,000 in gifts-in-kind to UMBC. The goal of the Life Sciences Campaign at UMBC is to raise \$1 million over three years from alumni, faculty, staff, corporations and foundations. The alumni portion of the campaign is \$200,000. As of June 28, 2001 donations have been received from 450 Life Sciences alumni, parents, faculty, staff, friends, corporations and foundations totaling more than \$390,000.