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## **Focused students win scholarships in new UMBC program\*** **By KAREN McLAUGHLIN For The Capital**

Some days, Tonya Taylor doesn't know how she juggles it all. A full-time student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County's Erickson School of Aging Studies, the wife and mother of three is the epitome of a busy woman. But all that work is paying off.

Mrs. Taylor, 36, is the first student to be awarded the \$5,000 AARP Career Award. The award, created exclusively for the newly founded Erickson School, provides financial assistance to students transferring from community colleges seeking to earn their bachelor's degree in Management of Aging Services at UMBC.

Dr. Joe Gribbin, an affiliate professor in the university's new program, said the award committee was impressed by Mrs. Taylor's motivation.

"We were very impressed with how passionate she was, how focused she was," Mr. Gribbin said.

Mrs. Taylor, of Annapolis, is in her second semester at UMBC in Catonsville and is a member of the first graduating class in the university's Erickson School of Aging Studies. The school is a new interdisciplinary undergraduate program at UMBC that includes study in aging services, management and public policy.

Created with a \$5 million gift from retirement community developer John Erickson and headed by Kevin Eckert of Severna Park, the pre-professional degree program prepares students for different job opportunities in the growing field of aging policy and services.

Rick Moody is director of academic affairs for the nonprofit American Association of Retired Persons, an organization that represents the nation's age 50 and older population. He said transfer students can play a vital role in filling jobs created by the nation's aging boom.

"Community colleges can play a crucial role as vehicles to help begin retraining our workforce to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of our maturing society," Mr. Moody said in a prepared statement.

Mrs. Taylor prepared for her studies by earning an associate's degree in Human Services and General Studies from Anne Arundel Community College. There, she balanced a full-time course load, a part-time job and three internships at the Anne Arundel County Department of Aging and Disabilities. It was there that she

found her passion.

As an intern, she learned about case management, respite care and support for caretakers.

"We went to people's homes and saw their needs, took their vitals, helped the caretakers with any necessary paperwork and keeping track of the person's medications," said Mrs. Taylor.

She also learned about nursing home care supervision and respite care services for caretakers. Best of all, she said, she was treated like an employee.

"We were able to go around all the different departments in Department of Aging, as well as other organizations like Partners in Care and Meals on Wheels," Mrs. Taylor explained. "You saw different aspects and how it really worked."

After graduating from Anne Arundel Community College last May, Mrs. Taylor and her family decided that it was time for her to continue her studies at UMBC.

But attending the larger university, especially as a nontraditional student, has been an adjustment.

"Anne Arundel (Community College) is small, it has a family feel," she said. "Going to UMBC was like going to the big city."

But Mrs. Taylor's determination sets her apart.

"She has picked herself up by her bootstraps," said Mr. Gribbin. "She wants to be the director of the Anne Arundel Department of Aging and Disabilities. This is a very mature young lady."

Mrs. Taylor's UMBC classmate, freshman Lauren Proctor, has also made an impression. Ms. Proctor, 18, of Indian Head in Charles County, is the second recipient of the Erickson School Achievement Scholarship. The scholarship provides full tuition and fees per academic year for a qualified student pursuing a bachelor of arts degree at UMBC in Management of Aging Services. Jena Rathell of Edgewater, was the first recipient of the scholarship, receiving it last September.

Although she never expected to pursue aging studies in college, Ms. Proctor learned about the new program when she was accepted to UMBC.

"It was a major part of my decision to come to UMBC," she said.

Ms. Proctor said that when she began classes last fall, she especially enjoyed learning about the different social aspects of the aging population and resulting

policies.

"I think that the issues that have caused policies concerning the aging population are interesting, as well as possible ways to change them and improve them," Ms. Proctor said.

Mr. Gribbin is equally impressed with Ms. Proctor. As a member of the scholarship committee, he said that Ms. Proctor's high school record was remarkable and her drive was admirable.

"She writes like a professional," he said. "For a 17- or 18-year-old, she brought a lot of polish to her application."

Ms. Proctor wants to pursue a career in policy work and attend law school to specialize in elder law.

For Mrs. Taylor, who also cares for her grandfather who has suffered with Alzheimer's since 1999, it's all about what she can do to help the older population live longer and with dignity. She sees the Department of Aging as a way for her to do that.

"I would really like to work in case management or ombudsman if I had a choice, but really any department within the Department of Aging and Disabilities would be fine," said Mrs. Taylor. "It's a wonderful organization."