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Tenured Professor Returns to Honors Roots

Ibrahim Dabo

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Media Credit: Courtesy of University of Baltimore
Betsy Yarrison

After 20-plus years at the University of Baltimore, Betsy Yarrison, Ph.D., was appointed to a position she once held 16 years ago. Since November, Yarrison, director of the Bachelor of Arts program in interdisciplinary studies, has been acting director of the Helen P. Denit Honors Program.

Yarrison has a long history in higher education honors. She graduated from the honors program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has taught honors classes at Cook College, Rutgers University and University of Maryland, Eastern Shore.

Also, she served on the committee that designed UB's original honors program in 1978.

"I'm thrilled," Yarrison said. "I was the first director of the Helen P. Denit Honors Program [from 1992 to 2000] and of the liberal arts college honors program before that. So it's a pleasure for me to hold the fort until we get a permanent honors director in the job."

One of her goals is to incorporate freshmen and sophomores into the current upper-division honors program so that there is only one honors community.

Yarrison said she always gives her best effort for students to optimize their learning abilities.

"I'm a very student-oriented teacher," Yarrison said. "One of the reasons I came to the University of Baltimore is because this is an institution where the emphasis of scholarship has always been good teaching."

Tara Tosti, MA publications design, has taken honors and standard-level classes with Yarrison. "She values discussion and each student's opinion and encourages discourse—no matter what the subject.

"Her appointment is fantastic. I think the biggest problem with the honors program before was lack of awareness—I didn't even know it existed until my later semesters," she said. "If anyone can bring awareness and energy to a program, it's Betsy. Her knowledge and personality will make the program something everyone will want to know more about."

In addition to her teaching style, Yarrison's commitment to the honors program is unquestionable.

"Betsy's enthusiasm and dedication to the honors program made her the natural choice for her new role as acting director," said Susan Tatterson, graphic designer for the Merrick School of Business, alumna and honors program graduate.

"Under her guidance, the program will grow to a new level—benefiting not only UB, but [also] the students currently involved in the program. The honors class I took with Betsy and Deborah Kohl remains one of my most memorable as an undergraduate," Tatterson said.

Kohl, Ph.D., associate professor in the Division of Applied Behavioral Sciences, was enrolled in two of Yarrison's freshman English classes many years ago and remembers how her learning techniques rejuvenated the classroom.

"I knew I was going to like her because the first day of class, we were reading 'The Iliad' and then she said, 'Don't worry about this, it will be just like Star Trek,'" Kohl said. "She was just as wonderful then as she is now."



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Kohl said that Yarrison, an officer in the National Collegiate Honors Council, has ensured that UB is well represented in the community of honors programs at the state and national levels.

Having now returned to her honors roots at UB, among her many goals, Yarrison will continue the 30-year tradition of providing food for honors students in the honors lounge.

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