Good afternoon Chairman Bohanan, Vice Chair Mizeur, and members of the House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Education and Economic Development. I am grateful for the opportunity to share how, with your ongoing support, University of Maryland University College (UMUC) is changing lives and creating futures for more than 33,000 Maryland residents.

AN EXTRAORDINARY UNIVERSITY

UMUC continues to play a critical and expanding role within the state’s public system of higher education. With working adults returning to college in record numbers, UMUC is still the only publicly funded four-year institution in Maryland—and one of very few in the United States—dedicated entirely to meeting the unique learning needs of such students. As the state’s open access university and largest virtual university, UMUC offers a viable and affordable educational option for both underserved and nontraditional students who might not otherwise be able to attend college.

UMUC has also built a solid reputation as the place to go for rapid-response solutions to critical workforce development needs, as and where they emerge. In fact, our new cybersecurity education initiative has made UMUC a valuable asset in Governor O’Malley’s campaign to make Maryland the national epicenter for cybersecurity excellence—a movement that could bring as many as 28,000 jobs into our own backyard.

Moreover, UMUC’s Master of Arts in Teaching program supports the state’s Race to the Top education initiative, by preparing qualified and experienced high school teachers in vitally important areas, such as science, technology, engineering, and math. UMUC is also educating Maryland’s next generation of homeland security experts, environmental management professionals, and biotechnology leaders at a time when the world is increasingly more volatile and uncertain.
AN EXEMPLARY YEAR

Thanks to sound management, strategic alliances, and prudent resource allocation, UMUC marked yet another banner year of steady growth and solid innovation. In 2010, the university

- Made the top ten in Global Academy Online’s list of best online universities in the world.
- Increased new enrollment by 10 percent worldwide and online enrollments by slightly more than 13 percent.
- Achieved the highest reenrollment rate in more than five years.
- Awarded 7,774 degrees.
- Launched a groundbreaking cybersecurity education initiative that included one undergraduate and two graduate degree programs.
- Initiated an ambitious project to reengineer its undergraduate curriculum.
- Received a $1.2 million grant from the Kresge Foundation to improve undergraduate student support.
- Furnished some $7 million in scholarship assistance to 4,213 deserving students.
AN ESSENTIAL REQUEST

Accomplishments such as these reinforce UMUC’s value to the state of Maryland and its 5.5 million lifelong learners. There is no doubt that the need for what UMUC offers will become even more acute as Maryland’s economic growth targets evolve, its communities become more diverse, and its adult student population expands even further.

In meeting these realities, UMUC is uniquely positioned to pioneer any number of forward-focused academic programs and services. But to do so, the university must have the financial flexibility needed to put its best entrepreneurial foot forward while maintaining its competitive edge, enrolling qualified students, recruiting top-notch faculty, and retaining experienced staff.

Although UMUC is the nation’s largest public university, it presently receives the smallest state allotment. In fact, only about 10 percent of its operating budget comes from the state’s general fund, which means that the university must rely almost entirely on tuition fees.

At the same time, the university must remain fully compliant with state-imposed cost-cutting measures, including recent furloughs and salary freezes, that make it more difficult to attract and keep the talent needed to maintain revenues. And in the current economic climate, the need to increase and diversify these revenues has never been greater.

Therefore, we respectfully ask that in addition to its $31.2 state general fund request, UMUC be allowed the discretion to implement requisite salary adjustments, not only to meet its current obligations but also to invest in its future. To support this request, I am pleased to present the following overview of this year’s most significant accomplishments.

EXPANDING OUR ENROLLMENT

As enrollment numbers show (see graphs below), UMUC continues to grow, even in the face of tough economic times, by offering students the academic options and opportunities they not only need, but have come to expect.

UMUC’s reputation for quality is certainly a factor in these increased enrollments. Recently, UMUC made Global Academy Online’s 2010 top ten list of best online universities worldwide, for the fourth time in eight years. Considered the distance educator’s U.S. News and World Report, this Web site features the top ten of more than 300 online universities and programs worldwide ranked in its publication Best & Worst Online Degree Programs.

According to the Academy’s publication, UMUC is being recognized for its trailblazing work in virtual learning, having now become a model that many colleges and universities are “scrambling to emulate.”
REAL-TIME PROGRAMS

Unlike traditional students, adults come back to college primarily for professional advancement—and in tight job markets, that often means that they are changing careers altogether. So to provide these adult students with highly marketable credentials in the very latest high-demand fields, UMUC has developed a number of innovative strategies for quickly and effectively ramping up new academic programs in these areas. And to ensure that these programs are up to speed—and our graduates up to the job—the university works closely with dozens of learning partners, in virtually every growth sector of the economy.

Cyber Education

In response to our country’s urgent need for highly skilled cybersecurity “warriors,” UMUC launched three cybersecurity degree programs in the fall, becoming the only institution in Maryland to offer both graduate and undergraduate degrees in that field. The programs, all of which are designed to produce complete professionals, were developed by a team of qualified faculty leaders working with a group of nationally recognized industry experts. Taught predominantly online, these programs are already breaking student enrollment records, with nearly 1,500 students enrolled last semester, and another 1,300 having applied for the spring.

Teacher Education

Likewise, when asked to help the Maryland State Department of Education fill critical teacher shortages, UMUC reengineered its Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program. By recruiting from among our large student pool of career changers and military veterans, the university now has 58 teachers ready to hit the ground running at graduation. Moreover, they have all the “right stuff”—an outstanding education; a working background in science, technology, engineering, or math; and a strong desire to share what they know.

Science Management

UMUC is also one of the first universities anywhere to pioneer the professional science master’s (PSM) degree, having now produced five such programs in high-need fields, all of which may be completed online. Touted by many as the “new MBA,” a PSM degree combines graduate studies in a scientific field (such as biotechnology, environmental management, and information assurance) with business management courses. Consequently, our PSM enrollment numbers are quickly rising—from more than 1,300 students to nearly 2,000 in only two years.

FACULTY WITH REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

UMUC continues to attract and retain an outstanding faculty of more than 4,000 scholar-practitioners, who as renowned academics, superb teachers, and recognized experts in their fields, teach and work in literally every corner of the globe.

One example is Jay Liebowitz, DSc, who is the university’s highly esteemed Orkand Chair in its Graduate School of Management and Technology. Ranked one of the top 10 knowledge management/intellectual capital research practitioners in the world, Liebowitz continues to drive research and development efforts in this burgeoning field. And he is using this tremendous expertise to help keep UMUC’s programs fresh, its faculty out ahead, and its students on the leading edge.
REAL ACCESS

Thanks in large part to UMUC’s ever-expanding Community College Alliance Program, transfer students account for nearly 50 percent of UMUC’s enrollments worldwide. In fact, UMUC enrolls more transfer students from community colleges than any other Maryland institution.

Inaugurated more than a decade ago, the Alliance Program takes full advantage of UMUC’s online offerings to implement more than 400 articulation agreements with community colleges—including all 16 of Maryland’s community colleges, as well as 52 schools from out of state, many of which have multiple campuses and/or substantial enrollments.

For example, out-of-state alliance partners include Miami Dade College, which serves some 170,000 students on eight campuses and at numerous outreach centers, and Central Texas College, which is one of the largest providers of two-year educational services to the U.S. military. The community colleges of Maricopa, Lone Star, and Dallas Counties—the largest community college districts in the United States—and Ozarks Technical Community College—one of the nation’s fastest growing two-year institutions—are also partners.

Through alliances with schools like these, thousands of students are able to move smoothly from an associate’s degree to a bachelor’s degree, without losing credits or ever leaving home. In return, UMUC attracts a steady stream of accomplished transfer students who have consistently proven to be among its most talented and successful graduates.

As the program grows to include thousands of students, from coast to coast, it also serves as an exceptional conduit for attracting out-of-state tuition revenues—an important factor in sustaining UMUC’s business model.

The Alliance Program also supports President Obama’s American Graduation Initiative, by offering expanded online access to four-year degree programs and providing scholarship support.

EMPOWERING OUR STUDENTS

As an open access university, committed to serving all qualified applicants, UMUC attracts an exceptionally diverse student body, representing myriad ages and abilities, cultural traditions, and socioeconomic circumstances. This student base also encompasses a substantial number of the state’s nontraditional and underserved student populations, including more African American undergraduates than any other four-year Maryland institution and almost twice the number of African American graduate degree candidates than in all of Maryland’s historically black colleges and universities.

UMUC also caters to students who face significant disadvantages in pursuing traditional academic options. Nearly all UMUC students are busy working adults, for whom the school day begins once the evening rush hour is over. So to earn a degree, these hardworking men and women need all the support they can get—from experiential learning environments, prior learning credit options, and 24-hour help desks to online writing assistance, digital library resources, and career guidance. These resources require substantial investments, a great deal of teamwork, and more than a little ingenuity to ensure that the support provided is as empowering as it is effective.
PRACTICAL DESIGN

Last fall, UMUC’s School of Undergraduate Studies launched an ambitious curriculum redesign project with one essential goal in mind: to ensure that UMUC graduates move successfully from coursework to real work.

Since then, hundreds of UMUC undergraduate faculty members have joined forces across disciplines, departments, and divisions to determine what students should actually be capable of doing once they graduate. So with plenty of input from industry experts, they are rewriting program curricula and realigning program outcomes across the board to align better with both industry standards and “best practices” for teaching and learning.

Moreover, to boost retention and completion rates among busy working adults, the School of Undergraduate Studies is moving all of its classes—online and on-site—to an eight-week format. These shorter terms are designed to enable UMUC students—many of whom must attend school part-time—to complete a degree within roughly the same timeframe as their full-time counterparts, without having to load up on courses.

VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Although UMUC’s virtual campus was originally developed as an academic delivery system, it is also an exceptional venue for connecting our students with the university community at large and service support in particular.

For example, UMUC’s Student Success Center furnishes online access to mentors and tutors, clubs and honor societies, experts, and future colleagues in various fields of study. And since many adults still equate education with desks in a classroom, UMUC created UMUC 411, an online orientation that enables prospective students to actually “test-drive” an online course, at no cost, before they enroll—an important first step to a successful academic experience.

The university also hosts virtual job fairs, which provide an effective way for students and alumni to network without having to actually miss work. Using a customized Web site, prospective employers set up virtual booths that UMUC students and alumni may “visit” at any time, from anywhere, to research the company, chat with representatives, and submit résumés. By all accounts, the process has been exceedingly effective for everyone concerned.
CUSTOMIZED SUPPORT

Digital technology also affords any number of options for customizing support services for specific student populations and individual learning needs.

As the university of choice for nearly 40 percent of all Latino/Hispanic graduate students enrolled in Maryland’s public institutions, UMUC recently unveiled an innovative Web-based support system designed to help these graduate students address any cultural obstacles they might encounter. The system incorporates online English language and writing assistance; one-on-one tutoring, as needed; peer advising; and hands-on professional development experiences.

And thanks to a $1.2 million grant from the Kresge Foundation, UMUC is working with two of its Maryland community college partners to create a groundbreaking data mining program. By capturing a wealth of information to support various predictive learning models, this program will enable UMUC to furnish far better support for undergraduate students as they move through the higher education pipeline.

Digital technology is also being used to develop undergraduate courses in conjunction with the Carnegie Mellon Open Learning Initiative. This cutting-edge project uses the latest technologies to foster a far more dynamic, flexible, and responsive e-learning environment for all students, regardless of their individual learning preferences and prior academic experience. The model provides data about student use and learning for both faculty and course designers and uses continuous evaluation of class performance to give faculty the information they need to effectively modify or supplement instruction to meet learning objectives.

FINANCIAL RELIEF

For working adults who are juggling tuition fees with grocery bills and mortgage payments, the cost of higher education can make it difficult to afford even a few courses here and there, much less a degree. So these students look for grants and scholarships that will help defray tuition expense and reduce student loan debt.

Because of this need, UMUC has made scholarship assistance its number one fundraising priority—a commitment that paid off last year to the tune of some $7 million in awards to more than 4,200 worthy students. UMUC also makes sure students are aware of all the ways they can make study more affordable—from military benefits and work-study options to employer-provided assistance and interest-free monthly payments—online at www.umuc.edu/paymentoptions.
EXTENDING OUR REACH

As the university’s enrollment grows, so does its footprint—both here and abroad. Although its roots are firmly planted here in Maryland, UMUC is truly a global academic enterprise, operating on four continents and serving more than 90,000 students in 27 countries and territories, all 50 states, and the nation’s capital.

AT HOME

Last year, UMUC opened its new and much-needed Academic Center at Largo, conveniently located in the heart of Largo’s ever-expanding business and technology district. In addition to consolidating the university’s rapidly expanding academic enterprise, this facility fully supports the state’s “green” building initiative. Indeed, it is the only building in the world that has been refurbished to achieve LEED Gold Certification.

AROUND THE WORLD

 Ranked by Military Times Edge as the most popular institution among active-duty military personnel, UMUC is the university of choice for some 50,000 servicemembers, military veterans, and their family members. In keeping with its long tradition of serving U.S. military personnel, UMUC continues to offer classes or advisory services (or both) at every military base in Maryland, as well as at bases across Asia and Europe—including 36 military field sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. Needless to say, this outreach gives Maryland yet another competitive advantage when base realignment and closure decisions are made.

Under a contract from the Department of Defense, UMUC has opened 10 new National Test Centers in Europe and the Middle East, with 15 more scheduled for completion. These centers house UMUC computer labs that are authorized to administer standardized tests for college credit, military exams, and various commercial certification tests. And while the government is extremely pleased with our speed and efficiency in getting this project off the ground, we are even more delighted with the tremendous visibility it affords.
FULFILLING OUR COMMITMENT

UMUC exemplifies many of the values we prize here in Maryland: lifelong learning, conscientious leadership, equal opportunity, and public service. The students who attend this great university truly represent its bold spirit, tremendous integrity, and high academic standards. Indeed, they are this university’s greatest legacy and the one constant barometer of its success.

Therefore, we owe them the very best that higher education has to offer. With your support, UMUC will continue to fulfill that commitment with the same enthusiasm and innovation that has always set this university apart from its competition.