TESTIMONY

TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS, SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

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PRESIDENT

FEBRUARY 25, 2008
INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Kasemeyer, Vice-Chairman Madaleno, and members of the Health, Education, and Human Resources Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about University of Maryland University College (UMUC), and the role it continues to play in the state of Maryland and, indeed, around the world.

UMUC is a unique institution because of its global reach. With the largest online enrollment of any public institution in the United States, UMUC continues to put its name, and the Maryland brand, across the country and around the world. At the same time, UMUC is foremost a Maryland institution, as 78 percent of our students are Maryland residents.

Yet as UMUC continues to compete in the global marketplace, we will face a number of challenges, especially when it comes to sustaining enrollment levels and revenues, a critical factor in making postsecondary education available to the state's underserved populations. Unlike Maryland's other public universities, UMUC must respond to growing competition for adult students with stepped-up marketing efforts, which in turn place a greater strain on our institutional budget.
Access

A major component of our service to Maryland is found in our accessibility. UMUC accepts all qualified students who come to us in pursuit of higher education opportunities. Our colleagues at University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), and the other state institutions simply cannot accept all their qualified applicants due to limitations on dormitories and other living spaces, classrooms, labs, and so on. At UMUC, we use innovation and technology to overcome those limitations with our online programs and classrooms in 21 locations across the state. We do not turn away qualified students for lack of resources or space. This is a very powerful policy that transcends many other policy issues, as will be discussed further.

That is a bold mission, and fulfilling it requires innovation and creativity not only in terms of course design and delivery but also with respect to wraparound student services. Our students are so geographically dispersed that we cannot expect them to commute to our campus to register for courses, apply for financial aid, receive advising, or make use of library resources. In fact, we believe that not having students travel for services gives us a competitive advantage and supports climate change initiatives. For this reason we have chosen to surround all of our courses and degree programs, especially those intended for fully online delivery, with an array of services designed to increase the value of our students’ educational experiences with us. One such recent innovation is our automated transfer credit evaluation process to ensure students receive an evaluation of their transcript within two days. A new self-service online system is being designed to assist students in determining how many credits may be transferred, saving time and money.

Our accessibility is complemented by our affordability. With the Governor’s tuition replacement funding included in the fiscal 2009 allowance, UMUC continues to have the second lowest tuition and fee schedule in the University System of Maryland (USM). As will be discussed later, this tuition policy can both help and hurt UMUC’s accessibility.

I mention these facets of the University to give some framework for the comments I am about to make with regard to important statewide and system-wide policy issues we now face, while ensuring that our students have the highest quality educational experience possible. It is my hope that, by the conclusion of these comments, you will have a clearer picture of the value that UMUC adds to the state of Maryland.
MINORITY STUDENTS

UMUC continues to be the “university of choice” among Maryland’s African American college students. In fall 2007 more than 10,000 African American students enrolled at UMUC, comprising 31 percent of the stateside student body. UMUC now enrolls more African Americans than any other four-year institution, including each of Maryland’s four Historically Black Institutions.

FALL 2006 UNDUPLICATED HEADCOUNT
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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<tr>
<td><strong>UMUC</strong></td>
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Source: MHEC Enrollment by Race and Gender Report
This is more than just a noteworthy enrollment fact; it is also a crucial policy issue for Maryland higher education. As will be discussed further, one of the major undertakings of the USM is closing the achievement gap between minority students and their white counterparts. It is no secret that African American students have lower retention and six-year graduation rates than other ethnic groups. What is less known, however, is why these students do not finish their educations. Many of these students have the ability to succeed in higher education, but may not have been prepared for college immediately following high school. For many, finances play a major role in deciding if they should pay tuition or work to support their families. These issues can blur also as a lack of financial support might lead to taking fewer classes and keeping students engaged in school. Financial obligations can also prevent students from focusing on their academics.

The reasons for attrition are complicated and varied. With UMUC, the state has a public institution that serves those students who were not prepared—academically, socially, financially, or all three—to succeed in a traditional undergraduate setting, but are able to manage those problems a few years later. UMUC has shown that it provides an important service for students who might seem like casualties of the achievement gap when they are in their early twenties, but become successful students when their finances and life situations stabilize. UMUC serves as the final step for a college degree for many African American students throughout Maryland. The high numbers of students that come to us from the community colleges, particularly Prince George's Community College, attest to this.

**Collaboration with MARYLAND'S COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

Several years ago, my predecessor came before you and stated that UMUC's goal was to have 2+2 articulation agreements at all 16 community colleges in Maryland. This was a daunting task, as each agreement is negotiated individually. At that time, UMUC had these “Alliance” partnerships with only five community colleges. That number is now up to 13, and we are in discussion with two other colleges that we believe will yield articulation agreements in time for the fall 2008 semester. Our team is working hard to close that loop with the final college by the end of this year.

UMUC enjoys the richest program of collaboration with community colleges of any institution in the state of Maryland. These alliances yield more than 200 articulated associate's-to-bachelor's degree programs.

Think of that for a moment—200 programs in which a community college student pursues one seamless curriculum from the associate’s degree into the bachelor's degree in a wide range of academic disciplines. Not only do these articulations prevent the loss of transfer credit, but they also allow a community
college student to continue into and complete a bachelor’s degree program without ever having to move from the county of residence. This helps to prevent brain-drains from counties such as Washington County, where only about 14 percent of residents currently are bachelor’s degree holders. In fall 2007 approximately 40 percent of our stateside undergraduate students had spent time in a Maryland community college before matriculating to UMUC.

These community college relationships are so important to UMUC that we have launched our own scholarship program to encourage outstanding community college students to continue on in a UMUC baccalaureate program. To date, UMUC has awarded over $2 million of its own funds in the form of community college scholarships. In this academic year, we reached a milestone. For the first time since implementing our Alliance Scholarships, demand has exceeded supply. For us, this means that community college students are even more convinced than ever that the partnership between their two-year institution and UMUC offers an exceptional opportunity to pursue a high-quality, four-year degree that is both affordable and accessible.

The benefits of this collaboration to both the community colleges and UMUC are considerable. The community colleges benefit by being able to offer their students more options, including longer-range planning for the future. Further, students have an incentive to remain at the community colleges to complete their associate’s degrees. In return, UMUC receives a steady stream of very highly qualified students into its upper-division undergraduate courses. UMUC has found that students who come to us through these community college articulations have significantly higher GPAs and lower withdrawal and failure rates than other undergraduate student segments.

A typical example of a UMUC-community college relationship is UMUC’s 2006 articulation with Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). We have 16 articulated programs with CCBC in the key areas of management and computer and information studies. Perhaps more significantly, we helped CCBC respond to a need for higher education opportunities at CCBC’s Dundalk campus, and began classroom-based courses in management studies there in fall 2006. Together, UMUC and CCBC are working to strengthen the Dundalk campus so that it can serve as an academic and economic centerpiece for that community.

UMUC’s outreach has profound effects on non-traditional, and a growing number of traditional, students across the state. However, there are also important statewide policy implications. UMUC’s minority students are not just completing their education goals that many started 10 or more years prior, but are doing so in a manner that defies most statewide and national trends. Working closely with community colleges not only reaches students who are unable to afford the high cost of tuition and fees at traditional campuses, but reshapes the state’s economy. We are able to accomplish this through appealing to working adults with workforce-relevant programs and tuition rates that are well below the rates of our competitors.
Self Assessment

UMUC has taken a leadership position among state institutions in the creation of a culture of continuous assessment, not only of student learning outcomes, but also of operational effectiveness and efficiency. The objectives of our Plan for the Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes include a shared commitment to continuous assessment.

UMUC continues to develop and use innovative, high-quality initiatives designed to increase student success including:

- Mandatory courses (both undergraduate and graduate) in the use of digital library and information sources;
- EDCP 100, a new elective course intended for returning and first-in-family students to familiarize them with higher education in general and UMUC in particular;
- Placement examinations in both writing and mathematics to ensure that new undergraduate students select the appropriate first writing and math courses;
- A fully online writing center that includes access to tutoring services;
- 24-hour, year-round access to UMUC librarians via e-mail, chat, or toll-free telephone;
- A Virtual Academic Integrity Lab (VAIL) to assist students in practicing proper citation and academic integrity; and
- A student orientation and tutorial in the use of UMUC’s proprietary learning management system, WebTycho.

Remaining Workforce Relevant

UMUC’s wide-ranging impact on the state of Maryland stems in no small part from its dedication to responding to specific state workforce higher education needs. The university developed and launched programs in high-need fields such as homeland security, information technology, gerontology, emergency management, and information assurance. In the area of information assurance, UMUC is the only institution in the country to provide our students with a remote-access Security Studies Laboratory, a crucial component of success both in the classroom and in the real world of information assurance. At the undergraduate level, all these programs have led to a broad array of community college collaboration.
The Impact on Maryland

By tying all these pieces together, it becomes clear how UMUC affects both working adults with full-time jobs and underserved and minority students. UMUC serves the state of Maryland in ways other institutions cannot. Both nationally and here in Maryland, African American students are overrepresented in college dropouts and community college enrollments. As has been demonstrated, this is the profile of the students UMUC serves: students returning to school or transferring from a community college.

Enrolling students, though, is not enough. The problems related to the achievement gap are found in persistence, not just matriculation. As stated earlier, UMUC is diligent in retaining students. Adult students have more pressing needs and conflicts in their everyday lives, and school often plays a secondary role. Our efforts at retaining our students seem to have an equally positive effect on all students. UMUC’s retention rates for African American students are similar to that of all other students. In short, our data indicates that there is no appreciable achievement gap at UMUC.

On the face of it, this seems like an amazing finding. But one phenomenon—one we discussed with the General Assembly in recent years—shows that this is not as surprising as one might think. As we discovered a few years ago, African American students enroll in online courses at the same rate as all other UMUC students. In the parlance of the late 1990s, UMUC never experienced a “digital divide.” In that context, the fact that there is little or no achievement gap is not shocking. It appears that adult students persist at rates that are not race-sensitive.
The community college relationships we have formed over the years have served minority students and those who are geographically underserved. Alliances have formed from Garret County to Easton and from Cecil County to Waldorf. Students are also being served in every regional center in the state, including the Eastern Shore starting in fall 2008. With its geographic reach, UMUC is redrawing the footprint for higher education in Maryland by taking programs to the students, rather than waiting for students to come to the programs.

Next Steps

This presentation has touched on just some of the important contributions UMUC is making to the state. But as alluded to in the beginning of this testimony, there are also serious challenges that lie ahead—the greatest of which are competition and funding. UMUC no longer faces competition from just a small number of for-profit institutions. As we branch out across the state and nation, we constantly encounter institutions trying to stake a claim in the adult student market. Many of these schools are large, well-funded public institutions that have the resources to both market their programs and put them online.

The other major challenge is funding. UMUC ranks at the bottom of funding guideline attainment, as the chart below indicates.

Source: University System of Maryland
UMUC’s low funding guideline attainment is largely attributable to its rather brief funding history. Fiscal 1998 marked the first year the university received general fund support. Since then, the General Assembly and three governors have provided support to build up that base. But the funding guidelines indicate more must still be done. The gap between UMUC’s attainment level and the average attainment level of the other institutions in the USM must be closed for UMUC to remain competitive in the marketplace. The state cannot be expected to make up this difference in one year. Rather, the best way to reach this goal is with a three-to-five-year plan that includes both increased state support and regular, responsible tuition increases. In the coming year, we look forward to engaging the regents, administration, and budget committees in a conversation focused on strategies that promise to bring UMUC near to the USM average attainment level as outlined in the funding guidelines.

CONCLUSION

In the recent report, A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education, which was presented to the U.S. Secretary of Education in the fall, the commission tasked with studying U.S. higher education found that, while our system is still the envy of the world, we have nonetheless fallen behind in certain key areas. Perhaps the most important area is the recognition that the academy has not responded to changes in workforce and societal needs.

Throughout much of UMUC’s history, the university faced little competition. Few U.S. higher education institutions were interested in the adult, non-traditional university student (including those serving in the U.S. armed forces). As you well know, however, that has changed dramatically in the past decade. Thanks to a growing awareness in the academy that new economic and workforce realities demand new approaches to higher education, a great many institutions, particularly those that are run for profit, have elected to target our student body.

As an institution, we welcome this competition, for we feel that we are and will remain the leader in non-traditional higher education, and we have the highest confidence in the quality and relevance of our programs and services. Yet we do not command anywhere near the resources that the for-profit institutions can bring to bear in marketing and recruitment. Our “brand” is a strong one, and our record of achievement is unsurpassed. We need your help to get the message out about UMUC in the state of Maryland.