TESTIMONY

to the House Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Education and Economic Development
of the Maryland General Assembly

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Susan C. Aldridge, President

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Introduction: UMUC—Opening Doors to Education in Maryland and the World

Good morning, Chairman Bohanan and members of the Subcommittee on Education, Business, and Administration. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the future of University of Maryland University College and the role the university has played and continues to play in the state of Maryland and around the world.

The fiscal 2008 Governor's allowance for UMUC is $25.1 million. The increase in this year's state allocation is consistent with the dramatic enrollment growth we have experienced and the increasing demands that growth places on our staff. As UMUC grows, we continue to improve the quality of the education we provide and the services we offer our students. My testimony will tie these issues together as we respectfully request your support for this year's budget submission.

I assumed the presidency of UMUC in February 2006, and in the ensuing year, I have faced a variety of challenges. Those challenges included an enrollment shortfall relative to the targets that had been set for us, shifts in state and national higher education policy, and growing competition in the higher education sector that we dominate.

I will discuss these and other challenges in a moment, but would like to begin by addressing a particularly important issue—the apparent lack of awareness in the state of Maryland about UMUC and the tremendous contributions it makes to the state's citizens and economy. For 60 years, UMUC has been known as "the adult education branch of the University of Maryland," or "that campus that delivers higher education to the military

overseas." In fact, thanks to the Maryland General Assembly, UMUC is now the "Open University" of the state of Maryland and the campus in the University System of Maryland dedicated to serving adults in the workforce by delivering classes on-site and online.

What does this commitment mean? First and foremost, it means that we seek to accept all qualified students. This is a standard that traditional institutions cannot achieve, simply because of the limits imposed by available student housing, classroom space, learning resources, and so on. At UMUC, we use innovation and technology to overcome those limitations. As a result, we are able to serve qualified students across Maryland who, for whatever reason, are unable to attend other USM campuses.

That is a bold mission, and fulfilling it requires innovation and creativity that reaches beyond course design and delivery. Our students are so far-flung geographically that we cannot expect them to commute to our campus to register for courses, apply for financial aid, meet with advisors, or use library resources. In response, we augment and support our courses and degree programs—especially those designed for online delivery—with an array of Web-accessible student services.

Our commitment to open access also means that we must be prepared to serve students who have been away from the classroom for many years, students who have transferred from other schools, or who may be otherwise ill-prepared for the demands of higher education. To help these students succeed, we expend considerable resources from the outset to provide them with access to the remedial instruction and ongoing support they need—especially in crucial areas like writing and mathematics. We do this willingly as part of our overarching goal of increasing access to higher education and fostering a lifelong love of learning.

I mention these aspects of our mission in order to provide a framework for my subsequent comments about our growth in enrollments, our commitment to providing access to higher education, our considerable impact on the state of Maryland (including our unparalleled collaborations with the state's community colleges), and our strategies for ensuring that our students enjoy an educational experience of the highest quality. I 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.

Enrollment Growth

UMUC's growth continued in fall 2006, and I have every reason to believe that the trend will continue in 2007. In 2006, UMUC recorded total worldwide enrollments of 261,019, of which 153,484 were online. Those numbers are impressive enough on their own, but in a historical context, they are nothing short of astounding. In the year 2000, for instance, total worldwide enrollments equaled 205,681. That means that, in six years, we have experienced a 27 percent increase in total enrollments (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. **Total Worldwide Enrollment Growth**
2000–2006
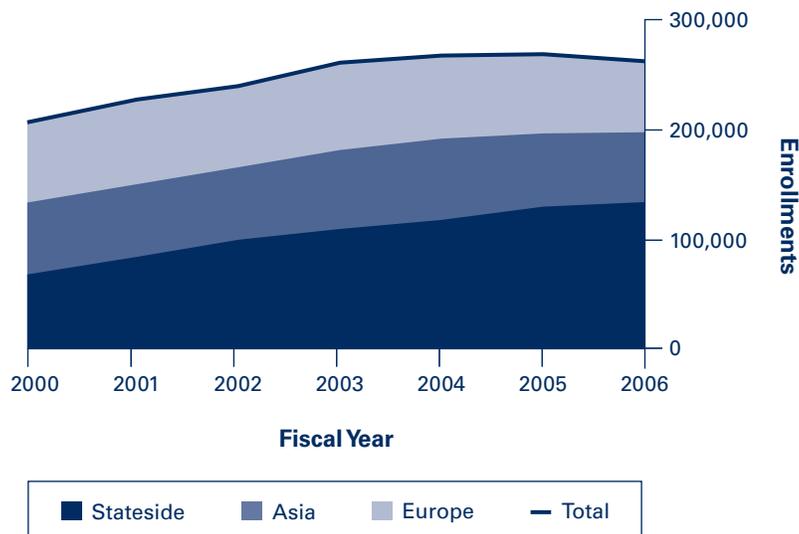
Source: UMUC Office of Institutional Planning, Research, and Accountability

UMUC's online enrollment growth is even more impressive. From 39,865 online enrollments in 2000, the university recorded 153,484 online enrollments in 2006, an increase of 285 percent in six years (see Chart 2).

Chart 2. **Worldwide Online Enrollment Growth**
2000–2006
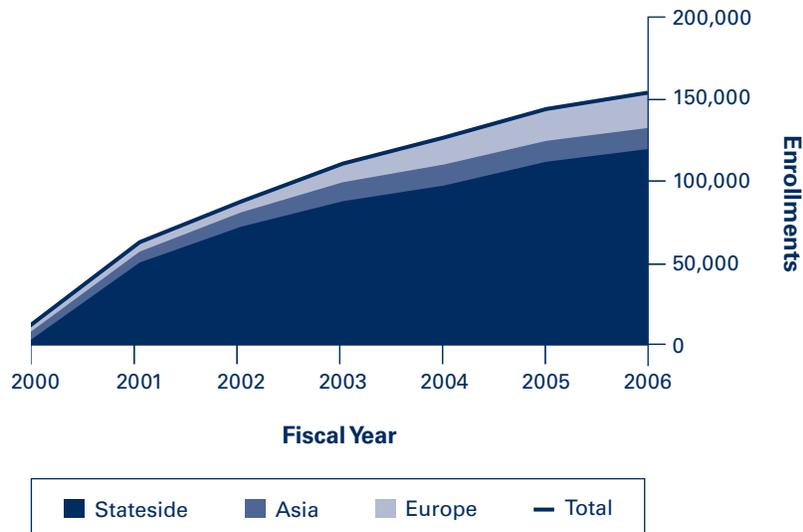
Source: UMUC Office of Institutional Planning, Research, and Accountability

Online enrollments now represent 59 percent of our total enrollments, a clear sign of the growing demand for and popularity of online instruction and degree programs.

Our student body has also grown, keeping pace with these enrollment increases. We now serve approximately 90,000 students worldwide; approximately half of those students live in the United States, and 78 percent of those stateside students are Maryland residents. Thanks in large part to online education, our stateside fall student body has grown by almost 50 percent in the past five years (see Chart 3).

Chart 3. Unduplicated Stateside Headcount Growth
Fall 2001–2006
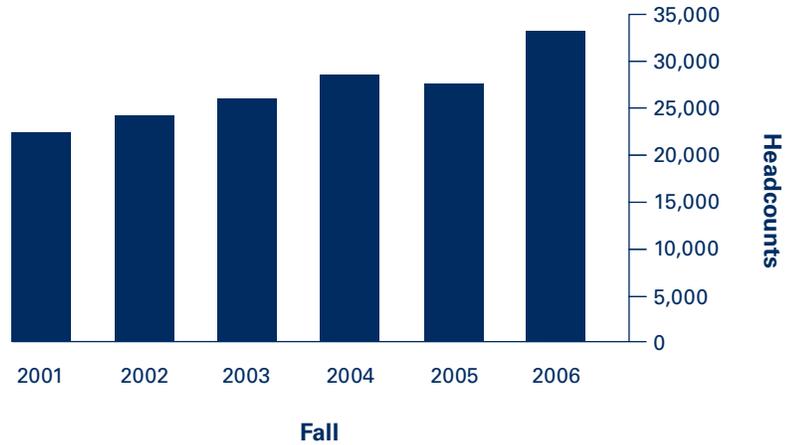
Most of our students are adults in the workforce. Four of every five UMUC stateside undergraduates work full time, and their median age is 32 years.

It is safe to say that no other Maryland institution has had to deal with such a remarkable growth rate and the concomitant challenges and stresses. Fortunately, we have in place the highly scalable technologies, faculty models, and student and faculty services necessary for handling these rapid increases. The systems are in place to support growth; however, the expenses must be covered. We are confident, for example, that we will be ready to accommodate the influx of students from the upcoming Base Realignment and Closure action, which will bring thousands of defense personnel to Maryland. We have been serving students at the various military installations in the Washington metropolitan area for many years.

One of the reasons UMUC has been able to grow is because of the quality and scalability of WebTycho, the university's proprietary online learning platform. One of WebTycho's key benefits is its ability to support multiple classrooms. As long as we can provide enough qualified faculty, we won't reach the limit of the number of students WebTycho can serve.

WebTycho is also a highly intuitive learning system. Faculty can teach and students can learn without extensive technical preparation or training. It is also equipped to adapt to the instructional needs of other institutions. The University of Baltimore, for example, is already using WebTycho as the platform for its online classes, with the online learning environment customized to reflect the look and feel of the home campus. Competing platforms, offered by private-sector providers, don't offer this flexibility; users are limited to a common look and feel, regardless of institution.

Growth brings with it expectations that are not always easily met. I refer here to the enrollment targets that we set last year and that were used by the University System of Maryland as the basis for the fiscal 2007 budget. After the projections were made, UMUC experienced an unexpected enrollment decline, as was reported last year. This meant that, in order to meet this year's target, we needed to enroll more than 9,000 new students. The entire university focused on this goal, and I'm pleased and proud to report that UMUC's faculty, staff, and alumni responded in overwhelming fashion, enrolling 10,000 new students—more students than compose the entire student bodies of all but a small number of institutions in the state.

It is important, also, to remember that UMUC is not "just an online university." Approximately 20 percent of our stateside enrollments are for on-site courses offered across Maryland, and the cost of space for these classes and for our support staff at outlying locations is considerable. To further complicate matters, the growing demand for our online programs and services has necessitated an increase in the number of Adelphi-based faculty and staff, and we have run out of room in our Adelphi buildings. Although we are both willing and able to assist the state of Maryland in solving its higher education capacity challenge, we cannot do so with our current physical infrastructure.

Access

UMUC is committed to providing access to all qualified students. Indeed, this commitment was a major factor in our decision to put the resources of the entire institution behind our highly successful online teaching and learning initiative. Those resources have paid off handsomely, especially in reaching members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education. For example, in fall 2006, African American students composed 32 percent of UMUC's stateside student body. To put that in context, UMUC now enrolls more African American students than any of Maryland's four historically black colleges and universities (see Chart 4).

Chart 4. **African American Student Headcounts**
Fall 2005
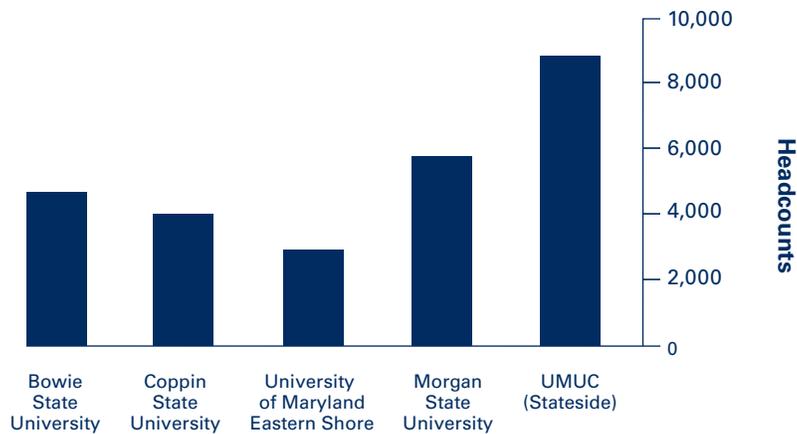
Source: Maryland's Historically Black Colleges and Universities
and University of Maryland University College

In 2005, according to *Black Issues in Higher Education*, UMUC ranked first in the nation in the number of master's degrees in information and computer sciences awarded to African American students. (It is worth noting that that ranking includes historically black institutions.)

In addition to challenging sociocultural barriers to access, UMUC has also had tremendous success in overcoming geographical barriers. UMUC has students who both live and learn in every jurisdiction. These students can take courses online, on-site at one or more of our 20 locations in Maryland, or in the combination of on-site and online formats that best meets their needs. We currently serve students in all 50 States, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, as well as in more than 20 foreign countries. The many military servicemembers and their families we serve through our European and Asian operations have access to online courses, as well as to courses on-site at more than 120 overseas locations.

Impact on Maryland

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. For example, we support Maryland's strong biotechnology sector by offering degree programs at both the undergraduate level (our Bachelor of Technical and Professional Studies program in biotechnology, offered in partnership with Montgomery College) and the graduate level (our Master of Science in Biotechnology Studies program). These programs complement "hard" science-oriented programs offered by other state schools by preparing students to deal with the management and policy issues unique to the biotechnology sector.

We have also developed and launched programs in Maryland that respond to critical needs in the workforce—most notably in homeland security management, information technology, gerontology, emergency management, and information assurance. In the field of information assurance, UMUC is one of only five Maryland institutions to be named a Center of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance by the National Security Agency. We are 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 and homeland security. At the undergraduate level, these programs have led to a broad array of community college collaborations, which I will discuss next.

Collaboration with Maryland's Community Colleges

UMUC enjoys the richest program of collaboration with community colleges of any institution in Maryland. At present, we have alliances with 11 Maryland community colleges; these alliances yield nearly 180 articulated associate's-to-bachelor's degree programs, which allow a community college student to pursue one seamless curriculum—from the associate's degree to the bachelor's degree—in any of a wide range of academic disciplines. Not only do these articulations assure students that they will not lose transfer credits as they transition to a four-year degree program, but they also make it possible for the student to complete the four-year degree without moving from his or her county of residence. This helps to prevent "brain drain" from counties like Washington County, where only about 14 percent of residents currently hold bachelor's degrees. In fall 2006, more than 40 percent of our stateside undergraduates had taken courses from 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 graduates to continue their schooling at UMUC. To date, UMUC has awarded nearly $2 million of its own funds in the form of community college transfer scholarships.

The benefits of these collaborations—both to the community colleges and to UMUC—are considerable. The community colleges benefit by being able to offer their students more options, including long-range planning for their education and professional futures. In addition, they offer students an incentive to complete an associate's degree at the community college. In return, UMUC benefits from a steady stream of highly qualified students entering its upper-division undergraduate courses (UMUC has found that students who come to us through these community college articulations have better retention and graduation rates when compared with other undergraduate student segments).

A typical example of a community college relationship is UMUC's 2006 articulation with Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). UMUC offers 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 among one of the institution's core constituencies—those who study at CCBC's Dundalk Campus. Beginning in fall 2006, UMUC began offering on-site courses in management studies at CCBC–Dundalk. Together, UMUC and CCBC are working to strengthen the Dundalk campus so that it can remain open and beneficial to the citizens who need it.

Quality

The ability to measure and demonstrate the quality of our courses and programs is a sine qua non for UMUC. As you know, there have been calls in Maryland and nationwide for greater accountability on the part of higher education in light of the enormous resources expended annually on student financial assistance.

UMUC has taken a leadership position among state institutions in creating 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 fostering shared responsibility for and commitment to continuous assessment on the part of students, faculty, administrators and other key stakeholders; collecting objective feedback on learning for the institution, administration, faculty, and students; and using that feedback to inform a process of continuous quality improvement.

In addition to our specific focus on outcomes assessment, UMUC continues to develop and use innovative quality initiatives to increase student success. These include:

- Mandatory undergraduate and graduate courses teach the effective use of digital library and information sources

- A new career-planning course—EDCP 100—is tailored to returning and first-generation students to familiarize them with higher education in general and with UMUC in particular

- Placement examinations in both writing and mathematics that help new undergraduate students choose the appropriate introductory writing and math courses

- An online writing center that includes access to tutoring services

- All day, every day access to UMUC librarians via e-mail, chat, or toll-free telephone

- A Virtual Academic Integrity Lab (VAIL) that helps students learn the hallmarks of academic integrity, including how to properly cite source material

- Online job fairs

- A student orientation and tutorial on WebTycho, UMUC's proprietary online learning management system

I am pleased to report that UMUC continues to garner prestigious awards in recognition of the high quality of its courses and services. For example, we have recently received:

- The Sloan-C Awards for Excellence in Institution-Wide Programming and for Most Outstanding Online Teaching and Learning Programs (for our Master of Business Administration and our Master of Distance Education degree programs)

- The International Council for Open and Distance Education's Prize of Excellence

- The Maryland Distance Learning Association's Award for Best Distance Education Program (for our Better Opportunities Through Online Education Program)

Conclusion: The Future

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 of 2006, the commission tasked with studying U.S. higher education found that, while our educational system is still the envy of the world, we have nonetheless fallen behind in certain key areas. Perhaps the most important area is in response to the needs of the workforce and society.

Throughout much of UMUC's history, we faced little competition. Few institutions of higher education in the United States were interested in adult university students (including those serving in the U.S. armed forces). As you well know, 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 higher education for adult students, 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.

Through the support of the Maryland General Assembly and the University System of Maryland, UMUC will continue to increase the number of students served, online or on-site, across the state of Maryland. UMUC is uniquely positioned for expansion if funding levels support the increasing costs for new students.

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