



University of Maryland University College
Student Advisory Council

October 30, 2014

TO: Javier Miyares, President
Marie Cini, Provost and Senior Vice President, Academic Affairs

FROM: Student Advisory Council

SUBJECT: STAC Response to the Ideation Study

As representatives elected by the student body of the University of Maryland University College (UMUC), we would like to provide feedback on the proposed future business model for the University.

The opening remarks of the ideation study states that “Several external forces are disrupting the status quo (new normal).” As stakeholders and representatives of the “new normal” we embrace and identify with that statement in many ways.

Our needs and priorities have indeed shifted because the economy has forever changed in many eye opening ways. We have to make serious decisions about where to invest our hard earned income and in some cases future debt in order to acquire a college education. Having said that, we are concerned with some of the bullet points in the opening sections of the study and would therefore like to provide some preliminary feedback.

- Pricing competition from agile for-profit institutions is intensifying

This statement is certainly based in fact. However, as students, price is only one of many concerns. If UMUC were to prove itself to be the cheaper provider, we wouldn't necessarily feel that it was a better option. We have seen our classmates move from UMUC to attend higher cost state and private universities across the country. We have been taught by our UMUC Professors that price is only a concern in a volume driven market like Walmart. Additionally, we have been taught that quality, when positioned correctly, beats the competition. Let's not forget that we are talking about the second most expensive product that most people will ever spend their money to purchase.

- The technology of distance and distributed education is commoditizing (fewer barriers)

This is certainly true. At one point in time, a business degree from Harvard would not have been an option for a potential UMUC student in Maryland, today everything else being equal, Harvard is an option for anyone in the world (even



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at a higher price). This speaks to the fact that quality is the brass ring. We want to feel proud of our degree.

The feeling of “wow, I finally have a college degree...” only last for so long. At some point in time, past and present students want to feel that they are attending or in the past attended, a University that is first rate and doesn’t require an explanation every time the name is mentioned.

- New learning methods, approaches, and technology disruptions (e.g., MOOCs)

The average student doesn’t know about MOOCs or many of the other teaching technologies and approaches. However, the average student does know whether or not they are learning and are proud of their education. Students speak more about their individual processors than they do about the University as a whole.

- Military base reductions are minimizing UMUC’s global presence advantage

This is a reality for every business enterprise and organization that is positioned to serve the military. This is not dissimilar to factory towns. Perhaps, UMUC should examine the use of brick and mortar visibility around the country to help support and bring attention to the virtual presence.

Question – do any studies exist that document geographic online enrollments for schools who have a physical presence in a given community? Example, the University of Phoenix has physical presence in many regions around the country, how does their online enrollment in those regions compare to their enrollment in regions where they do not have a physical presence?

We agree that business as usual will not benefit the University or its Stakeholders at this time or moving forward. We agree that the “focus needs to be student-centric with learning tailored to unique individual and personal needs...” However we are concerned that too much tailoring will take the University down a notch instead of raising the bar. There is a delicate balance that must be reached and we are not aware of the details of the plan to reach this balance. We would like to know more.

The short list of options provided by the producers of the study are indeed food for thought. However, we are concerned about the options that didn’t make the list. Sometimes when a person views the deleted scenes from a movie, they realize that they would have enjoyed the movie even more if the deleted scenes had not been cut. Often the deleted scenes are cut to save time and money and it’s not always the best choice. In the case of the Ideation Study, the sample audience seemed to be the members of the think tank and not enough stakeholders from other areas of the University community. It is hard to imagine that the students would have been opposed to becoming part of one of the other USM schools (assuming it’s a good school).



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College Park is the logical choice but other great USM schools would also have provided an identity that many UMUC students would have liked. Why was this option dismissed? We are concerned that subordination while a possible good choice was dismissed out of administrative pride.

In closing we would like to state that this process has been an eye opener for the Student Advisory Council. Regardless of the direction chosen by the University and regardless of the decisions made by the State Legislature, we believe there is a great need to have real stakeholder representation or (at the very least) observation at the highest levels of the institution. In much the same way that the Board of Regents has a student member, the University should have such a position as well. We understand that the Shared Governance structure is supposed to provide a path for our voices to be heard, but we would like to see a more active placement. If the University becomes a non-profit organization with a Board of Directors, we want a student member appointed to the BOD. Whatever the final model becomes, we want to see a path left open for a student to hold a position.

We thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns. We stand ready to assist in any way we can for the greater good of the institution and its stakeholder groups.