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Maryland Higher Education Commission
Higher Education Fiscal 2022 Budget Overview

Testimony of Dr. James D. Fielder, Jr., Secretary of Higher Education, to the Senate Budget and Taxation Subcommittee on Education, Business and Administration and the House Appropriations Committee

February 5, 2021

Issues

Page 23. MHEC should comment on what steps are being taken to ensure that it is complying with the requirements of CCRCCA and when this data will be available.

Our current MHEC data collections do collect some information regarding transfer. For example, we can identify if a student was enrolled at college A in fall 2015 and then subsequently enrolled in college B in spring 2016. However, this only tells us movement between institutions and not explicitly the transfer of credit.

Similarly, specific data elements in our collections can provide limited information regarding transfer. For example, we currently collect data on the number of "native credits earned" and "total credits earned." A simple calculation implies that the subtraction of these two values would quantify transfer credits; however, in some instance the calculation may include noncollegiate (e.g., AP, CLEP) or experiential (e.g., life experience) credits rather than solely postsecondary credit. Further, these data points do not identify the number of credits that were denied transfer, nor the details of the credits that were transferred. While MHEC does have access to course-level data (at public institutions only), the detail needed to identify barriers around transfer may or may not be able to be discerned through the course-level data.

Finally, we do collect data on the source of transfer credit, but only for students who graduate with an associate or bachelor's degree from public institutions. As with the prior example, this provides data on source of credits and total credits awarded, but not on how those credits were applied to the degree (general education, degree-specific requirements, or electives) or on credits that were not applied to the degree. Credit data on those who graduate, while of value, does not provide insight into the credit-related barriers to student progress and completion.

In general, the available data related to transfer found in our current collections ultimately mask the challenges students face when transferring between institutions, particularly the issues around credit loss. Therefore, an existing collection must be modified, a unique, standalone collection would be established, and/or additional creative solutions (e.g., paying for services administered

by the National Student Clearinghouse, creating a short-term collection from the institutions to perform an in-depth policy study) would be implemented.

Transfer is a complicated phenomenon, particularly when considering the fact that students often chose what courses they wish to take and navigate transfer in highly variant ways. Before any step is taken, a thorough and statewide discussion regarding the purpose of the endeavor (and subsequently identifying the research questions expected to be answered) needs to occur. At this time, it appears that the main focus regarding transfer is credit loss. However, time to degree, academic success, and enrollment patterns may be of additional interest when investigating issues around transfer. Questions regarding transfer that would help this investigation may include: Upon transfer, did a student remain in the same major or academic discipline?? Are there specific admissions requirements for a given academic program (separate and apart from institutional admissions requirements)? Are there articulation agreements that are – or are not – being adhered to? Did the student take time between enrollment at one school and enrollment at another (i.e., non-continuous enrollment)? Does the student have an outstanding account balance at an institution that prevents releasing the transcript? Did the student receive the minimum course grade needed to transfer the course? These questions go beyond a quantitative data collection.

House Bill 460 may help in requiring institutions to submit annual reports to MHEC regarding the denial of the transfer of credit. Should House Bill 460 pass, that report may create the foundation for a transfer collection that better captures credit loss when transferring.

MHEC expects to explore the next steps on collecting data on transfer in the coming months. It is worth noting that the agency recently prioritized a new non-credit data collection with the community colleges, particularly considering recent legislation that now awards state scholarship funds to these programs. Previously, MHEC had very little insight into student-level data for non-credit programs at community colleges. This new collection took over 12 months to develop and is in a two-year pilot phase, as some institutions needed time to implement a new data collection on their campuses. These are similar considerations that will need to be taken when developing any new data collection.

Finally,, MHEC cannot find evidence that the CCRCCA required MHEC to collect and report college credit transfer data annually for Maryland students. At this time, MHEC believes it is in compliance with the requirements of CCRCCA.

Page 24. MHEC, USM, Morgan State University (MSU), SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to more easily facilitate the student transfer process for these students.

In 2017, MHEC established regulations regarding transfer that conformed to the requirements of the 2013 CCRCCA legislation. Specifically, these regulations establish admissions requirements for transfer students at public institutions, the transfer of credit earned at public institutions, the transfer of non-traditional credit, the transfer of general education credit and the reverse transfer

of credit. More recently, MHEC developed an articulation agreement template and made additional amendments to the regulations to include similar protections for "first-time students with advanced standing" (meaning, recent high students who earned college credit while in high school). MHEC is aware, and supportive of, the collaborations between the public 4-year institutions and the community colleges to overcome the domain-specific challenges that transfer students face. MHEC is also aware of potential (and necessary) updates to ARTSYS; as a USM tool, USM can provide further information on ARTSYS updates.

With regards to COVID, many students – including students intending to transfer – had to consider their own unique circumstances when contemplating reenrollment for the fall 2020 semester. MHEC will support the work of Maryland campuses in ensuring that students, including transfer students, are given every opportunity to successfully pursue a high-quality postsecondary education.

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM *of* MARYLAND

Maryland Higher Education Overview
USM Chancellor Jay A. Perman/Requests for Comment
February 5, 2021

COMMENT REQUESTED

Page 24—What steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to more easily facilitate the student transfer process for these students.

The University System of Maryland has long been attentive to the needs of transfer students, who comprise a significant share of our enrollment. Last fiscal year, USM transfer students numbered 38,191, 29 percent of our total undergraduate population. That number represents a one-year, 0.7 percent dip in *total* transfer students—that is, those matriculating from Maryland community colleges and from other in-state and out-of-state two- and four-year institutions, as well as those transferring between USM universities.

For the duration of COVID, all USM institutions have enhanced their online advising services for transfer students, and transfer fairs have been converted to virtual events. (We expect that some of this virtual activity will continue long after COVID has passed.) Over the long term, the USM has focused a key piece of our strategic work in enrollment management on developing and expanding pathways for transfer students.

While our total transfer population has experienced only a modest decline, the drop among students transferring from Maryland community colleges was more substantial. In FY2020, we saw a one-year, 4.4 percent drop in community college transfers, for a total of 11,167. We expect this decline to worsen, given pandemic-related challenges and their acute, deleterious impact on U.S. two-year colleges and the students they serve.

At the same time, we hope to reverse this drop in community college transfers with more focused attention on the academic and financial needs of incoming transfer students; improved admissions, placement, and academic advising practices; course redesign efforts; supportive learning communities; and expanded dual-admission agreements.

And we believe we'll see quick progress as we undertake a priority effort—improving the transfer process itself. In collaboration with the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, the USM has convened 12 affinity groups, consisting of faculty from four-year and two-year institutions statewide, to develop core

outcome assessments for individual courses. These assessments allow the institutions to determine course comparability more accurately than is possible based on a comparison of syllabi.

This effort includes more than 300 faculty in accounting, business administration, computer science, cyber, education, English, health, information systems, math, psychology, social science, and sociology. Meanwhile, the convening group has assembled a parallel Provost Council made up of chief academic officers from five four-year and five two-year institutions.

The primary focus of these groups has been comprehensive improvements to ARTSYS, the system designed to facilitate the transfer of students from Maryland community colleges to a USM university or other participating four-year institution. The group contracted with Quottly Inc. to develop a robust, state-of-art platform that has improved the transfer experience in two significant ways: 1) As courses are deemed comparable, ARTSYS will automatically update the system. Personnel no longer have to update the system manually for each course reviewed. 2) Even more importantly, the student portal is transformed by a search engine that permits students to explore many recommended transfer program pathways at once; easily save their own data and searches; and securely upload their transcripts using any mobile device. The new platform will also permit virtual meetings with advisors, in addition to face-to-face meetings.

These enhancements have been in development over the last year, and ARTSYS demonstrations have been provided to the USM; non-USM public institutions; private colleges and universities; community colleges; and MHEC.

State funding has *not* been made available for this project. Initial one-time-only IT implementation costs are $10,000 for any institution with a recognized student information system, and $20,000 for institutions with a "homegrown" system. Full implementation costs—including all course comparisons and recommended transfer pathways, and the capacity for interinstitutional registration—are proposed to be distributed on the basis of institution size. Thirty-seven participating institutions would proportionately share a total yearly cost of $892,500.[1]

While this cost is significant, it's worth it. To be an effective tool for students and for institutions, ARTSYS needs these upgrades, and we anticipate they'll streamline a process that's been justifiably criticized as cumbersome. We owe students a seamless interface that facilitates this critical juncture in their college career and sets them up for immediate and long-term success.

COMMENT REQUESTED
Page 31—Steps that have been taken to address education delivery and access for their students.

The University System of Maryland understood at once that with a pivot to emergency remote instruction last spring, some students would be at a distinct disadvantage, with limited—or even *no*—access to the technology and connectivity they needed to meet course requirements. That disadvantage was liable to persist through the fall semester, when the USM delivered courses in a largely online or hybrid format.

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[1] The USM has also negotiated a price for a system that doesn't allow for interinstitutional registration.

USM institutions immediately assessed the magnitude of the issue. Many universities surveyed their students, faculty, and staff in the spring, and again over the summer in preparation for fall. These surveys showed that the vast majority of students and employees had access to the technology and connectivity required for online education and telework, and most of the gaps identified in the spring were temporarily closed to finish the semester, with more sustainable solutions put in place over the summer.

Two institutions mapped student and employee addresses, overlaid with FCC maps of cellular or hardline internet connectivity. This effort identified not only those with no internet access, but also those who had connectivity options but no ability to pay a provider. For these students, financial aid was pursued to help them purchase a connection.

Institutions that did *not* formally poll students regarding technology access have nonetheless aggressively communicated with them about access programs available through their IT and/or Student Affairs departments.

In concert with this effort to *assess* the technology gap, our universities launched aggressive programs to *close* it. All USM institutions have equipment loaner programs in place. The spring pivot to remote instruction allowed the universities to measure student needs, and the summer provided the time to ensure that loaner programs were replenished for fall.

Where connectivity is the issue (vs. technology), most universities purchase and lend out personal hotspots (or other devices) so that students and employees can access the internet from their homes. Where home connection isn't an option, our universities have gotten creative. For instance, with a number of campus buildings closed last spring, many universities created Wi-Fi hot spots in their parking lots and garages, where students could learn over a central connection to the campus network, while appropriately distanced from one another. Since then, our universities have identified underused rooms in campus buildings that can serve as personal study spaces and hotspots.

Many USM universities are using institutional funds distributed through the federal CARES Act to provide students with computers and connectivity. Additionally, most of our universities have launched and sustained fundraising campaigns, whose proceeds go directly to the purchase of loaner laptops and hotspots. One institution's foundation provided sufficient technology funding to support an expansion of the loaner laptop program; virtual computer labs enabling student access to software normally available only on campus; and cloud subscriptions enabling software to be downloaded to personal devices.

I think it's worth noting that some universities are meeting the connectivity needs of their surrounding communities as well as their students. The University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) has partnered with Comcast to provide one year of high-speed internet service to about 1,000 families in West Baltimore, targeting those with children in UMB's partnering preK–12 schools.

We're acutely aware that higher education requires adequate technology and connectivity. This was true long before a pandemic that laid bare a persistent digital divide. We're aware, too, that students on the wrong side of this divide are at a nearly insurmountable disadvantage. Without exception, our universities

have deployed their resources and their creativity to close the technology gap so that all students have what they need to compete and succeed.

Morgan State University
Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis

*House Appropriations Committee
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee
Delegate Ben Barnes
Friday, February 5, 2021; 1:30 PM

*Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Business and Administration Subcommittee
Senator Craig J. Zucker
Friday, February 5, 2021; 1:30 PM

DLS Higher Education Fiscal 2022 Budget Overview

Suggested Comments

Page 24 - MHEC, USM, *Morgan State University (MSU)*, SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to more easily facilitate the student transfer process for these students.

MSU Response: Numerous adjustments have been adopted to help mitigate the challenges that many prospective transfer students and their families are facing during the pandemic. The Office of Undergraduate Admission and Recruitment is permitting students to submit an unofficial transcript(s) to complete an application. Application fees have been waived from April 10, 2020 - present. New initiatives are constantly being developed, such as virtual Morgan Major Mondays, which is designed to offer departmental information sessions to prospective students and allows students to explore and learn about the various opportunities offered at Morgan. In addition to Morgan Major Mondays, university tours and admission sessions are also held virtually. Moreover, the Office regularly participates in state-wide virtual community college transfer college fairs.

Knowing that many institutions from which students would be transferring had moved to offer or require pass/fail grades in spring 2020 due to the pandemic, the University temporarily adjusted its transfer credit policies to allow acceptance of Pass (P) grades for major courses for fall 2020 and spring 2021. The Office of the Registrar invested in the College Source Transfer Evaluation System (TES) and built a repository that has national and international transfer credit listing with over 30,000 course articulations in under a year. These articulated courses are now integrated into our student information system (Banner) which provides consistency in course evaluation and allows for faster processing of transfer credit evaluation. We have also streamlined the incoming transfer evaluation workflow process to include utilizing a dedicated data entry processing team, dedicated staff to prepare and review evaluations, and checks and balances to ensure that degree evaluations are reflecting transfer credit accurately.

The Transfer Student Programming (TSP) office has been engaging in proactive call campaigns to be certain that all new transfer students receive customized service and have their questions answered in reference to Morgan's COVID policies and processes. TSP is also in the process of developing a series of optional Q&A meetings via Zoom for newly admitted transfer students to meet with the TSP Coordinator and of streamlining orientation and onboarding processes for transfer students, in order to provide a more engaging and excellent experience for transfer students. These changes aim to produce transfer students who are well-informed, equipped with the appropriate resources, and prepared for successful matriculation at Morgan State University.

Page 31 - The Chancellor, presidents of SMCM and *MSU*, MICUA, and MACC should comment on steps that have been taken to address education delivery and access for their students.

MSU Response: To ensure equal access, Morgan has provided students and faculty access to laptops and hotspots as needed. Morgan continues to acquire high quality remote instruction software licenses and manipulatives, and new simulation software for specialized instruction. Morgan has utilized CARES funding to upgrade instructional spaces in our academic buildings to enable remote instruction simultaneous with in-person instruction. Over 130 classrooms have been upgraded with the capabilities for HiFlex course model through Zoom. This will allow faculty to teach and interact with the students in the classroom and virtual attendees in real time. Smart boards, cameras, confidence monitors, and lavalier and regular microphones were also installed in these classrooms to enable this teaching model. Morgan created the Technology Teaching Assistant (TTA) position to assist faculty on a project basis with enhancing their instructional design and materials used in remote or online instruction and support the faculty in utilizing the new IT/AV technology in the classrooms for Hybrid instruction. Over 100 Remote Instruction Course Assistants (RICAs) positions were also created to provide additional virtual support for instructors. The Academic Calendar has been adjusted to start classes on February 1st and end on May 14th. Morgan has introduced five Reading and Wellness Days this semester, in lieu of Spring Break, which is in line with national trends at other universities. These days will provide the opportunity to rejuvenate, relax, and rest-no classes will take place. Morgan will continue to offer predominantly online instruction. All face-to-face instruction for hybrid courses (129 sections) will begin after the add/drop period on February 14th. Faculty will continue to utilize tools for remote instruction during the semester for Hybrid courses to the extent possible and schedule in-person sessions for hands-on and laboratory experiments according to the guidelines established for maximum safety on the physical campus. Classrooms and labs that will utilize face-to-face instruction have been reconfigured by measuring for social distance safety and attendance schedules are staggered to accommodate this lowered capacity. Mask use is mandatory. Alternate assignments in lieu of in person attendance are offered by each face-to-face instructor for students who test positive and need to isolate or other students who may need to quarantine during the semester. Faculty are required to record their course lectures for easier student access throughout the semester. All departments must determine alternative course replacement options for students who cannot participate in hybrid course formats but need the class for graduation. There is an "Incomplete" policy extension for up to one year and schedule flexibility for field placements, internships, etc. that were interrupted by COVID-19.

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

Page 34 - The committees request that the University System of Maryland (USM), *Morgan State University (MSU)*, and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) continue to provide annual instructional workload reports for tenured/tenure-track faculty.

MSU Response: Morgan consistently provides a detailed analysis and breakdown of instructional productivity and teaching load trends of Tenured/Tenure-Track faculty in its Annual Joint Chairmen's Report on Instructional Workload for AY 2019-2020. The following are highlights from that recent report. During the 2019-2020 academic year a diverse population of 773 faculty delivered 190,132 student credit hours (SCH) of instruction at Morgan State University. 42% of the faculty are Tenured or on Tenure-Track. This ratio has not changed compared to the 2018-2019 AY. The total course units delivered this year was 3,984. Most upper division undergraduate and graduate courses were taught by the Tenured and Tenure-Track faculty. Tenured and Tenure-Track faculty delivered 44.9% of the SCH with 7.1 average course units (ACU) per faculty, while Department Chairs delivered 2.5% of the entire instruction with a rate of 5.0 ACU. Full-Time Contractual faculty delivered 33.7% of the SCH with 7.6 ACU per faculty, and finally the Part-Time Contractual faculty delivered 18.9% of the SCH with a rate of 2.2 ACU.

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Higher Education Overview
February 5, 2021

House Appropriations Committee
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee
Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
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Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee
Senator Craig J. Zucker, Chair

Dr. Tuajuanda C. Jordan, President
Mr. Charles C. Jackson, Government Relations Liaison

Introduction – The Public Honors College

As the State's designated public honors college, St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) provides a premier liberal arts education that is both affordable and accessible. The College awards a variety of undergraduate degrees, as well as a Masters of Arts in Teaching graduate degree. With a

The Nation's 1st Public Honors College

faculty of gifted teachers and distinguished scholars, a talented and diverse student body, and a low student/faculty ratio, St. Mary's College provides a challenging curriculum within an academically nurturing environment. In addition, the College fosters a sense of social responsibility and community among its students through its curriculum and campus life.

Supporting the two goals articulated by the State's historical vision for the College - the educational requirements of an honors program and the promise of access - sets St. Mary's College uniquely in the State and in rare company in the national higher education sector. St. Mary's College has been highly successful in supporting State-wide goals with one of the highest retention and completion rates among Maryland publics, a commitment to diversity, and in providing financial resources for students with need.

As a public college that is both accessible and affordable, St. Mary's College provides the opportunity for academically talented students from a broad socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial spectrum to acquire a liberal arts education. This diversity creates a rich academic and social environment that enhances the education provided by the College.

The College continues to evolve as an innovator within the national higher education sector. Our new core curriculum, <u>Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery</u> (LEAD), will provide every student with theme-based integrated learning experiences, practical skills, internships, capstone projects, and other experiences that integrate career preparation with an honors curriculum within the context of the foundation of a liberal education. Our national standing and successes make us the leader among public liberal arts institutions. St. Mary's College has become **The National Public Honors College**.

As always, the College is grateful to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Maryland Higher Education Commission for their ongoing commitment to higher education, in general, and to St. Mary's College of Maryland specifically.

Response to Questions in the Higher Education Overview

Page 24: MHEC, USM, Morgan State University (MSU), SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to more easily facilitate the student transfer process for these students.

St. Mary's College continues to improve the ease with which transfer students are able to matriculate from community colleges. Recently, the College has added articulation agreements with the College of Southern Maryland in Computer Science, Mathematics, Environmental Sciences, Applied Physics, Biochemistry, Biology, and Chemistry. The College has similar agreements in place or in development with Anne Arundel Community College, Howard Community College, Montgomery College, the Community College of Baltimore County, and Prince George's Community College. The Master of Arts in Teaching program is also working on agreements with Carroll Community College, Frederick Community College, Hagerstown Community College, and Wor-Wic Community College. In addition, an Assistant Director of Admission for Transfer Students was appointed last year, providing a seasoned professional to lead our efforts to improve enrollment of transfer students.

For the Fall 2020 semester, St. Mary's College saw an increase in transfer students from community colleges, increasing from 55 in Fall 2019 to 61 in Fall 2020 (11%). The number of transfer applications for Fall 2020 was down, however, from previous years due to the pandemic, as many transfer fairs were cancelled and admissions staff was unable to visit community colleges.

Currently, St. Mary's College is using virtual formats to recruit transfer students. To further improve the admissions process, in Fall 2020 the College held focus group meetings with admitted transfer students with a goal of identifying ways to improve the process. Those improvements, which include a quicker release of admission decisions, financial aid awards, and transfer credit evaluations, were subsequently implemented in the Spring 2021 application cycle.

Also, in partnership with the College of Southern Maryland (CSM), St. Mary's College has developed the St. Mary's Transfer Edge Program (STEP), which allows CSM students to take one class per semester at the College with a 50% tuition waiver. This program will engage CSM students with SMCM and ease their transition from community college into the St. Mary's College community.

Page 31: The Chancellor, presidents of SMCM and MSU, MICUA, and MACC should comment on steps that have been taken to address education delivery and access for their students.

St. Mary's College began the 2020-2021 academic year on August 17th utilizing a hybrid model of synchronous in-class and remote instruction. Implementation of our hybrid synchronous model of teaching and learning is working well. The College remains flexible and is prepared to pivot to all online instruction if the need arises.

The rapid shift to remote operations, including instruction and student support services, provided significant opportunities to increase access. Online student services allowed for more intentional scheduling of appointments, rather than simply relying on drop-ins, while still maintaining the ability for students to obtain service quickly. Online instruction, particularly between standard academic terms, allowed the College to better assist students in making timely degree progression. For example, in a pilot Winterim term, students were able to return home during the winter break and still continue to make academic progress toward their degrees via online courses. Entering the pilot, 57% of the students registered for Winterim were "on-track" for four-year graduation. After earning credits during Winterim, now 70% of the students registered during Winterim are "on-track" for four-year graduation. The College anticipates increased enrollment (and therefore increased revenue) from regularly offering remotely off-session terms (Winterim and Summer). These extra terms will undoubtedly also allow more students to graduate in four years.
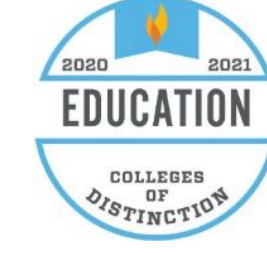
Maryland Independent College and University Association
Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis

House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Education and Economic Development
Delegate Barnes
Friday, February 5, 2021

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
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Sara Fidler, President of MICUA, sfidler@micua.org

For almost 240 years, Maryland's independent colleges and universities have been part of the State's system of postsecondary education. By partnering with private, nonprofit colleges and universities, Maryland is able to serve more students in more geographic regions, offer more academic programs, award more degrees, and obtain more favorable outcomes at a lower cost for State taxpayers. In addition, most of these students stay in Maryland after they graduate and become important contributors to the state's economy and tax base. This is a successful public-private partnership that has stood the test of time.

Today, Maryland's 13 State-aided independent institutions serve more than 65,600 students in 180 geographic locations and offer 1,600 approved academic programs, including more than 900 post-baccalaureate and graduate programs. These advanced-level academic programs are essential to Maryland's knowledge-based economy. The MICUA institutions have achieved remarkable outcomes as measured by high retention rates and graduation rates, shorter time-to-degree, low student loan default rates, and top-ranked mid-career salary earnings. In 2019, Johns Hopkins University, MICUA's only doctoral research university, spent $2.6 billion on research and development activities, issued 150 patents, fueled 24 new start-up companies, and created 1,000 new jobs. With just 3% of the State's appropriation for higher education, the MICUA institutions produce remarkable benefits and provide an incredible return on investment.

The State's investment in its independent institutions is a wise and efficient use of taxpayer dollars. Therefore, we are disappointed that the 2021 *Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act* reduces the Sellinger Program appropriation by $29.8 million (34%) and disregards the long-standing funding relationship between the State and the different segments of higher education. Further, the BRFA continues the recent practice of level-funding the MICUA institutions in a manner that

compromises the formula that ties State funding to the number of students at the institution. **We respectfully request that the Maryland General Assembly reject the BRFA and fully fund the Sellinger Program in the fiscal 2022 budget.**

The *Higher Education Fiscal 2021 Budget Overview* prepared by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) is well-written and thorough. We appreciate this opportunity to comment regarding the steps that are being taken by our institutions to assist the transfer student population, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the steps that are being taken to address education delivery and access in a remote work/learning environment.

Assisting the Transfer Student Population

Our institutions are greatly interested, and heavily invested, in assisting and facilitating the transfer student population. To that end, we participate in ARTSYS, the State articulation system, and are in the process of evaluating enhanced involvement with the newly redesigned and functionally improved system that is being developed and implemented with a third-party vendor in cooperation with the University System of Maryland (USM). Further, we actively pursue various grant funding opportunities to assist these students: one of our institutions was awarded a grant in the fall of 2020 from the National Science Foundation to provide scholarships, academic support, and mentoring to a specific cohort of community college transfer students; and another institution is currently co-chairing a workgroup that is exploring grant funding to expand transfer pathways toward the attainment of a liberal arts degree. In the last year, the number of Maryland community college articulation agreements among our institutions has increased by 17% (from 159 to 186) and one of our schools has over 80 (and growing) articulation agreements in place.

Although the pandemic has had a significant impact on the transfer student population as described in the DLS *Overview*, the MICUA institutions have been aggressively creative and innovative in their outreach to these students. These initiatives have included:

- offering virtual alternating week "Transfer Talks", or weekly Zoom "Transfer Thursdays", to address questions and concerns;
- hosting weekly Zoom rooms for "Transfer Hangouts" where students can connect with each other and share experiences;
- attending virtual transfer college fair sessions;
- hosting multiple virtual Admitted Transfer Student Day(s) so that these students may interface with the offices of financial aid, admissions, registrars, residence life, academic life, and VA benefits even without the benefit of in-person appointments;
- increasing flexibility on various deadlines and the method of delivery for academic credentials and documents due to obstacles created by a virtual environment;
- waiving application fees;
- transitioning campus tours to online visits that include live virtual events;
- accommodating grades of pass/fail or credit/no credit;
- developing and implementing an online academic orientation program in an asynchronous format (due to the flexibility afforded through asynchronous orientation, one campus was able to have its first-ever orientation focused exclusively on veteran transfer students);

- strengthening the role of the student mentor (the lessons learned here may continue beyond the virtual environment imposed by the pandemic);
- convening admissions and transfer advising staff more frequently;
- creating sample degree plans so students have a better idea of what credits are eligible for transfer; and
- increasing financial aid support and scholarships for these students.

Addressing Education Delivery and Access

The MICUA institutions have been leaders in protecting the health and safety of our students during this time of public health crisis. Eight of our institutions decided to offer only virtual instruction this fall, while five of our institutions offered a de-densified socially distant residential experience with a hybrid model of both face-to-face and virtual instruction. For the spring semester, ten of our institutions are offering a hybrid model of both face-to-face and virtual instruction, one will phase in a hybrid model later in the semester, and two are offering only virtual instruction. Each institution has successfully balanced the best interests of its students.

However, the plans that our schools made for fall 2020 and spring 2021 were developed following numerous workgroup meetings during which all aspects of the reopening (or not) was discussed, every stakeholder was consulted, and every potential outcome was evaluated. In contrast, in March of 2020 when the State (and the country) shut down, we had to adapt quickly to a virtual environment. In doing so, we immediately established:

- laptop loaner programs for both students and faculty with contactless checkout systems;
- the provision of additional equipment, such as webcams, and hotspots, as reliable Internet access is a major obstacle for many of our students and some faculty;
- a common online communication platform (one school provided all faculty with Zoom licenses);
- expanded technology help desk hours covering evenings and weekends to support students in different time zones and on different schedules; and
- technology grants for students to purchase equipment and pay for high-speed internet.

Later, we implemented new technology in our classrooms to allow for simultaneous face-to-face and remote instruction, provided training for faculty members who would need to use the technology, and retrofitted residence halls.

<u>Financial Aid</u>

Finally, we note that despite the pandemic and its related challenges, we continue to prioritize the financial aid that we award and we are proud of the efforts that we have made to ensure that low-income students are able to access and afford higher education and their choice of institution. The pandemic has demonstrated that our students need financial aid more than ever. One in four of our students is a Pell Grant recipient, and over 80% of the need-based financial aid that MICUA students receive is institution-based ($285 million in fiscal 2020); almost 90% of our Sellinger funds is used for financial aid for Maryland students (in fiscal 2020 this was $51 million).

Further, as part of the Guaranteed Access Partnership Program (GAPP), we match 100% of the State-awarded Guaranteed Access Grant so that low-income high-achieving students may receive up to $38,400 in the 2020-2021 academic year towards their pursuit of higher education at our schools.

We are appreciative for the opportunity to offer this testimony as part of the Higher Education Overview. Please let us know if there is any further information that you require, or any questions that we can answer.

Higher Education Overview Response

Maryland Association of Community Colleges

February 5, 2021

Submitted by:

Dr. Bernard Sadusky, Executive Director

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) appreciates the thorough and accurate presentation of the Higher Education Overview. MACC thanks the Department of Legislative Services Analyst for capturing the challenges community colleges face in a troubled educational environment.

MACC was asked to address the following two issues.

Department of Legislative Services Question 1:

MHEC, USM, Morgan State University (MSU), SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic to more easily facilitate the student transfer process for these students.

MACC Response:

The COVID crisis has challenged the transfer system even more as the pandemic has disrupted how students enter postsecondary institutions. Higher Education institutions must be able to navigate transferability of courses and credits in an effective, transparent and student friendly manner. Much of our resources have been spent negotiating an array of articulation agreements with individual institutions; and while these agreements are well intended, Maryland's community college students are still confronted with loss of credit(s) or course(s) and the increased financial burdens resulting from such losses. This simply is unnecessary and must end if we are to have students complete their degrees in a reasonable amount of time and avoid growing student debt.

Overcoming many self-imposed transferability barriers will require a continued collaborative effort. Prior to the pandemic, the community colleges and our four-year partners had increased dialogue to strengthen existing articulation agreements by having two- and four-year faculty discipline members meet and attempt to resolve these issues. This has proven somewhat

successful; however, the effort does not provide the accountability required when a course or credit is denied. MACC recommends that the legislature pass transfer legislation that provides for the collection of data and requires a documented rationale for any denial of credit(s) or course(s). Subjectivity must be removed from the transfer process.

MACC, along with our USM partners are exploring the efficiency of a revised ARTSYS tool. The process has been costly and does not provide the required assurance needed by transferring students. Common course numbering, which is utilized in other states, may offer a long-term solution to transferability denials. MACC believes that transparency with respect to transferability acceptance or rejection will allow students to proceed with their transfer desires with increased certainty.

MACC is also working with the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA) on Transfer Pathways to the Liberal Arts. MACC along with MICUA are both looking for new and innovative ways to grow and improve transfer pathways between our two segments and are also working to determine if there are potential grant opportunities to support these efforts.

To help our students navigate the transfer process, MACC, working with all our colleges, held virtual transfer fairs over a three-week period in the fall. We had 120 colleges participate in the fall and have 100 colleges scheduled for the spring transfer fair. MACC has also continued to digitally message the need for continued educational experience, along with universal FAFSA applications, which would open the door to the opportunity of receiving financial aid.

Department of Legislative Services Question 2:

The Chancellor, presidents of SMCM and MSU, MICUA, and MACC should comment on steps that have been taken to address education delivery and access for their students.

The pandemic has certainly disrupted traditional modes of instruction. However, Maryland's community colleges have been innovative in charting a path for students that remains mission critical. Our colleges transformed from in-person instruction to remote learning with assistance from the federal CARES Act and additional GEER funding.

The community colleges continued assessing the pandemic's impact of moving to remote learning and working with the Maryland Department of Health and local health departments, the colleges were able to follow strict safety and health protocols to bring students back to campus for hybrid and face-to-face instruction that is critical to programs in Allied Health, performing and visual arts, culinary, applied apprenticeships, and other continuing education offerings that lead directly to the workforce.

Another approach was to offer shorter compressed semesters instead of the more traditional 15-week semesters. This allowed students to register for courses past what would have been a normal cutoff period for students, which helped more students access community colleges.

Despite these approaches, the majority of instruction remains remote and the colleges have used federal stimulus dollars to make certain our students have the necessary technology to be connected online. The colleges have discovered that even with the aid of federal grants, too many students simply did not have the appropriate technology or the ability to access internet/broadband for their online courses. The COVID-19 impact has heightened how critical it is for our State and our communities to have reliable internet access.

In response, many of the community colleges purchased laptops for the students and staff, as well as provided public Wi-Fi hotspots in campus parking lots, so students can drive to the college and complete their assignments. The pandemic has exposed, almost overnight, how essential fast and reliable internet is for the productivity of our State and for our entire educational pipeline.

The community colleges have also worked with students to increase student financial aid assistance through federal funding as well. The CARES Act and GEERS funding has helped to provide funding for our most vulnerable students yet affordability remains one of the largest barriers, along with digital access, for our students.