



UNIVERSITY *of* MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

**University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

**House Appropriations Committee
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee
Delegate Ben Barnes**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Education, Business and Administration Subcommittee
Senator Craig J. Zucker**

January 28, 2021

University of Maryland Eastern Shore Response to DLS Analysis

Undergraduate Headcount, Student Performance and Institutional Aid.

DLS Question: The President should comment on the portion of institutional aid going toward need-based aid, considering that over half of the FT/FT students in the 2018 through 2019 cohort received a Pell grant.

First, it is important to note that UMES has experienced significant leadership instability and turnover in recent history that directly impacted the start of the 2019-2020 academic year. For example, since 2015, the university has employed, three Financial Aid Directors, three Directors of Admissions, two Directors of Advising and Retention, and two Vice Presidents of Enrollment Management. This lack of consistency limited UMES' ability to implement a tangible strategic plan that could stabilize the declining enrollment. Ultimately, this decline led to several administrative changes across the university. Those changes included the hiring of a new University President (September 2018). Upon her arrival, President Anderson conducted a comprehensive review of her current administration and determined changes were needed to support her strategic growth plan and administrative needs. As a result, the following hires were made: Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Experience (VPEMSE February 2019), Director of the Center for Access and Academic Success [Advising and Retention] (May 2019), Director of Financial Aid (July 2019), and Director of Admissions (August 2019). In addition to the strategic hires, President Anderson combined the divisions of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs to allow for an integrated and strategic approach to recruitment, student engagement, financial awarding, and degree completion. Thus, a critical task for the new VPEMSE was implementing this new structure and creating synergy among the fourteen various units. This included, but was not limited to, training staff on enrollment management strategies, establishing a series of student enrollment data reports shared amongst leadership, enhancing the utilization of institutional aid, and creating strong divisional partnerships with areas such as Academic Affairs and Marketing.

Historically, UMES has utilized a portion of its annual institutional aid to support recruiting, retention, and degree completion efforts. With respect towards recruitment, funding is allocated to be distributed in the form of recruitment scholarships. Scholarships are awarded based on a variety of metrics to include, high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, and major of interest during the recruitment cycle. To assist student success through continued enrollment and ultimately degree completion, institutional aid funds are also allocated and utilized in the form of retention mini-grants to offset the cost of enrolled, degree-seeking students who were in danger of being dismissed from the semester due to an outstanding financial balance. Each semester, students are evaluated and allocated funding based on an awarding system that utilizes a variety of criteria such as cohort year, GPA, enrollment status, and FASFA submission status. Funds are not utilized to eliminate entire financial debts. Instead, the funding is used to ensure persistence and timely degree completion. In addition, some institutional aid awards are tied to criteria such as attending financial literacy workshops, meeting with academic advisors, and meeting with career development counselors. These activities are intended to assist students with understanding the

financial cost associated with prolonged enrollment while at the same time encouraging timely degree completion.

For academic year 2020, UMES engaged with Ruffalo Noel Levitz (RNL) to secure their “Advance FinAid Solutions” package. This contractual consulting service aids UMES in obtaining financial aid optimization through the use of their four proprietary software platforms: 1. RNL Affordability Predictor; 2. RNL FinAid Simulation Software; 3. RNL True Cost Calculator; and 4. RNL Smartview. This suite of services assists in leveraging institutional aid during the recruitment cycle, and in developing strategies for retention and degree completion success. For example, 5,200 admitted students were packaged by March 1, 2020 to aid students in their college decision process. Thus, by distributing timely financial aid packages to students, UMES experiences increases in student enrollment for fall semester.

In addition, for academic year 2020, UMES modified many of its awarding practices to better serve both prospective and current students. These practices included, but were not limited to earlier awarding timelines, the automatic packaging of all prospective students with either a need-based or merit-based grant, the distribution of retention awards, and increasing work-study opportunities throughout campus.

Finally, UMES continues to enroll a student population with significant financial need, evidenced in 52% of our student population being Pell Grant eligible. UMES has exhibited an ability to attract and enroll a greater number of academically accomplished students, a notable percentage of these meritorious students have enrolled at UMES with external awards from civic organizations, social clubs, and various scholarship agencies. As a result, UMES has expended less institutional need-based aid. It is also worth noting that students who exhibit great financial need are also beneficiaries of federal, state, and local funding programs that often reduce their initial demonstrated need. As UMES continues to grow in its mission of expanding access to marginalized communities, it is inevitable that the allocation of need-based aid will increase; however, if UMES maintains its ability to attract and enroll academically remarkable students, said demonstrated financial need may be mitigated within reason.

Fiscal 2021

DLS Question: It should be noted that, in December 2020, UMES received a \$20 million unrestricted gift from MacKenzie Scott, the largest gift from a donor in the school’s history. **The President should comment on how UMES plans to the use this gift.**

The unrestricted gift from MacKenzie Scott is first being invested in an endowment that will provide a long-term stable fiscal viability for the University. These funds will allow the university to utilize funds for better marketing for student recruiting and for student scholarships. For example, UMES will be able to increase the enrollment by providing more funding to students based on certain criteria; resulting in an almost ‘free education’ to individuals. Funds will also be used to leverage faculty professorships aligned with research. It is crucial that the University leverage these funds to build a sustained financial base that will serve generations of students and allow the institution to pursue research endeavors that will benefit the citizens of Maryland.

Pivot to Remote Learning

DLS Question: The President should comment on efforts to provide mental health services remotely and if there has been an increase in demand. The President should also comment on whether the shift to providing courses and services online shifted the thinking of how UMES can deliver programs to students, opportunities to expand its reach, and the impact on UMES' future business model.

As stated, in March 2020, in response to COVID, UMES pivoted to remote learning. UMES sent students home in the middle of the spring semester; and then, using a de-densified model, brought a portion of students and faculty back for Fall 2020 semester, using both hybrid and remote learning. The DLS analysis provides details on the various strategies undertaken in regard to remote learning.

Mental Health Services. During the spring semester in response to the COVID pandemic the University utilized some of the CARES funds to invest in virtual mental health services. Specifically, UMES Counseling Services pivoted to virtual services on March 16, 2020. Students were informed of tele-mental health services via UMES News, UMES Counseling Services Website and social media platforms. Students were able to access paperless documentation to engage in services through a secure link that was connected by the Center's electronic medical record provider, Titanium.

In Fall 2020, Counseling Services provided a hybrid model for delivering mental health offerings. UMES' psychiatrist and counseling staff were available on campus for crisis situations while individual counseling and group sessions were offered virtually. Anecdotally, counseling directors across the USM system saw a decline in utilization of services compared to previous years at the initial start of the Fall semester. The data from UMES Counseling Services EMR, Titanium, is indicative of this trend. Below is UMES counseling service utilization since the inception of virtual services, the period covers March 16-December 31, 2020.

Spring and Summer 2020 semester

66 appointments; 126.30 hours

Fall 2020 Semester

170 appointments: 474.75 hours

Counseling Services Appointments & Hour Totals from Spring 2020 - Fall 2020:

236 appointments; 601.05 hours counseling hours

In addition to the regular counseling services provided on campus, UMES created the COVID - 19 Care Team in August 2020. Since creation, the team counseled over 110 students in quarantine or isolation providing wellness checks daily.

Shift to Virtual Learning/Services. The shift to providing courses and services online offered the following changes in thinking of how UMES can deliver programs to learners:

- 1) Online and remote learning opportunities (degrees, individual courses) need to be carefully planned for, as all students do not have equal access to appropriate bandwidth. Student and faculty ability to learn and teach remotely can be taught, with appropriate support; UMES learned that this support, now much more well-developed, will be an important and integral component to any online program.
- 2) Students in their first year need different and expansive help in foundational courses (Mathematics and English). Mathematics is now a separate department and its immediate, primary goal is to significantly improve students' learning in foundational courses, with the mandate to decrease the course grades of DFW rate by 50% within one year, so that students can successfully and more quickly move through their degree programs.
- 3) UMES has created and/or revised several programs that do not incur new expenses for the first several years (Digital Media Studies and Sport Management); these programs should expand UMES' reach into areas where it already has strength (health and communication)
- 4) The ability to create interdisciplinary programs across UMES' five schools is increasing; for example, the development of more programs that take advantage of existing strengths (e.g., Art Therapy = Fine Arts + Psychology + Counseling) will help strengthen the business model.
- 5) The academic division is also considering evolving and strengthening alternative pathways, such as certificate and digital pathway programs. Career certificates that teach foundational skills in 'shorter' time periods may serve as an attractive entry point to a degree, or as stand-alone learning. Scuh certificates also lend themselves to remote learning for nontraditional learners.
- 6) Another change has been a shift using virtual advising, which helped to ensure the personal touch with our students during the online spring and hybrid fall semester. Using this type of advising model will continue to become part of the ongoing business model going forward.
- 7) Virtual learning will also be expanded at our Regional Centers with selected programs that can enhance the workforce needs of the State. Regional Centers are going to take advantage of hybrid and distance technologies in order to create synergies with geographically distant class sections. And virtual strategies and services are being considered in our ongoing business model for enhancing our transfer student recruitment and retention.

In summary, instead of just returning to normal, UMES will use the opportunity afforded from the pandemic to create a 'new normal' -- that reflects our mission and provides the learning environments valuable for the citizens of the State; while maintaining financial efficiencies.