



Salisbury University
FY 2023 Operating Budget
Testimony & Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis
SU President Charles A. Wight, Ph.D.

Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation
Subcommittee on Education, Business and Administration
Nancy J. King, Chair
Friday, February 18, 2022

Maryland House Appropriations
Education and Economic Development Subcommittee
Benjamin S. Barnes, Chair
Wednesday, February 23, 2022

Members of the subcommittee, I announced my retirement from the presidency of Salisbury University in the fall, so this will be my last time before this esteemed body – and I take this opportunity to say THANK YOU. Over the last four decades, I served in various educational roles across the country, and I can say, without reservation, that your ongoing and continued support of students’ pursuit for a higher education makes Maryland stand out. It’s a major reason Maryland continues to be a state with high educational attainment, high income potential, and one of the best places to live and raise a family. So again, on behalf of everyone at SU – and now, a grateful Marylander – THANK YOU.

Members of this committee are familiar with the challenges faced by higher education as a result of the pandemic and, unfortunately, Salisbury University was no exception. One of the national trends that we’re seeing as we slowly return to normal is that students are deciding to stay closer to home when they make their college decision.

We are taking actions to address our declines in enrollment and the changing landscape of higher education. In the fall, we launched a new branding campaign – Make Tomorrow Yours – to help us better tell the story of the opportunities offered to SU’s graduates. During our re-branding process, we received input from students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of our community – resulting in a genuine story about the SU experience.

Early signs are that these efforts are paying off as our applications and deposits are already trending up and consistent with 2019.

We’re engaging in new outreach initiatives to bring back some of our near-completers and we’ve committed record funding to financial aid.

The pandemic also exposed some significant areas of concern for our region and for the State of Maryland.

We expanded hours and resources at our Dave and Patsy Rommel Center for Entrepreneurship – which is located in Downtown Salisbury. We want to help businesses get back on their feet and continue to pre-pandemic momentum when it comes to innovation and creativity in the state.

We recently established the Center for Healthy Communities in our College of Health and Human Services with the goal of providing resources and support to historically under-resourced communities. Additionally, we're committed to increasing output in critical health care professions such as nursing – where our students have the highest NCLEX pass rate among baccalaureate programs in the State of Maryland.

And we're not solely focused on those needs on the Eastern Shore. Recognizing the shortage of qualified professionals in the area of mental health, we are increasing enrollment in our social work program, which is currently offered at satellite locations around the state. We are going to do our part to improve that practitioner pipeline.

Over the last two years, we've had to set up an on-campus public health operation to serve both students and employees. We continue to test, contact trace, and provide vaccinations and other services on our campus, and that's because we decided that if we're going to be open, we're committed to doing so safely and in a way that does not present a burden to our regional health care system.

I'm proud of our ability to keep students safe and for our attention to the growing challenges related to the mental health and wellness of our students. In addition to providing in-person resources and services, we expanded operations to include on-demand telehealth visits. We've found that many of our students even prefer this way of seeking care over traditional appointments.

We also recognize that although we all are dealing with the pandemic, it has affected everyone differently, particularly those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. At SU, we made sure that our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion was reflected in our COVID policies and our actions overall. As president, it's been my goal to foster an environment where everyone can feel a sense of belonging on our campus.

I need to take this opportunity to thank Chancellor Perman and his team for their support during these challenging times. His leadership and that of the USM allowed us to navigate this pandemic while also maintaining our commitment to the important initiatives and programs that our students depend on.

I also want to thank Sara Baker and her team for their thoughtful analysis. It can be difficult to have someone open the books and tell us what we need to do, but Sara's professionalism and thoroughness make it palatable.

I believe I answered the questions during my testimony, but, to put a finer point on things:

We are working hard to address enrollment decline by engaging in new marketing efforts. Much of our decline was the result of larger-than-usual graduating classes (as opposed to retention decreases), so we need to bring in more students.

Our employee-to-student ratio is already among the lowest in the system, but we are looking at other areas where we can cut costs without negatively impacting our students.

With that, I want to make clear that we are in full support of the governor's budget. I'm happy to take any questions and provide additional comments on the questions from the Department of Legislative Services.

ENROLLMENT

Comment Requested:

1. *Page: 4—The President should comment on, given the national trend of enrollment declines at regional institutions across the country, how SU will be able to stabilize enrollment and eventually bounce back to prepandemic levels and will this lead to changes in SU's business and academic model. In particular, the President should comment on efforts to reverse the decline in continuing students and transfers, which predates the pandemic.*

Salisbury University Response:

- We are working hard to address enrollment decline by engaging in new marketing efforts. Much of our decline was the result of larger-than-usual graduating classes (as opposed to retention decreases), so we need to bring in more students.
- We implemented a number of initiatives designed to bring in more students while continuing to retain our students at high rates. For example, we have expanded our branding efforts, increased outreach through dual enrollment, and partnered with University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Wor-Wic Community College and Chesapeake College to create a Stay on the Shore campaign for local graduating students. On the retention side, we've placed tutors and social work students strategically in the residence halls and we have partnered with TimelyMD to offer on-demand mental health services.
- Finally, while our retention rates remain strong and our recent four-year graduation rates are some of the highest that SU has seen in years, SU will continue to focus on reestablishing and growing enrollments in light of COVID-19 and other challenging factors.

EDUCATION AND GENERAL EXPENDITURES**Comment Requested:**

2. *Page: 15—The President should comment on the budgetary impacts of enrollment projections and efforts being taken to identify efficiencies to better align the budget with projected revenues.*

Salisbury University Response:

- SU continues to fulfill and succeed in its mission with modest employee-to-student ratios. We are looking at other areas of efficiencies across campus without negatively impacting the quality of education our students deserve. Academic support, student services and instruction continue to be our primary focus to ensure our students receive the level of education and support they require and deserve.
- Our budget was impacted not only by lower enrollment, but also the ongoing direct and indirect expenses associated with COVID-19 mitigation.
- During FY21, SU reduced expenditure plans in order to better align the budget with projected revenues. We continue to utilize revenue and expense forecasts to proactively manage spending across the organization. As a result of this effort, our FY22 projections are aligning to current revenue forecasts.
- As we look forward, early signs show that our enrollment management and branding efforts, through our new branding campaign – Make Tomorrow Yours – are paying off. Our applications and deposits are trending up and are consistent with pre-pandemic numbers from 2019.