

CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

FROM JAY A. PERMAN



Looking Ahead With Hope. Doing the Work That Endures.

What a difference a year makes. As 2021 begins, we at last have real hope in the fight against COVID-19. Vaccines proved safe and effective will soon be widely available to Marylanders. Of course, distributing those vaccines is a Herculean effort, so the USM is working with the state on ways that our students might reinforce Maryland's corps of vaccinators, ways that our campuses might serve as community vaccination sites, ways that our students, faculty, staff, and leaders can promote vaccination as an act of service—a humane way to protect population health.

This last effort is vital, because ending this pandemic depends not on vaccines, but on people getting vaccinated. It depends on us boosting our collective immunity. And so I ask everyone who's able to get a vaccine to do it as soon as they're eligible—to do it for those they love and for those they don't even know, for those who cannot or will not get vaccinated themselves. I promise to do the same.

Maryland's vaccine rollout notwithstanding, this isn't the end of our battle against COVID—unfortunately, not even close. And so our USM institutions will operate this spring much as they did last fall, relying on campus de-densification and, to a large degree, distance learning. We'll enforce the same strict public health protocols we did last semester, because the principal way to control disease spread is through our day-to-day, decidedly low-tech behaviors: wearing a mask, washing our hands, keeping away from one another. All of this vigilance will be buttressed by more frequent COVID testing and faster return of results, so that we can quickly confirm positive cases and begin isolation.

I remain hopeful that the spring semester will be the last one marked by our “new normal,” that, slowly, with vaccines making their way into the arms of most Americans, our campuses and classrooms will swell with students, and the divisions necessary for COVID control will yield to the connections that make our universities such dynamic places to learn, and debate ideas, and share perspectives.

These important exchanges haven't stopped, of course. They've just gone—many of them, anyway—online. Our “normal” looks different, but its essence is intact. Despite a semester

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like no other, USM students showed resilience and resolve. They engaged in their coursework when significant obstacles and distractions gave them good reason not to. They spoke passionately on issues of racial equity, economic and environmental justice, and civil rights. And with more than eight in every 10 USM students registered to vote, they took their passion to the ballot box.



The University of Maryland, Baltimore is serving as a community vaccination site, staffed by personnel from the University of Maryland Medical Center, as well as students from UMB's School of Nursing and School of Pharmacy. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

You can learn more about our students and how we're serving them in the USM's [2020 Annual Report](#). I'm particularly proud that in a year of grave financial hardship for students, our institutions awarded \$174 million in financial aid, \$12 million more than the year before. I'm proud that need-based aid within the University System has climbed 62 percent since 2010; that half of all undergraduates graduate with *no* student loan debt; that, in an act of grace last year, universities used student emergency funds to distribute another \$2.4 million to those in financial distress.

I'm proud, too, of our work toward achieving racial equity and inclusion. We made a promise last year to explore issues of race and racism in our scholarship, and to redress racial injustice within our institutions and our communities. Students of color make up half of the USM's enrollment. In 10 years, we've grown our minority student population by 36 percent and our minority faculty population by 65 percent. Together, we're committed to the strength of our diversity, and to policies and practices that enable all to learn, contribute, and succeed *equally*.

The USM serves not only students, of course. We serve the state. Last year in particular, that service was indispensable. With our work in COVID testing, treatment, and vaccine development; public health advice and innovations; predicting and preparing for future pandemics, we've been vital to Maryland's COVID response. This is what our research and scholarship do—not just during a crisis, but every single day: They solve problems and save lives.

So, yes, I do look forward to getting back to “normal.” Because our normal is pretty extraordinary.

Sincerely,

Jay A. Perman
Chancellor, University System of Maryland



USM OnTrack Transforms Online Learning

Last November, the *Chancellor's Newsletter* profiled *USM OnTrack*, a partnership between the University of Maryland Global Campus and the USM's Kirwan Center for Academic Innovation. The impact of this partnership, facilitating high-quality online learning in the era of COVID-19, is being felt in classrooms and labs—real and virtual—throughout the USM.

A key pillar of *USM OnTrack* is the course development assistance made available through an agreement with iDesign, an instructional design service provider. With iDesign offering thousands of hours of fundamental support to both faculty and students, USM institutions are able to more easily and effectively move courses online.

Dr. Denise Yost, director of Graduate Certificate Programs and Extended Learning at the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES), was one of the first to see the potential this approach offered. Targeting graduate-level courses that already have online components and that enroll small cohorts of students, Dr. Yost and her colleagues shifted four UMCES courses to online delivery last fall, leveraging the support available from iDesign and USMx, the USM's partnership with edX.

The addition of new asynchronous learning modules (students and faculty *not* engaged at the same time, with no real-time interaction) into existing synchronous learning models (students and faculty engaged at the same time in either a shared physical or online environment) presented some challenges. But by accommodating these different learning approaches, emphasizing patience, and working collaboratively with the *USM OnTrack* group, the team at UMCES successfully implemented the shift—a shift Dr. Yost says provides the “best of both worlds” for students and faculty. It augments the experiential learning and personalized education of UMCES's courses with improvements in interactive engagement and flexibility.



Last fall, USM OnTrack provided more than 750 hours of instructional design support to help our institutions adapt courses for effective online delivery. In addition, more than 1,400 faculty participated in professional development seminars to strengthen their online teaching skills.

While a full assessment of asynchronous online learning is pending, the reaction has been very positive among UMCES faculty and among students, especially adult learners. And, tellingly, other USM institutions are following UMCES's lead: This spring, iDesign is providing Coppin State University with instructional design and development services to facilitate the transition of all eight courses in Coppin's Early Childhood Education program to online learning platforms.

Another innovative aspect of *USM OnTrack* is its partnership with Labster, a leading provider of virtual science labs.

Dr. Jennifer Bobenko teaches biochemistry at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES). Under COVID restrictions, she faced a critical challenge: A total of 24 students could enroll in each of her lab sections, but with six-foot distancing guidelines, a lab could physically accommodate only 12 students at a time.

So Dr. Bobenko found a way to “parallel” the lab experience virtually. Students spent half of their lab time conducting virtual experiments and the other half conducting the bench experiment. Using Labster, Dr. Bobenko was able to introduce the topic, explore relevant concepts, put the lab work into real-world context, and familiarize her students with process and protocols, all *without* being in the lab. With students conceptually well-prepared for the actual lab work—having virtually walked through the experiment in advance (multiple times if they wished)—they could efficiently complete the work in the time afforded.

While a formal assessment of the semester is still being compiled, anecdotal evidence suggests that students came out with a better conceptual understanding of biochemistry protocols. Students also shared overwhelmingly positive feedback on the Labster approach, especially happy with their ability to preview an experiment virtually and learn about the broader implications of the findings. Additionally, Labster allowed Dr. Bobenko to give students access to other highly advanced virtual protocols that are simply too sophisticated or cost prohibitive for UMES to provide. And importantly, the platform enabled the participation of students with documented health issues that prevent them from coming to campus. Without Labster, these students would have been unable to enroll in the courses.

These success stories underscore the massive potential of academic innovation to improve access and affordability, enhance the learning experience, and expand degree pathways. COVID may have accelerated our adoption of these innovations, but their impact will be felt long after the pandemic has passed.

USM Joins Vaccine Advocacy and Distribution Efforts

With two safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines now being distributed to the American public, the beginning of the end of the pandemic is in sight. But the fight is far from over, and the USM remains fully engaged in battling COVID.

In support of the statewide effort promoting vaccination, USM Chancellor Jay Perman and presidents of the system's 12 universities have joined together in a campaign to urge Marylanders to get vaccinated. The campaign, featuring a joint statement and video, seeks to reassure Marylanders of vaccine safety and efficacy, and especially targets those in minority communities who have suffered chronic inequality in health care access and outcomes and a history of exploitation in medical research. This advocacy is powerful, given that more than half of the USM's 12 university presidents are Black.

Individual campuses are also leading efforts to overcome vaccine hesitancy.

Bowie State University is hosting town hall meetings to encourage students, faculty, and staff to get a COVID vaccine when they become eligible. A social media campaign and weekly emails will support vaccine education throughout the spring semester.

The Health Center at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) has formed a task force on vaccine distribution. The task force will coordinate dissemination of accurate vaccine information to staff, faculty, and students and emphasize compliance with CDC guidelines.

Salisbury University (SU) will support the vaccination effort by sharing information through the university's COVID webpage, social media, the SU Parent Portal, campus signage, and digital publications. SU President Charles Wight will promote the effort directly through his weekly virtual briefings and campus messages. Frostburg State will initiate its own campaign using varied communications vehicles, including weekly emails from President Ronald Nowaczyk and the virtual town halls he hosts regularly for the campus community.

Several USM institutions are in discussions with the Maryland Department of Health and local health departments to serve as community vaccination sites. Once vaccines are more widely available, these sites could prove vital to an accelerated vaccine distribution program.



And Coppin State University School of Nursing Professor Charlotte Wood has been appointed to the state's COVID-19 Vaccine Technical Advisory Group. The group is focusing on communication strategies targeted to diverse populations throughout Maryland.

In many ways, supporting COVID vaccination is a point of pride for the USM. The team of scientists that developed the Moderna vaccine included Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett, an alumna of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). The clinical trials to determine safety and efficacy of the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were led by the School of Medicine at the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB). Dr. Bruce Jarrell marked his first day as UMB president last fall by taking part in the vaccine trial. UMBC President Freeman Hrabowski and his wife Jacqueline also took part in the trial—expressly to highlight the urgent need for African Americans, Latinx, and other people of color to participate in medical studies.

And in recognition of her pioneering work in vaccine development, *The Baltimore Sun* named Dr. Kathleen Neuzil, director of the Center for Vaccine Development and Global Health at UMB, a **2020 Marylander of the Year**. Dr. Neuzil is one of two principal investigators for the COVID-19 Prevention Trials Network launched by the National Institutes of Health, and led the effort to develop and test COVID vaccines under the country's Operation Warp Speed initiative.

Institutions throughout the USM are supporting Maryland's vaccination effort in other ways, too. UMCES will give the state access to its freezers, needed for the ultra-cold conditions in which the Pfizer vaccine must be stored. Meanwhile, several universities are in discussions with the Maryland Department of Health and local health departments to serve as vaccine distributions sites for their own students, faculty, and staff, and in some cases, for residents in the surrounding communities as well.

Over the last year, the USM has led a coordinated, comprehensive, and compassionate response to COVID-19. With this vaccination effort, the system remains dedicated to ending the pandemic for good.

Record-setting Philanthropy Brings Hope in Difficult Times

There's no doubt that 2020 will be remembered as a challenging year, marked by struggle and loss. For the USM, COVID-19 cleared campuses, short-circuited research, intensified students' stress, and sapped university resources. But as is often the case in times of darkness, the good news shines that much brighter.

For the USM, that good news is the humanity and generosity shown to students in need.

The pandemic has caused enormous financial hardship for USM students, many of whom lost work-study and other jobs when campuses and businesses closed. To relieve the strain on their students, USM universities tapped their emergency funds, helping students pay for necessities like food, rent, and medications, and covering unexpected expenses that can spell financial disaster for students living week to week.

As these emergency funds were painfully stretched by COVID, institutions began fundraising campaigns, winning incredible support from alumni and friends. Within the first few months of the crisis, USM universities and regional higher education centers saw more than \$800,000 in donations earmarked for their emergency funds.

Among the first to step up with support were the **USM Foundation** and the USM Board of Regents. The USM Foundation donated \$150,000—\$10,000 for the emergency fund at each of the USM's 12 institutions and three regional centers. The regents together contributed another \$80,000.

This outpouring of support continued throughout 2020, and to date, nearly \$2.4 million has been raised in support of student emergency funds systemwide.

As the USM community responded to the unprecedented need brought about by COVID, there emerged a parallel movement of philanthropic support for the larger vision and mission of the University System. And while every USM institution has received generous gifts this year, the past several months saw a significant number of historic—even transformative—

gifts for our universities.



Last spring, the University of Maryland Global Campus received the largest single contribution in its history, a \$16 million gift that nearly doubled the university's endowment. UMGC put the gift to immediate use, helping students struggling financially.

At Salisbury University, gifts and gift commitments from Bob Clarke and Glenda Chatham—longtime supporters of SU—approached nearly \$5 million last year, including a \$1.5 million endowed gift commitment to benefit the Honors College.

In 2020, Towson University (TU) received the largest planned faculty gift in its history, \$1 million from former physics professor and department chair Dr. Eddie Loh, whose gift funds scholarships for TU physics students. Towson also received the largest single donation from an alumnus/a, a \$5.3 million gift from Dr. Fran Soistman Jr. to support the College of Health Professions, the College of Business & Economics, TU athletics, and programming to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Samuel G. Rose, a retired real estate developer who earned his law degree taking night classes at the University of Baltimore (UB) School of Law, established a \$5 million fund for undergraduate scholarships at UB. The new fund sets a single-donor record for cash contributions to the university.

And the end of 2020 brought incredible news, as philanthropist MacKenzie Scott announced gifts of \$25 million to Bowie State University and \$20 million to the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. These are the largest gifts the universities have ever received, and will allow them to increase financial aid for students, invest in academic programs and innovations, and expand their endowments, enabling long-term stability and growth.

While COVID has financially stressed our students and our institutions alike, it has also sparked astonishing generosity from those who understand what higher education promises our students, and who refuse to let this crisis defer their dreams.



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