
College Completion in Maryland

**Presentation to the
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and the
House Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**

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College Completion in Maryland

Introduction

To keep the United States globally competitive, in 2009, President Barack H. Obama set a goal for the United States to have the highest degree completion rate in the world by 2020. Although the United States led the world as recently as the 1980s, it currently ranks twelfth. Increased degree completion is necessary for the country to remain globally competitive but also for individuals to be competitive in the job market – by 2018, 66% of jobs in Maryland will require at least an associate’s degree. Following the President’s lead, Governor Martin J. O’Malley announced a College Completion Agenda with the goal that at least 55% of Marylanders ages 25 to 64 hold an associate’s or bachelor’s degree by 2025.

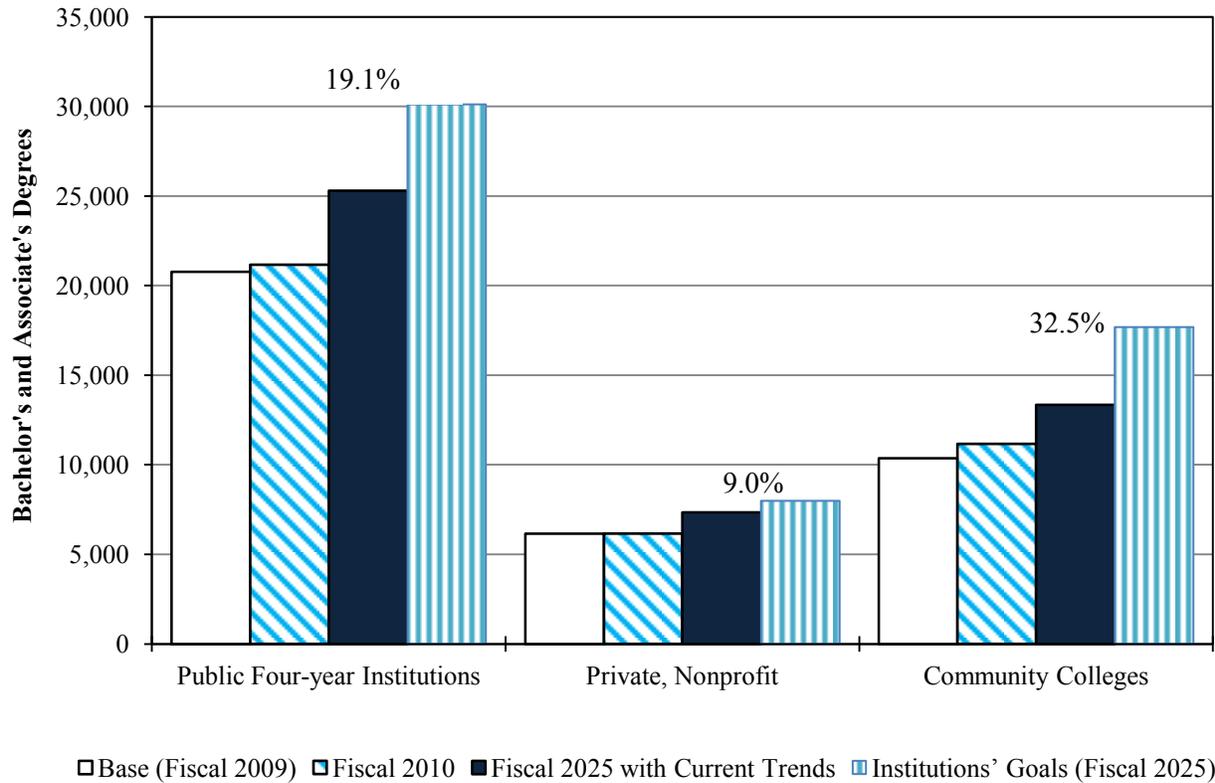
Maryland’s current degree attainment rate is 44%, with the State’s public and private nonprofit colleges awarding 38,475 undergraduate degrees in fiscal 2010. To achieve 55% by 2025, 58,000 degrees must be awarded annually. Current trends show that 45,970 degrees will be awarded annually by 2025, so the State’s colleges must increase annual production by 12,025 degrees, or 26.2%, above current trends.

Each segment of higher education in Maryland has set goals toward awarding 58,000 degrees in 2025, as shown in **Exhibit 1**. The exhibit shows that the individual segment goals total 55,774 degrees, a little short of the 58,000 degree goal.

The combined goal of public four-year institutions is 30,110 degrees by fiscal 2025. This represents a 19.1% increase above where current trends would place them and accounts for the University System of Maryland (USM), Morgan State University (MSU), and St. Mary’s College of Maryland (SMCM). USM and MSU have revised their strategic plans and have estimated the related costs to get there, discussed later in this briefing. SMCM is not planning a major increase in enrollment or in degrees awarded but does hope to increase its four-year graduation rate, thereby awarding more degrees in less time. The State’s community colleges have set the most aggressive goal, increasing degree production 32.5% above natural growth, which equates to 4,332 degrees annually.

To increase degree production by such significant amounts by 2025, major changes in how higher education “does business” will need to be implemented. Maryland received a \$1 million Complete College America (CCA) grant in 2010 to implement statewide initiatives to reach the goal.

Exhibit 1
Annual Degree Production from Maryland Higher Education Segments
Toward 55% Goal

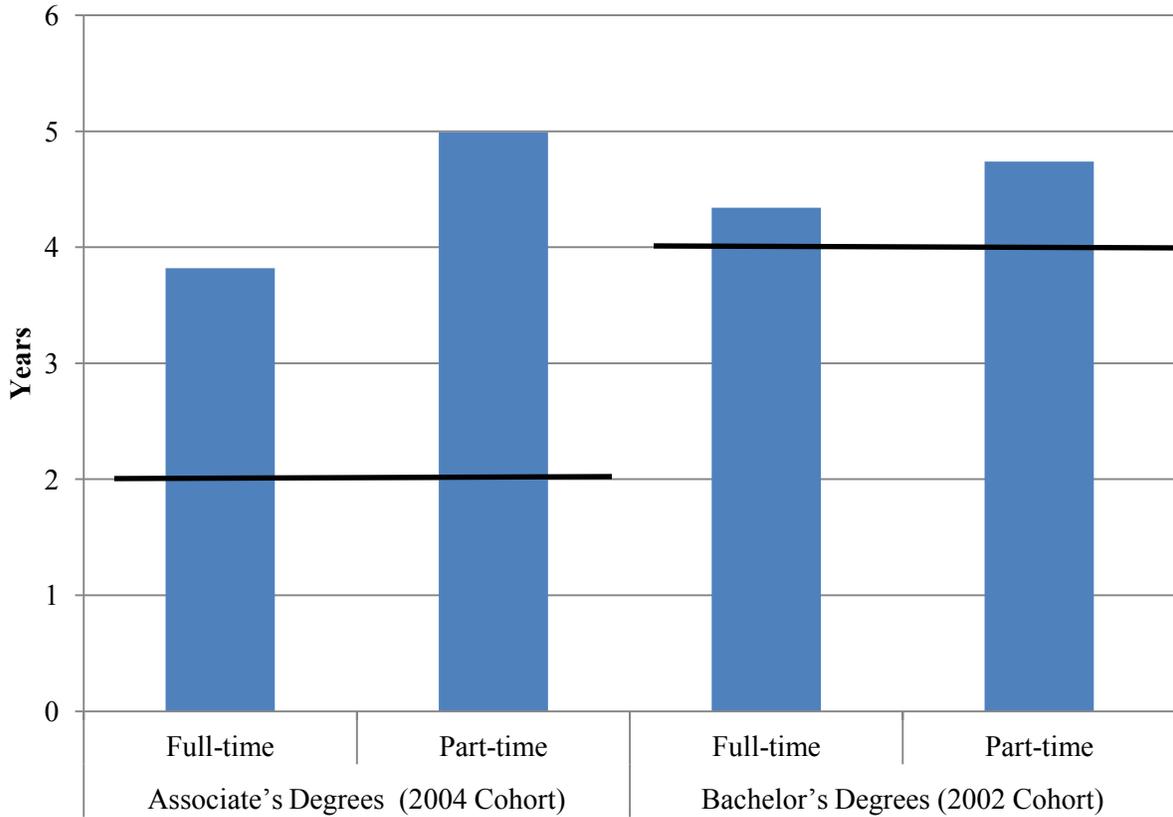


Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission; Governor's Budget Books, Fiscal 2013; Department of Legislative Services

CCA Data

As part of the CCA grant, Maryland was required to submit data for numerous metrics. **Exhibit 2** shows where Maryland stands on one of the CCA metrics, time to degree. If students completed their associate's or bachelor's degrees faster, the State's colleges would be producing more degrees at a faster rate. The exhibit shows the average number of years part-time and full-time students required before they earned a degree. For public four-year institutions, the averages are relatively close to their goal of 4.0 years – the average length of time was 4.3 years for a full-time student and 4.7 years for a part-time student.

Exhibit 2
Average Time to Degree
Community Colleges and Public Four-year Institutions

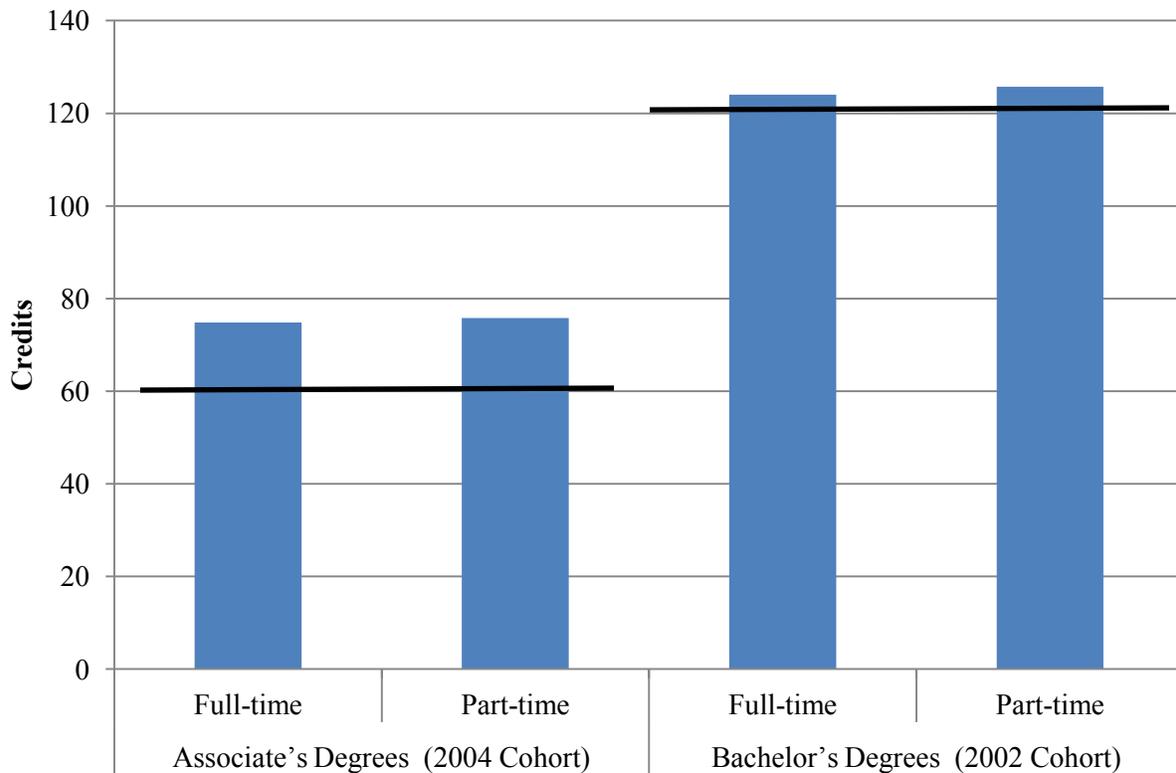


Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

However, the average length of time needed to complete an associate's degree is close to that of a bachelor's degree, although two years is the goal for an associate's degree. Given the significant number of students who enter with developmental education needs at community colleges, a slightly longer average may be acceptable. It should be noted that the definition of a full-time and part-time student is based upon initial enrollment status, and if a student starts as full-time but drops to part-time after the first semester, he or she will continue to be reported as a full-time student. Nevertheless, it took nearly as long for a student who entered as full-time to earn an associate's degree as it did for a full-time student to earn a bachelor's degree, 3.8 years. Part-time students at community colleges took longer than their public four-year counterparts, 5.0 years.

This difference can also be seen in the number of credits earned toward a degree, which is typically 60 credits for an associate's degree and 120 credits for a bachelor's degree. **Exhibit 3** shows the number of credits earned by graduates in the 2004 cohort (for community college students) and 2002 cohort (for public four-year college students).

Exhibit 3
Average Credits to Degree
Community Colleges and Public Four-year Institutions



Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission

For bachelor's degree seekers, full-time students averaged 124 credits and part-time students averaged 126 credits, both close to the standard 120 credits. For community college students, the longer time enrolled translated into more credits earned. The average was 75 credits for full-time students and 76 credits for part-time students. There are agreements between community colleges and public four-year institutions for students to transfer more than 60 credits, but that will likely have a minimal impact on the overall average. Reducing the time to degree and the number of credits earned for community college graduates could make significant gains toward the State's degree completion goals.

This data comes from the institutions, which are reporting it for the first time to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) as part of the CCA grant. MHEC has indicated that it may not have the authority to collect this level of data after the grant concludes. Continued collection will be useful to track the State's progress toward the degree completion goals. **The Secretary of MHEC should comment on student- and transcript-level data collection efforts for the CCA grant and plans to collect and utilize the data to track progress toward the 55% goal.**

New Strategic Plans to Help Reach 55%

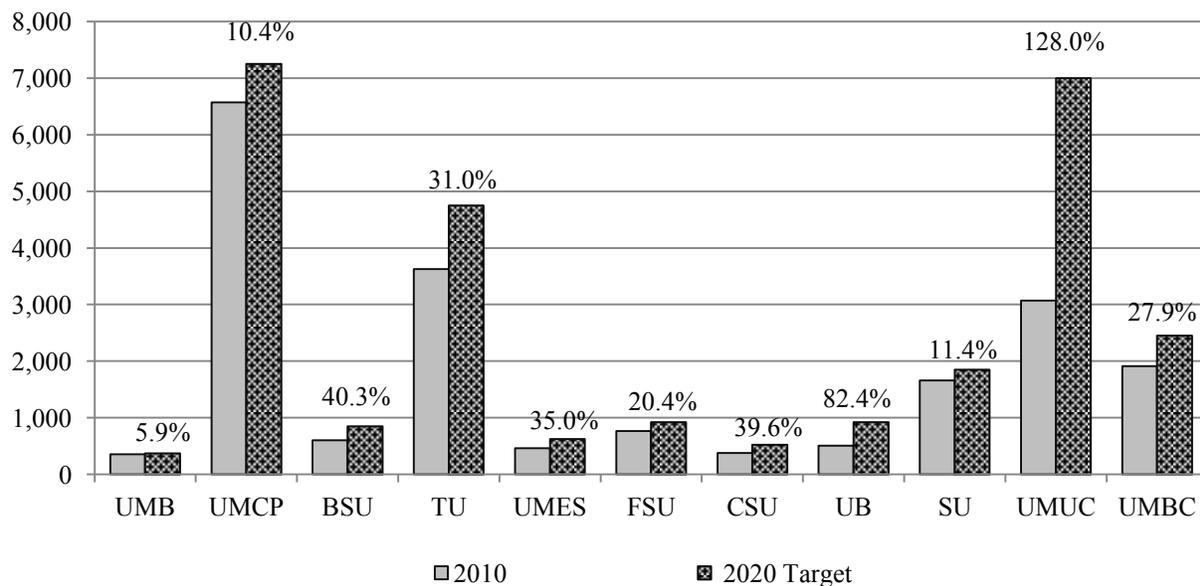
In order to reach the 55% goal, public higher education institutions have set targets and, in some cases, developed plans to reach the goal by 2025. The targets to achieve the goal vary by institution, as would be expected, but the ambitiousness of the targets also varies significantly by institution. For some institutions, the targets seem unrealistic based on historic trends, while in other cases the targets appear to be much more achievable, almost too easy. Overall, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) raises some questions about the underlying assumptions for enrollment growth (including improved student retention) and improved student success used by USM and MSU in particular to set their targets. "Stretch goals" that encourage institutions to improve degree production may be a useful strategy to reach the goal. However, unrealistic targets that may require significant additional resources are not useful in helping the State achieve the 55% goal.

USM's Completion Strategy

Given the high levels of degree production that are needed to reach the 55% goal and the time required to earn a degree, USM's strategy is based on reaching degree targets by 2020 and then sustaining that level of production for five years in order to reach the State's goal by 2025. In order to meet its share of the goal, USM's strategic plan calls for annual undergraduate degree production to increase 40.6%, or 8,086 degrees, from 19,914 in fiscal 2010 (baseline year) to 28,000 degrees by fiscal 2020. In developing its degree completion target, USM assumed that approximately 60.0% of the additional degrees awarded annually are from enhanced retention efforts, which include closing the achievement gap, developmental course redesign, and other CCA initiatives. The remaining 40.0% comes from new enrollment. Each institution developed its own target based on an analysis of its enrollment and academic strategies to develop enrollment and degree completion targets. Overall, it is questionable whether USM will be able to meet its degree completion target given the underlying assumptions regarding enrollment growth and the retention and graduation rates at various institutions

It is expected that the University Maryland University College (UMUC) will account for over half the degree production, increasing the number of undergraduate degrees 128.0% over the 10-year period, as shown in **Exhibit 4**. It should be noted while USM's overall target is

Exhibit 4
Undergraduate Degree Targets by Institution
Fiscal 2010 and 2020



BSU : Bowie State University
 CSU: Coppin State University
 FSU: Frostburg State University
 SU: Salisbury University
 TU: Towson University
 UB: University of Baltimore

UMB: University of Maryland, Baltimore
 UMBC: University of Maryland Baltimore County
 UMCP: University of Maryland, College Park
 UMES: University of Maryland Eastern Shore
 UMUC: University of Maryland University College

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems, University System of Maryland

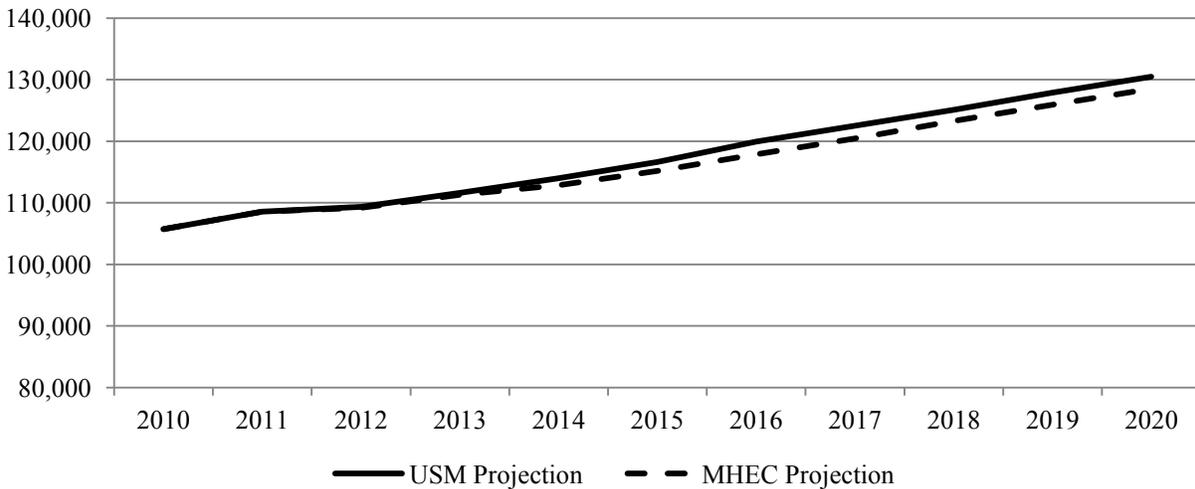
28,000 degrees, institutions did not provide a specific target number but rather a range resulting in USM's target ranging from 27,000 to 29,000 degrees. Each institution's mid-point was used to determine each specific target in Exhibit 4. Overall, USM relies heavily on UMUC and Towson University (TU), which are expected to add 3,930 and 1,125 degrees, respectively, accounting for 66.4% of the overall degree growth. The University of Baltimore is projected to have the second highest growth rate of 82.4%, or 418 degrees, as it expands its four-year undergraduate program. Additionally, it is anticipated that Bowie State University (BSU), the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), and Coppin State University (CSU) will increase their degree production by an average of 38.3%, or 555 degrees. However, the ability of the institutions to reach this goal is questionable given that over the past five years, these institutions combined awarded an additional 153 degrees, an increase of 10.9%. **The Chancellor should comment on the ability of BSU, UMES, and CSU to achieve their degree**

targets given the retention rates and historic growth in the number of degrees awarded at those universities.

Requires Significant Enrollment Growth?

In order to reach its degree completion target, USM plans to “significantly” increase undergraduate enrollment, implying institutions will need to grow at a higher than projected rate. Since institutions developed their own targets, USM made assumptions regarding enrollment needed to meet their completion targets. According to USM, enrollment needs to increase 25.9% from 105,704 students in fiscal 2010 (baseline year) to 133,086 by fiscal 2020. However, this enrollment target is not drastically higher than the MHEC projections, as illustrated in **Exhibit 5**. MHEC estimates enrollment will increase 17.4% to 128,532 students; 1,934 less students than USM’s target. The primary difference, as shown in **Exhibit 6**, is that USM projects enrollment at BSU, CSU, and UMES to increase by an average of 35.0% while MHEC projects a more moderate rate of 12.0%.

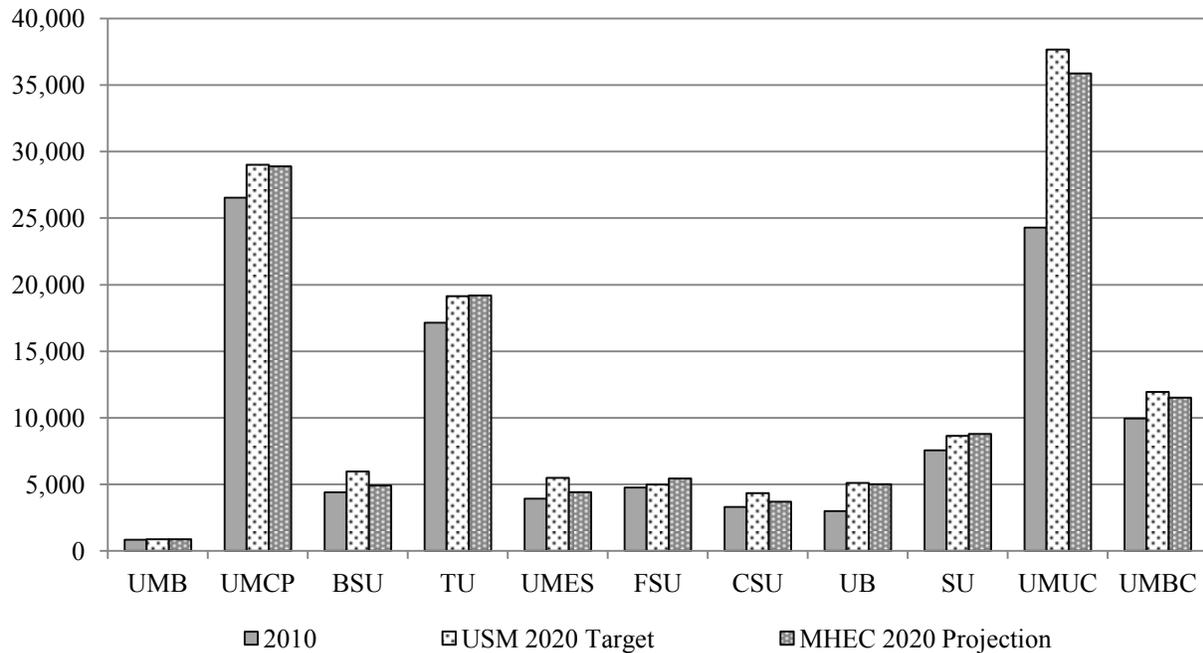
Exhibit 5
USM and MHEC Enrollment Projections
Fiscal 2010-2020



MHEC: Maryland Higher Education Commission
USM: University System of Maryland

Source: University System of Maryland; Maryland Higher Education Commission Enrollment Projections 2011-2020, June 2011

Exhibit 6
Undergraduate Fall Enrollment
USM and MHEC Enrollment Projections
Fiscal 2010 and 2020



BSU : Bowie State University
 CSU: Coppin State University
 FSU: Frostburg State University
 MHEC: Maryland Higher Education Commission
 SU: Salisbury University
 TU: Towson University
 UB: University of Baltimore

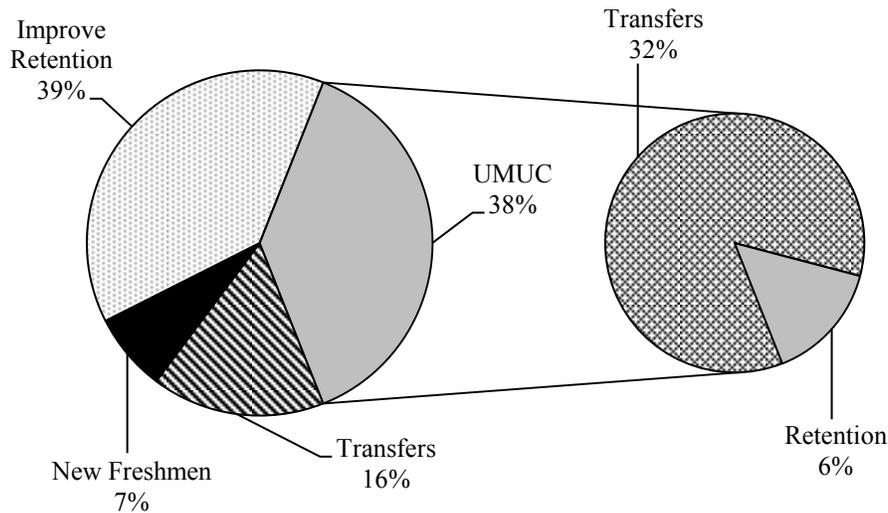
UMB: University of Maryland, Baltimore
 UMBC: University of Maryland Baltimore County
 UMCP: University of Maryland, College Park
 UMES: University of Maryland Eastern Shore
 UMUC: University of Maryland University College
 USM: University System of Maryland

Source: University System of Maryland; Maryland Higher Education Commission Enrollment Projections 2011-2020, June 2011

Institutions will not be able to reach enrollment targets by solely relying on increasing the number of first-time, full-time students. According to USM's *Fall 2011 Preliminary Opening Enrollment and Estimated FY 2012 Estimated FTE Report*, the number of Maryland high school graduates declined 4.8% over the past three years, corresponding with a 7.5% drop in first-time full-time students at USM institutions. Therefore, USM plans to grow enrollment through (1) improved retention; and (2) new students, including transfers.

While the enrollment targets are available for fiscal 2020, the breakdown by the type of enrollment growth is only available through fiscal 2016. Between fiscal 2011 and 2016, USM plans to increase the number of undergraduates by 11,376 students; new freshmen will only account for 7%, approximately 825 students, as shown in **Exhibit 7**. Since USM is relying heavily on UMUC to meet its degree completion goal, it follows that UMUC would experience the majority of the enrollment growth with transfers and improved retention accounting for 38% of the total growth, or approximately 4,275 students. Improved retention at the other institutions is expected to result in 39%, or approximately 4,300 students. This will require those with low retention rates to have successful retention programs in place that can accommodate an influx of students. **The President of UMUC should comment on how UMUC will accommodate such a rapid expansion of undergraduate students while at the same time improving retention rates and ensuring the quality of programs and services.**

Exhibit 7
Composition of USM Undergraduate Growth
Fiscal 2011-2016



UMUC: University of Maryland University College
USM: University System of Maryland

Source: University System of Maryland

At the other end of the spectrum is the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), which has the highest retention and graduation rates in USM. UMCP is expected to increase its degree production by 681 degrees, or 10.4%. Since UMCP has the highest second- and

third-year retention rates of 93.0% and 88.3%, respectively, for the 2008 cohort, and the highest six-year graduation rate at 82.6%, it will need to grow enrollments of new and transfer students to be able to meet its target. In order to meet its target, UMCP projects a need to increase enrollment 9.6%, or 2,558 students, over fiscal 2010. While UMCP anticipates some of this growth will occur at the Universities of Shady Grove (USG), it has not determined what portion of this increase will take place at UMCP and at USG. It should be noted that UMCP reports plans to keep enrollment at the current levels for fiscal 2013 and 2014. However, any growth runs contrary to UMCP's strategic plan to right size enrollment by reducing undergraduate enrollment to 25,000 students. UMCP's plan, implemented in fiscal 2010, was designed to allow for a better distribution of students among majors and programs, thereby improving the quality of undergraduate education. This raises concerns about the impact these additional students will have on UMCP's resources at College Park and USG and on the ability to maintain UMCP's quality of education. **The President of UMCP should comment on where the tipping point is and at what point additional students may adversely affect the quality of education leading to a decline in student success.**

MSU Completion Goal Plan

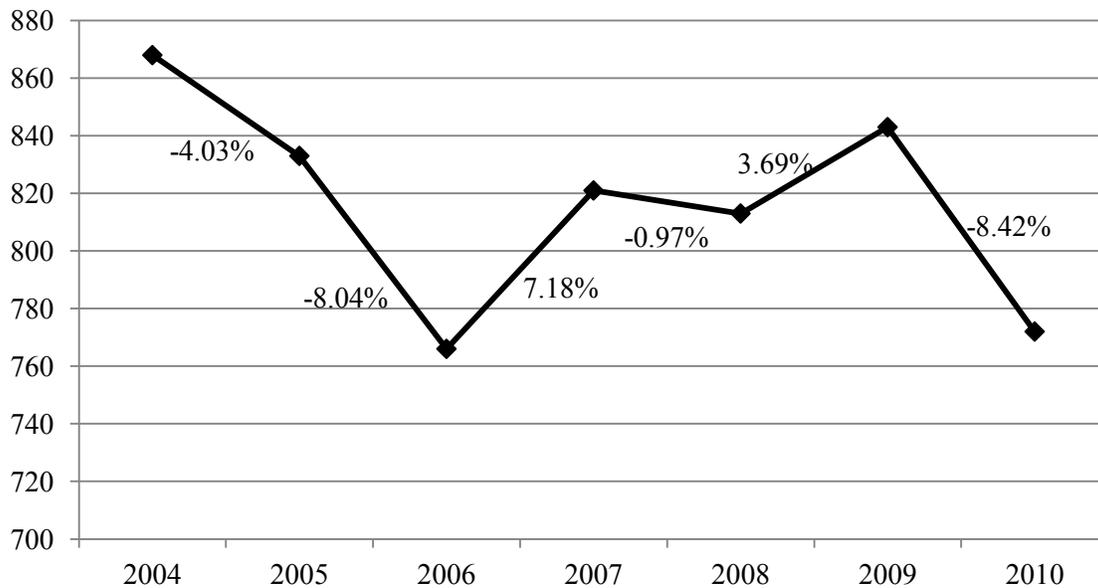
To meet its share of the State's goal, MSU plans to double the number of undergraduate degrees awarded from 772 in fiscal 2010 (baseline year) to 1,622 by 2021. By using a multifaceted approach, MSU plans to meet this target by increasing undergraduate enrollment and improving retention, which will lead to the awarding of more degrees. This is reflected in MSU's strategic plan; enhancing student success is the first goal which includes improving retention and degree completion with particular emphasis on undergraduate students. MSU based its degree completion target upon the six-year graduation rate increasing from 33.8% to 50% within the next 10 years. However, this assumption is questionable considering its six-year rate has fallen 10 percentage points since the 1999 cohort attained the highest rate of any cohort of 43.8%.

MSU plans to significantly increase undergraduate enrollment 47.5% from 6,622 in fiscal 2010 to 9,765 in 2020 in order to meet its completion target. This is considerably higher than MHEC's projection in which undergraduate enrollment grows 18.8%, to 7,864 students by fiscal 2021. MSU plans to grow enrollment by the addition of new students including transfers, improved retention, and online programs but has yet to determine the proportion that each of these factors will contribute to enrollment growth. While MSU will rely on improved retention to help grow enrollment and has made progress in improving retention, over one quarter of the students since the 2003 cohort did not return for their second year of college. Achieving its completion goal would require MSU to have in place programs, services, and financial aid that can effectively accommodate an influx of students, thereby ensuring success.

As previously stated, MSU plans to double the number of undergraduate degrees awarded. However, this target may be unrealistic given the retention rates and falling six-year graduation rate. Over the past six years, the number of undergraduate degrees conferred has declined 11.1%, or 96 degrees, as shown in **Exhibit 8**. After reaching a low of 776 degrees

awarded in fiscal 2006, the number seemed to be on an upward trend only to drop by 772 degrees conferred in fiscal 2010. Increasing the six-year graduation rate by 16.8 percentage points in 10 years will require effort to ensure that the appropriate programs and infrastructure are in place. However given the lack of details in the strategic plan on how it will improve retention and graduation rates it is difficult to determine how MSU plans to improve and track student success. Overall, given the above mentioned concerns, it is questionable whether MSU will be able to achieve its degree completion goal. **The President of MSU should discuss how MSU will meet the target based on recent variations in the number of degrees awarded and retention and graduation rates.**

Exhibit 8
Undergraduate Degrees Awarded
Fiscal 2004-2010



Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; Department of Legislative Services

Cost of Completion Goal

USM estimates between fiscal 2012 and 2016, it would require an additional \$168.3 million, a combination of State funds and tuition revenues, to implement programs and services needed to meet its degree completion goal, as shown in **Exhibit 9**. USM notes that additional investments would be needed after fiscal 2016 but has not provided those estimates. This does not include the portion of current services costs attributed to this goal, such as increased personnel costs related to an additional 762 positions. Furthermore, in order to accommodate the enrollment growth needed to meet its degree completion goal, USM states that “re-installation” of the Enrollment Funding Initiative (EFI) is a “mission-critical” factor. However, while EFI did prove to be successful in increasing enrollment (10.3% from fiscal 2007 to 2009) when funds were made available to subsidize growth, it did not necessarily translate into student success. Although student completion data is not currently available for these cohort groups, according to USM’s November 2011 *Instructional Faculty Workload Report*, the four-year graduation rate for those entering a USM institution in 2006 (fiscal 2007), declined two percentage points to 39.0%. This indicates that increasing enrollment without the appropriate infrastructure in place to accommodate growth will not guarantee student success or completions.

Exhibit 9
University System of Maryland Estimated Annual Degree Completion Costs
Fiscal 2012-2016
(\$ in Thousands)

	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>Total</u>
Degree Completion	\$23.1	\$25.5	\$36.7	\$40.0	\$43.0	\$168.3
Current Services Cost	78.9	82.5	88.2	94.3	100.8	444.7
New Positions	121	148	168	164	161	762
Capital	\$96.0	\$160.0	\$265.0	\$186.0	\$181.0	\$888.0

Source: University System of Maryland

While MSU has developed a cost estimate for its strategic plan, which focuses on elevating its Carnegie classification to a high research institution, it has not determined what portion of these costs is directly attributed to meeting the completion goal. Overall, MSU estimates in order to achieve all the goals in the strategic plan, an additional \$253.5 million comprised of \$150.0 million in State funds and \$103.5 million in tuition revenues will be required. Expenditures include \$161.0 million related to faculty and staff; \$35.3 million to replace outdated equipment; \$29.8 million for financial aid; \$24.5 million for facilities renewal;

and \$2.9 million related to the library. In addition, the plan calls for \$908.5 million in new capital projects. **Given the State's fiscal condition, it is unlikely that the State can afford to provide this level of increased support to USM and MSU. The Chancellor and Presidents should comment on low- and no-cost steps that can and will be taken to improve student success and college completion.**

St. Mary's College of Maryland

SMCM has said it will contribute to the 55% goal but has not set specific degree targets or developed a plan to reach the targets, making it impossible to evaluate their reasonableness. SMCM has indicated that it will focus on increasing the four-year graduation rate, which is already the highest in the State at 72.2% for the 2004 cohort. **The President should comment on SMCM's degree target and strategies for meeting the goal.**

Community College Completion Goals

The goal set by community colleges is to award 17,671 degrees by fiscal 2025, 4,332 degrees above natural growth. According to the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), each of the State's 16 community colleges set a goal for themselves based on local trends and what they felt were realistic targets. Together, they add to 17,671 degrees. In order to measure each college's progress toward the goal, a breakdown of the target by college should be provided.

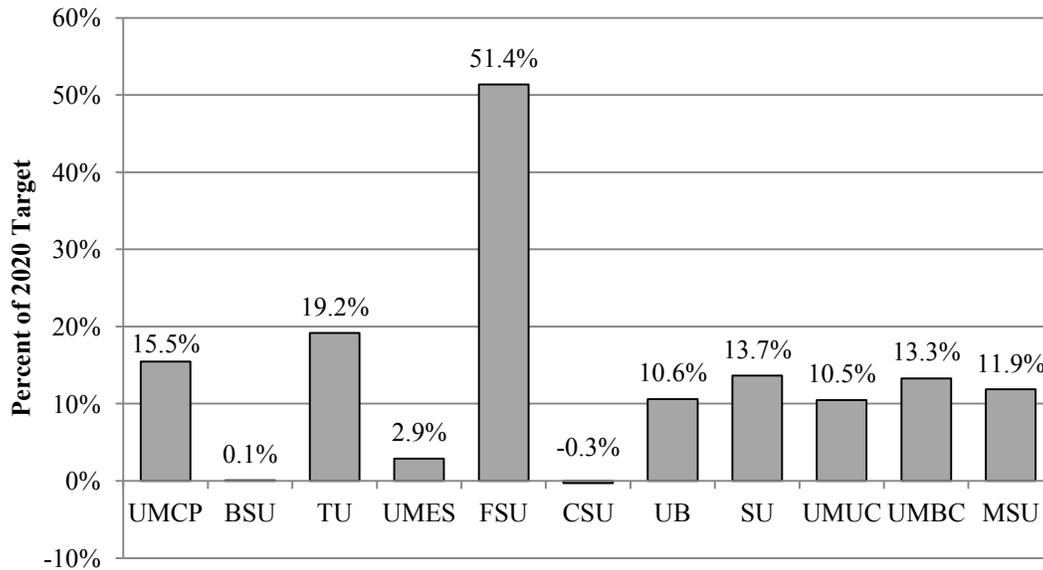
MACC advises that the colleges have been working together and sharing best practices in student success. Maryland's community colleges held the nation's first Summit on Completion in December 2010, a gathering of the institutions where administration and faculty discussed and shared successful initiatives at the different colleges. A second Summit on Completion was held in December 2011.

While the community colleges are sharing information on how to improve student success, they are largely working independently toward their goals. MHEC should play a coordinating role for the community colleges and help them reach the State's and their degree attainment goals. **The Secretary of MHEC, MACC, and the Presidents should comment on the best practices that the colleges are implementing and the coordination between the colleges and MHEC to achieve the 55% goal.**

Progress Toward Goal for USM and MSU

Despite the ambitious targets for some institutions, institutions have made strides toward achieving targets over the past year, especially degree completions goals. **Exhibits 10 and 11** illustrate the progress made in fiscal 2011 toward achieving the projected increases needed to meet the plan targets (the fiscal 2020 target minus the fiscal 2010 baseline). In terms of

Exhibit 10
Progress Toward Fiscal 2020 Enrollment Targets
Fiscal 2011



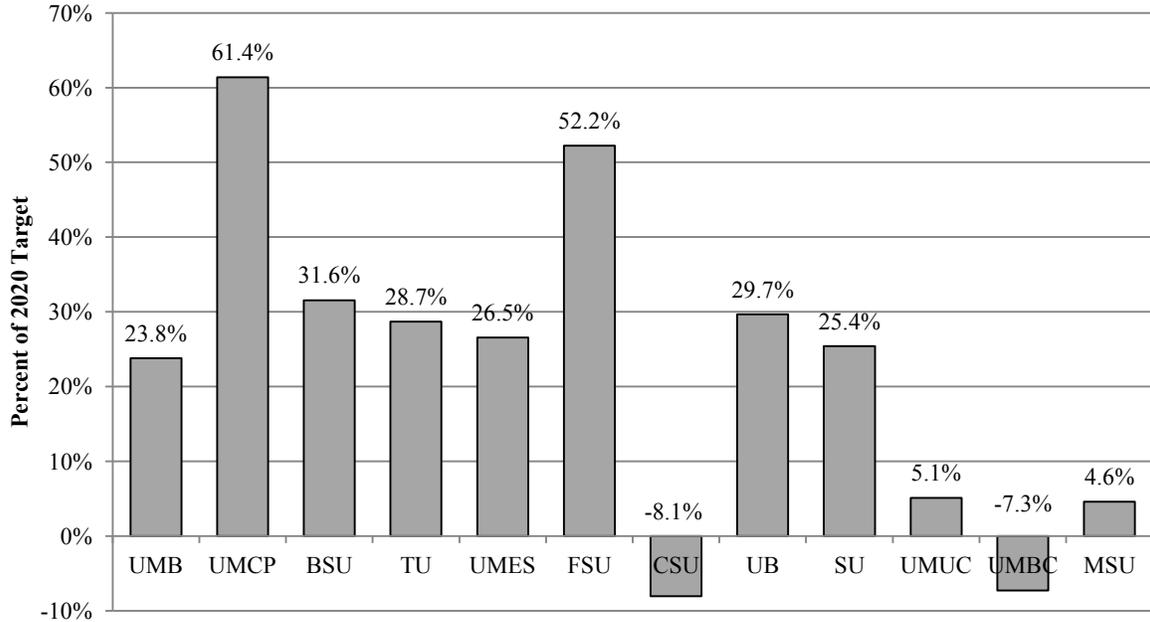
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 UMUC: University of Maryland University College
 USM: University System of Maryland

Note: Data shows the percent of the fiscal 2010-2020 increase needed to achieve the target that was reached in fiscal 2011. The University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) is not shown due to undergraduate enrollment declining by 72 students from 844 fiscal 2010 to 772 students in fiscal 2011, thereby resulting in UMB being -248.3% from meeting its target.

Source: Maryland Higher Education Commission; Morgan State University; University System of Maryland; Department of Legislative Services

**Exhibit 11
Progress Toward Fiscal 2020 Degree Targets
Fiscal 2011**



BSU : Bowie State University
 CSU: Coppin State University
 FSU: Frostburg State University
 SU: Salisbury University
 TU: Towson University
 UB: University of Baltimore

UMB: University of Maryland, Baltimore
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 UMUC: University of Maryland University College
 USM: University System of Maryland

Note: Data shows the percent of the fiscal 2010 through 2020 increase needed to achieve the target that was reached in fiscal 2011.

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System; University System of Maryland; Morgan State University; Department of Legislative Services

enrollment goals, most institutions have made modest headway with six USM institutions and MSU achieving, on average, 13.5% of targets, as shown in Exhibit 10. Frostburg State University (FSU) made significant gains attaining 51.4% of its target with the addition of 111 students in fiscal 2011. However, it is not clear if FSU can sustain this growth and/or accommodate increased growth given the constraints on resources. As discussed previously, UMUC is being greatly relied on to significantly increase, not only enrollment, but also degree

completion. UMUC met 10.5% of its enrollment growth of 13,362 undergraduate students, indicating that meeting this goal may be a challenge. BSU, UMES, and CSU experienced slight or negative growth, suggesting their targets may be unattainable.

Degree completion targets for some institutions appear to be more reasonable than for others, as depicted in Exhibit 11, with UMCP and FSU achieving 61.4 and 52.2%, respectively. However, the number of degrees awarded between fiscal 2010 and 2011 at UMBC and CSU declined by 39 and 12 degrees, respectively. This is disconcerting particularly for UMBC where degree production is targeted to increase by 535 degrees. With CSU, the decline in degrees awarded, coupled with the decline in enrollment, raises questions as to whether the goal can be attained. UMUC and MSU have only met 5.1 and 4.6% of their projected increase in degree production, again, indicating their goals may be overly ambitious. Overall, some institutions seem to have set goals within reasonable expectations while other institutions' goals may be difficult, if not impossible, to attain.

Considering the progress that has been made so far, large influxes of dollars may not be needed, at least in the short term, to increase degree completion. In terms of enrollment, all institutions appeared to be successful in increasing their enrollment in the past year despite the lack of State funding for enrollment. Given the success of the institutions making progress toward their goals, it raises questions about the costs USM and MSU have estimated to meet the completion goal. **The Chancellor and Presidents should comment on the policy and fiscal implications of the progress made to date toward the targets.**

Issues and Recommendations

DLS has raised a number of policy and budgetary issues associated with meeting the 55% goal, and the public higher education segment heads and presidents have been asked to be prepared to discuss them. In addition, the following issues should be discussed:

- role of the regional higher education centers and for-profit institutions in reaching the 55% goal;
- balance of new enrollments and improving student success as strategies to reach 55%; and
- coordination between community colleges and public four-year institutions, particularly related to transfer students and efforts to encourage students to receive an associate's degree before transferring.

In order to consistently track the progress of the higher education institutions toward the 55% goal, DLS recommends that an annual progress report (report card) be developed and coordinated by MHEC. MHEC should also analyze the institutions'

progress and report to the Governor and the General Assembly on any concerns regarding the lack of progress or best practices that are not being implemented. DLS also recommends that MHEC convene an annual Summit on Completion for higher education institutions to share best practices in completion and cost-saving strategies across all segments.