

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2013 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 268

(Chair, Appropriations Committee)(By Request -
Departmental - University System of Maryland)

Appropriations

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science - Joint Graduate
Degree Granting Authority

This departmental bill authorizes the Board of Regents of the University System of Maryland (USM), subject to the approval of the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), to authorize the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science (UMCES) to award graduate degrees in marine and environmental sciences jointly with another public senior higher education institution and award post-baccalaureate certificates. The definition of “public senior higher education institution” is altered to include UMCES.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2013.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: USM and UMCES can implement the bill using existing resources; however, resources may be diverted from existing projects and responsibilities or tuition and fee charges to students may increase. UMCES’ federal and private grant revenues may increase in future years due to UMCES being eligible for grants restricted to degree-granting institutions. UMCES will incur ongoing administrative expenses beginning in FY 2017. UMCES’ higher education tuition revenues and expenditures increase equivalently. MHEC can evaluate new joint degree and post-baccalaureate certificate programs using existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: USM has determined that this bill has minimal or no impact on small business (attached). The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) concurs with this assessment.

Analysis

Current Law: “Public senior higher education institution” means the constituent institutions of USM, Morgan State University, and St. Mary’s College of Maryland. The Board of Regents of USM may not authorize UMCES to award degrees or certificates.

Background: UMCES is a research institute for environmental and natural sciences studies. Its mission is to develop a comprehensive program of environmental research, education, and service. Research focuses on the watersheds, estuaries, and coastal areas of the State of Maryland and the greater Chesapeake Bay region, applying knowledge to help predict conditions in Maryland’s ecology. Additionally, UMCES administers the Maryland Sea Grant College program. Funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Sea Grant program is a network of 30 university-based programs located in the coastal and Great Lakes regions.

UMCES includes three geographically distinct laboratories under a single administration:

- Appalachian Laboratory in Frostburg, founded in 1962 at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay watershed with research focusing on landscape and watershed ecology;
- Chesapeake Biological Laboratory on Solomon’s Island, founded in 1925, conducts marine research and is home to UMCES’ research fleet; and
- Horn Point Laboratory in Cambridge, founded in 1973, conducts research on biology, chemistry, physics, and ecology of the organisms and ecosystems from wetlands and estuarine water of the Chesapeake Bay.

In addition, University of Maryland Baltimore County; University of Maryland, Baltimore; and UMCES partnered to establish the Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology which conducts marine and environmental research.

Each of the laboratories serves as a regional center, offering natural science education programs to K-12 teachers and students. Environmental education programs also serve environmental interest groups and institutions within and beyond USM that are concerned with environmental research, education, and service.

While UMCES does not grant degrees, its faculty members contribute to graduate education by advising, teaching, and supervising the research of undergraduate and graduate students within USM degree-granting institutions. These activities further the institution's goals of providing quality research and graduate education and helping to build an educated workforce.

In December 2010, the Board of Regents' (BOR) Educational Policy Committee reviewed and discussed the proposed revised mission statements of all USM institutions and regional centers. At the time, UMCES' mission statement proposed to "build on the Center's success in graduate education, including leadership of the MEES [Marine-Estuarine-Environment Sciences] program..." According to USM, the system requested UMCES to explore the path toward becoming a graduate degree-granting institution.

At the December 2010 meeting, BOR requested UMCES to revise its mission statement to further elaborate on its role in graduate education. The statement was modified to include a provision that "The USM and UMCES are developing a path for the Center to assume an expanded role in graduate and professional education, including possible accreditation as a graduate degree-granting institution." The mission statement was submitted to MHEC in February 2011 for approval. MHEC approved UMCES' revised mission statement, which includes a provision for UMCES to assume an expanded role in graduate and professional education, including the possibility of attaining accreditation as a graduate degree-granting institution in January 2012, and BOR granted final approval in February 2012.

The MEES program was established in 1978 as an interdisciplinary and inter-institutional graduate program. The program offers master's and doctoral degrees in six areas: oceanography, fisheries science, ecology, environmental molecular biology, environmental chemistry, and environmental science. Courses offered through the MEES program are available to any USM graduate student. The program is administratively housed at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), which provides administrative services including those related to admissions, registration, and billing. Additionally, students have access to services provided by the Graduate School including assistantships and academic mentoring. The director is considered a UMCP employee who has a half-time teaching appointment supported by UMCP and half-time research appointment funded by UMCES.

The Governor's proposed fiscal 2014 budget includes \$45.6 million in total revenue for UMCES, including \$21.0 million in State general fund and Higher Education Investment Fund monies.

State Revenues: UMCES' federal and private grant revenues may increase in future years due to UMCES being eligible for grants restricted to degree-granting institutions. USM projects UMCES will receive approximately \$800,000 per year in additional grant funds that could be used to support graduate student stipends, instrumentation, training, and research. DLS cannot confirm UMCES estimated grant revenue.

State Expenditures: USM reports that the bill can be implemented with existing budgeted resources. DLS concurs, with the caveat that these resources may need to be diverted from USM's and UMCES' existing projects and responsibilities.

Prior to conferring joint degrees, UMCES must receive accreditation and program approvals from MHEC. USM estimates that it will cost approximately \$200,000 in total over the next two years to prepare the accreditation application and to cover fees assessed by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education for accreditation. USM reports that funds from tuition revenues will be used for this purpose, and an existing academic administrative officer will be responsible for managing tuition revenues to deliver and enhance the programs. However, UMCES does not charge tuition currently. This means either MEES students will pay additional tuition and fee charges for a joint degree, or existing tuition and fee revenues currently received by UMCP will be diverted to cover these costs. While USM stated that no State funds will be required or used for the accreditation process, using \$200,000 for the accreditation process means that those funds cannot be used to otherwise enhance and strengthen the existing MEES program at UMCES and UMCP.

For the post-baccalaureate certificate programs, UMCES anticipates that it will take at least two years to receive accreditation and that the programs will receive approval from MHEC shortly thereafter. USM reports that these programs will be self-supporting through tuition revenues.

Once UMCES begins offering joint degree and certificate programs, projected to be in fiscal 2017, UMCES will incur ongoing expenses specifically related to administering its portion of UMCP's MEES program, which UMCES has proposed to be the first joint degrees that it would award. These expenses cannot be reliably estimated at this time; however, it is assumed that no additional State funds will be required for this purpose.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Higher Education Commission, University System of Maryland, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 4, 2013
ncs/rhh

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ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC IMPACT ON SMALL BUSINESSES

TITLE OF BILL: Education – University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science –
Joint Degree Granting Authority

BILL NUMBER: LR0094.USM#1

PREPARED BY: University System of Maryland

PART A. ECONOMIC IMPACT RATING

This agency estimates that the proposed bill:

WILL HAVE MINIMAL OR NO ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL
BUSINESS

OR

WILL HAVE MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL
BUSINESSES

PART B. ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

The proposed legislation will have no impact on small business in Maryland.