



University of Maryland University College

**STATEMENT OF GREG VON LEHMEN
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**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT, GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION, FEDERAL SERVICES, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ON IMPROVED EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR OUR MILITARY AND VETERAN
POPULATION
SEPTEMBER 22, 2011**

Good afternoon Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Greg Von Lehmen and I am the Provost and Chief Academic Officer for University of Maryland University College. On behalf of our president, Susan C. Aldridge, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss improving educational outcomes for our military and veteran population.

University of Maryland University College (UMUC) was established in 1947 to meet the unique academic needs of working adults. Today, it serves 94,000 students in 28 countries and all 50 states, about 40,000 of whom are active duty military service members, veterans and their families. These remarkable men and women take classes onsite at more than 150 locations – including military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan – and online through our award-winning virtual campus, one of oldest, largest, and fastest growing in the world.

The State of Maryland invested in its citizens by creating UMUC as Maryland's open university serving nontraditional students who reside in Maryland, the United States, and throughout the world and to provide the citizens of Maryland with affordable, open access higher education.

Accordingly, UMUC continues to play a critical, and certainly expanding, role within the State's public system of higher education. UMUC is the *only* publicly funded four-year institution in Maryland dedicated entirely to meeting the unique learning needs of working adults. As an open access

university, committed to serving *all qualified applicants*, UMUC attracts an exceptionally diverse student body, representing a myriad of ages and abilities, cultural traditions and socio-economic circumstances. That said, we enroll a substantial number of the State's non-traditional and underserved student populations - including more African American undergraduates than any other four-year Maryland institution, and almost twice the number of African American graduate degree candidates than in all of Maryland's HBCUs. For the most part, UMUC students are in their thirties and forties. Four out of five of them work fulltime; nearly half are married with children; more than half are women; and well more than one-third are self-identified minority group members.

Unlike their traditional, college-aged counterparts, the vast majority of UMUC's students are seeking academic opportunities that support professional advancement in their chosen fields. And in tough job markets such as this one, many of these students want to change careers altogether.

Our dedicated faculty make it possible for UMUC to provide its students with some 130 undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate program options. Our Graduate School of Management and Technology also offers one of only a few Doctor of Management programs in the country, as well as a variety of executive training opportunities, all of which are designed to help our students compete in today's global economy.

UMUC's focus on adult students started with its service to active duty-members, which began with face-to-face programs on military installations in Europe in 1949 and Asia in 1956 and continues to this day. More recently, the university has also sent faculty and staff downrange to offer educational opportunities for servicemembers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa and locations in the Middle East.

Accountability, Quality Assurance and Student Support at UMUC

UMUC has instituted many processes in order to increase positive educational outcomes for all of our students, but especially for our military and veteran students. I would like to highlight a few of these processes below:

1. Office of Enrollment Management

The Office of Enrollment Management (OEM) has instituted Measures of Accountability to ensure World Class Service adherence. The underlying principle that is the foundation of every interaction and transaction is the university's first core value: Students First. OEM's service purpose is, "We create student success by providing World Class Service". Available, Courteous, Knowledgeable and Responsive are the standards upon which student service is delivered. To measure adherence and provide accountability to these standards, appropriate behaviors have been identified. These behaviors can be measured and monitored. In order to achieve the highest levels of service, quality assurance standards and practices are monitored and measured on a daily basis.

With regard to prospective students, OEM adheres to guiding principles in how to conduct outreach to and with this population. Although the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (“FERPA”) does not apply to prospective students, we treat every prospect with the same respect, provide the same service and safeguard their information with the same privacy standards as we do with our current students.

During the lead acquisition process, UMUC only acquires leads who have specifically expressed interest in our institution. These proprietary leads have given permission for the university to conduct outreach to them. During the lead qualification process, OEM follows established business protocols to ensure prospective students are only contacted on an intermittent basis and not multiple times a day. At any point in the process, a lead or a student in an applied, matriculated or enrolled status, may request not to be contacted. In these instances, the university will apply a “DNC” (Do Not Contact) indicator on a student’s record and only essential information will be sent to the student. Email communications also includes an “Opt-Out”. Due to the number of email communications our students receive, it is imperative that they have the option not to receive unwanted communications from the university. In regards to telephone calls, the university records all inbound calls. A caller will hear a recorded disclaimer on each call stating that calls can be monitored and recorded for quality assurance purposes. The department has an extensive evaluation process in place to constantly measure calls to ensure that callers receive the highest level of service. In addition, this affords the department opportunities to recognize staff for exemplary service and to identify areas for improvement. In order to establish consistency, the department utilizes a Customer Relationship Management tool called “Goldmine”. Each prospective and current student has a Goldmine record which has a transactional history of every interaction with a contact. Having a record of each student interaction allows the university to customize outreach, research issues and build a better relationship with its students.

The purpose of quality assurance in relation to prospects is to measure and analyze all aspect of the relationship in order to ensure that the customer service levels that are expected are delivered.

2. Office of Career Services

To support the educational needs of the nontraditional student, the Office of Career Services provides quality resources and services to assist UMUC students and alumni worldwide with their career planning and job search needs. These services are available from enrollment through graduation to the working world and are designed to reflect the evolving needs of UMUC’s talented and diverse adult population. To this end, our Office of Career Services provides both face-to-face and virtual career fairs, assistance with resume and cover letter drafting, and support from career counselors who can help guide students through the entire job search process. As an example, UMUC provided a virtual career fair for students seeking jobs in the cybersecurity field. This was geared towards students who are serving (or who have served) in the military since they already have a desired security clearance.

3. Effective Writing Center

UMUC's Effective Writing Center provides an array of writing related services to the UMUC community. All UMUC students can receive feedback and advisement on papers either online or in person. Further, faculty members can invite EWC guest lecturers into their classrooms to provide general advice or to assist a classroom of students with a specific paper or topic.

4. 24/7 Library Support

UMUC's Library is available virtually all of the time via e-mail, chat, phone, or in person meetings. At just about any time of the day, UMUC's students from around the world can contact our Librarians for reference assistance, search an online database with access to numerous database and countless research articles, and borrow hard copy and/or electronic books.

Recommendations

I would like to bring to your attention areas in which the federal government can assist in supporting improved educational outcomes for our military and veteran student populations.

1. Military Tuition Assistance

Returning veterans are coming home to a highly competitive job market and as the unemployment numbers indicate, far too many are unemployed and countless others are underemployed. This is especially true for our younger veterans. When competing against non-veterans, the key differentiator is often a college degree. And the military services have made significant investments in narrowing this gap by funding the cost of college through the Tuition Assistance program. This program has catapulted a significant number of active duty service members toward educational goals that many had once thought to be impossible. The impact of increased investments in Tuition Assistance is substantial. In Fiscal Year 2002, the first year of 100% Tuition Assistance, there was an increase of 32% in individual enrollments and this increase had held steady in subsequent years. We fully support and look forward to working within the new DoD MOU provisions and the Military Voluntary Education Review process. But at the same time, we ask this committee to continue your leadership in this area and to closely examine the impact of proposed changes to the Tuition Assistance program. Thoughtful consideration and further discussion must be given to the long-term implications of a disinvestment in the Tuition Assistance program—especially in terms of providing opportunities to earn the educational credentials necessary to open doors of opportunity for those who serve this great nation with great honor and courage.

2. Continued Support of American Council on Education and Servicemembers Opportunity College Programs

As this committee considers the role of the federal government in improving educational outcomes for our military service members and veterans, I want to draw attention to two investments by the Department of Defense that have a significant impact on accelerating the time-to-degree for active duty, Guard, reserves, and veterans. One is the investment in the academic assessment of military skills training and occupational experiences. Since 1945, the Defense Department has contracted with the American Council on Education (ACE) to review the learning outcomes acquired through this formal training and to publish these findings in the form of college credit recommendations. More than 2,300 colleges and universities rely on these recommendations to award college credit for military training with more than 300,000 transcripts sent out each year.

The second important investment made by the Defense Department is in the establishment and continued support of the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC). The SOC Consortium consists of approximately 1,900 institutional members that enroll hundreds of thousands of service members, their family members, and veterans annually in associate, bachelor's, and graduate-level degree programs on school campuses, armories, and military installations within the United States and overseas, and through a variety of distance learning methods. The SOC Degree Network System (DNS), a subgroup of SOC Consortium member institutions, are selected by the military services to deliver specific associate's and bachelor's degree programs to service members and their families. University of Maryland University College is one of 160 accredited institutions that participate in the DNS.

We recommend continuing support for these programs due to the value that individual service members gain from the evaluations of their prior learning. Such evaluations can jump start the veteran's academic progress toward degree completion by recognizing prior learning and accelerate their entry into the work world by shortening their degree completion time. Additionally, on average, service members pursuing associate's degrees in the DNS receive 14.6 semester hours of credit toward their degree; at the bachelor's degree level, 21 semester hours of non-traditional credit have been awarded.

3. Putting Teeth in Military Installation Voluntary Education Review (MIVER)

DoD Directive 1322.25 requires that all institutions participating in the military tuition assistance program sign an MOU with DOD committing them to review all of their programs according to MIVER best practices. In the past, this program has resulted in team visits to installations, review of academic programs and team recommendations about issues or problems to be addressed. Historically, there has been little consequence for institutions that did not observe the principles or address the recommendations. A concrete step that the federal government could take is to create and implement a regime that would produce consequences, including suspension of eligibility to participate in the TA program, for institutions that are seriously out of compliance.

4. Reinvestment in Education Counselors

While the investments I have discussed provide a remarkable return on investment and promote student success, funding shortfalls have resulted in a drastic reduction in providing service members and veterans with easy and convenient access to highly qualified education counselors. Once the hallmark of the installation education center, prospective students are now relying heavily on colleges and universities to help in determining the right fit in terms of what school to attend, which program to enroll in and what sequence of courses to take. Despite the very best efforts of the services, this latest generation of largely first-time, first-generational students are often left to their own devices to make a decision that should be preceded by unbiased and highly qualified advising. As this committee considers how best to assure sound investments in educational programs and the means by which to increase academic success for our military and veteran populations, we ask the members to examine this issue.

Conclusion

University of Maryland University College strongly supports the work of this committee in exploring proven practices in improving education outcomes for those who have honorably volunteered to support and defend this great nation of ours. They deserve nothing less than the best we have to offer. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, and welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee going forward.