Testimony on the Proposed Merger of
UMB and UMCP into the University of Maryland

by

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I would like to thank the Board of Regents for providing me an opportunity to testify
on the possible merger of UMB and UMCP. I am a new Dean of a new college created
by an integration of two colleges.

We live in a century of the life sciences. There has been amazing progress made in
our understanding of living matter. We now know the blueprint of life and we live in
an age of quantitative biological measurements. Researchers can now access
massive databases and obtain detailed information about thousands of genes. Life is
simply an emergent phenomenon arising from the interactions between these genes
often mediated by the cell products. What we have is a complex system whose
whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. In order to make life better, there is
an unprecedented need for thinking across disciplines and, even more important,
the training of a new generation of scientific leaders who will be able to identify and
solve the challenging problems of tomorrow. These leaders will have knowledge
firmly grounded within a discipline but yet will be able to speak and understand the
different languages of several disciplines. We have seen a microcosm of this here at
College Park with the integration of two colleges, one focusing on the computational,
mathematical, and physical sciences, and another dealing with the sister subjects of
chemistry and the life sciences. Yes, this integration has had a few problems
primarily associated with the different cultures within the disciplines but the
rewards of the integration far outweigh the costs. Our college is poised to make
significant breakthroughs in grand challenge problems such as understanding the
brain and the deceptively simply stated problem of deciphering the characteristics
of an organism from its genome.

The intellectual advantages of bringing UMB into the mix are enormous. The world
of life sciences is a divided one. Doctors in our medical school are heroes who
confront illnesses every waking moment and use all the weapons in their arsenal to
help their patients. At the same time, life scientists toil away in their labs hoping that
one day their discoveries will have a real life impact and be useful to the doctors.
But there is a big gap between these two worlds. Significant progress can only be
made by straddling the boundaries between them. Yes, there have been a few
fruitful collaborations between our two campuses, as exemplified by the exciting
research being carried out at the Institute for Bioscience and Biotechnology
Research (IBBRe) on Therapeutic Design and Development with a third partner, NIST,
and the development of a successful graduate program in neuroscience and
cognitive science. But the untapped synergies are sadly too many. Integrating the complementary strengths of the two campuses will be a win-win situation. I would like to echo the sentiments of Dan Mote who stated, "What you see in the current record of no major collaborations and of opportunities lost is what you should expect to continue to achieve without a merger". On the other hand, a partnership between our two campuses will lead to significant progress in the academic, industrial, and economic development of Maryland. It will be an economic engine for our state by creating new companies, it will keep existing companies in Maryland, and a powerhouse public university will create a strong business foundation for our state. Even more important, it will make life better for people the world over. And what can be more satisfying than that?