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

by

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I wish to thank the Board of Regents for providing me an opportunity to present written and oral testimony on the possible merger of the two USM campuses. While there are many questions raised by this possibility, I believe that the principal one is: “Will the people of the State of Maryland be significantly better served if the Baltimore and College Park campuses are merged into a single University of Maryland?” I will address this question based on my experiences.

Academic health centers are found inside and outside public and private universities, and because they operate essentially under their own rules, there is no doubt that the merger could be accomplished without disrupting its operations. The same can be concluded for other professional schools and for the College Park campus as well. However, a merger of this scale requires changes in internal policies and procedures to allow, encourage and inspire the merged universities to work together across their research and educational missions. The efforts required to make those changes are costs that need to be justified by the benefits achieved by the merger.

A prominent outcome of a merger would be the elevation of the State’s principal public research university to the highest echelon of national and global stature. The complete span of excellence of the merged university would position it to compete with the best globally on the largest research and service opportunities. The State would then project two equally world-class universities, one public and one private, each positioned among the best globally. Being highly reputed makes a university an important attractor – an attractor of the most talented students and faculty, an attractor of remarkable research opportunities, an attractor of business to the State, an attractor of opportunities for its alumni and an attractor of global partnerships with industries, governments and universities.

Since about 2000, partnerships between industry, governments and universities have been forming on a “global innovation platform” to create information and accelerate innovation. Developing and developed countries alike are creating high-quality, globally competitive research universities. For the State of Maryland to compete globally its principal research universities must be competitive if a share of the largest-scale, most important global initiatives are to come to the State. A divided University of Maryland leaves the individual

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1 During the Cold War, the U.S. operated on a “national innovation platform” that controlled information and controlled innovation for national security and commercialization purposes. But by 2000, because of the consequences of globalization, information could no longer be controlled. A new paradigm emerged for the “global innovation platform.” Creation of information and acceleration of innovation became the goal achieved through global partnerships between industry, universities and governments. The $500 million, 10-year BP energy grant given to UC Berkeley and the University of Illinois in 2007 is an exemplar of this paradigm.
campuses, UMCP and UMB alone, incomplete for many of the most competitive opportunities that call for the complementary strengths of both campuses.

The advantage gained by bringing all key assets into one merged university may appear available to the two independent campuses because in principle they could work together. However, history verifies that that outcome is rarely realized. On major initiatives especially, the internal competition between two strong campuses makes partnerships between them more difficult to achieve than partnerships with external entities. Three way partnerships between two strong USM campuses and an external party are similarly rare. Effective collaborations on major initiatives only occur in circumstances where internal competition is minimal and the two campus policies are compatible. I will relate four personal experiences of how this principle works, three from Maryland and one from California. I provide these exemplars only to demonstrate how university organizations actually work.

As one example, the University System of Maryland created a plan to distribute the assets of the former University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute to campuses within the USM through a competitive RFP process. Campuses were offered the opportunity to propose uses for the UMBI assets either partially or entirely. My efforts to discuss a joint proposal with UMB were not accommodated. Understandably then, the Baltimore and the College Park campuses each crafted proposals for the entire UMBI asset. Not surprisingly agreements on the usage and distribution of the asset were not achieved. The outcome was left to the Chancellor’s office to decide, a process that was probably unsatisfactory for all involved. It is telling to note that each campus alone had no difficulty in deciding what it wanted to accomplish among its internal interested parties. However, the two independent campus goals were different and were pitted against each other in a competitive circumstance. Had the two campuses been a merged one at the time of the RFP, I have no doubt that the matter of a proposal would have been an internal discussion about what should be done, and a single, powerful proposal would have been forthcoming. That would have been a highly desirable win-win for the two campuses where the win-lose format destined by the RFP was not. It was opportunity lost having long-term consequences for the State.

As a second example, about three years ago there was a potential opportunity to create a proton therapy center in the University of Maryland Research Park, M-Square, that would be used for treatment of cancer patients and for other research purposes. This joint effort between the Baltimore and the College Park campuses was put forward with a third party developer who was committed to raising about $200 million right at the time of the global financial crisis. (The developer chose the site.) While the two campuses came to agreement on the venture, the funds to build it could not be raised, and the project did not go forward. Recently, the Baltimore campus has renewed its efforts to create a proton therapy center albeit this time without participation of College Park. The College Park campus will likely renew its efforts with another external partner, too, leading to a second heavy particle cancer treatment and research center. A merged university would not duplicate major capital and operating expenditures at this scale and would not diffuse research strengths either. This is opportunity lost.

As a third example, less than a decade ago, the Baltimore and College Park campuses independently decided to create schools of public health. Discussions between the campuses about creating a joint school broke down because the rules for accreditation permitted only one campus to be accredited. Both campuses wanted the substantial benefits accrued to the accredited school. Consequently, both campuses decided to proceed independently to create
two accredited schools of public health. As it turned out, College Park renamed its College of Health and Human Performance to be its School of Public Health, expanded its offerings and faculty to fulfill accreditation requirements and was fully accredited at its first opportunity. The accreditation of a school of public health in Baltimore was put on hold and remains so. Had the campuses been merged when School of Public Health was created, today there would be a larger, stronger, more efficient and fully accredited School of Public Health located both in Baltimore and College Park serving the people of the State of Maryland. A merged university today would accomplish the same result. This is opportunity waiting to happen with long-term consequences.

As a fourth example illustrating how different campus organizations impede collaborations, in the early 1990’s while I was at the University of California Berkeley I tried to create a single department of bioengineering that would span the Berkeley and San Francisco campuses of UC. No department of bioengineering existed on either campus. Faculty and students from both campuses would be members of the joint bioengineering department, and teaching and research would be conducted in an interdisciplinary manner. But because there had never been a single department that spanned both campuses, the policies of both campuses were not in place to allow it to happen. Policies related to credit for courses, degree requirements, expected teaching responsibilities, term schedules, overhead rates on research, assignments of space, promotion of faculty, ownership of equipment, and so on were different on the two campuses and no one wanted to take on all the rules for one new department. So even though the merit and desire to create the department were high, the two campus organizations were too much to overcome. So it did not happen. Had the two campuses been a merged one, this would have been soluble because there would be many such interests and the campus policies would have accommodated it as they do elsewhere. It was opportunity lost with long-term consequences.

**Closing Observation**

The justification of the Baltimore-College Park merger resides in the way things work. *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.* Projecting forward a decade or two, it is clear that opportunities for major research and other initiatives will continue to increase substantially; their financial scale will be larger; their complex multidisciplinary needs in medicine, science, engineering and analysis will increase substantially; and their importance to the State’s global competitiveness will increase, too. This is the course of the world and is not, and will be not determined by State actions. The State needs its principal research university to be aligned to compete most effectively as these major opportunities arise. For that reason, I believe that the people of the State of Maryland will be significantly better served by a merged university today, and increasingly so in the future. This is a singular opportunity.

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