

University Student Government Association
University of Maryland Baltimore
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February 9, 2023

President Bruce Jarrell, M.D., F.A.C.S.
University of Maryland Baltimore
220 N. Arch Street
Fourteenth Floor
Baltimore, MD 21201
Via email

CC: Dr. Roger Ward, Provost; Dr. Flavius Lilly, Vice Provost; Dr. Patty Alvarez, Associate Vice President of Student Affairs; Dr. Courtney Jones Carney, Executive Director, Intercultural Leadership and Engagement

Re: Follow up on student concerns raised during February 8th USGA Senate Meeting

Dear President Jarrell:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with the University Student Government Association (USGA) last night. We are writing to follow up on the concerns students raised and ensure these concerns receive appropriate consideration. As a reminder, students primarily identified four issues: (1) increased opportunities for remote inclusion on campus, (2) access to campus-wide emergency funds, (3) access to public health resources, and (4) accommodations for pregnant and parenting students as priorities.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) mission seeks "to improve the human condition and serve the public good of Maryland and society at-large through education, research, clinical care, and service." Action to address students' identified concerns, which arise out of and contribute to broader structural inequities, is necessary to achieve UMB's mission and comport with UMB's core values of equity, justice, innovation, respect, well-being, and sustainability. Students across the UMB campus have repeatedly reached out to USGA senators and executive board members to let us know just how dire these issues are for students in our community and we expect you will take action to address students' concerns, which we have further detailed in this letter.

I. Remote Inclusion

The COVID-19 Pandemic prompted unique opportunities for a broad population of students to engage in high quality remote education for the first time. The University of Maryland, Baltimore along with numerous other institutions of higher education demonstrated that intentional uses of hybrid and remote course delivery allowed many to discover meaningful inclusion within education for the first time in their educational careers, making education more accessible for students and faculty.¹ Such changes have been especially beneficial for parenting and non-traditional students aspiring to complete professional education programs while balancing competing demands of raising children and work respectively. Ensuring students from various backgrounds are included in our classrooms enriches all our educational experiences and better prepares us to serve patients and clients when we graduate. As students who've benefited from increased inclusion of diverse experiences in our programs, we want to ensure these experiences remain in the form of hybrid access to education and remote employment experiences on campus.

A. Hybrid Access to Classes

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act require public institutions of higher education to make reasonable modifications in order to guarantee disabled students' access to educational programming.² Similarly, Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act requires that institutions of higher education make reasonable modifications to programs to ensure pregnant and parenting students receive equitable access to education.³ Students have also cited the benefits of hybrid access in reducing environmental impacts and financial burdens imposed by commuting. Hybrid access to classes also plays an essential role in promoting public health by allowing students to stay home when they are ill without concern that doing so will cause them to fall behind, adversely impact their grades, or inhibit their ability to graduate. As a student senate with members who personally benefited from expanded access to hybrid and remote instruction, we witnessed the University's ability to quickly adapt to new course delivery methods when the entire population demanded this access, and we demand you to maintain this access for those who benefit from ongoing synchronous, hybrid access to classes during their graduate and professional education. By facilitating training on effective synchronous hybrid access to classrooms and furnishing the resources necessary to implement hybrid access, UMB can help make hybrid classrooms a meaningful choice for students and faculty. In addition, developing policies requiring the provision of synchronous hybrid access as a reasonable accommodation for disabled students and pregnant and parenting students can ensure hybrid access is available for those who require it to complete their

¹ See, e.g., Amanda Morris and Emily Anthes, [For Some College Students, Remote Learning Is a Game Changer](#), THE NEW YORK TIMES (Aug. 26, 2021); Sylvia Goodman, [Campuses Are Going Back to Normal. This Group Has One Message: Stop.](#), THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Sept. 2, 2022).

² U.S. Dep't of Educ., Office of Civil Rights, [Disability Discrimination Frequently Asked Questions](#) (July 7, 2022).

³ U.S. Dep't of Educ., Office of Civil Rights, [Know Your Rights: Pregnant or Parenting? Title IX Protects You from Discrimination at School](#) (Jan. 10, 2020).

education.⁴ Guaranteeing access to educational opportunities in the most integrated and inclusive setting available benefits our entire community by increasing lived experiences in our classes and enhancing diverse representation in professional fields. ***Accordingly, we believe that the UMB administration must take the critical step of embracing synchronous hybrid access to classes to fulfill the University's obligations to provide equal opportunities for all students and to align with its aspirations of creating a more diverse and inclusive community.***

B. Remote Work-study

The federal work study program provides critical financial support for many graduate and professional students with demonstrated financial need, allowing students to access flexible work opportunities that minimize student debt while providing valuable service to our community. Unfortunately, many students who were able to participate in federal work study through remote work during the pandemic found their opportunities have subsequently been limited.⁵ Nonetheless, recent guidance on the federal work study program suggests remote work is permitted, assuming employers provide students with adequate resources and supervision.⁶ Many schools permit remote work study and as demonstrated in the 2020-2021 school year, when almost all students worked remotely, UMB can successfully facilitate remote work for various work study positions. Such experiences provide students with valuable opportunities to gain the skills to navigate our hybrid professional workforce. In addition, the school may also be obligated to make reasonable modifications to work study programming to ensure disabled students and pregnant and parenting students maintain equal access to the opportunities afforded by the federal work study program. **Thus, we urge the administration to develop policies to ensure all eligible students can equally benefit UMB's federal work study program.**

II. Campus Wide Emergency Funds

UMB students have raised ongoing concerns about economic disparities that impede completion of graduate and professional education. Students in higher education often assume significant debt to pursue their professional aspirations, and these financial burdens disproportionately fall upon multiply marginalized groups that have been systematically deprived of financial opportunities. Moreover, financial hardship is a significant stressor that can worsen

⁴ Numerous courts have determined public entities must furnish synchronous hybrid access to in-person activities as a reasonable modification. *See, e.g., Silver v. City of Alexandria*, 470 F. Supp. 3d 616 (W.D. La. 2020) (finding that virtual participation at in-person legislative sessions was a reasonable accommodation under Title II of the ADA); *Palmer v. Michigan*, No. 1:22-cv-90, 2022 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 57079 (W.D. Mich. Mar. 29, 2022) (virtual attendance at in-person meetings is a reasonable accommodation under the ADA).

⁵ Students have reported being able to switch to contract work from federal work study positions, however, this limits some of the benefits students may receive from participating in the federal work study program.

⁶ National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, [Ask Regs Q & As, Can an FWS Student Work Remotely Due to Coronavirus?](#) (2023) ("This guidance applies regardless of the COVID-19 national emergency or when it ends."); *see also* 34 C.F.R. Part 67.

mental health and increase one's risk of suicide, further emphasizing the need for proactive measures to mitigate these disparities as a matter of both public health and social justice.⁷

Notably, Black students, Indigenous students, students of color, first-generation college students, students from low-income backgrounds, disabled students, LGBTQIA+ students, and parenting students all experience disproportionate financial barriers that impede access to education and too often limit professional opportunities. While USGA is aware that each of UMB's seven schools has some form of emergency fund,⁸ marginalized students often incur inordinate expenses that school funds fail to cover. A few examples of these financial burdens that students brought to USGA's attention include sudden health care expenses; educational testing required to access disability accommodations in classes and on professional licensing exams; unexpected travel costs; and sudden technology failures. An expanded campus-wide emergency fund could assist with the aforementioned needs and any number of other financial barriers that may impede a student's ability to complete their education and ensure students' educational and professional dreams aren't unjustly derailed due to structural inequity. Further, by publishing information on the UMB website about the campus wide emergency fund's available resources and eligibility requirements, the University could ensure all students have access to information about available assistance so they know such assistance exists, should they need it. The fact that USGA was not even aware of existing emergency funds indicates this information is not currently known by students, which means many are unlikely to seek out assistance. Many USGA members have tried and failed to seek emergency financial assistance from the University, and we hope these steps will mitigate these barriers for future students. ***Accordingly, UMB must significantly expand campus-wide emergency funds and advertise such resources to ensure funds are equitably distributed across the student body. Increasing access to emergency funds will promote mental health and bolster EDI initiatives seeking to increase equitable opportunities for students who might otherwise be excluded due to economic injustices.***

III. Public Health Resources on Campus

Numerous students also shared concerns about insufficient access to public health resources on campus, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact students' educational experiences. Students specifically identified access to COVID-19 test kits as a priority, so that students can take appropriate measures to protect themselves and their community when they are exposed to COVID-19. UMB's failure to provide COVID-19 rapid antigen tests imposes a disproportionate financial burden on students, particularly those at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 in their clinical experiences, students with limited access to free testing kits via the

⁷ Benjamin F. Miller and M. Justin Coffey, Health Policy Brief, [Understanding Suicide Risk and Prevention](#), HEALTH AFFAIRS (Jan. 29, 2021), DOI: 10.1377/hpb20201228.198475.

⁸ The UMB website identifies school emergency funds, but some of the links are broken and the website makes no mention as to the availability of any University-wide funds, which has precluded students' access to these funds. UMB Student Affairs, [Student Emergency Funds](#) (last accessed Feb. 9, 2023).

U.S. postal service,⁹ students with Medicaid,¹⁰ and students at higher risk of complications from COVID-19. Students also expressed concerns that not having access to COVID rapid antigen tests could require missing more classes and/or clinical days than would otherwise be necessary if they could access rapid antigen tests to confirm a negative test result to confirm it is safe to end quarantine. In addition to provision of COVID-19 rapid antigen tests on campus, students also requested access to free masks in accessible locations across the campus and improved public health education, so the entire campus community is more equipped to respond to fluctuations in transmission. Public health resources are necessary to create equitable, inclusive, and safe learning spaces on campus, and ensuring these resources are easily accessible makes it more likely that students will utilize these resources to keep our communities safe. ***Thus, UMB must provide students with COVID-19 rapid test kits and masks in accessible locations across the campus to facilitate the health and safety of our entire community. Relying on insurance or government programs to provide access fails to ensure equitable access to all members of our community.***

IV. Inclusion of Student Caregivers

Pregnant and parenting students along with other student caregivers experience disproportionate barriers in higher education, due to their efforts to balance competing responsibilities.¹¹ Students on the UMB campus have reported difficulties accessing parental leave after the arrival of a new child, exclusion from campus transportation when accompanied by children, and difficulties negotiating unexpected interruptions in childcare. At minimum, the University should ensure policies exist to guarantee adequate parental leave for all new parents and as previously mentioned, increasing access to hybrid instruction could further support many parenting students. However, the University should also take other steps to ensure parenting students are included on campus. For example, allowing children accompanied by parenting members of the UMB community could ensure students can safely navigate their journeys to and from campus without assuming additional financial burdens and assisting with backup childcare options during exam periods could further promote equity. ***Thus, we urge the administration to design campus-wide policies to promote inclusion of student caregivers across the UMB campus.***

We appreciate your consideration of these concerns, and as part of UMB's commitment to shared governance on campus, the USGA Executive Board would appreciate the opportunity to

⁹ The U.S. Postal Service limits availability of COVID tests to 4 tests per residential address, limiting access to people in shared housing. United States Postal Service, [At Home Covid Tests](#) (Dec. 15, 2022).

¹⁰ Maryland Medicaid limits at-home COVID-19 Tests to 4 per 30 days and requires people to obtain a prescription from a pharmacist to obtain them, providing fewer tests with more barriers than private insurance. See Md. Dep't of Health, Advisory No. 240, [COVID-19 Home Test Kit Coverage](#) (Feb. 8, 2022).

¹¹ See Kelly Field, [Colleges Brace for More Pregnant and Parenting Students](#), THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Nov. 21, 2022).

engage in a follow up conversation in one month to gain a status update on the steps the administration is taking to address student concerns. The E-board is scheduled to convene again on March 1, 2023, at 5:30pm and we would welcome the opportunity to meet with you then. However, if that timing does not work, we are happy to arrange an alternative, mutually convenient time. Please provide proposed follow up times by February 20th so we can coordinate our schedules accordingly.

We look forward to working with you to ensure UMB affords all our students' equitable opportunities to achieve their educational and professional aspirations.

Sincerely,

Joanna Ye
USGA President

Courtney Bergan
USGA Vice President

On behalf of the University of Maryland Baltimore, University Student Government Association