



Witness Testimony of Mr. James H. Selbe
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Before the

Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee
Hearing Entitled
Voluntary Military Education Programs

On

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Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 192
Washington, DC 20510

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of our president, Javier Miyares, who is participating in our overseas commencements this week, I thank you for this opportunity to share University of Maryland University College's (UMUC) proud history of more than 60 years of service to our nation's military around the world as an open access, public university and a member institution of the University System of Maryland (USM).

My name is James Selbe, and I am Senior Vice President for Partnerships, Marketing and Enrollment Management at UMUC. I am also a proud veteran, having served for 20 years in the U.S. Marine Corps.

I would like to begin by expressing UMUC's appreciation to Defense Appropriations Committee Chairwoman, Senator Barbara Mikulski, for her long-standing support of UMUC's commitment to the military and for her critical role in including reinstatement of the Military Tuition Assistance Program in the U.S. Senate Continuing Resolution. The Military Tuition Assistance Program, a critical component of the Voluntary Education Program, serves three vital purposes:

1. It assures recruits that they can enlist right out of high school and still receive a college education.
2. It trains personnel in the skills needed to ensure a professional military as those skills become more complex.
3. It provides for an educated workforce as veterans return to civilian life and seek full-time employment.

The abrupt elimination of Military Tuition Assistance in March of this year by several branches of the military proved a dramatic example of the importance Americans place on higher education benefits for service members.

As you know, the outcry from military students, veterans groups, military support organizations, educators, economists, and the general public was swift and powerful. They made clear that this program is a key element of the basic compact between the U.S. government and the thousands of young Americans who agree to enlist and risk their lives to protect the United States.

We could have no greater champion than Senator Mikulski and we thank her—and you—for the bipartisan support this committee has demonstrated for higher education opportunities for our active duty military forces and their families.

UMUC commends this committee for holding this hearing to draw attention to the important role of the Voluntary Education Program and Military Tuition Assistance.

Currently, UMUC has some 50,000 military personnel, veterans and their families—more than half of our overall student body—enrolled in our courses. These men and women take classes on site at more than 150 locations—including military bases in Afghanistan—as well as online through our award-winning virtual campus.

We are committed to providing high-quality, low-cost, state-of-the-art, comprehensive, academically challenging course work for our servicemen and women. And we are committed to helping them succeed in their studies and their careers. In the past three years, we have created groundbreaking new undergraduate and graduate programs in cybersecurity in order to train students for this rapidly growing job market that demands specialized skills, an area vital to the defense of our country.

UMUC's Long and Rich History Educating our Nation's Military

At UMUC, we say with pride that serving the military is in our DNA.

It all began in 1949 after the Defense Department decreed that all military officers must have at least two years of college education. While military personnel stationed in the United States could attend local colleges, those in war-ravaged Europe were not afforded the same opportunity. Among those advocating that the Pentagon provide higher education to troops stationed in Europe was Air Force Col. William C. Bentley. While serving at the Pentagon, he already was taking classes at the University of Maryland's College of Special and Continuation Studies—the forerunner of UMUC. The Pentagon issued a call to the nation's universities, asking for proposals on how to educate active-service personnel in Europe.

Only the University of Maryland responded.

With just one week to organize a program, George Kabat, dean of Maryland's College of Special and Continuation Studies, gathered seven professors willing to turn their lives upside down to travel to war-ravaged Germany and establish the first classes at a U.S. military base. In the first month, more than 1,800 military personnel signed up, overwhelming the seven professors.

By that time assigned to Germany, Col. Bentley was among those students. In our very first graduation ceremony at Heidelberg in 1951, he was awarded a bachelor's degree in military science. And in one of life's amazing coincidences, just one month ago, William C. Bentley's great-granddaughter, Lauren Bentley, earned her bachelor's degree in psychology in what will be our last graduation ceremony before the Heidelberg campus closes. In total, four generations of this single family have served their country and experienced the education benefits that William C. Bentley helped launch.

During the Cold War, UMUC's education program quickly expanded wherever American troops were needed—in Europe, Africa, the Middle East and, beginning in 1956, in Asia and the Pacific Islands—Japan, Okinawa, and South Korea.

Dwight Eisenhower was the first of seven presidents who have commended UMUC's work when he wrote a letter in 1959 saying, "The fact that more than twenty thousand members of our Armed Forces are now enrolled in the overseas education program is most heartening. This is further proof of Americans' respect for higher learning, and, in particular, the eagerness of the men and women of the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps to take advantage of their educational opportunities."

During the Vietnam War, UMUC for the first time—but certainly not the last—sent professors into combat zones by establishing classrooms at 24 military bases across South Vietnam. In the late 1960s, a revolution against the King of Libya spilled over into the UMUC campus serving Wheeling Air Force Base. Water pipes were blown up, bombs thrown and the center had to be abandoned. But classes were up and running again by the next term.

UMUC adjusted to the all-volunteer military where education became more critical to military morale than ever. Instructors traveled by plane, train and sometimes sam loe, a three-wheeled pedicab, to reach servicemen seeking an education. They earned the reputation as the "Academic Foreign Legion" with the motto, "Have syllabus, will travel."

Time and again, UMUC faculty known as "downrangers" have ventured into remote parts of war zones, traveling dangerous routes to reach accommodations that sometimes were little better than cobweb-filled garden shacks. In Afghanistan, the schools have come under attack. During a May 2012 graduation ceremony at Kandahar, graduates interrupted their reception to dive into bunkers as enemy rockets fell nearby. As one participant said, "It was a ceremony where you don't just hear a speaker talk about heroes, but one where they surround you."

We have no trouble finding professors who want to volunteer for this duty. They have a commitment to military education. Some of them are veterans. There is a sense of adventure that speaks to them. But most important, they know how important what they are doing is to the success of our military and to the country.

UMUC is used to pulling up stakes and pulling out whenever the American military mission ends in one place. And we are just as prepared to deploy our professors wherever the new combat zone or military outpost may be. All that we can predict is that conditions will change and they will change overnight. Our troops will continue to be a military support power. And we will be right there. We just don't know when and where.

Today, UMUC offers 130 undergraduate and graduate degree and certificate programs and serves over 92,000 students in 28 countries and all 50 states. UMUC's principal aim—and, correspondingly, our online service model—are centered on providing high quality, low-cost postsecondary education to working adults in Maryland, and around the world, with a particular focus on serving active duty military personnel. Our students seek the rigor and quality characteristic of the University System of Maryland, delivered through an open, affordable, and easily accessible format aligned with adult learners' busy lives and work schedules.

UMUC is a proud recipient of the highest honor in distance education, the "Sloan Consortium Award for Excellence in Institution-Wide Asynchronous Learning Network Programming." In 2010, UMUC received three IMS Global Learning Consortium awards: Learning Impact Award; Best in Category, Faculty Development Network for the UMUC faculty e-zine; and Best in Category, Online Laboratory for UMUC's online hands-on labs in information assurance. Also of note, UMUC received the 2011 Institution Award from the Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) in recognition of its quality education programs that are provided to the armed services

As an open access university, UMUC also attracts an exceptionally diverse student body, representing myriad ages and abilities, cultural traditions, and socioeconomic circumstances. UMUC enrolls a substantial number of the State of Maryland's non-traditional and underserved student populations and graduates a significant portion of the state's minority degree recipients.

A snapshot of our students reflects that:

- Many UMUC students are in their 30s and 40s (with an average age of 31);
- Four out of five of our students work full time;
- Nearly half of our students are married, with children;
- More than half of our students are women; and
- Of our current students:
 - o 17% were new to higher education;
 - o 26% were new to UMUC;
 - o 30% are overseas students;
 - o 49% were transfer students;
 - o 56% are in the military or affiliated with the military (28% active duty); and
 - o 76% are undergraduate students.

UMUC is committed to ensuring our students' success and satisfaction, just as we remain committed to continually improving our programs and practices to meet the evolving needs of working adults and other non-traditional learners. This includes a recent transition (fall 2011) to an outcomes-based curriculum designed to better meet the current needs of undergraduate students. That redesigned curriculum involved:

- Redefining academic program objectives based on employer feedback, and cascading the redefined program objectives into course objectives.
- A year-long research program to compare student learning achieved by the same online courses in different lengths.
- The work of more than 600 full- and part-time faculty.

Our commitment to quality and student success is validated in numerous ways, including through an examination of our student retention rates. The retention rate for new students admitted in fall 2010 is 70%. UMUC understands that adult students often stop working toward their educational goals (i.e., "stop out") because of deployments and family and work considerations; therefore, we are very proud of this retention rate and seek to increase it every year. UMUC's commitment to transparency in its performance is reflected in many different types of data points on our website, so that prospective and current students and employers can meaningfully evaluate the quality of our offerings. This material includes information about our employees and students, degrees awarded, graduation rates, and much more. In this context, it bears noting that UMUC's student loan default rates for FY 2006–2009 range between 3.1% and 4%. These rates place UMUC in the middle of the USM degree granting institutions and lower than national data.

Students in Uniform:

A Look at the UMUC Military Student Experience

There has recently been a steady decline in undergraduate enrollments across higher education. This has led a growing number of institutions to begin targeting military students and veterans to replace lost revenue. Educating active duty military students is not like educating any other kind of student and those institutions that decide to embark on this path need to understand this. These students are also our nation's protectors. They stand on the front lines so that we can be safe. They bear a heavy responsibility for their country and we who endeavor to educate them bear a heavy responsibility to them.

Military students face extraordinary challenges that require dedicated resources and highly skilled advisors. UMUC has created a successful military learner

framework based on early, embedded, tiered interventions and sustained, differentiated support at strategic points along the student journey

Every day UMUC Military Advisors answer on average 480 calls and 600 e-mails from military students who are at various stages in their degree progression and who are stationed around the world. UMUC's dedicated team of advisors and support personnel ensure that today's military members are equipped to transition from combat to classroom to career.

Prospective students hear about UMUC from a variety of sources, including television and radio media, AFN and Stars and Stripes ads, as well as by word of mouth from any one of the tens of thousands of other military students and alumni of UMUC. UMUC's presence on 150+ military bases around the world also contributes to the number of prospective students that come through our doors every day.

Here is how our military student support works through the eyes of a hypothetical NCO I call Sgt. Smith.

Sgt. Smith is called by a military advisor after he attends an Ed Fair at Fort Meade and requests more information on a cybersecurity degree. The advisor engages in a dialogue with Sgt. Smith that focuses on:

- *MAPPS (Motivation, Admissibility, Program, Payment, Start Date)*
- *Sgt. Smith's advisor also discusses his schedule (military trainings, possible deployments, family) and what he has done while in the military (Military Occupation Specialty duties) to begin formulating a plan*
- *Sgt. Smith's advisor creates a record in the University's student information system in order to provide accurate and timely follow up*
- *If Sgt. Smith hasn't taken an online class before he will be encouraged to test drive UMUC 411, an online classroom where he can develop his confidence and talk to faculty, advisors and potential classmates who understand the demands of military life*

Information is shared with prospective students in a variety of ways. Telephone and e-mail communication are routinely used by military members, but UMUC also has online guides and tools to help these students navigate the often unfamiliar path in higher education. Once a decision has been made to attend UMUC, the military advisor works with the student to identify the most appropriate pathway.

Sgt. Smith decides his work, deployment schedule and home life will currently allow him to pursue his goal of obtaining his degree. He has a discussion with his advisor to review his next steps:

- *Sgt. Smith gathers his unofficial transcripts and his advisor begins the tentative evaluation process in his chosen field of Cybersecurity to see his potential transfer credit*
- *Sgt. Smith's advisor ensures maximum use of his military credit as well as any credits that he is transferring from other institutions*
- *A discussion now occurs regarding the application process; Sgt. Smith is made aware of the application fee and UMUC's military tuition rate and he receives a "Welcome Packet" as an introduction to UMUC and the resources UMUC has available to military students*
- *Sgt. Smith's advisor provides him with recommendations for his first and second semester course planning in order to provide an extended path to follow*
- *Sgt. Smith's advisor looks at credit by exam options in order to maximize efficiency in degree completion*
- *The military advisor also revisits Sgt. Smith's transfer credit and experience in higher education to determine if EDCP 100 should be suggested as a potential first course*
 - *EDCP 100: Principles and Strategies of Successful Learning: A military specific section of the standard UMUC class that serves as an introduction to knowledge and strategies designed to promote success in the university environment*

Once the decision to enroll has been made, students register for classes in a variety of ways. Some register on their own via the MyUMUC student portal; those using Army Tuition Assistance register via the GoArmyEd portal; and others call or e-mail into advising to request assistance with the steps to register. In all cases, an immediate message goes out to students upon registration with follow-up instructions such as logging into the learning platform; purchasing course materials, making payment, and noting add/drop deadlines. Advisors check in at key moments during this critical first term of enrollment.

Sgt. Smith is granted support and tuition assistance approval from his Education Center to enroll into six credits for the current term. He registers for the two courses recommended by his advisor. The classes begin next week:

- *Sgt. Smith's advisor contacts him on the first day of class to ensure he has logged in to the virtual classroom, reviewed the syllabus, gathered his course materials and posted an introduction in the classrooms*
- *If Sgt. Smith has not completed any of the steps, the advisor troubleshoots potential barriers—time & schedule, technology, personal—and makes recommendations as appropriate*
- *Sgt. Smith's advisor sets a short-term next action to check and confirm steps have been taken and a long-term next action to make sure Sgt. Smith stayed on track*
- *Sgt. Smith is offered participation in Successful Beginnings, an online orientation guide that helps tackle all administrative, academic, and financial issues a new student faces*

The first term can be a challenge for students despite preparation efforts, as they are still learning to navigate through their academic careers. Many have been out of education for a significant length of time and some may stumble before gaining solid footing. UMUC has in place several layers of “safety nets” to catch problems early and cushion the experience for students.

Sgt. Smith has been logging in and participating in classes, but feels he is struggling. He feels underprepared compared to his classmates in the area of writing and math. He is unsure about his choice of major. His workload has unexpectedly increased adding to his stress.

- *Sgt. Smith's advisor calls to check in and hears “trigger words” that indicate he is having difficulty. The advisor begins problem solving the source of struggle and offers UMUC resources (Accessibility Services, Effective Writing Center, Center for Student Success, and Tutoring) as appropriate. (Within the semester, the student may be contacted based on external factors pertaining to that student—for example, if the student has an outstanding balance, if his or her Official Evaluation has been completed, or if transcripts/mil docs have come in or are still missing; communication is tailored as needed)*
- *Because Sgt. Smith's Official Transfer Evaluation is completed within this first semester, his advisor maps the entire degree to plan out prerequisites, potential pitfall courses, and preparedness of each semester's enrollment. The advisor also negotiates a realistic graduation deadline that works with Sgt. Smith's eventual goals*

- *During the Degree Map discussion, the advisor also opens the door to next semester's registration by offering classes from the Degree Map and highlights possible opportunities for outside professional certifications*
- *The advisor periodically touches base with Sgt. Smith to ensure continued success and mentions registration for the next semester as appropriate—in addition, advisor will be listening in these conversations for concerns or frustrations that may need to be addressed, such as potential reasons for withdraw and exception process information*

Every military student is unique and most are traveling on a nonlinear journey with multiple start and stop points. Military students' multi-institutional attendance and discontinuous enrollment can be broken down into several different "swirls" that affect their retention. Whether the swirl includes a trial enrollment to see if the school "fits," a supplemental enrollment at another institution to expedite degree completion at the home school, or a serial transfer student, UMUC seeks to mitigate the repercussions of these student-made decisions and in fact, encourages continued progression.

Sgt. Smith eventually found his footing and with support from UMUC services and faculty, he was able to pass his first courses. He feels more confident with six credits under his belt but still feels trepidation about taking math courses online. He also wonders if he can accelerate his degree progress by testing to earn additional credit.

- *Sgt. Smith's advisor prepares and gains approval for Sgt. Smith's "Letter of Permission" which allows him to take his math class face-to-face at a local community college near his base. The credit will reverse transfer back to UMUC upon his successful completion of the math course*
- *Together, Sgt. Smith and his advisor explore him taking American Government and Introductory Sociology through a College Level Examination Program (CLEP) credit by examination test. This testing option saves Sgt. Smith time as well as Tuition Assistance funds. Credit by exam is also an excellent option for Sgt. Smith when he is on temporary assignment and unable to take classes during a term. Credit by exam allows Sgt. Smith to stay on schedule*

The path to degree completion for a military learner—whether it be an associate's, bachelor's or advanced degree—is a long one. Competing time demands, changes in duty locations, commander support and family responsibilities all contribute to the need to delay goals, both short and long term. With the appropriate framework and a scaffolding of support for the military student, success is achievable.

UMUC's relationship with the student doesn't end when the military student makes the transition from the classroom to career upon graduation or upon separation from the military. At UMUC, the student's academic journey follows a parallel path that coincides with the transition to civilian status. A team of veteran advisors have a tool box that allow the veteran military student to continue his/her path to academic success or to that coveted career in cybersecurity.

Sgt. Smith self identifies to his advisor that he is separating from Active Duty in 12 months and is excited to be completing his final 15 credits.

- *Sgt. Smith's advisor discusses his "after degree" plans*
- *The advisor promotes transitional information, may revisit professional certification where applicable, and highlights deadlines for graduation application and details of the graduation checklist and Commencement*
- *The advisor engages Sgt. Smith in UMUC's Career Services as a resource. Resume writing, job fair preparation and strategies for federal job searching are all topics to be discussed with Sgt. Smith*
- *Where appropriate, Sgt. Smith's advisor would also introduce potential graduate programs and discuss the graduate school admissions criteria and process*
- *As a cybersecurity major, Sgt. Smith qualifies for the articulation agreement between UMUC's Undergraduate School and Graduate School which allows eligible students who complete their undergraduate degree at UMUC with a major in cybersecurity to reduce their total coursework for the MS in cybersecurity or cybersecurity policy by 18 credits (three courses)*

Tracking and Reporting Military Student Outcomes

The difficulties in tracking and reporting student outcomes for military students are many and complex. Despite these challenges, UMUC is firmly committed to transparency in reporting student outcomes for our military students. Furthermore, we applaud recent efforts by the Department of Defense and the Department of Education to develop measures more appropriate to military students and other nontraditional cohorts.

The challenges in measuring student outcomes start with the need to agree on definitions and to then identify key measures that are appropriate to the enrollment behaviors and desired outcomes of military students. The Department of Defense has taken a major step toward addressing these issues by requesting that the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) convene a working group to assist colleges and universities to more consistently define military students and establish data collection parameters. A white paper, *Educational Attainment: Tracking the Academic Success of Servicemembers and Veterans*, was published by SOC and includes background information and recommendations.

UMUC has adopted many of the recommendations of the aforementioned working group. These recommendations include:

- Define military students as active-duty, Reserve, and National Guard servicemembers receiving Military Tuition Assistance.
- Track and report military students who:
 - o have successfully completed three courses/nine semester hours in a two-year period, and
 - o have a cumulative GPA > 2.0, and
 - o who have transferred in and have had accepted at least nine credit hours.
 - o Track the cohort at a rate 200% that of “normal” time—eight years for bachelor’s and four years for associate’s programs.
- Track the cohort at a rate 200% that of “normal” time—eight years for bachelor’s and four years for associate’s programs.

Based on this methodology, UMUC is now tracking military students beginning with the 2006 cohort. The graduation rate for students who have completed their degrees within five years after starting is 53%. This compares favorably with our overall student population (56%) and even more favorable when benchmarked against national rates for undergraduate students attending public institutions (50.6%).

(*Educational Attainment: Tracking the Academic Success of Servicemembers and Veterans*—by Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges—is attached to written testimony)

U.S. Military Tuition Assistance Program

Too Important to the Nation to Cut

As our fictitious Sgt. Smith shows, UMUC has developed an extensive support system that is aimed at our military students and their unique problems in completing an education. UMUC is, in fact, uniquely qualified to help military personnel based on our proud history, our track record of success and our continuing efforts in the 21st century to provide high quality, low cost higher education to our nation's servicemembers.

Just how valuable military education is to the participants and to the nation became starkly clear when, on March 5, 2013, the U.S. Marine Corps became the first branch of the services to eliminate the Military Tuition Assistance Programs - not cut it back, but eliminate it altogether. In rapid succession, other branches followed.

As mentioned, the outcry from across America was immediate. Students, veterans, educators and employers made clear to Congress that the Military Tuition Assistance Program is not a frill and is too important to the country to cut. *It is a key element of the basic compact between the U.S. government and all Americans who enlist to protect the United States.* Many of them are right out of high school, and they agree to serve with the understanding that the military will provide them with a good education. The promise is right there on the recruiting Web sites.

As everyone in this hearing room knows, the uproar was so intense that Congress acted with lightning speed and bi-partisanship not seen in many years. On March 20, the U.S. Senate passed a continuing resolution including a provision directing the military services to reinstate the Military Tuition Assistance Program. The next day, the U.S House passed the same bill. And on March 27, the President signed the bill into law. It took only twenty-two days from start to finish for the country to speak and for Congress to hear and act to reinstate one of the most popular and essential programs the nation can provide to those who defend our country.

During the controversy, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Washington, D.C., audience that "there is nothing more important in a democracy than education." He called himself "the military's highest ranking student," and education "a national strategic resource."

Education is key to the very ability to function in the military. Our ever-more-sophisticated defense systems depend on highly educated personnel working in

complex environments. Or as Gen. Dempsey said, “We ask these young men and women to solve some of the world’s hardest problems in its hardest places.”

Education is also key to the ability of our veterans to function in civilian life. When service members return home, the best predictor of how well they will fare in finding employment and successfully readjusting to life after the military is the level of education and professional training they have when they separate from the service. Military personnel who leave the service without this education will have a harder time finding civilian employment, adding to the already high unemployment rate for veterans and hurting our economic recovery.

We at UMUC were pleased and proud that Gen. Dempsey understood the value of this education and that so many of you on this committee came together in a bipartisan effort to reverse the decisions of the Armed Forces. That was a ringing endorsement of what matters most in the defense of this nation—an all volunteer force, well educated and with high morale.

Mr. Chairman, education is the best investment we can make in the future of those who put their lives on the line for our country. And as we have done for more than 60 years, UMUC stands ready to provide it anywhere in the world that our military needs to go.

Thank you.