<u>**University of Maryland Community Survey: Opportunities for Change**</u>

All members of the University of Maryland community – students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends – were invited last fall to submit ideas to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, which is developing a plan to set the university on a course to become one of the world's finest public research universities. More than 700 people responded, providing more than 6,600 answers to the survey's 15 questions. Since one of the most important tasks facing this committee is to identify areas where improvements must be made for the University to move forward, the list below was assembled with that goal in mind. In addition to the many positive comments about the University and its strengths, the following themes emerged from the survey's call to identify challenges and propose solutions:

<u>**Safety**</u>: Mentioned over and over by students, faculty, staff, and alumni, safety was seen as a critical issue to be addressed if the University is to improve itself and its image. Fear of crime on and around campus was cited as a disincentive for signing up new students, faculty, and staff. Recommendations included beefing up police presence – including more foot patrols at night.

<u>**Housing**</u>: The lack of sufficient housing for students, the lack of affordable housing for faculty and staff, and problems associated with living near the campus – including concerns about crime, public school education, and neighborhood amenities – were seen by many respondents as serious obstacles to the University's advancement. Recommendations included more intervention in the public schools near campus, incentives for faculty and staff to live nearby, university acquisition of low-quality off-campus apartments and their replacement with better student housing, and regular shuttle service to off-campus areas where students might find acceptable and affordable housing.

<u>**Amenities:**</u> The lack of a college-town feel and the dearth of college-town amenities – restaurants, movie theaters, grocery stores, coffee houses, and other places to gather – were frequently cited as detracting from the University's appeal. The appearance of Route 1 was also mentioned as a detriment. On campus, there were complaints about an inadequate number of places for students to study in groups and inadequate facilities for faculty to get together. Recommendations included more university involvement in – and incentives for – College Park enhancement (in addition to the ongoing East Campus redevelopment project). On campus, suggestions included efforts to diminish the large-campus feel, creating more congenial areas for students to gather and study, providing a welcoming environment for transfer and commuter students, and helping local Maryland students feel more independent. There were calls for more attention to the child-care needs of faculty, staff, and students.

<u>**Transportation**</u>: Access to the Metro on campus, easy access for students to downtown Washington (including dedicated buses to and from campus), improved traffic flow for commuters, and reductions in the expense and hassle of parking were common suggestions. The absence of a Metro stop on campus, in particular, was seen as a barrier to students making greater use of the school's proximity to Washington.

<u>**Money**</u>: This was a frequent subject of survey responses. More affordable tuition, more competitive salaries, help with the cost of textbooks, partner benefits for employees, and improved assistantship opportunities for graduate students (in terms of compensation and the number of positions available) were among the suggestions for attracting and

retaining students, faculty, and staff. There was a proposal to provide scholarships for veterans, especially disabled veterans.

CORE: While the suggestions ranged from keeping the CORE requirements of undergraduate education as they are to ditching them – and a great deal in between – there were some common suggestions. A number of respondents suggested more flexible requirements. This was seen as helping students whose fields require a great deal of technical expertise to get enough traction for good placement after graduation. Greater flexibility was also seen as helping students who want to become fluent and literate in a foreign language but have a hard time doing so while fulfilling their CORE requirements and meeting the requirements of their major. Other suggestions included allowing internships, community service, and foreign study to substitute for some CORE requirements. Respondents proposed that CORE courses focus on contemporary social issues, environmental sustainability, other real-world problems, and technology. A number of respondents suggested the CORE system must ensure that all undergraduates are proficient in communication – from writing to the competencies associated with contemporary technologies of communication – and that they be knowledgeable about contemporary tools for research. Others suggested smaller CORE classes, fewer but higher-quality offerings, and opportunities for students to get more of the life skills they will need after college, such as saving enough to buy a house or to prepare for retirement.

Educational and intellectual environment: While attitudes about the quality of undergraduate and graduate education varied, suggestions included increasing the number or level of the following aspects of academic life: interdisciplinary programs dealing with pressing issues; interaction and collaboration between units on campus; mentoring programs for students and faculty; course-related interaction with Washington-area governmental, scientific, and cultural institutions; alternatives to the single-project thesis for graduate students, such as the publication of several papers; and support for publication by graduate students in peer-reviewed journals. There were recommendations for more faculty/student interaction, more consistency in the quality of classroom instruction, greater faculty supervision of teaching assistants, more tenured faculty teaching undergraduate courses, and increased recognition for excellent teachers. There were also calls for improving the conditions in classrooms and laboratories, providing more staff support for faculty research, and increasing financial support for the library system in order to expand the available resources, including research databases. Other suggestions included placing less emphasis on sports and greater emphasis on the value of learning for more than acquiring job skills.

International and service components: A number of respondents proposed encouraging or requiring both international study and participation in community, national, or international service programs. Also common were calls for increasing the University's global interactions in other ways, including more attention to critical global issues in courses and expanded use of faculty-exchange programs.

Red tape: This surfaced repeatedly as a problem to be addressed – in purchasing, hiring, student status paperwork, and approval of new academic initiatives. There was a range of suggestions for streamlining these processes and for making it easier to study and implement new ideas in a timely way. Some respondents also called for more flexibility in the way University resources are allocated.

Sustainability: The need for more attention to becoming a "green" campus and promoting "green" awareness was stressed repeatedly. Respondents suggested that energy audits would go a long way toward reducing costs and improving energy use – starting with all the buildings that have lights burning through the night. Recommendations also included making the campus an energy showcase through the development and use of solar, wind, and biodiesel technologies. Other suggestions included making environmental sustainability an element of the CORE curriculum.

Potential ambassadors for the University: The frequency with which members of the faculty said they would be reluctant to recommend the University to their children or to children of friends was striking. Roughly half of the 106 faculty members responding to this question offered answers such as "no," "probably not," "I am not sure," or "not if they have other options" – or "yes" but with a caveat, such as recommending the school for special programs rather than making a blanket endorsement. While this was by no means a scientific survey, the responses suggest that addressing faculty members' concerns – about safety, inconsistent academic rigor, and uneven quality across departments –would position them, as a group, to become better ambassadors for the University. Alumni were another group seen as capable of playing an expanded role in attracting talented undergraduates, both through outreach to high school students and through a University initiative to generate more publicity for the accomplishments of its graduates. Asked whether they would recommend the University, about two-thirds of the 112 alumni respondents answered with a strong "yes." Across all groups, answers to this question suggest that addressing the sorts of issues raised in this report – including safety, housing, and faculty-student interaction – would strengthen the level of endorsement for the University.

Diversity: A question on issues related to minority recruitment and retention elicited strong opinions, ranging across a continuum from the idea that the University pays too much attention to diversity to the idea that the University talks up diversity but does not promote enough inclusivity. A question based on author Thomas Friedman's notion of a "flat" world also prompted a range of diversity-related responses, including questions about whether there is enough attention paid to those who get "flattened" or left behind in a flat world. Some of the many suggestions related to diversity included these: creation of a U.S. Latino Studies program; greater tolerance for diversity in the sexual orientation of faculty and staff (through partner benefits for University employees); finding meaningful ways for students to learn from each other about cultural differences; and more careful attention to minority students coming from neighborhoods so homogenous (in terms of race, ethnicity, and poverty) that the mix they find on campus is, ironically, an unfamiliar atmosphere that requires adjustment.

Image: Where the university is strong – such as faculty who are prominent in their fields, research initiatives on critical topics, or unique academic programs – a common suggestion was to do more to raise public awareness of these strengths locally, nationally, and globally. Other suggestions included raising the University's profile by increasing the number of conferences on campus, providing a hospitable environment for visits by leaders in various fields, and establishing a University of Maryland Press.