



**In Their Own Words:**  
**Student Perceptions of Their Collegiate  
Experience at the  
University of Maryland Eastern Shore**

**Focus Group Report, Spring 2014**

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## Executive Summary

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore has a current first to second year retention rate of 68%. This rate has remained at or below 70% for the past six years. The institution has begun looking at the various strategies currently used to address student retention, this includes academic, student services, student engagement, student learning, etc. Assessing all aspects of campus is essential when determining what direction should be taken to increase student success rates.

Academic persistence and retention are important within university settings. In order to gain a better understanding of student experiences at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, a qualitative study was conducted with current UMES students. This study used focus groups as a method to collect data regarding student experiences.

There were a total of 64 student participants in this study across a total of eight focus groups. There were two focus groups for each academic classification and broken down by gender. This study included a total of 64 participants- 23 freshmen, 15 sophomores, five juniors, and 21 seniors. There were a total of 26 females and 38 male participants. The participants range in age between 18 and 25; racial make-up was 97% African-American and 3% White; nearly 50% of the participants were Pell grant recipients; the students' GPA ranged from 2.0 to 4.0.

The findings of this research concluded that students believe UMES is a great school and have had a lot of positive experiences; however, the negative interactions with campus faculty, staff, and administration can sometimes make the institution unbearable. Several participants had stated at some point they considered transferring from UMES for a variety of reasons. Some recurring comments that may have contributed to this include: Poor customer service; students being treated like children; disrespect from student service offices; low morale amongst faculty; a lack of student activities; and a low level of Hawk Pride. The findings section includes various quotes from students regarding their UMES experience.

Based on the statements shared by students, the researchers drew various conclusions, which informed the recommendations being made to the university: Improve Campus Communication, Enhance New Student Transition/Acclimation, Revamp Advising Structure, Improve Customer Service, and Increase UMES Outreach.

In order for this institution to move forward, it must be willing to do things differently. This may mean the need to restructure programs and offices, increasing the level of accountability for all university employees, and it is necessary for the institution to be honest about its areas of challenge and be willing to address them. To be an institution embracing the concept of Eminence to Excellence, each employee must be committed to raising the bar in their performance and exude the university core values daily.

## Introduction

College student retention is one of the main topics of concentration for higher education institutions. The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (2014) defines student retention rates as “the rate at which entering freshmen in a fall semester enroll the following fall semester. It includes only students who begin full-time in associate and baccalaureate programs.” According to National Center for Education Statistics in 2011, the fall 2011 national student retention rate amongst full-time, first-time students at all 4-year institutions was 79% and at all 2-year institutions was 60%. The range for only public 4-year institution retention rates was 62% at least selective schools (open admission) to 95% at highly selective schools (where less than 25% of students are accepted). Retention is a multi-dimensional phenomenon on a college campus. In order to increase retention it requires a focus on those items that have the ability to improve student life and learning.

It is essential in any retention plan that it is not focused too much on the numbers and loses sight of the primary purpose -- **to improve student life and learning**. Adaptation to a new way of addressing social and academic engagement by all campus constituents is a must in order to achieve retention goals. A change in attitude, values, culture, beliefs, and procedures by faculty, staff, and students will be vital. A “Student-centered philosophy” must be the prevailing idea. While these concepts appear to be simple, the process to achieve them is difficult and may be complicated.

In the 2006 U.S. Department of Education document *A Test of Leadership*, “accountability” was identified as an essential component to the sustainability of higher education institutions. It is important that institutions are held accountable for providing academic programs, co-curricular activities, and support services which positively impact the success of students. However, in order for student success to truly occur, it is vital that institutions understand what students want and need in order to be retained and matriculate toward degree completion. To draw this conclusion, institution leadership cannot speculate and just provide programs and services that “they think” will benefit students, but they must listen to the students and understand their wants and needs. Therefore, it is pertinent that when strategizing on how to best retain students at higher rates, that students are active participants in the conversation.

## UMES Student Retention

Institutions of higher education are committed to the success of its student population. UMES is a 4-year public university that offers 26 undergraduate, 12 masters, and 4 doctoral programs, several co-curricular programs and activities, and student support services. The institution seeks to provide students with a well-rounded collegiate experience. However, despite the university's efforts to enhance student retention, it has seen the first year retention rate fluctuate between 65% and 70% over the past 6-years (see Table 1). In comparison to some schools in the University System of Maryland, UMES' retention rate is on average 15-20% lower.

**Table 1. Six-year First-Time, Full-Time Fall Semester Cohort Retention Rates**

Cohort Year	Cohort Size	1 <sup>st</sup> year Retention Rate
2007	875	66%
2008	1038	70%
2009	876	65%
2010	944	68%
2011	748	69%
2012	882	68%

A further look into student retention rates reveal that there is a difference in student retention based on race and gender. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the university's retention rates based on race/ethnicity and gender for Fall 2011 and Fall 2012.

**Table 2: UMES Fall 2011 Cohort Second Year Retention By Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2011 Cohort			Retained Fall 2012			Fall 2011 Cohort 2nd Year Retention Rate		
	Gender		Total	Gender		Total	Gender		Total
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
<b>African American</b>	231	350	581	153	247	400	66%	71%	69%
<b>Native American</b>	0	1	1	0	0	0	-	0%	0%
<b>Asian</b>	6	0	6	3	0	3	50%	-	50%
<b>Hispanic</b>	7	9	16	4	7	11	57%	78%	69%
<b>White</b>	25	21	46	21	13	34	84%	62%	74%
<b>Native Hawaiian</b>	0	1	1	0	1	1	-	100%	100%
<b>Two or More Races</b>	31	47	78	22	30	52	71%	64%	67%
<b>Foreign</b>	6	5	11	5	4	9	83%	80%	82%
<b>Others</b>	4	4	8	1	4	5	25%	100%	63%
<b>Total:</b>	310	438	748	209	306	515	67%	70%	69%

**Table 3: UMES Fall 2012 Cohort Second Year Retention By Race/Ethnicity and Gender**

Race/Ethnicity	Fall 2012 Cohort			Retained Fall 2013			Fall 2012 Cohort 2nd Year Retention Rate		
	Gender		Total	Gender		Total	Gender		Total
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
<b>African American</b>	246	408	654	158	279	437	64%	68%	67%
<b>Native American</b>	1	0	1	1	0	1	100%	-	100%
<b>Asian</b>	2	1	3	2	1	3	100%	100%	100%
<b>Hispanic</b>	10	12	22	6	7	13	60%	58%	59%
<b>White</b>	38	30	68	32	16	48	84%	53%	71%
<b>Native Hawaiian</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-	-
<b>Two or More Races</b>	51	71	122	38	51	89	75%	72%	73%
<b>Foreign</b>	3	6	9	1	4	5	33%	67%	56%
<b>Others</b>	1	2	3	1	1	2	100%	50%	67%
<b>Total:</b>	352	530	882	239	359	598	68%	68%	68%

Over that past couple years the changes in the retention rates based on race and gender has changed for a variety of reasons, which is unknown. Therefore, it is vital that the institution explores the rationales as to why students have decided to leave or remain at UMES. This study provides insight from the perspective of some current students as to the positive and negative experiences they have had at UMES, which have played a role in their matriculation.

## Methodology

In assessing student retention it is important to acknowledge that student perceptions of what resources, services, and support they need to be retained, varies from the ideas faculty, staff, and administration perceive as retention issues. Therefore, it is pertinent that when strategizing on how to best retain students at higher rates, using a qualitative method to collect this data is beneficial for the institution.

In fall 2013, a research study was conducted to ascertain the perceptions of students at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. Data was collected with the purpose of answering one main research question:

How do current UMES students describe their experiences (academic and non-academic) while being enrolled at the institution?

Gaining insight on student experiences at the university, what improvements they would like to see, and how the institution could improve in various aspects of campus is important when establishing effective retention plans and strategies.

Qualitative research permits researchers to develop a more in depth analysis on the experiences and environments of their participants. Focus groups were used as a data collection tool because this method allows for interaction between members of the target population and encourage a connection between the participants on common experiences. The focus groups were separated by gender and academic classification. This study included a total of 64 participants- 23 freshmen, 15 sophomores, five juniors, and 21 seniors. There were a total of 26 females and 38 male participants. The participant age ranges included 18-25; racial make-up was 97% African-American and 3% White; about 50% of the participants were Pell grant recipients; the student GPAs ranged from 2.0 to 4.0; and there was representation across all of the academic schools, with the majority of the participants' majoring in Business, Technology, Arts, and Social Sciences.

Participants were selected through a variety of methods, which included flyers, emails, solicitation in classes, campus organizations, social media, and word of mouth. Students self-selected to participate in the focus groups and did not receive any monetary or course credit for their participation. During the focus groups pizza and sodas were provided to participants. Prior to solicitation of research participants, this study received IRB approval by UMES.

## Focus Group Findings

This section of the document will highlight the key themes/discussion topics that were identified from the focus groups. In addition to the themes direct quotes from the students are also included. Within each section, quotes are sub-divided by the division in which the quote applies. If a comment does not pertain to one division overall, then it will be listed under the sub-heading “General Comments.” Be mindful that the quotes speak to an individual student’s experience and opinion.

### What is it like being a student at UMES?

Students had various opinions about what it is like being a student at UMES. With some students they feel like they are obtaining an overall enriched college experience, while others feel UMES is not providing everything it could for them. At UMES, some students feel emotions of excitement, anxiety, hate, love, stress, etc. when describing their interactions with their peers, faculty, and staff.

#### Student Affairs & Enrollment Management

*“It’s just like high school....I know it’s college but I wish there was more guidance to help you manage your time a little bit better....for me I kind of need that extra push....I know we have freshman mentors but I just wish there was little bit more push. – Freshman female*

As it relates to being like high school:

*There is a lot of drama with females because I stay to myself but I’m nice to everybody...but because I’m to myself a lot of females don’t like me....I think there needs to be more workshops to empower young ladies...because the men they get together and form cliques but the girls...they’re not positive...for the this to be an HBCU we need to empower each other even though we’re freshman we’re mature enough to know what it means and I just don’t understand why the girls can’t do that....things are so petty and stuff like that is petty. – Freshman Female*

*I like it here...it feels like a family to me here. I started out in the summer enrichment program academy so before I got here during the fall I was already acclimated to the school and it became like a second home – Sophomore Male*

*The social life is pretty good but it does get boring at times....people say that we are not a real HBCU because there is no Greek life or football team. But I’m not too concerned with that – Junior Female*

*It’s a life changing experience. Coming from a suburban environment and coming to a rural lifestyle...it takes time to adapt to it but it’s almost over. I was from a fast*

*pace environment so coming from high school where I could go out on Friday and Saturday night and have something to do and then rest on Sundays whereas now it's just they will throw a party on Friday for the students and then Saturday they have nothing for students to do besides ride the shuttle and then on Sunday everybody is probably washing their clothes or doing homework so it calms you down to slow down but my personality –Senior Male*

*I think UMES needs to a better job in selecting students as far as the students that come here because the facilities can be messed up...there can be so many issues with technology and it goes on and on but if you bringing in students with lack of intelligence...lack of motivation...and no positive mindset we're not going to be able to talk to these students so I feel like it's better to pick quality over quantity. We need to be known for academics more. I want my degree to mean something. Not people asking oh you only needed a 1.9 GPA to get into UMES. – Senior Male*

### **Administrative Affairs**

*If I had to use one word it would be frustrating. Somehow I always manage to find all the hiccups with everything...for instance last semester I had to take out a loan to help pay for living expenses, and books and because I was a freshman it took longer to get my refund check but in between that time I was taking biology that required an online course code to do your homework and when I went to the bookstore they didn't sell it and I had no cash...I had all this loan money and I couldn't use it and I couldn't buy my book and was like how am I going to do my homework when I can't even get on the website and went and I spoke to everyone I could think of...I went all the way up ....and I explained my situation....and I asked could student accounts cut me a check so I could get the money to buy the book because the bookstore doesn't sell it....this is the only way to get the book and he says the bookstore sells everything you need for classes and he calls them and he found out they didn't sell it and he says oh well there is nothing I can do for you. And so I was like what do I do and I had to borrow money from someone to get the book when I had all this money sitting there and I couldn't use it – Freshman Female*

*I need something to do keep me busy, to keep me occupied, to keep me out of trouble. We are between the ages of 18-22....we like to have fun...we can't even stand outside to talk to our friends where as I can go home and stand outside and socialize with my friends and have a good time. Out here the police are coming and threatening to mace us and taze us and things like that so you look at things and wonder could I do more at another university – Senior Male*

## Academic Affairs

*Academic wise UMES is a good school because they provide a lot of opportunities as far as getting help with studies...I feel like some teachers aren't the best but there are some teachers that are good at what they do – Sophomore Female*

*I feel that the small class sizes makes it easier for me to learn...I don't learn well in big groups so small classes help me to focus better and I get more personal interaction with the professors and there are lot resources if you're falling behind. – Sophomore Female*

*It's stressful being a student here at times because academic wise it can be stressful because things are sometime disorganized when it comes to courses that we have to take. ....for the most part I have a pretty good experience there are just things that could be better with academics and the structure of course...they are disorganized.– Junior Female*

*I'm a fifth year senior so it took me time to be away from certain things and focus on my work so UMES has made me grow up a little bit. – Senior Male*

## General Comment

*This an HBCU so you expect the divine 9, the football team...you know the college experience so I feel like we miss out somewhat because we don't have half of the things that other HBCUs may have but at the same time you're still in school and you're still getting an education so you're still getting what you came here for but I think the experience is not exactly what someone may expect. – Senior Female*

*I think the problem here is not so much that people can't do the work but the atmosphere...its friendly when it wants to be but it's like hostile. – Freshman female*

*Being a student at UMES is a love and hate process because at times I love my school but then I just get so frustrated. When I say frustrating I don't mean just one aspect of my college career since I've been at UMES it's kind of a little of everything from my professors to my friends to the service to the SSC. It's a whole thing. – Senior Female*

*It's been an enjoyable experience. I've had a really good time here. It teaches you about independence so I'm enjoying it. I'm from Washington D.C. so this was my first choice. It was a way to get away from the hectic lifestyle of D.C. It's a lot calmer here. It's a rural area. It's quiet and I like it. – Senior Male*

## Why I came to UMES

Various reasons were cited as to why students opted to attend UMES including family traditions and peer influence, financial reasons, and previous experiences with events and programs at UMES before being admitted. For most participants, there was a desire to attend an HBCU when making their college decision. Some applied to Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), but ultimately chose to attend UMES.

**Family tradition and peer influence.** Many participants indicated that family members and peers had an influence on their decision to attend the university (we need to decide on a name). Some had parents, siblings, and other extended family members who had attended and graduated from HBCUs providing a lens for what attending an HBCU was like.

### Institutional Advancement

*I came here because a lot of my family members went here....hearing about it from my cousins and people from my high school they were like they love it here and plus I didn't want to be too far from my mommy so this is just far enough and just close enough that if anything were to happen to a family member I could get home too....I also talk a lot to alumni and I really want to bring this HBCU back to what it was before I got here so I'm able to start a legacy...and my grandfather and grandmother went here in the 1960's I want to say so they were telling how they met at UMES....and they would tell me stories about that and how they use to talk and how they fell in love and my sister went here too so this is a time that we would share as being sisters... – Sophomore Female*

*Growing up my childhood best friend....both of her parents went to UMES and so whenever I went over her house I was just like I have to go to UMES...they were just so sophisticated and well put together and they had wealth....as I grew up that kind of drifted off but I really didn't want to go anymore....my senior year I had the intention on going to a PWI in NY and got accepted...I wasn't even thinking about UMES until someone persuaded me to go to onsite admissions....got accepted on the spot and got a scholarship....as time progressed during my senior I realized NY was expensive and I was paying out of pocket so I thought about UMES because its affordable and closer to home and it's an HBCU and I wanted to go there when I was younger so I was persuaded to come. – Sophomore Female*

### General Comment

*I came here because my best friend talked me into it...I really didn't know much about UMES but then I also wanted the college experience and I couldn't really get that at a community college so I came here and its cheaper than other schools...I also*

*had a hand full of people from my high school here so coming here I would at least know somebody– Sophomore Female*

*I came when I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and we stayed here... they let us come to different classes each day and we stayed for 3 days. At the time in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, usually they would do stuff at the different high schools in the area but this was the first college that I ever went in. I remembered that experience when I got in high school and then I saw how much it cost so I decided I would come here because it was affordable and it gave me a lot of money. – Senior Female*

**Financial reasons.** While family and friends influenced some participants' decision to attend the university, others were influenced by financial incentives and tuition rates. Many of our participants (enter an approximate percentage) were in-state students and chose to attend the university for the in-state tuition rate. Affordability was important as some participants relied on family members for financial support.

### **Administrative Affairs**

*I got accepted to Rutgers and NYU but my mom really didn't have money to pay for that school and I wanted to get away...and I have two cousins that went here before and they said they really liked it and this could be the school for me so this was my first choice to come here – Freshman Female*

*I got into SU but I have a partial honors scholarship and a couple of grants that pays my tuition and fees....SU offered money but it wasn't quite enough....it boils down to money and I need to stay in the area because my father is 60 and everyone else is kind of doing their own thing and my mom needed help with the kids so I needed to stay local– Freshman female*

*MONEY...I would not be here but I fortunate enough to get a full ride to this university and that is the only reason why I came here and my parents really pushed me to go here because this was an HBCU so with that and the money I'm here – Sophomore Female*

*It had my major, it was affordable, and it's close to home. – Sophomore Female*

*I got a full scholarship to this school through the honors program but it was my last resort because it was in state and it was home away from home cause it was so far but it was still in state so once I got the scholarship letter I wasn't going to pass on a full ride so I ended up just coming here. – Sophomore Male*

*I came here because it was cheaper than most schools and it was in state and it was the furthest away that I could go in state because this wasn't my first choice but when I found out how much it was to pay for my first school my mother said I would have to*

*transfer later on so since I knew that already I just decided I might as well go somewhere else and I had already been accepted here so I just decided to come here. – Senior Female*

*I came here because they came to my school and did an on the spot acceptance and then the cost was cheaper so I decided to come here but it was my last choice. I wanted to go to Morehouse, Virginia Commonwealth, or Howard. But I tried a couple of other schools. I went to Morgan and PGCC and didn't like....UMES called me and said they had housing so I came down here at the last minute. – Senior Male*

*I came here because it was an HBCU and I liked the campus size and I got a scholarship to come here it wasn't necessarily a last choice but I wanted to go to other schools but financially I just couldn't do it. – Sophomore Male*

**My Back up plan.** There are many students who saw UMES as their back up plan due to finances, family, or other reasons preventing them to attend their first choice school. Despite UMES being their back up plan, they decided to remain after their first year.

### **General Comment**

*This was my backup plan....I was accepted into (lists several other out of state institutions) and I was starting my process at all of those schools but financial aid basically was what set me back. I really didn't qualify for too much financial aid and my parents are paying out of pocket for me and my sister (also attends UMES). Then I also have two other siblings in college when I started college so my parents have 4 children in school at the same time so it was a financial situation...there was not enough money for me to go out of state or to afford any tuition that is higher so that's why I came here – Junior Female*

*I wanted to go to an HBCU because I'm from NY so it was completely different when I came down here. I've been around predominantly white people my entire life and I wanted to be different and I can see the difference (laughs). –Senior Female*

*This was my last choice because I got accepted to St. John's and Bowie State but I had to do an enrichment program and because of the cost of that I just came here because I didn't want to have to go out of state because of out-of-state tuition so I just came here – Senior Male*

*This was my backup plan. I got accepted into Davidson and I was trying to follow my hoop dreams but I went down there and it was kind of a racist environment. So the south starts school earlier than up here so I was down there for like 3 weeks but by the time I transferred up here they still had housing for me so I just came here instead of going back home. – Senior Male*

*I'm still here because I'm trapped. I tried to leave but nobody was taking my credits at other schools so that's why I stayed. I didn't want to start over again. It was too long of a road. – Senior Male*

## **Freshman Experience**

The first year of college is important for a student. The ability to aid a student to connect with the campus environment and help them build positive relationships ultimately plays vital roles in student retention. Key ideas shared by the participants include the following:

- Over the past few years students felt that the number of activities has increased, but in hindsight those activities are the same from year to year; thereby, making them irrelevant.
- Residence Life requirements: Why is it mandatory to live in a dorm?
- Few programs targeting transitions to college, fees associated with joining organizations, clubs, etc. leaving some students without a support system within the university
  - FYE courses for some students “served no purpose”
  - “I miss my family and it would be helpful to have resources, events, etc. to help with coping

## **Academic Affairs**

*The freshman experience class was really helpful and gave me information that I needed – Sophomore Female*

*My first semester was awful because I was a student athlete so when I went to meet my advisor the first thing he said was you're a student athlete...you need to change your major because this is not for you so that was very discouraging for me because that was something I wanted to do and I was thinking when you first come to college you meet people that will support you and push you and this is the first person that I'm meeting that I think will guide me through my experience and he's telling me it's not for me so that really effected my first semester and I just wanted to go home. - Senior Female*

*It started off ok but it's like every time something happens it just makes you rush to want to get out of here...in a rush to graduate...when I got my first failing grade ever it was here and it was Math 101 and I'm really really good at math cause all my classes after that I've never gotten nothing lower than a B. Then when I tried to find housing they made me live in a traditional dorm (participant was a transfer student not a freshman but living on campus it is required for transfer students) and then the day after I moved in a dorm another person that lived in a dorm I guess they knew somebody that got them into a better housing situation so I felt like it just makes me*

*want to rush to get out of here. Even if I want to get my graduate degree I wouldn't do it here. – Senior Female*

### **General Comment**

*My first semester here was really good but that's when people say it was like back in the day....now it's different....you can see a big change...I'm only a junior but you can see a change from when I first started to now...we were always doing something on campus my freshman year. I think the hawk pride has changed....our freshman year we were saying hawk pride catch it everywhere...we could be outside and someone would say and we would say catch it but now you barely hear that on campus. I just think that people don't have hawk pride anymore. People were proud to go to this school and now it's like they're not anymore which is kind of sad. I don't see our school as really being in the community because at our event last night we were talking about HBCUs v. PWIs and we were talking about Salisbury and they were saying how their community in Salisbury supports that school. They have banks that support them...their students basically get discounts at every place in Salisbury and then we come down here and then it's like even though we are only about 10 minutes apart it's like two totally didn't worlds. – Junior Female*

### **Transition to College**

Many of the students reflected on their transition to the university. Their experiences were both positive and negative. Several described having to adjust to the university and local communities. In addition, for the majority of participants attending college was their first time away from home and family for a significant period of time. While participants felt excited to attend UMES, after arrival some found that they were not fully prepared.

### **Student Affairs & Enrollment Management**

*When I got here I was like I'm in the middle of nowhere and I didn't have my car so I didn't what to do....we basically have subway and McDonalds so it was just wasn't fun...and it seems boring but there was some excitement every now and then – Sophomore Female*

*My transition was hard because I'm a mommy's girl....my mother I'm hooked to the hip with so I was like I need my mother...I was like ma don't go but as time went on I got myself together and stopped crying....I actually came out to the welcome back week events and met people but I really needed a car (laughs)...I went home the second week of school because it was not really homey here at first because where I stayed at it was guys living on the other side but once every once came back I liked*

*here...I'm still a mommy's girl but I'm learning how to grow up but we still talk every day. – Sophomore Female*

*My very first semester here they had so many events and people were open and there were so many different events being held on campus and SGA was really good which really helped bring the students out so it was fun during that first year. – Senior Male*

*Then socially it was hard to adapt because while we might have some events during the week it's really the weekend where things should be happening because during the week you're going to school and on the weekend if there is nothing going on everybody goes home and the campus is dead. It becomes that much harder to make connections and to make friends so that you have something to do on the weekend and because I didn't really have that it was harder for me to adapt. - Sophomore Male*

*Thank God for twitter and hash tags because I felt like I didn't come here alone because we have the UMES 16 hash tag so it was like we knew each other. So my first day on campus when I was moving in my mother was like alright I'm out but I wasn't alone because I already knew people so the first day we went to ocean city...a bunch of us and we were out every night....but it was a transition for my mother and family for me to be away. I had been the person who had been taking care of my mother so helping her transition was important.- Sophomore Female*

*I also think the university could make it feel more homey like allowing us to put stuff up on our walls like being able to do that allows us to feel like an individual and not being able to do it holds us back especially as a freshman. There are so many rules during the freshman year and I think so many people leave because of that but then the next year those rules like for visitation are gone and think we lose so many people because they probably have more freedom in their home then they had here at college– Sophomore Male*

### **Academic Affairs**

*When I first got here I did enrollment 101 and you know how in high school your guidance counselor sets up your classes....nobody did that...we had to set up our own classes so I ended up in classes I shouldn't have been in like I took the wrong math...I was placed in to one but didn't take it because I didn't know what I was doing....I didn't know where my scholarship money was and I didn't know who to talk to. So my father tried to help me but it was a lot of you just have to do these things for yourself...being on your own it was hard for me. – Sophomore Female*

*My transition was not easy...first off I come from Delaware and the atmosphere in Delaware versus here is very different. I wasn't used to and that took some adapting*

*on my part to look through the eyes of other people and understand where they are coming from. Why they act the way that they do so that I don't judge and so that I can understand. School wise I didn't have a hard time because I took AP classes which in some cases was more work there than it is here to be honest. – Sophomore Male*

### **Administrative Affairs**

*It was frustrating because I came expecting one thing and then I got here and you ask for help and a lot of staff is really rude like in different places you go, you just don't know why because you really don't understand. You're 17 or 18 coming right out of high school....you don't know anything about Pell grants unless you look it up and that's not likely for us to look up the Pell grant or let me see what the Stafford loan is about...so when you walk in there they expect you know something that you don't know anything about and if your mother and father never went to college they don't know because they never had to go through it and I didn't know what to do. – Senior Female*

*In financial aid they are just really rude...you call and ask a simple question and they are like oh we don't have money and just cut you off but as a student. I should get some help whether its advice or something...and honestly that's only if they answer or put you on hold forever. – Senior Female*

### **General Comment**

*I thought I was prepared but it was a shock being on my own...academically it wasn't but socially it was because I'm on my own and I don't have anybody....and I get kind of home sick...I call my mom every day to tell her I appreciate you because everything she taught me is paying off now – Freshman Female*

*It was a culture shock but I'm from Baltimore and I'm use to MTA's and public transportation and being able to get places or being able to walk to a place...at home for \$3.50 I can go everywhere all day until 3am this next day so I was in complete shock....and I don't think it hit me that I was alone until I saw my father drive away and I was like NO don't go. – Sophomore Female*

*My first year was probably my best year of college and since then it's been all downhill. As a whole the university has declined. I have adapted pretty much to the school and it's not like there is anything to do in the town...it's not like there is much to do out here outside of the school so you really depend on the school for a lot of stuff and then you just get use to the same stuff. – Senior Male*

**SEA Program.** The university currently offers the Summer Enrichment Academy (SEA) to first time freshman in the summer prior to their first semester of full-time enrollment.

Attendees get a head start on course work and transitioning to school by enrolling in two courses (Math and English) during the summer school sessions. Several participants cited that SEA was a program that supported helping them to prepare for college and transition. Participants indicated that the program was very helpful and is recommended for more students.

### **Student Affairs & Enrollment Management**

*I did the SEA program here so I knew people from that program once I got to UMES and that helped me in my transition here a lot” – Sophomore Female*

*The transition was pretty good for me because I did the SEA program so I knew a lot of the people that were going to come back so I had people that could help me if I needed help. I also knew my way around campus because of the program so it was manageable – Sophomore Female*

*I think my adjustment was easier than a lot of other people because I took advanced placement classes in high school so I was use to the work load...I also did community college for a semester during my senior year and then I did the Summer Enrichment Academy which has helped me adjust even more. I think everybody should have done that program because you were here for the whole summer so you got used to being away from home and doing the work and going to class, but I feel like they should have pushed that stuff more so that people would know that it’s available. - Sophomore Male*

*I came for the SEA program before I graduated from high school. I came here for a week and then I went back home to go to graduate and then I came back. So for me I didn’t have a lot of time in between the summer and when I started college so the transition I think for the SEA program it was good to come. I think it’s a good program because I actually got to come and get to know some people and the campus before everyone else was back so that helped in my transition. – Senior Female*

### **Why I stayed at UMES**

There are a variety of reasons why students decided to remain at UMES after their first. Even students who had negative interactions their first year, they stayed and continued in spite of some obstacles. Some key reasons are bulleted below, and then following are quotes provided by the students. One aspect that is important to note is that few participants mentioned they stayed because it is what they really wanted to, but there were other contributing factors. However, there were many participants who noted the family support and level of care they have felt at UMES.

- Money – UMES was cheapest option
- Credits – more than likely would not transfer

- Family – reasonable travel time and financially better option for family
- Friends – good relationships already formed; don't want to have to start over

### **Academic Affairs**

*My mom doesn't want me to come back home....she just wants me to be free because I'm on my own and I'm a mommy's and daddy's girl so she wants me to leave the nest and I like here...despite the negative things. I made friends here and I didn't do that at home...I was a loner so that's why and I feel like the teachers care about what I'm doing so that makes me want to stay here – Freshman student*

### **Student Affairs & Enrollment Management**

*Getting involved was big for me....because more than likely if you get involved you will like it better because you actually get to see the changes that are happening because you're involved and invested time. Like I was thinking about transferring but now that I have invested time into this campus and invested my efforts I don't want to leave. – Sophomore Male*

### **General Comment**

*I stayed at UMES because of my funding issue...and my boyfriend is trying to get me to go to SU but I said that everyone here bails...I don't want to go to a new school and have to learn a new set of rules and whole new set of teachers and a new administrative system...I'd rather stay here and try to make this place just a little bit better instead of just sitting and complaining and doing nothing about it and deserting everyone – Freshman female*

*I can't compare this school to others because it's the only university I have attended but for me it's a sense of family with my fellow peers as well as certain faculty members where I just feel like home and I feel like I have a support system away from my hometown – Sophomore Female*

*The main reason why I stay here and what's pushing me is the friendships....that's the main thing. The professors that I meet and even the administrators and even though academically they may not help me as far as what I do in class, they can help me as far as having a better resume' or helping me with the real world. Some things you just can't learn in a classroom you have to learn from somebody who has been around a lot longer than you and that helps me out a lot – Sophomore Male*

*I'm still here because I'm trapped. I tried to leave but nobody was taking my credits at other schools so that's why I stayed. I didn't want to start over again. It was too long of a road. – Senior Male*

*Nobody is trying to transfer....if you transfer now you will never graduate. I transferred here and most of my credits transferred but not all of them so I'm behind by a semester and that's enough. I don't need to be anymore behind so I stayed whether I wanted to or not. I'll just go to the school I want to go to for grad school".*  
 – Senior Female

*While you can get academics at a lot of places, you can get good academics but it's the social aspect that really keeps people at a college. When you don't have it that's when people tend to transfer and that's why I thought about transferring...and to go even deeper for me at certain points it didn't feel like I was at an institution of a higher level of learning. A lot of the students still have that high school mentality and even some of the professors have that mentality where they will show to class later or come in one minute before the 10 minutes mark or they will neglect to do a lot of things. You know we're in college and I don't like the fact that people still get babied and that some professors will disrespect the students and then wonder why the students disrespecting them or vice versa like students coming into class later with the music blasting in their ears. This is a university! It's just constant disrespect on campus that I didn't like because it didn't seem like there was a higher level of learning and UMES doesn't really have a brand so even when I'm home in Delaware people don't even know what that is....we don't have that brand that sets us apart from other universities. Like this summer I was in an internship and they had all the interns go around and say where they go and when I said university of Maryland Eastern Shore...there were two people who went to College Park in there so they thought I was a terrapin too and I was like no I'm a hawk and they were like what's that....even then....they went to College Park and they didn't know where Eastern Shore was that says a lot to me. – Sophomore Male*

*A lot of people don't get involved because a lot of people don't even want to be here a lot of people come in knowing that they want to transfer to another university....from day 1 they know that they are transferring....a lot people don't get involved because the moral on campus is low...we don't have a lot of pride in our university and that is evident if you walk through the SSC. Not a lot of people look like they are happy to be here. Even at Morgan people are happier than they are here. And it's like events be happening but the promotion is bad so it makes it seem like nothing is happening on campus when in fact a lot of things are, you just don't know about it so people think the campus is dry....all we do is go do to class and go back to our dorms and that's it so a lot of people just want to transfer – Sophomore Male*

*I went to three high schools so I told myself before I started whatever school I was at I would stay. It's hard trying to readjust and change all the time and then when you transfer you don't know what will transfer over and how long you will be there. I*

*actually did try to put my application in at another school but by the time I got in I was looking at it like do I really want to be in school for another whatever years it would take, so I decided to stay and I'm graduating on time – Senior Female*

### **Missing “Full HBCU Experience”**

Attending an HBCU was very important for many participants. Several participants indicated that they were missing out on the full HBCU experience due to the location and campus environment UMES. Further, several participants had experience attending events at other HBCUs in their hometowns or other schools where their friends attend, as well as portrayals of college in movies such as *Stomp the Yard* and *Drumline*. This may have given students a false impression or higher level of expectation of what the “HBCU experience”. Pride within the university community was especially important for participants. Having pride in the university included athletic programs, graduation and celebratory events, and other activities. Some key aspects lacking at UMES that students considered were contributing factors to the HBCU experience include:

- Greek Life- the lack of all Divine 9 organizations, primarily the sororities
- No football team or marching band
- Athletics are weak with the exception of bowling & volleyball (not the most popular sports)
  - “Basketball has been losing for years and there are no changes?”
  - Basketball viewed as #1 sport due to lack of football but the school has “no pride” in the program as far as winning
- Lack of Hawk Pride in Faculty, Administration, & Students
  - Thursday is Maroon & Gray (not marketed and few people participate)
  - Lack of “community involvement” – “SU has better relationships in community”; Gull card accepted at more businesses

### **Student Affairs & Enrollment Management**

*I don't want to say I got tricked but they did a good job selling it because my open house was that Friday during spring fest so the carnival was out and I just thought this is what happens every Friday but I was WRONG. I will say they (the recruiters) didn't give me false information but it was just how they sold it.– Senior Male*

*UMES is not what I'm use to as an HBCU....I feel like a lot of freshman come here thinking it's going to be an HBCU that has everything that they perceive so coming in I was like where are the sororities and fraternities?...where is the student involvement on campus? ....a lot of people say this campus is dry and they don't come back because it's boring...that's how they feel but you can go to another school and*

*have the same experience if you aren't getting involved and networking. – Sophomore Female*

*My aunt went to Howard so when I was younger I would go to activities with her and she was a band dancer so we would go to football games and events and I'm not putting down our school but that was the full HBCU experience and we don't have the whole thing but I'm still good. – Sophomore Female*

*When we have activities on campus it's like pulling teeth to get people to come out....we need to have more pride in our school....we need hawk pride here. – Sophomore Female*

*I love UMES but I wish we could experience like what they did years ago when they had everything like when they had the marching band and they had the actual football team and they had the Greeks. I'm glad those things are coming back and I know it will get better as they come back in the next few years. – Sophomore Female*

*My expectations when I got here.... I just thought this was going to be one the schools!!! I love my university...I love my HBCU but I'm thinking I'm going to come down here and see some AKAs, some Delta's and I heard this school was a party school so I wanted that HBCU experience with the Divine 9 and the bomb housing...it's supposed to be so much but then when I got here I was just like ok cool we have the Kappa's and the Alpha's...some organizations wasn't here and then some have come back and they (UMES) sell it for recruitment but then when the students get here and they pay their money what they told us is not here. – Senior Male*

*I think that with seniors...when I was a freshman the seniors sometimes made me really want to stay because they seemed so excited....like their experience at UMES was so great....they were so excited about graduation...there was so much going on even December graduation had stuff going on throughout the whole semester. It's like now we are 5 weeks from graduation and there is nothing except for buying the cap and gown and taking the pictures and I feel like they don't really celebrate graduation here anymore. It's like we should just go do that...IT SHOULD BE SOMETHING EXCITING! It would help keep people here if they are looking forward to something but it just seems like it's nothing for UMES to be proud of or excited for and other students are seeing this...these are some of the first people that they meet...and somebody putting their opinion on a freshman might influence someone...I'm paying all this money...I'm not seeing what I want or need so maybe I need to leave now before it's too late. – Senior Female*

## **Athletics**

*I LOVE SPORTS! The basketball coach needs to be fired ASAP. No more years here. All the years here and he's never had a winning record and he went like 2 (wins) and 27 (loses) last year and they kept him here. I just want to know why is he still here. With that being our best program here because we don't have football that should be the most successful program and I feel like it's the worst program. They need to fire and start with a clean slate. The athletic director needs to be fired because his hiring is piss poor. I go to the games because I enjoy sport s but they just not good and I just want the coach fired. – Senior Male*

*I don't think that complete hawk pride will come back until we get our football team back...every other school that has a football team they all go out to the games....nobody here goes to our basketball games cause we aren't good....that's completely honest...but as a short term goal because I know the football team won't come for a while...UMES needs to show their students that they care....just showing that they care and that we compete with these other schools and having better alumni involvement. If you go to Howard and you see somebody else that goes to Howard you automatically have something in common...a lot people don't even claim that they went to UMES. – Sophomore Males*

*Pride really comes from the sports that you have on campus. The better your sports the more pride you have. I can say I go to UMES and we beat Howard....it has a lot to do with sports as well everything else that encompasses the HBCU feel but when we are able to get our sports up the level where they need to be to the D1 level that we play in and we are going to MEAC conference championships and not getting blown out the first game that's when things will change. – Sophomore Male*

*Maybe if we support our basketball team more maybe they will start winning. We get into games for free and still nobody goes. I mean who wouldn't want to go to a free event. People would go if it was another school but don't nobody really give support. – Senior Female*

## **General Comment**

*I thought about transferring because at first I felt like I was not getting the true HBCU experience. I only applied at HBCUs because that's where I wanted to go and I felt like other schools they had a different feel to them then we have. They have some of the things like a football team and band. Homecoming....our homecoming is in February and everybody else's is in October and November so I felt like at first we were not up to standard with them but then I put an effort into it and I started to like it so that's why I didn't transfer. But another reason is when you go out of state and you*

*say you go to UMES people don't even know what that is ....so I was like I want to go to a school where you would be like where do you go to and be like "Howard" ...everybody knows what Howard is and where it is. We are just now known and would like to say I go to UMES and people know what that is (student is active in SGA) – Sophomore Male*

*When I think of an HBCU and what I envisioned the main thing that I think of is pride and I think this school could definitely work on our pride and how we carry ourselves to a higher degree a lot more. – Sophomore Male*

### **Academic Affairs**

*I feel like the pride and joy of the school is the golf program and the pharmacy majors and they put a lot of money into them...they put a lot of effort and advising into them...one of the teachers was in the airline magazine and it's just so much positive in that area...why can't it be in all of the areas? – Senior Female*

### **Communication**

It is important that the university clearly communicate to students the things they need to know to be successful. This applies in and out of the classroom. Whether it is sharing vital deadlines, educating students on campus policies, providing information on upcoming events, or direction on how to navigate university systems, communication is valuable. Students identified two key communication areas that need some improvement.

- Email Correspondence- the university sends too many emails, causing students to begin ignoring them.
- Consider more social media, texts blasts, or a UMES App to send out information on social events, workshops, etc.

*I don't know if we need to have announcements on a loud speaker or what but no one checks their email. – Freshman female*

*I know for a fact that a lot of students don't check their email so I believe we need more face to face communication about events because you can see a flyer in email or on instagram and think you might go but if someone talks it up you are more likely to go. – Sophomore Female*

*One thing we did during welcome back week was invasion of the dorms and that really did work because we were at the cookout and we set there to see if any freshman would come out. So at around 5 we went in invaded the dorms knocking on their doors asking them to come out and have fun and told them we had stuff for them*

*and it really got them pumped. They came out and they felt like we really cared because we came in and got them – Sophomore Female*

*I never know about the events because I rarely check my email and I don't look at the posters so if they're not out there I really don't know what is going on. I think because we get so many emails from the school I just don't read them...I may glance at them but texts would probably be better...like for certain things I think they email us for no reason like today blackboard went down and they sent an email and 5 minutes later it went back up and they emailed us for that so every single thing they email about is not a concern. – Sophomore Female*

*You know how we are not allowed to use the café for promos, I feel like the café would probably be one of the best places to promote events because everybody goes there...like if you have it around the school nobody going to sit there and be like let me read this but if we can promote around the school and make it big and colorful so people will see it they will come...there are televisions all over the café so why not play commercials or have flyers on there then you don't even need physical flyers– Sophomore Female*

*Texts blast would work because like we have hawk alerts for emergencies we could have hawk alerts for events because everyone has a phone....it doesn't have to be everything but for the big events – Sophomore Female*

## **Security**

Campus security was a major concern for some students. There were comments made by students regarding a variety of security related matters. Some key security pieces discussed were:

- The ending of Student Security- this was an important component for students and provided employment.
- Security responds differently to incidents depending on the residence hall. For example, some members of security team seem more vigilant while others are more relaxed
- Slow police response time to campus incidents
- White Boards
  - Students feeling they were a waste of money
  - “Used as a way for the university to get on the map”
- Parking Stickers – only valid in certain lots; impacts when students are visiting friends in other housing.

## **Administrative Affairs**

*I think it should be mandatory for students to sign up for Hawk alerts...I mean who isn't on their phones – Freshman female*

*Security is terrible....that security at the booth and at the clusters is terrible....I understand that students may have a sticker or they can be dropping their friends off....like a friend had to drop me off at UT and I had to walk all the way from UT to student apartments by myself in the dark...their not staying they are just dropping me off and he's like no he has to turn around and go to UT and then you'll get dropped off...you'll walk and anything could have happened to me...there is not light back there. – Sophomore Female*

*Sometimes the security just sits in their car on their phones and sometimes they are in there with their chairs back sleeping...like knocked out so it's like what is your point in being here...they sit there and they don't know nothing....so they need to find another way or another person to sit there and not keep having these security guards that's mad at us because they have to work this time of the night...it's just so much stuff with security it's just terrible– Sophomore Female*

*I have concerns, for example my friend has a parking sticker on her car that says she's only supposed to park by Murphy but I live in Clusters so then she can't come to visit me at a certain time because of the sticker ....I just feel as though if we have a parking sticker that says we are students and live on this campus we should be able to visit our other friends on campus...we just want to visit each other. – Sophomore Female*

*Sometimes when we have study groups my friend has gotten parking tickets because of their sticker being for another area....and I don't think that's fair...we shouldn't have to walk from Hawk's Landing to UT in the dark just to come here....you should be able to park your car wherever students are permitted and not have to get a ticket especially since you paid for a parking pass. It's just too much .Like they just built a parking lot right in front of Murphy but Murphy residents can't park there and Hartford residents have to park by Hazel and the PAC and that lot is clear by the time the night comes. – Sophomore Female*

*It's all about the area you're in because if you go to Arden's their security be on it! They don't care they are on it....they stand outside of that car...even if you walking in they ask to see your ID...do you have a parking pass? .... they are very friendly but other areas have lazy security and that's where most of the crimes happen. – Sophomore Female*

*We have to pay \$100 for every hour that police work past their shift for events which is ridiculous...they work for UMES so why do we have to pay them to protect us so it's like the security and the police here are just shaky. – Sophomore Female*

*I think security is not understanding....like I understand that some people don't have a sticker but if I don't have sticker to Arden's and I'm trying to drop somebody off that's doing laundry you go tell me no....I have to make them walk all the way to the back or with groceries it's the same thing and I think there is an easy solution to that....put visitor's parking in Arden's and once that parking lot is filled up then you can't get it....you could even put like a 30 minute time limit on the spots. – Senior Male*

*The campus is very dark....there are areas that are completely dark and someone could run up and get you and nobody would ever know. So they should have some security in those areas so we can feel safe....I think security is kind of sad here and it's even worse when like your parents or family come here and they ask about something or where something is and security catches an attitude with them....it's really embarrassing and my dad is a police officer and he'll be like what do these security officers really do? So now my mom stays on the phone with me if I have to walk somewhere and I feel scared...I feel like if you're going to have security have someone who is reliable. – Sophomore Female*

### **University Administration- Cabinet**

*I have so many questions about the white boards and so much to say and my questions never get answered (student went to town hall in the fall with administration)....They kept giving the same answers to everybody...well it's all on security....I don't see how that works....they said a lot of things that make sense but to me personally it did not change my mind about the whiteboards because really who is that protecting....even the teachers it's not protecting them because I'm putting myself in the gunman's position...if I was a teacher I'm not standing there. That board might be there but if I hear pop pop pop....I'm leaving I gotta go...like I'm just going to sit here. I mean it's not going to protect anybody....this is the board right here....your feet and parts of your body are still visible....a gunman can still hurt you. There are so many other things we can do....I was expecting the board to be a reasonable size but it's not protecting nothing and a gunman could clear out a whole room with that little board we're not going to hide behind it. And the same company that made the boards I hear they make bullet proof doors and that would have been better to have instead of a little board. – Sophomore Female*

### **Student Affairs/Enrollment Management**

*I lived in upper classman housing and all of my roommates made my life a living hell...I went to my RA about it and nothing was done... they left the kitchen like a dump; I couldn't even use the sink. I spoke to various people in authority about it and no one did anything and at the end of the semester everything blew up because I*

*wouldn't wash their dishes because it was my day to clean the kitchen. I went and spoke to the RA on duty and he called my RA and my RA was like she has to clean the room it's her turn and I was like no I've been speaking to you about this for months....no one has done anything...I'm not doing these dishes...well you're going to get a fine so I put their dishes in plastic bags and stuck them next to their doors. One of the roommates came into my bedroom and started threatening to beat me up and I called university police because I was scared out of my mind and they came and took her side....she reared up in their presence and started cussing me out and comes towards me and they did nothing about it...they threatened to suspend me and not let me stay for finals if I didn't wash their dishes and they stood there until I did them. I had to leave and go stay somewhere else for the night because I was so scared. I hadn't done anything to anybody...I cooked...I offered them food – Freshman female.*

### **Evaluation/Interactions with Faculty**

Students have had positive and negative interactions with faculty on campus. Overall students feel that there are faculty who are committed and want to be at UMES. However, this is not consistent across academic departments. Students have experienced the discontent faculty may have with the university through the way they teach in the classroom. Some of the main points regarding faculty include:

- Faculty are really helpful and attentive in class (students feel in most instances that they can go to faculty for help)
  - However, according to participants some faculty are not available during office hours on a regular basis which can be frustrating
  - Need to use Blackboard (grade book) and give midterm grades so students are aware of progress (some use it but it is inconsistent among faculty); some faculty do not respond to emails
- Students feel that faculty evaluations are pointless “we see the same cycle”
- Advising needs improvement (student perception is that faculty need training on advising; faculty have too many advisees)
  - All departments need to have a course sequence that breaks down courses by semester (should be uniform from department to department); as students switch majors departments have different formats and some are difficult to understand (what classes to take in what semester not listed)
  - Seniors “confusion over who your advisor is because some departments have different advisors based on classification”
  - Rehab department – noted for caring for students

## Academic Affairs

*My teachers make us interact with them and that's what I like...the typical college images are like you're just going to sit in class and the teacher won't know your name and stuff like that, but I like that my teachers open up themselves to us...like my email is here and my number is here and that's what I like because I email my teachers 24/7 (laughs). I like the class size and they take time with us that are why I came to this school because of the smaller setting compared to other schools where they may have 400 students in class. – Freshman female*

*I like my teachers...I feel kind of sorry for them sometimes because a lot people in the class don't care about their own grade. Teachers end up spending so much time waiting for people to come in because everybody is late or trying to get people to just wake up and look at the board and in my English class there are only like 5 people out of 30 that will answer a question so the teacher has to go around the room and force people to participate. – Sophomore Female*

*All of the faculty across campus need to turn they're respect level up because my first semester here (student came in as transfer student from another HBCU) one of my criminal justice classes...she jokingly sad throughout the semester if something happens during final exams you're not excused. The last day for exams my brother died and she was like oh well. I felt that was very very disrespectful and when I tried to come back during winter time because I had to stay here (student is an athlete) she just was like well you should have told me beforehand. Why would I want to discuss that with you when the whole semester you were like 'oh if somebody grandmother die then you need to just come take the test'....she didn't give me a second chance to take the test or anything so I feel like sometimes they need to be more understanding....anything can happen at any time. I didn't know that was going to happen the morning of the exam so I felt like that made me want to leave here. I didn't want to transfer again but I felt that made me really want to tell people who are in high school DON'T GO TO UMES! – Senior Female*

*I also think that some of the teachers are over worked. I feel sorry for my professor because she got hired late because the teacher who was supposed to teach the course was out on leave and so she comes into the semester like the day before classes start....she doesn't even have an email address yet, so she has to give us her cell phone number so we can text her for questions. She can't get blackboard to work....she's teaching so many classes that she doesn't have time to assign homework because she can't grade it. To get an assistant to help....she's adjunct faculty so it's not going to happen...I guess it's really hard to get teachers for this school maybe they don't want to come here but the ones that are here work really hard. – Freshman female*

*The teachers genuinely are trying to help you and push you to do well – Sophomore Female*

*The advising needs to be worked on....unless I know exactly what I'm looking for and have my questions planned out I won't get answers from my advisor at all....I think they need to work on that aspect – Sophomore Female*

*There are some teachers who will help you but there are some that will not work with you at all....it's like oh if you don't got it you don't have it....or you just need to study...but some people have different ways of learning...like I have a teacher that will sit there and just use PowerPoint...I don't like that...I like to have the information but I like teachers that will grab my interest and my focus to come back every day...because there are students who just don't go to class because the PowerPoint's are online so they can just do that way so it's like some teachers need to get a more creative way to help students because it can help a lot. – Sophomore Female*

*I have come across some professors that maybe just are so good at what they do that they don't know how to teach it and that's a problem...like I have teachers that I just don't understand and some teachers need to understand that we don't know what you know so you may have to slow down and stop just talking for 50 minutes. I can look around the class and everybody is on their phone so that's a problem and the teacher will tell us like oh the average test grade is a 53...well maybe there is something wrong with what you're doing because the average is failing and if it was a few then maybe they didn't do what they were supposed to do, but when there are 35 people in the class then maybe you should change what you're doing for us – Sophomore Female*

*This semester I have this teacher that refuses to teach us...she thinks she's like a movie a star and I'm dropping her class because she does not teach and she says she doesn't because she's a philosopher. I came here to learn and all of us have different learning styles and I'm not going to learn by just reading a book that's not even a textbook. – Sophomore Female*

*Because of my major I have a lot of foreign professors and it's not that I'm being racist but I can't understand them. So I try to come to them to explain it a little more and they are like no you should know this. If they would explain it I may not have to go get outside help....it just becomes too much for one class.....but sometimes faculty can adjust their attitudes. – Sophomore Female*

*A lot of the teachers do not have offices which means I have to catch them before classes start or as soon as class ends....I have another class so when I have that class*

*he comes in at 12:05 class starts at 12 so I can't talk to him then and then I have a class after his class so how am I supposed to talk to you? ....a lot of them (faculty) get offended when we say we don't understand, but really don't and a lot of these professors act like they were never students. – Sophomore Female*

*My advisor is a nice lady but I feel like when I leave her office I haven't learned anything...first off she put me in the wrong classes second semester that's why I had issues with my financial aid because I wasn't taking as many credits as I was supposed to and then she is never in her office....her office is always closed so when it comes time for me to get classes when will she be there...I won't even bother going to her....I'll just go to the dean– Sophomore Female*

*My advisor...I just stopped going to....I came to her one time and I had the sheet with classes that she had emailed me and I asked her what courses I need to take next. She was like well what does it say on the paper? So I told her it says a lot on this paper which ones should I take and she says well you're an adult now you can pick. So after that I never went back and she still emails me stuff, but if I go to her office she doesn't tell me anything she just gives me an attitude. So I just pick the classes off the sheet that I think I should be taking – Sophomore Female*

*Most of the teachers care about you doing well here and its friendly, but there are a good amount of teachers that don't care and they are just here for a check. They don't care about what you want to do or care about your grade and don't care about seeing you succeed. They just come in...teach...and leave. Sometimes they don't even teach they just kind of talk and not convey anything....I think what teachers don't always realize is that everybody doesn't have the same learning style....you have to be able to perceive what your classes are taking in and adapt just like we have to adapt to you they have to adapt to us....and the teachers don't do that they've been doing a set way for 25 years...they're going to keep doing it that way...times change people change everybody had to change to fit the times. Sometimes if you ask too many questions they get annoyed with you and teachers don't like to be corrected....you're not perfect....if professor gets something wrong it happens and I'll raise my hand and ask is it actually this, and because that's what I got and they will say no but in actuality it was correct. They don't have to respond in a disrespectful manner just because they messed up...nobody is perfect...not everything will be right all the time....and some teachers...they just need to retire honestly...its passed their time and they just need to leave because they don't teach at all and I don't get anything out of that. I might pass a class but then moving on to the next level I don't understand because my foundation is weak. – Sophomore Male*

*Some of the teachers are really helpful and they want to see you succeed...others are just here for a paycheck....I can remember one class...I swear we did not learn one*

*thing, but we still had tests so why are we taking a test if we haven't learned anything. Some professors are just here to collect a check rather than see us grow as a people. Another thing is a lot of them do not want to adapt to the times that we are in....they do not want to use blackboard, they want to use the same teaching styles that's been around since 1940....now these days kids don't just go to the library read the book and know what's going on ...it doesn't work for a lot of students....I can't just read a book and know everything....I need you to actually teach, write it on the board and explain it so like some of them don't know how to adapt to the times that we're in. – Sophomore Male*

*I feel like most of the professors here lack pride in the school. A lot of the teachers this isn't the only university that they teach at. They'll teach somewhere like at Salisbury and I have heard some of them say the way that things are done here is not as good as it's done at Salisbury. I can't really fault them for that because I think most of the students think the same way where they lack the pride in the school altogether and I think that's reflective in the faculty also...and I think sometimes when you ask for help they seem like they don't want to be bothered by you and so for me if I feel like I'm coming to you for help because you said I could and you feel like you don't want to speak to me or like I'm bothering you that just completely shuts me off. I'm not going to want to ever come talk to you again and that's just what it is. – Sophomore Male*

*I pretty much have a good relationship with all my teachers...but sometimes we don't know our progression...that's the main things as students we need to know how we are progressing. Just as much as we need to utilize blackboard the teachers need to utilize that as well to convey to us hey this is your grade for this and we're not getting that then we are all over the place...we don't know what grade we have in that class...that is my only concern when it comes to faculty. – Junior Female*

*The advisors need to be more knowledgeable about stuff because I transferred here and I wasn't aware of a lot of stuff like the English proficiency exam because some of my credits just transferred. I never heard anything else about it so I feel like they need to be more knowledgeable so that they can tell the students that they are advising what's offered when. You're walking across the stage and you don't get your degree 6 weeks until after graduation....you look back on your transcript and you need 3 credits for a random class. I don't even understand why they allow people to walk and they still have stuff left like that doesn't make any sense that shouldn't even happen at all.– Senior Female*

*There is one lady in my department....I go to her for everything...I'm hesitant to go to other people....she's not my advisor but my advisor didn't know what he was talking about ....it was hard to talk to him because I felt like he didn't know too much even if*

*I asked him questions it would take days for him to get back to me with an answer so I would just go to another person. – Senior Female*

*Some of the stuff faculty put in their syllabus they don't abide by....they will say they have office hours at certain times and then they aren't there or they will say they use blackboard and they don't use blackboard so it can be really hard to get certain information and then contacting them....I've had teachers tell me they have email but they don't use it...like we may need to contact a teacher with something and we can't....I don't expect them to be up at midnight to answer my email but to just respond and just be there at office hours...the small things. – Senior Female*

*There was this one professor who came in and he was writing on the board and we couldn't see it so we were asking him to erase what was there from the class that was in there before us and he got upset and told us to shut up. And when we're explaining we couldn't see what he was writing he told us to "h" with ya'll and left the class. I do ask a lot of questions especially in Math but he was just rude with everybody and he loved to say shut up to us. – Senior Female*

*I mostly have positive relationships with my professors. I see them walking around on campus and I can easily go up to them and shake their hands and say hello and their pretty friendly. – Senior Male*

*I went to the tutoring center every day when I was taking Math 109 and I still never got better than a 70. I don't know how I can get tutoring every day and not do better. I've never studied so hard for any class ever in my life and I barely passed so I think they really need to reevaluate that program because one math 109 class I was in one time I knew I had to get out of there because on the first day the teacher was already talking about failing...how are you talking about failing when we are just getting in the class and then says you may have to take it once, twice, maybe three times its ok....NO It's NOT OK nobody wants to keep paying their money to take 109 over and over I think it's the main class that really holds people back at this school. – Senior Female*

*Math 109....they need to change that class because the professors don't even give us a chance with what we're learning...they are like one minute I'm trying to learn and he's like oh we have a test and the next week it's like we have a quiz and we have to go to study sessions as a part of our grade and so much but how much is really being taught and its very fast paced. And it's like I can help students who are taking 110 but 109 is just foreign to me...why? And then we can use graphic calculators for the homework but not on tests...how does that make sense. And it's like HW, pretest, test, quiz....every week and it just keeps going and math is just something where you have to sit down and just take time. I'm in there now and I struggle and math was always*

*one of my strongest points when it comes to school and my issue is the point value system on a test....there will literally be 4 or 5 questions on a test so if you get one or two wrong you fail automatically and I feel like that's not fair. – Sophomore Female*

*Another problem I think professors have is that they stereotype their students...like last semester in my math 109 class the very first day the very first thing my professor said to me was just to let you know  $\frac{3}{4}$  of this class is not going to pass...just be prepared for that.....so there are 20 of ya'll in here and only 2 of ya'll will pass and I'm letting ya'll know that right now. How you go come in the class day 1 and not even greet us at all, but come in with a defeated attitude. That shows that you just stereotyped this class and think that will be like every other class that you've had so we already as students have this mindset that we don't even want to learn from this professor because he doesn't want to teach us....because he comes in here saying I'm going to fail so maybe I am going to fail because that's what he thinks so the whole atmosphere is just negative attitudes. Instead of just taking it out on each other because I know sometimes we feel some type of way about the university, and then we take it out on our professors sometimes the professors they feel some way towards the university and they take it out on us.....we should all come in with a different attitude towards each other and not take it out on each other – Sophomore Male*

*When you're taking your general education courses you get the teachers with the personalities...the teachers that want to help you get to the next level...I can't speak for everybody but my major (criminal justice)....as I have started taking the 200 and 300 level courses I was getting the same professors who aren't really helping me. The teaching methods change. My sociology teacher was awesome....I remember so much that he taught but once I got to some of the upper level course you can tell that the teachers don't really care. They've been here for so long...they're comfortable so they think that what they did 20 years ago still works and that's not only for the teachers. I think that's for the administration as well. – Senior Male*

## **Interactions with Staff**

Students spend 15-20 hours in the class each week with their faculty, but majority of their time is outside of the classroom interacting with campus staff. Primarily students work with student services offices in order to receive assistance with financial aid, housing, tutoring, food services, etc. One key complaint from students was the poor customer experienced on campus. This was consistent across all eight focus groups; they feel a lack of respect from some staff members on campus. However, despite the complaints, students have found some staff members to be very supportive and caring.

- Lack of Customer Service/professionalism in various offices and dining services on campus

- Issues – “A lot of students are first generation, so questions in offices to staff/to faculty are important, they really don’t know because they don’t have the experience”
- “Nothing done” – until parent gets involved; students prefer to handle issues on their own but at times must get parent involved to see results
- Staff always seem agitated/upset
- Students avoid certain offices until absolutely necessary (usually last minute) because of perception of the workers having attitudes.

### **Student Affairs/Administrative Affairs**

*The bad experiences that I have had at UMES are with people who work in the SDC and SSC...they don't know how to interact with students....the biggest issue is they just don't know how to speak to people...yes they are my elder but we are both adults and I'm going to treat you with respect and I think that I deserve a certain amount of respect in return- Sophomore Female*

*The people in the SSC and SDC their attitudes could be adjusted just a little....I would like to go into Hawk's nest just once and be able to get my food without somebody ignoring me completely when I ask a question.....just having good customer service....it's a common sense thing...I'm being nice to you and it's a simple thing. – Sophomore Female*

*Some of the people that are here in the offices that are here to help....their main purpose is to help the students in what they do not know and I feel like if you have that job you should have a smile on your face and be willing to help people and not have an attitude about doing your job because that's what you're here for. You're here to help. The SDC that building in particular it's just.....no one wants to go to someone for help if you feel like you're made to feel like you're dumb or you're getting on someone nerves that's just....I feel like they need to work on that – Sophomore Male*

### **Administrative Affairs**

*I know people who will say they want to transfer because of their experience with the financial aid office...like they are just not friendly...people avoid going there even when they really need to go there because they don't want to deal with that because the people there have bad attitudes. I'm in the honors program and they are supposed to hold our money and somehow my name was just skipped over and there were other students who had their money disappear and then they got refunds this semester for funds that disappeared last semester. It's a lot of little things that should not be happening...we should be more professional than that...I shouldn't have to avoid your office and even the people in dining services...some of them are friendly but a lot of them are not....I just came here to get some food and you're ruining my*

*day...there is no need to be that nasty....if you don't like your job you don't have to be here. –Sophomore Female*

*With financial aid you have to keep calling them and calling them and calling them and they will tell you that....like I get outside grants and I will call them an ask when is my grant going to be available they will tell me it should be there in a few days and then automatically one hour later it posted to my account...ok sure!? Some of the mistakes they make.....like a few weeks ago I live off my return money until my check gets here....a couple of weeks ago I was transferring my money to my hawk card to take care of some things and instead of having a negative balance it was positive and I was calling and was like what's going and my friend was like oh yeah they do that all the time on Friday's....the fact that we accept that as norm that they make mistakes is not ok....I know mistakes happen but that's why you double check things....it's not acceptable that that has become the norm. – Sophomore Female*

*I haven't had too many bad experiences with staff...like in dining services they are pretty nice...they like me cause they always save me some yams on the side on soul food Thursday's. I have a pretty good relationship with them. I think the Hawk's nest sometimes they are a little unprofessional and sometimes in Water's as well but for the most part the SSC and campus life is ok. I don't think they are used to this year because a lot of students are asking questions and asking and asking and constantly questioning things and I think they aren't use to it and the administration as well. I don't think they are used to students actually challenging them on something. I think they have stuck to it for years and that it was alright. Nobody was really complaining about anything but now people are restless and starting to make noise about some things. . – Junior Female*

*The financial aid office the office that just bothers me....because they don't care...they are not trying to talk to you they just want to go home they are not worried about you....you ask them a question and it's like they try to rush you off the phone...they try to give you whatever little piece of information just to get you to be off the phone....they really don't care or maybe they do but that's not how it come across. – Senior Female*

### **General Comment**

*But I'm always in Dr. Jenkins office and Ms. Mills and Bird Hall as well....pretty much everyone is helpful because they have the open door policy so they are helpful there. Of course Dr. Bell and her cabinet....it's kind of hard to talk to them so hopefully I can get a chance to talk to them. I know they are very busy though. – Junior Female*

*Where is your willingness to help other people? You were in my place at one time so where is your willingness to help me? – Senior Female*

*I feel like a lot of the staff bring their problems from home to work. So if their mad they will put that on me just because I'm there at that time. Sometimes the professionalism is lacking. – Senior Male*

*I've learned that you have to build a relationship with some of them like for instance....say us 10 or 11 people go in there and we speak and say have a good day....but then you have that one student that comes in there rushing her to do something or they are disrespectful or just doing something that is not positive then they may be disrespectful to that 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> person that comes along but you do have those people that you try to be cordial and outgoing and friendly with that still come in with a bad attitude. You can't get mad at me because you chose to work in the café'. That's not my fault or responsibility. If I was doing your job I would have to have a smile on my face to serve you because that's what I signed up to do. – Senior Male*

*The people in the SDC are not too friendly, especially in financial aid and the registrar's office. I don't know why. I just wanted my grants but they don't want to help and they just are not friendly.– Senior Female*

## **Administration**

The administration plays a key role in setting the tone for the university based on their leadership. As illustrated below, students find that it is important for administration to be more actively involved or connected with the operations of the various units, so that issues that arise can be addressed sooner rather than later. Students also note the important of being aware of what's going on across campus and to eliminate silos.

## **Academic Affairs**

*My advisor doesn't know what he's talking about so I've just been advising myself based off the catalog but for some people not everybody is a go-getter and can do that. So I know a couple of people who were supposed to graduate on time and then when they were going around to get signatures...you go to the registrar...you go around to get cleared and everything...now you find out you have five credits left on this or when you transferred here this didn't cover that. Also I know when we here that first week for the SGA thing president Bell spoke about there is supposed to be a 90 credit audit...I know a lot of people who are graduating in December who never had that so that is something that should be known because she said that's a policy in the handbook that was here before when ever got here and I know a lot of people who are way past 90 credits and never had that and when they are graduating they find*

*out that they can't and then UMES says ok well you can walk anyway. And the catalogs change so some people are looking at the wrong catalog and then being advised wrong— Senior Female*

### **General Comment**

*As far as the administration goes I feel like they don't talk to each other...like no one knows anything about a department or office but their own so when you go to the wrong place they send you to the wrong place and they tell you oh we don't do this maybe go to such and such instead of calling that place to see if that's the place you need to be. – Freshman female*

*The administration should consider a switch jobs day maybe over the summer so there aren't a lot of people coming in but it would provide them a better idea of how the entire university works instead of just focusing on their paperwork so that when a student has a question they feel like it will actually get answered instead of having to ask 6 different people and you still have no clue what you're supposed to do. – Freshman female*

*I think UMES could improve if they do a reevaluation of the teaching staff, advisors, and just all the way around the university have higher standards...I think if the administration really took the time out to actually get to know the people that they are hiring...it's real easy for someone to put on a show during an interview but if they (administration) go around and actually act as a student and see what's going on. They could shadow us or somehow get to know what's really going on and do something about it. – Sophomore Female*

*They (administration) could have someone that goes around and randomly step into classrooms...I don't expect Dr. Bell to that but they can hire someone to do that because they can constantly check in to see that people are doing what they are supposed to do. – Sophomore Female*

*I like that I know my president and I see her out...she's not like this high and mighty person and if you see her walking around on campus she speaks to you...she's not sitting on some high horse thinking that she's better and too good to actually get to know her students – Sophomore Female*

*I have a lot of good relationships with a lot of people but I think for a few of the professors and administrators they have a problem with the university or even the state and it feel like that take that out on their students. For instance I know I've heard about raises and stuff like that and I feel like some professors they don't fully like this university so instead of putting in a full effort they won't put in effort at all to the university not even towards their teaching. – Sophomore Male*

*I think the changes that the administrators try to make, like with having a town hall....that will probably be the only time we see them but I think the decisions that they make are based on how they want the school to be....they aren't making decisions for us. I think sometimes they get stuck in their old ways and they don't want to change this school but I do feel like with Dr. Bell being here she's kind of pushing them out of that and I like the changes that she's been making. It feels like we are making progress, but I feel like there are other people on the campus that run this university that are just stuck in their ways because there are a lot of improvements that can be made– Sophomore Female*

*The administrators in the town hall were trying to dodge our questions when we were asking...I think Dr. Bell was the only one who was laid back and honest with us. The rest of them would just say we'll get back to you later. – Sophomore Female*

*I feel like the administration is not supportive at all. Being a member of a student organization, you start to see things that other students who aren't as involved don't see. For example, as of now we don't have a speaker for December graduation and that's a big concern why is that not done in advance and they don't do anything to try to get a speaker. Why not start working on this from freshman year. Nobody sticks to anything....nobody is pushing anyone to do it. You don't see administration pushing this stuff and we don't have support from them so the only person that speaks every time I walk past them is (Dr. Jenkins). Everybody else will just walk past me like I'm not even here. And I normally always say hi or something. – Senior Male*

*I think the administration doesn't experience what we go through. I don't ever see them walking through a dorm or sitting in a classroom to see how things are. I think personally they were more concerned with whiteboards to make them look good as an administration but as students we see it as a negative aspect of the university as far as safety. I want to send my kids here because I'm thinking is somebody going to shoot it up or that \$60,000 could have went somewhere else. I understand the whiteboard situation but there are other ways this university could have been put on the map in a better aspect something more positive. – Senior Male*

## **Campus Environment**

How a student experiences a campus environment is indicative to whether or not they will be likely to remain. It is vital that the institution creates a positive and engaging environment for students from the moment they arrive on campus. The way campus buildings look, classroom style, housing conditions, and governing policy all play a role in setting the tone and perception of the campus. Some key points include:

- Housing is outdated & needs to be upgraded

- Washers/Dryers barely work and are too expensive (often money is lost in machine)
- Maintenance Issues (slow response unless there is a major emergency such as a flood)
- More activities in housing as alternative to parties Space for students to meet with friends (particularly of the opposite sex)
- Classrooms need to be remodeled

### **Student Affairs/Enrollment Management**

*Last week when it was raining my ceiling fell and it was over the weekend...it started on Thursday, the paint started to buckle and I told the RA and nothing could be done because of the rain.....I understood that but over the weekend the rain lightened up and I had to take all of my clothes out because it happened over my closet. I told someone and Monday came and they had promised me someone would come by. Monday came and I waited until like 3 and nothing was done so I got upset because I shouldn't have to be uncomfortable....I waited to come back from home....I live in NJ that's four hours away so I stayed there and missed class so I could sleep in a bed.....so nothing happened and when I talked to the maintenance people they got an attitude and said they can't do anything about it and so I was like I'm just going to let it pass. Nothing was still done by Tuesday and I was getting upset so I called my mom and it took for my mom to call everybody until they did something. I'm like if we're all adults I should be able to talk to whoever I need to talk to without my mom having to call for them to do something. I think it's a shame that if parents call something gets done but when the students say something about it nothing will get done – Freshman Female*

*We need improved housing on this campus. It's one of the main areas students complain about. I think leaders on campus need to visit so you can see what we go through, the upkeep and the technology. We should not still be using keys to get into a residence hall. I can understand student apartments and the clusters but when you go to SU...a school that's just as small as ours but there you just put a keycard in and your door opens whereas you can go to a machine or to an RA if your key card is messed up and get it fixed. That's an improvement we could make for dorms and really it's safer. If it's lost you can shut it off and it won't work in anybody else room where as here if you lose a key you have change all the locks in that cluster and that's expensive. – Senior Male*

*A lot of the activities on campus are unorganized and start 2 hours late...I don't understand why I'm paying my money and the organizations are unorganized and have us standing in line for hours by then I don't want to go. – Sophomore Female*

### **Administrative Affairs**

*I feel like some of the buildings are just outdated....like the classrooms are very childlike...I feel like more should be like Hazel where the classrooms are more adult like....I have classes where I'm literally sitting in little baby desks and I feel like it just makes me feel like a kid....my books don't even fit on the desk". – Sophomore Female*

### **General Comment**

*The rules and regulations are inconsistent...you go from having all these rules as a freshman to so much freedom after that....I understand the principle behind the rules but they are so inconsistent and the way they go about it is incorrect. – Sophomore Male*

*I was shocked when I got here...like once I came out here all I saw was trees and dirt which my friends had told me that's what it was like so I kind of saw it coming but when you see it for yourself it's different and then it wasn't that terrible. – Senior Male*

*The events here....they just do the same old events each year and I've just adapted to them so I know exactly what to expect each year and so there is nothing you can really do out here. – Senior Male*

### **University Resources**

Higher education funding is becoming scarce across a variety of campuses. This decrease in funds impacts the types of services, resources, and tools available to offices and students. Limited resources can negatively impact the types of activities and programs the institution can provide and as a result this influences student satisfaction and their campus experience.

- Weekend Events – Lack of events on weekends sends students across the Bay and to other universities to attend social events
  - Lack of social meeting space on campus on any day
  - SSC – if outsiders need it they are the priority; students feel this space should be designated as student space (they should be priority)
  - Offer movie nights, game day, prom flashback, etc. as alternative to parties
- Hawk Card – Not enough businesses take the card (school was not paying bills in a timely fashion?)
- Transportation – Hawk Shuttle does not run often enough on weekends (very long wait for a ride and crowded)
  - Need more shuttles and better hours

- Technology – Computers need updating, lab assistants could help update; IT needs more help
- Tutoring Services – need improvement
  - “Get faculty more involved”
- Career Services
  - Office lacks information; aren’t very helpful
  - Career Fairs – Perception among students is that only certain majors have representatives; many do not attend because of that
- Graduate School Prep Workshops – None (according to students) for (GRE, assistantships, application process, etc.)
- Offices closing early

### **Student Affairs/Enrollment Management**

*I think it’s important to have freshman activities cause we’re new, you know so we can bond....so movie nights or empowerment or something like that...that’s better than joining groups because then you have to have a commitment to the group so we could just have a night when somebody speaks to us or our peers talk to us about empowering and each other and uplifting each other instead of bringing each other down – Freshman female*

*Sometimes I walk into the SSC and there is stuff going on and I had no idea it was happening so I think there are a lot of programs....the information just doesn’t get out to students.*

*The weekends here.....many students go home because there is nothing to do on the weekends...the SSC is pretty much closed...Hawk’s nest is closed....after 6:30 once the café closes you’re basically on your own and you have nowhere to eat unless you go outside of campus if you drive because the shuttle that runs during the weekday that goes different places they don’t do that on the weekends they only go straight to the mall and Wal-Mart. – Junior Female*

*I think we should get to use the resources that we actually pay for because Plaza hasn’t had computers that work since first semester and washing machines don’t half way work. I have lost at least \$10 in the machines trying to wash clothes because the machines are constantly not working and then I have to carry my clothes all the way to the Clusters or to a friend’s apartment to wash clothes and even if I put in a report that I lost money in the machine it takes forever to get to that money back...and when I have problems with my laptop I can’t get my work done because when we turn on the computers in Plaza it would shut down or make a beeping sound for hours. – Sophomore Females*

*I wish people were more welcoming....like in the career center I feel like they are supposed to help us get jobs...especially the seniors and like when I go in there it's more like here is this paper here is that paper like all these papers instead of actually sitting down with me and asking what's my major and things like that. They think a brochure is going to help me more than a one on one conversation. – Senior Female*

### **Academic Affairs**

*Services need to be better. I'm an engineering major and there are no tutoring services for engineering and I know a lot of other majors have tutoring services available. And also I think for seniors they need to have some type of programs or workshops or something so that we know what type of grades and classes we will need if you want to get into graduate school what type of resume you should have, information on internships...stuff like that...a lot of information I just feel like we're missing out because no one is giving it– Senior Female*

### **General Comment**

*The infirmary...last week my foot started swelling up so I'm limping and I'm about to go the infirmary and my RA is like what happened and I'm like my foot is swelling....she tells me that the infirmary is closed....why does the infirmary close so early first of all second...why are they closed .....it doesn't make any sense at all....anything can happen at any time of the day....I don't expect you to be open 24 hours but closing at 4pm is completely unacceptable....so I go the next day...I had called my grandma to ask her what to do in the meantime so the next day the swelling goes down and I had realized it was a spider bite. So I go to the infirmary and I was literally there for five minutes and I told her I think I got bit by a spider and I told her my foot was swelling and so that was the secretary...the doctor is standing behind her and she's like walk around here real quick and so I walk around...I'm standing in the doorway...we didn't go into a separate room I'm standing in the same room as the secretary....she tells me to take my shoe off so she can take a look and I'm like ok. I take of my shoe off and she looks at my foot and is like where is the bite...and I'm like that's what I came to you for I don't know and she's like well the swelling went down so if something else comes up come back. That's all you have for me....I came all the way down here just for you tell me that....so then I just leave....so unprofessional. The infirmary is completely out of line. – Sophomore Female*

### **Other issues**

Students shared a variety of issues and concerns they had about the university. This section speaks to miscellaneous items, which did not fit into one particular section above.

- What we would like to see here at UMES

- Student selection – need higher standards
  - Quality over quantity
  - Automatic admission at high schools, college fairs, etc. (is this the right thing to do?)
- Why can students walk when they have not completed their degree? – mentioned as disrespectful to those who have met requirement
- University Policies – need consistency
  - Example: Attendance policy varies from department to department/faculty member to faculty member
    - Student was told she had to attend and take final even though her brother had died that morning
    - Student was enrolled in course where there was an automatic fail after missing 3 days
- Yellow/Green Water? – brought up in sophomore and Senior Female groups
  - “I have to buy water just to make oodles of noodles and I feel like they should tell you that before you come here”
  - “I learned in class that it’s chicken feces that runs through the system here....it makes people skin have issues” – Senior Female
- Dining Services
  - Lacks vegetarian/vegan/healthy options
  - Hours are not sufficient
- Institution Branding is needed- UMES should be listed amongst other top HBCUs
- Town and Gown relationships

### **Student Affairs & Enrollment Management and Institutional Advancement**

*I feel like there are some things the university could do as far as interaction within the community but at the same time the community has to help as well. I feel like there is a constant struggle between Princess Anne and UMES where neither one of them wants to adapt to each other’s cultural or personality in a way....cause I feel like Princess Anne is one way and we’re another way and we’re telling them to be like us and that’s not really helping they are like why should be like ya’ll why can’t ya’ll be like us. So if there was some way that we could get Princess Anne and UMES on one accord around the entire city because like Salisbury has like everything that’s built around the campus and everyone takes the Gull cards and even the Starbucks has a section upstairs that was strictly made for the SU students....that’s something I wish I could see....just more community involvement with Princess Anne. - Sophomore Male*

### **Student Affairs & Enrollment Management**

*The career center...I feel like they don’t ever come out of the career center...they will post maybe 5 internships once and a while but I feel like we don’t see them except for*

*at the career fair that they have every year with the same majors. How do ya'll not have any type of rehab people there? I don't understand that....when this school has so many majors how can you only cater to certain majors. – Senior Female*

### **Academic Affairs**

*We should be getting the most out of this school while we're here and I don't feel like we get the most out of being here....like preparing us for graduate school....I don't get any information on that...or the career center I feel like that doesn't help so I feel like there are certain things we need to get more of while we're here to prepare us...like when they have the career fairs we need more stuff this is focused on everybody not just one major– Senior Female*

*Everybody here has a PhD or master's and there are students in their class that have no idea about that and I think that is the disconnect here...I have teachers who have a PhD who never talk to me....I go to their office and they aren't there ...it's just disappointing– Senior Female*

### **General Comment**

*Last year we had a couple of tragedies happen and I think that some of the students were disappointed in how it was handled. We had that big thing in Hytche or whatever but people just left there feeling empty. There was no type of pride or anything coming from the faculty and staff...like even though we are a certain age we're still children...we're still students here and I think a lot of people fail to realize like sometimes you need motivation...some people aren't looking for that but a lot of people are and there is nobody here...I'm not saying there is nobody but a lot of people haven't met that person who is there for them or either the person that does help everyone on this campus they are so overwhelmed because they are the one person that everyone is going to...from the student perspective yes we need to come out and do more but the faculty and staff need to too they need to come out and actually help students instead of acting like this only a job ....for them to get to where they are somebody had to help or do something different for them to be there. – Senior Female*

*I want to see a drastic change in their level of respect and pride for the school and I think that can change the school around. And the type of students that come here I just wonder why they accepted these people or why did they take the time to come here because it's so evident that they want to be doing something else with their time other than being here to get a degree or to network and expand...you can't really say to the university change the type of people that you accept here but to be honest I just really think that would increase the pride to get more people that are serious about*

*what they need to do to actually acknowledge why you come to the university. – Sophomore Male*

*I feel like so many people graduate from here and feel like they got scammed...like school is a scam and this year I really see how UMES is trying to rob you....I hear so many complaints about that...I don't think it should feel like that my senior year of college...just adding up more and more fees...I feel like UMES needs to go back to the more welcoming feel that it had when I was a freshman like a big family rather than a government agency – Senior Female*

*Freshman year I thought it was a lot better but as time went on and all of these experiences I've been through here...I've had very negative experiences since I've been here so that has made me like not want to come out at all....this has just been the worst experience ever and I never want to come back...it was just one thing after another and it was just very frustrating so that what has withdrawn me from the school...I just want to get out of here. – Senior Female*

*The whole school needs to be rebranded in general. I think we should be able to compete with the top HBCUs and really the top schools in general....there should be no way that somebody say I go to UMES....and they ask is that an HBCU...I say yes and they've never heard of it. Everybody knows about every HBCU but they don't know about us....that needs to change. And we definitely need a better relationship with Princess Anne because the community that you're in can have impact on moral on campus that would improve everybody's experience here. – Sophomore Male*

### **Administrative Affairs**

*Dining definitely needs to be improved. They offer little variety and when it comes to health...I'm a vegetarian and I can't eat anything here but salads every day because I don't eat meat and they put in most of the meals and everything is so greasy in Hawks nest. Can we have some healthy options? – Senior Female*

## Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the experiences shared by students across the focus groups, there were positive and negative interactions students have had at UMES. There are students who have truly enjoyed their time at the institution and exude a sense of pride. However, it is vital to review the negative feedback given by the students. The items addressed by the students would not require major adjustments to make to the campus units, while others items would warrant greater focus. Below are recommendations being made to the university in order to enhance its service to students and ultimately positively impact student retention:

- **Improve Campus Communication**-The lack of communication on some matters within the university creates frustration and confusion for the students. When this frustration is magnified, students may begin to consider leaving the university. This communication gap is not focused in one area, but is consistent across campus. Ways to minimize communication gap:
  - Monthly School/Departmental Town Hall Meetings- these meetings will allow for deans and chairs to update their students on any programmatic changes and to receive feedback from students.
  - Hawk Social App- using various means of communication in addition to email to communicate information to students regarding events, important notices, etc. Students are connected to their phones, so the university should consider connecting with them in that way.
- **Enhance New Student Transition/Acclimation**- Aiding students in becoming acclimated to campus is essential to them building connections and creating a great sense of pride and appreciation for the institution. It is essential to use as many avenues as possible to increase student engagement from point of entry.
  - Increase engagement in university new student events- It is important that faculty, staff, and administration are setting a welcoming tone with first year students beginning with the various new student events.
    - E101- The interactions students have during this event establish their first impression about various offices on campus. It may be necessary to change the format of this program allowing for students to meet the dean of their school, have a more formalized process to meet their faculty advisor, and increase the participation of current students in the event so that they can connect with the new students.
    - New Student Orientation- New student orientation provides students with an opportunity to learn and develop positive campus relationships before classes begin. One event apart of the program that could create a more intimate opportunity for faculty and staff to connect would be the Pinning Ceremony. During this program first students receive their “M” pin and officially become Hawks. This program should be a

symbolic transition for, and one that truly welcomes them into the Hawk family by member of the campus community.

- Creating First Year Program Curriculum- Many institutions have established campus units which focus on a student's first year. These offices not only focus on the First Year Experience course, but it encompasses a full curriculum which is inclusive of curricular and co-curricular programs. This first year focus encourages major exploration, learning about getting involved on campus, understanding campus policies and procedures, various workshops, mentoring programs, etc. The goal of first year programs is helping students develop a connection with the university from the moment they arrive on campus.
- **Revamp Advising Structure**- Based on the current advising structure it appears that most faculty in departments serves as advisors. However, everyone does not have the skill set, passion, or desire to serve in this capacity and as a result it reflects in how they advise students. It is the recommendation to identify specific faculty/staff in academic departments to serve as advisors. If advisors are limited to certain faculty, this may require shifting in course loads or other department activities to ensure they would be able to meet the increase advising load. Whatever structure used, in depth training is necessary to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of individuals serving in the advising capacity.
- **Enhance campus/community relations**- It is essential that UMES works to improve the relationships with local businesses in order to create opportunities for students. Students introduced various examples regarding how the Salisbury community embraces SU students. The ability of these students to use their Gull card at several locations, as well as businesses creating space for students to study and hang out. The Salisbury community embraces SU students, and UMES students see this type of care and support important to their collegiate experience.
- **Improve Customer Service**- This was a common theme throughout the focus group. The university is taking strides to address customer service through the Hawkspatiality program and introduction of the ICARE Core Values. ICARE is definitely important; however, it cannot be just something the university should have flyers about or included apart of email signatures, but it must be intertwined in the day to day activities of campus units. In cases where this level of customer service is not upheld, then individuals and offices must be held accountable.
- **Increase UMES Outreach**- Along the lines of enhance campus community relations, it is important that UMES begins to consider the development of pipeline programs. Pipeline programs would provide opportunities for students to come to UMES for targeted summer programs while they are in middle and high school. These programs could have a STEAM, Arts, Athletics, or other focus. Students would have the ability to work with current students, faculty, and staff. These programs provide students an

early look at UMES, as well as it could create new streams of revenue to the institution.

### **Conclusion**

UMES is a great institution with a lot of potential for success. However, a key component to this success is the students. Without the students the institution would cease to exist. The conversations around retention do not need to remain as talk only, but action is necessary. Students want to share with the institution their concerns and issues, but not only that, many of them are committed to seeing it change and being involved in the process.

In order for this institution to move forward, it must be willing to do things differently. This may mean the need to restructure programs and offices, increasing the level of accountability for all university employees, and it is necessary for the institution to be honest about its areas of challenge and be willing to address them.

This report captured the experiences of 64 UMES students. There are many more students whose experiences may have been quite similar to the research participants. This report should not be reviewed as a completed piece, but as a fluent document that will evolve as more students are interviewed and additional experiences are collected. The intent of this report is to generate discussion and ignite action across campus units.

This year the university will celebrate 128 years of developing scholars, leaders, and global change agents. In order to continue this extensive legacy, the university has to be progressive, and open to adding/changing programs, policies, and practices while eliminating old ones. To be an institution embracing the concept of Eminence to Excellence, each employee must be committed to raising the bar in their performance and exude the university core values daily.