USMSM
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM of MARYLAND
AT SOUTHERN MARYLAND

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF ADVISORS MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 2026, AT 5:00 PM, USMSM

In Attendance: Joe Anderson, Dr. Evalyne Bryant-Ward, George Hurlburt, Kaprese James, Dr. Dale Nesbary, Dr. Maria Navarro, Dr. Rhonda Phillips, Dr. J. Scott Smith, Dr. Yolanda Wilson, Cindy Greb, Thomas Saul, and Dr. Sybol Anderson.

Not in Attendance: Bonnie Green, Julie Oberg, Gary Kessler, Senator Jack Bailey, Philip Melton, Dr. Theresa Shafer, Brad Stover (Office of the Attorney General), Glen Ives, Ellen Herbst (USM), Dr. Alison Wrynn (USM), and Anthony Foster (USM). (NOTE: Due to systemic technical difficulties, the Zoom medium was unavailable, leaving many remote members, who otherwise would have joined, out of the meeting.)

Call to Order: Chairman George Hurlburt welcomed and called the Board of Advisors (BoA) to order at 5:12 p.m. He noted a slim majority was present)

Approval of Minutes: Joe Anderson made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 10, 2026, meeting, seconded by Dr. J. Scott Smith. The motion carried.

Chair Remarks:

Mr. George Hurlburt announced that briefings were deliberately foreshortened to permit a robust discussion of the College of Southern Maryland (CSM) partnership proposal. He briefly traced the Board of Advisor's long journey towards stabilization, noting that a higher degree of stability is being achieved.

Executive Director's Report

Dr. Dale Nesbary expressed his gratitude to Dr. Yolanda Wilson and Dr. J. Scott Smith for their collaborative efforts over the past several months, particularly in successfully coordinating multiple letters of support for institutional initiatives. A primary focus remains the transition to a dedicated, full-time institutional leader, vital for the long-term health of USMSM. Drawing on a decade of experience with the Community College Board and leadership roles at Germantown Hospital, Dr. Nesbary emphasized that stable leadership is the cornerstone of institutional growth. While currently serving in an interim capacity after returning from retirement, Dr. Nesbary anticipates a full transition to the new leadership within the next several months.

Dr. Nesbary's primary focus centered on the Statewide Early College Initiative. In anticipation of this discussion, he provided the board with his formal testimony previously delivered to the

Maryland Legislature in Annapolis regarding the matter. He further discussed the necessity of engaging students through a robust K-20 educational pipeline long before they reach higher education. To ensure a steady enrollment of high-quality candidates, USMSM must focus on strategic early engagement, starting as early as the third grade. By introducing students to healthcare professionals such as nurses, doctors, and therapists at a young age, the institution can foster early career aspirations. Furthermore, successful enrollment at the university level is fundamentally dependent on the K-12 environment; therefore, they must ensure that primary and secondary students are meeting the benchmarks required for eventual success within the University System of Maryland. This requires ongoing coordination to ensure "workforce readiness," so that students possess the foundational skills required by university partners upon graduation.

Dr. Nesbary provided a historical overview of Early College dating back to 1958 to illustrate how current institutional issues have evolved over decades. Key takeaways from this perspective include a strong alignment between current priorities and the work being performed at the College of Southern Maryland (CSM). The primary drivers for the institution remain focused on workforce support by aligning programs with regional economic needs, enrollment growth through optimized community college-to-university transitions, and overall institutional success to maintain Southern Maryland's competitive standing in the state's education landscape. Dr. Nesbary concluded by praising the current momentum of the Board and staff, noting that these long-standing initiatives are now seeing a higher level of execution and success due to the collective effort of the current leadership team.

MATRIX Laboratory Report

Dr. Jamison Watson reported the Matrix Lab continues to expand its research portfolio. The MATRIX Lab has a rigorous STEM grant to promote Science and Technology and a Lockheed Martin grant for autonomous refueling window definition. The lab has also successfully diversified beyond traditional defense applications into the medical and environmental sectors. Significant new milestones include a National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant for the development of ingestible capsules, which provides valuable hands-on research opportunities for students, and a partnership with the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory for autonomous biofouling observation and inspection. This collaboration focuses on underwater autonomous systems and environmental monitoring, providing critical data for the broader Marine Sciences field.

To support the regional autonomous systems workforce, the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) Clark School of Engineering (CSE) is systematically building a robust academic ecosystem in Southern Maryland. Following the successful launch of the first graduate-level course in Fall 2025, which focuses on the Development Test and Evaluation, Verification and Validation (DTEVV) of autonomous systems, the CSE has received formal approval for a new Certificate in Autonomy Development. The local faculty remains on track to offer full on-site DTEVV Master's Degrees on-site by Spring 2029. The Southern Maryland Engineering Partnership is an ongoing collaboration between CSM, the CSE, and NAWCAD that creates a streamlined pipeline for students to transition from community college to high-level engineering roles within the Navy.

The STEM outreach initiatives are equally active, designed to spark interest in the sciences among middle and high school students through live demonstrations and creative problem-solving rotations. To date, the Matrix Lab have engaged over 350 students across nine regional schools. A key priority moving forward is to increase representation in Charles County to ensure equitable access to these programs across the tri-county area. Furthermore, the ongoing seminar series will feature high-profile speakers at UMCP, including a lecture by multi-agent robotics expert Dr. Peter Stone on April 9 and a keynote by the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Science and Technology on May 7.

The Matrix Lab is positioning itself as a premier resource for regional industry and small businesses through enhanced facility access and corporate partnerships. We are working closely with Huntington Ingalls Industries (HII) to align our research with large-scale naval manufacturing needs. To demonstrate our technical capabilities and support services for joint proposals, we will host an industry open house on July 15. This event, alongside our spring lecture series and faculty seminars, underscores our commitment to making the Matrix Lab a central hub for innovation and technical problem-solving in the Southern Maryland community.

Review CSM Partnership

Mr. George Hurlburt noted that the primary objective is to transition from theoretical discussions to actionable prioritization, specifically strengthening the strategic relationship between the College of Southern Maryland (CSM) and the University System of Maryland at Southern Maryland (USMSM). Central to this progress is the search for a new Executive Director, which remains on schedule. The candidate pool has been narrowed from 21 to 15 individuals representing several distinct leadership models, with final interviews slated for the end of May. The committee aims to have the new director on board by July or August 2026 to lead these critical transitions.

Board of Advisors Vice-Chair, Dr. Evalyne Bryant-Ward facilitated a review of the College of Southern Maryland's (CSM) prior presentation delivered April 2025, leading the board in a strategic discussion to refine and prioritize a collaborative action plan aimed at strengthening the partnership between USMSM and CSM.

Dr. Yolanda Wilson discussed the significant driver for this shift is the data surrounding the "transfer challenge." According to the transfer research provided by the Aspen Institute, of the 80% of community college students who express an interest in transferring to four-year institutions, approximately 30% successfully transfer, and a mere 16% ultimately complete a Bachelor's degree within 4-6 years. This is due in large part to the number of part-time students at community colleges. Time to degree completion is a major challenge. But the pipeline is also exacerbated by the lack of a statewide articulation agreement in Maryland. CSM must manage hundreds of individual agreements, leading to significant "credit loss" when students find that different universities require different prerequisites for the same major. CSM currently has over 300 separate articulation agreements. To support a seamless transition for transfer students,, new agreements will focus on including, where appropriate and agreed upon, guaranteed admission criteria, co-advising on pathways and reverse transfer provisions. Doing so will reduce

fragmentation which costs students both time and money, often deterring them from finishing their degrees.

However, a critical barrier remains in the reliability of course offerings at USMSM, often referred to as the "enrollment loop." Currently, university partners may list courses at USMSM, only to cancel them shortly before the semester begins due to low enrollment. This inconsistency erodes students' confidence in the site, leading them to consider online or out-of-state programs. To resolve this, the board seeks institutional commitment from four-year partners to run "foundational" cohorts regardless of initial enrollment numbers, thereby establishing USMSM as a reliable "landing pad" for local students.

Furthermore, CSM stresses the importance of students completing their associate's degree before transferring but continues to explore reverse transfer agreements if students transfer early. Also, advocating for more "credit-friendly" models, physical university partners must become as flexible as online institutions, like UMGC, to remain competitive and ensure that Associate of Applied Science credits are valued during the transfer process.

Dr. Wilson also stated addressing accessibility and logistics is essential for long-term success. While CSM has launched the "CSM Connector" bus to bridge its own campuses, USMSM still faces challenges due to its distance from main public transportation routes. When combined with unreliable schedules, the physical campus becomes a difficult choice for working students.

Discussion:

The limited number of Board of Advisors participants present applauded the Chancellor's and the across-the-board USM-level commitment to RHEC success, but lamented the inconsistent response from the partner Universities. They noted, however, the successes achieved via the UCMP CSE and the increasing prowess of the well-run MATRIX Laboratory and its growing academic influence. To some, this represents a working model of achievement required in other regionally relevant academic disciplines.

Based upon CSM graduation demographics, Dr, Navarro pointed out that the field of possibilities could be narrowed and can then govern the way forward without specifying further regional needs. This, of course, would be tempered by avoiding challenges to strengths already resident at St. Mary's College.

Dr. J. Scott Smith recommended leveraging an established, well-performing Mechanical (and electrical) Engineering program as a blueprint for future development. He also noted that many other regional programs have dual-enrollment potential, as evidenced by the blueprint funding going to regional school districts for Community College engagement across the curricula. He emphasized there was money on the table.

This discussion led to the conclusion that the best advice may be to use the CSM graduate demographics as they evolve, through enhanced and sharply focused articulation agreements, as

leading indicators of need, while engaging in initiatives that are already funded or have already demonstrated paths to success at USMSM. This notion extends to unique research initiatives aimed at attracting educators from afar.

All this stated, the members present were of a singular mind that these objectives could not even be considered without additional USMSM staffing, enabled by additional monetary investment in the still-fledgling RHEC.

With this, the meeting was adjourned.

The **next BOA Meeting** will be on August 11, 2026, as an all-day Impact Session to consider how the regional RHEC serves the entire region. The session may include a very brief business meeting.