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Facing the Future Together

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“Rather than jumping over someone to get what you want, consider reaching out your hand and taking the leap side by side, because life is better when we leap together.” Kermit the Frog’s message to University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) graduates in May could not have been more timely, not just for grads getting ready to leap into society, but also for their universities, which face an unprecedented array of challenges. Research, diversity and inclusion, international students, student finance — all now face the prospect of dramatic change under federal government policy.

Six months ago, everything was coming up roses for our universities at College Park and in Baltimore. “Our university gives us so many reasons to be proud,” wrote UMCP President Darryll J. Pines, PhD, MS. “Internationally ranked academic programs. Amazing artists and groundbreaking researchers. Award-winning faculty. Extraordinary and caring staff. Together, we are channeling our collective excellence to take on the grand challenges of our time.”

Even in light of the many challenges imposed by the federal government over the last several months, that’s all still happening, and in a big way. Topping the list at Maryland’s flagship university right now are two very big ideas that are increasingly connected: quantum computing and artificial intelligence (AI).

Just over a year ago, UMCP launched the Artificial Intelligence Interdisciplinary Institute at Maryland (AIM), offering teaching, learning, and innovation opportunities, building on over 100 faculty members who teach AI. At a recent meeting, Pines told Lt. Gov. Aruna Miller and leaders from chip maker NVIDIA, when it comes to AI, he’s “all in.”

And then there’s quantum. We’re not talking about Planck’s Constant or Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle. That’s quantum *mechanics* and *soooo* last century. No, today’s quantum is being called a seismic shift in computing. Where our computers today use electrical signals to create “ones” and “zeros” to represent data, quantum computing uses quantum bits, subatomic particles that exhibit very peculiar particle and wave characteristics. As a result, quantum computing might be able to tackle far more complex problems, like modeling complex biochemical reactions, and revolutionize everything from meteorology to metals science.

In April, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore and leaders from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency joined Pines to create the Capital Quantum Benchmarking Hub, a cooperative effort dedicated to testing and evaluating quantum computing prototypes and systems for national security and commercial applications, based in College Park.

There also are big collaborations taking place between the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) and UMCP. Many, but not all, are part of the [University of Maryland Strategic Partnership: MPowering the State \(MPower\)](#). MPower’s founding idea is for researchers from different disciplines at UMB and UMCP to link up and collaborate to tackle challenges neither one could do alone.

And of course, for the last several years, the two universities have even coordinated and reported research activities as one. Together, the University of Maryland now ranks 18th among all U.S. institutions in research expenditures and 11th among public institutions. The last report, for Fiscal Year 2023, shows \$1.4 billion in research spending, an increase of \$157 million from the previous year.

But this year is different and difficult on several fronts.

Starting with research, dozens of grants at both institutions have been cut, most ostensibly for failing to meet changing presidential administration priorities or because the grants are related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts. Federal grant-making agencies also have said that they're cutting reimbursement for facilities and administration costs — also called indirect costs — by more than two-thirds from currently negotiated rates. At the same time, approvals for new grants and extensions for ongoing projects have slowed to a trickle.

Both universities have made great strides in recent years addressing disparities in representation and opportunities and engendering full engagement and participation in our communities. But some of those efforts must now be re-examined in light of threats that universities may be engaged in “unlawful DEI.”

The underlying legal threat — violations of Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act —also has been used to cancel hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding, most famously at Columbia and Harvard universities over failure to protect Jewish students from antisemitism on campus. This month, the administration also used accusations of civil rights violations at Columbia to threaten that university's accreditation.

Another common concern is the status of international students. Baltimore and College Park both enjoy large numbers of students and scholars learning and working here on visas from all over the world. In May, the State Department announced it would aggressively revoke the visas of Chinese students. Two weeks ago, a trade deal with China seems to have reversed that. In the meantime, a travel ban has been imposed restricting travel from 19 countries, and reports say the government is considering banning travel from 36 more countries. At the very least, it's a nerve-wracking time to be an international student in the United States.

Domestic students are facing their own issues. The “One Big Beautiful” reconciliation bill now being modified by the Senate includes a cut of nearly \$350 billion to student finance. The bill would eliminate federal Direct Subsidized student loans and substantially cut the amount and availability of Pell Grants, which are received by almost 7 million low-income students. Another program under threat is the Grad PLUS loan program. Under the reconciliation bill, the \$19 billion support for graduate-level student loans would be phased out completely within five years.

It has not, however, all been doom and gloom. Court challenges have put the brakes, for now, on many of the suddenly imposed cuts. For example, this month a federal judge ordered the restoration of some 800 canceled grants. Less than a week after the Department of Defense announced it would cap indirect costs at 15 percent, another federal judge issued a temporary restraining order. Judges also have struck down similar caps at the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy, voided some grant terminations, ordered the release of pro-Palestinian student protestor Mahmoud Khalil, and reversed a ban on international students enrolling at Harvard.

There are hundreds more legal challenges awaiting decisions, including Harvard's lawsuit to reclaim some \$2 billion in federal funds. Both UMB and UMCP joined 16 other universities this month in an amicus brief to that suit.

The leaders of those two universities, UMB President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, and Pines, discussed the issues facing higher education today and their own brand of collaboration on the June 26 edition of “Virtual Face to Face.” Watch their discussion and their answers to attendees' questions in the video at the top of this page.