



UMB News

Moving Beyond the Pandemic to Innovation and Discovery

May 20, 2022 | By [Mary Therese Phelan](#)

Harnessing lessons learned during the pandemic. Maximizing demonstrated resiliency. Expanding the capacity for pivoting and innovation. Continuing to align with [the University of Maryland, Baltimore's \(UMB\)](#) mission of improving the human condition. All are areas of focus as the [University of Maryland School of Nursing \(UMSON\)](#) celebrates the past year and looks forward to the year ahead, said **Jane M. Kirschling, PhD, RN, FAAN**, the Bill and Joanne Conway Dean of the School of Nursing, as she delivered her 2022 State of the School address in Baltimore on April 28.



Speaking to an audience of UMB leadership; UMSON faculty, staff, and students; and invited guests, Kirschling outlined highlights in the areas of education, faculty research and scholarship, collaboration, and community engagement.

She noted that in 2021, UMB began work on a new strategic plan that will be in place until June 30, 2026. This new UMB plan, completed and released in late 2021, informs and guides the individual strategic plans developed by each of the seven schools and the major administrative units of the University.

"This planning process is a reminder of the ways in which we are *one* University — and how the mission, vision, and goals that we share as a University inform and guide our work as the School of Nursing," she said. "As I prepared for this presentation and thought about the content of the videos that you will see during the course of my remarks, I was struck once again by how much our work as a School reflects the overarching mission of our University — *to improve the human condition and serve the public good of Maryland and society at large through education, research, clinical care, and service*. As you listen today, I am sure you will have a strong sense of how our shared purpose and commitment, and the core values that we hold in common, shape our individual and collective efforts."

Kirschling's theme for last year's virtual State of the School was "breaking new ground for a new way forward," considering the many ways in which the pandemic created a new landscape for learning and presented a plethora of challenges for the school's faculty, staff, and students.

Students follow along in the program as they listen to Dean Jane M. Kirschling deliver her "State of the School" address.

"This year, as we step beyond the pandemic, we are harnessing what we learned, the resiliency that we demonstrated, and our amazing capacity for pivoting and innovating — and we are shaping it into that new way forward," Kirschling said.

For his year's theme, Kirschling chose Innovation and Discovery, one set of [UMB's new core values](#), "and it is the underpinning of all that we do, whether in teaching, in research and scholarship, in practice, or in service."

Some people may be surprised by one of the critical areas that UMSON faculty are being challenged to invent new ways of doing things, she added.

"It is in teaching and learning," Kirschling said. "We have emerged from a pandemic that demanded regular and rapid changes in order to keep teaching and learning on track as we vacated our classrooms. We were fortunate to have faculty who were well versed in teaching online or in virtual environments and to have a strong infrastructure in learning technologies."

Such skills and abilities are increasingly important as the School's student population continues to change.

"We are experiencing the challenge of a new generation of students — the much-discussed Gen Z," Kirschling said. Born between 1997 and 2012, the Gen Z cohort is predominant among the School's entry-into-practice students, which is significant given that entry-into-practice students constitute 45% of UMSON's total student population of over 2,100.

Gen Z students bring different expectations and different preferred ways of learning, particularly given their lifelong exposure to technology; they have been shaped by smartphones and social media, she said, adding that Gen Z students require different teaching techniques to help them learn effectively.

"The pandemic gave us a crash course in supporting these students in their learning; however, the pipeline of Gen Z is long, and our teaching will need to continue to evolve," Kirschling said.

UMSON's expertise in clinical simulation was a significant strategic strength during the pandemic. Clinical simulation, including that based on standardized patients, allows students to practice skills and complex procedures in a safe environment and to engage in situations that they might never have the opportunity to experience during a clinical rotation. During the pandemic, UMSON increased its use of simulation and was able to replace in-person clinical activities with new methods of simulating nursing scenarios through virtual patient encounters.

"As we look ahead to continued statewide competition for clinical sites, the innovative approaches tested during the pandemic coupled with our outstanding Standardized Patient Program will help us continue to develop high-quality clinical experiences," Kirschling said.

New thinking about teaching and learning is also needed as UMSON implements the curricular changes required under the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's new *The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education* for nursing education. These are national standards that define what constitutes preparation to be a nurse and, in turn, form the basis for assessing nursing students for licensure.

The new standards shift the focus from what one knows to what one is able to do with what one knows, Kirschling said.

"It means that we will be graduating students who require enhanced critical-thinking, decision-making, and leadership skills. It also requires greater curricular focus on issues such as the social determinants of health, population health, and health equity," she said.

Kirschling also outlined initiatives UMSON has undertaken to address and improve issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, creating new and innovative models for student learning in the clinical environment, and the School's role in developing Maryland's nursing workforce.

Finally, the dean spoke about continuing the School's rich legacy of research and developing nurse researchers. UMSON's PhD program launched in 1979 and was one of only a few nursing PhD programs in the nation at that time. Over the past several years, the School has strengthened the diversity of its PhD pipeline and has seen a 37% growth in students in the entering cohorts from underrepresented populations. The PhD program is currently the most diverse R1 or R1-equivalent nursing PhD program in the United States, Kirschling said.

For FY 2021, the School of Nursing ranked No. 13 among public schools of nursing and No. 19 among all schools of nursing in terms of the aggregate dollar value of research awards from the National Institutes of Health.

“As we look ahead to another year and the early stages of our 2022 - 2026 strategic plan, we are indeed developing new initiatives that will ‘shape the profession of nursing and the health care environment by developing leaders in education, research, and practice,’” said Kirschling, citing UMSON’s mission. “As always, we are doing this in the context of our commitment to ‘improve the human condition and serve the public good.’ And you can be quite certain that our work will engage us all in ongoing innovation and discovery.”

For other highlights and the full UMSON State of the School address, watch the video above.

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