

Just yesterday, I was delighted to be a few miles south of USG in North Bethesda, as

And in the run-up to the election, TU was highlighted as a leader for engaged college students. With more than 85 percent of students registered to vote, Towson ranks among America's top colleges for civic participation.

The University of Baltimore (UBalt) also geared up for Election Day, with student leaders offering information, resources, and an Election Day Bash. UBalt is acclaimed for its voter engagement—recognized by *Washington Monthly*, by the All In Campus Democracy Challenge, and in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement.

UBalt has been riding a wave of international publicity, after its Innocence Project—led by defense attorney Erica Suter—secured the release of Adnan Syed, whose 1999 conviction was the subject of the Serial podcast. And, in fact, Mr. Syed's first public appearance following his release from prison was at UBalt, where he detailed the procedural history of his case for the university's Innocence Project students. Kurt, I'm so glad UBalt's pioneering work in criminal justice—and criminal justice reform—is being recognized.

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) is seeing its star rise on the national stage. Just last week, UMES became the first HBCU selected for the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Driving Change Initiative, intended to create culture change at research universities so that undergraduates from all backgrounds—particularly those historically excluded—excel in STEM. UMES is using the grant—\$2.5 million over five years—to create STEM STARS, an immersive living-learning community for students. This is a *very* big deal. Heidi, congratulations.

Next month, UMES will graduate its first class of physician assistants, helping fill primary care provider shortages across the country. And with UMES boasting its highest enrollment since 2015, bucking national trends, President Anderson has shared her insights about HBCU growth from the pages of *The Business Journals* to those of *Forbes* magazine.

University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) President Valerie Sheares Ashby has taken the spotlight as well. She was named the 2022 Technologist of the Year by *Women of Color* magazine. In an extensive interview with *Times Higher Education*, she eloquently made the case that research excellence cannot exist without research inclusion. President Ashby was one of three women profiled by the *Baltimore Sun* in a piece on shattering the glass ceiling. And earlier this month, she took part in a *Washington Post Live* conversation about building a diverse STEM workforce.

Operationalizing this commitment to diversity, UMBC and the School of Medicine at UMB have won a five-

In between those two visits to FSU, I joined UMB as its BioPark broke ground on its newest building, 4MLK. The eight-story tower on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard is the first phase of a \$320 million project planned at the West Baltimore site. The building will provide critical wet lab space in the city's downtown—a shortage that's hampered research and economic growth. The UMB BioPark also celebrated the opening of the BD Innovation Center, a state-of-the-art facility giving students and researchers access to new lab space and advanced diagnostic tools. Bruce,

who think our excellence must come at a steep cost, I point you to the newly released *2022 Trends in College Pricing*, put out by the College Board. It breaks down cost of attendance, state by state.

For in-state students attending a Maryland public university, average tuition and fees come to \$10,560, just *below* the national average. This in-state cost puts Maryland right in the middle—25th most expensive—among all 50 states. That's far better than our neighbors—Pennsylvania, Virginia, Delaware—whose tuition and fees for resident students are much higher than Maryland's.

Here's an even better affordability metric: Just about half of all USM undergraduates complete their degree without any tuition debt whatsoever. That's because we've put a premium on financial aid. Together, our universities awarded \$180 million in aid last year to nearly 45,000 students with financial need. In less than a decade, the amount of university money distributed annually in aid has grown by 50 percent, as has the number of students receiving it. That trend line is by design. We've committed to growing need-based aid so that lower income students will be held harmless by tuition increases.

Our affordability is the result of relentless attention and effort from our leaders, across the System and the state. It is a pledge we've made to our students and to their families, and it's a pledge we've kept. That makes me very proud.

Now I'm going to cede the podium to Regent Bill Wood, who is—with Regent Hur—leading a Systemwide effort on prison education. He has a very brief update to deliver. Before he does, I want to note that last month, Regent Wood and I joined UBalt President Kurt Schmoke, together with his faculty and staff, at a reception honoring UBalt's Second Chance College Program, which provides a degree pathway to inmates at Jessup Correctional Institution and continues post-release. It was this program that stimulated my interest in doing *more* in the prison education space—doing more to replicate and scale UBalt's extraordinary success. And in fact, Bowie State and UMES are now part of the federal Second Chance program.

At last month's UBalt reception, we were joined by several students currently enrolled in the degree program and by its first-ever graduate, J12 792 re re4tpe College(ess3@11EF3 11.04 Tf1 0 0 1 402.31 292.61 T