

FY 2025 Operating Budget  
Testimony & Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis  
SU President Carolyn R. Lepre

I would like to thank ~~Chia Smith~~ and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss some of Salisbury University's

proud that we have been recognized as having the highest 4-year graduation rates for transfer students between a single university and community college pairing in the state of Maryland with our partner, Wor-Wic Community College, according to the US Department of Education, and in the top 25 of all university/community college pairings in the United States.

We recognize that student success in and out of the classroom is highly intertwined with mental well-being. We have made a significant investment in TimelyCare, a 24-7, tele-mental health service provider that is free for all SU students. We are

celebrated 10



Teacher of the Year semifinalists in the county area of Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset counties are SU alumni.

Of course, we educate more than outstanding teachers in Salisbury

## Comment Requested

The President should comment on, given the national trend of enrollment declines at regional institutions, how SU will be able to stabilize and grow enrollment.

In the face of a national trend of declining enrollments, Salisbury University is actively leveraging the unique opportunities within our region to not only stabilize but also foster growth in enrollment. Currently, we are introducing four innovative programs designed to meet workforce needs and student demand: Bachelor's degrees in Coastal Engineering, Geotechnical Engineering, and Music Therapy and a Master's degree in Public Communication. Additionally, we are continuously evaluating possible new program ideas that are developed through ongoing discussions with local business owners and students, ensuring alignment with both the workforce needs of our community and the diverse interests of our student body.

In our commitment to reaching new and diverse populations of students, SU is reinforcing our mission of providing high-impact practices to all students. Starting in the upcoming fall semester, our Men's and Women's Golf teams will compete, broadening our university's appeal to a new population of student. Simultaneously, an SU Marching Band is in its early stages of development, promising an enriched campus experience. Furthermore, we are dedicated to improving student access to study abroad opportunities, with the goal of establishing ourselves as the public university in the State of Maryland with the highest percentage of students having at least one global experience before graduation.

We have new and aggressive recruitment strategies being utilized this spring, including dedicated VIP events for admitted students both on the Eastern Shore and in other parts of Maryland; faculty calling campaigns; and redesigned Open House events. As we look to the future, as part of our Blackwell Hall renovation, begun this January and scheduled for completion in Fall 2026, we will have all

new and carefully designed admissions auditoriums and spaces will show off Salisbury University and our unique educational experience.

New students are only part of the enrollment picture. We are also spending time and resources on retention efforts, as we aspire to a goal of improving our retention levels from our current 80% to 85%. To that end, we are launching new campaigns, including faculty doing systematic individual outreach to at-risk

The President should comment on why expenditures on need-based aid have declined over the past five years.

Salisbury University's need-based aid is tied to the percentage of remaining need after merit. As we have increased merit awards to remain competitive in a challenging enrollment landscape, students' remaining need has decreased and as a result, the overall amount of need-based aid has declined since 2017.

This does not mean that there is less need. In fact, our increase in total awarded aid demonstrates that the need is increasing. What it does reinforce is that we're recruiting students who have need but are also qualified for merit aid, a population that will continue to be in high demand from recruiters across a variety of institutions. What's even more impressive about these figures is that almost half of our most recent incoming class was comprised of first-generation students.

Salisbury University's first-year students are known for their strong academic profile. Additionally, SU understands the competitive market where our traditional class hails from and the declining population from the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. Given the challenging enrollment environment and shrinking college-going population, the highest achieving students are in more demand in our post-pandemic environment.

As a result of these changes, we have been expanding the eligibility of merit-based aid criteria and the overall institutional amounts have been increasing. In spite of challenges due to the pandemic, the overall amount of institutional aid that SU has awarded students has increased even with declining enrollment.

As our enrollment rebounds from the decline attributed to the global pandemic, we have seen an increase in need-based aid in both 2022 and 2023, as well as with merit aid. We anticipate this period of enrollment growth to continue.

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to target programs and initiatives toward these students to improve their success at SU.

We also plan to offer gap funding to admitted ~~eligible~~ eligible students who have applied to be a part of our Fall 2024 class, should the amount they receive be less than what the average award was for students in our Fall 2023 class. We hope that these efforts relieve some stress from their college decision making process and for them to see that Salisbury University is committed to their success from the start.

Given the continuing shortfall in revenue, the President should comment on where SU will find the funds to make students whole.

While tuition and fee revenue are down, Salisbury University continues to be in a strong fiscal position. We have made internal reallocations to ensure that our students – particularly those with the greatest need as mentioned in the previous question – continue to receive the support that's necessary for them to succeed.





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I would like to thank Chia King and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss some of Salisbury University's remarkable achievements, along with the many opportunities that we foresee for our institution.

At SU, we work to make a better tomorrow for our students, employees, and community. Today's testimony will focus on initiatives that both support the goals of our great state and also the people of Salisbury University and the Eastern Shore

We exist with the dual purpose of ensuring student success to contribute to the well-being of the Eastern Shore and state. To this end, we recognize that setting students up for success includes keeping our students enrolled for timely graduation

I am proud to say that SU has the second highest six-year graduation rate among Masters-level institutions in the USM and the highest four-year graduation rate among Masters-level institutions in the USM. Additionally, SU increased our retention rates this year to 80%; up four percentage points from last year. We were one of the few in the USM who saw an increase in our retention rates. That means, when we bring students to Salisbury University, we keep them at Salisbury University!

When students transfer to SU, they are given the same hands-on attention that our first-time college students receive to support their success. At SU we graduate 66% of our Maryland Community College transfer students within four years – and are



celebrated 10 years of partnership with Chonnam National University in South Korea

Often our students strive to combine their research and professional interests with a study abroad experience. Mentored by our talented faculty, our students have received more than 100 national and international fellowships awarded over the last decade, including Boren, Rangel, and Goldwater Scholarships. Our greatest success during this period has been with the Fulbright Scholarship. For the past seven years, including this one, we have been named a Top Fulbright producer in the country, and had the distinction of being named number one producer of Fulbright Students at Master's level Institutions in the nation last year

Studies show college athletics to be another high impact practice that substantively increases student success and satisfaction. Approximately 10% of our student body is one of our outstanding DIII student athletes. Continuing our legacy of excellence, last spring we celebrated two national championships. Men's lacrosse earned their 13th NCAA DIII national championship in program history and cheerleading team earned their first national championship in program history. That said, whether they win or lose on the fields and courts, our student athletes win in the classroom. Our student athletes have higher cumulative GPAs and graduate at higher rates than the average SU student, illustrating how significant the athlete experience can be to overall collegiate success.

Since joining Salisbury University, we have learned that Sea Gulls pride themselves on our commitment to the greater Salisbury and Eastern Shore community. Just a few weeks ago SU earned the 2023 Division III NCAA Community Service Award, recognizing our success.



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