III. THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

A necessary part of any strategic planning effort is an assessment of the University's current strengths, the challenges we face, and the opportunities that are open before us.

Our Strengths

As we move into a new century and a new phase of strategic planning, we can boast a wealth of special advantages and strengths from which flow a new energy and confidence among faculty, staff, and students.

- We have a large and growing number of talented, creative, and entrepreneurial faculty who are acknowledged as leaders in their fields and recognized with national awards, prizes, and election to professional academies.

- The academic profile of our undergraduates, for both in-state and out-of-state students, has grown more impressive each year, and the University is now the school of choice for academically talented Maryland high school seniors.

- The University has a strong record of outstanding accomplishments in research across the entire range of disciplines, is increasingly recognized for programs that are characterized by innovation and creativity, and has established its role as a leading contributor to knowledge in the humanities and social sciences, in science, and in technology.

- Our established culture of effective teamwork and cross-disciplinary cooperation facilitates the development of the interdisciplinary programs and research efforts that will become increasingly important in the years to come.

- The University is located in an area of unparalleled intellectual resources for every area of study and in close proximity to the major government research laboratories, libraries and agencies, world-class museums, outstanding cultural opportunities, renowned think-tanks, and a thriving entrepreneurial business community.

- Our location next to the nation's capital and to the many international organizations, embassies, and outstanding statesmen and scholars it attracts is a major asset for the promotion of international programs and recruitment of international scholars and students.

- The University's location offers excellent opportunities for engagement with public policy issues, a major strength in many of our schools and colleges.
• The University enjoys a diversity in its student body that is unequaled among most public research universities and that has greatly enriched the University and added to its excellence. At present, 33% of our undergraduates are students of color, and among all non-Historically Black Institutions, we rank among the top five in the number of baccalaureate and doctoral degrees awarded to African-Americans.

• Reflecting the strength of our faculty, staff, and students, the University is increasingly ranked among the leading public research universities in surveys of national excellence.

• We have achieved national recognition for our outstanding and growing number of innovative and challenging undergraduate programs, including the University Honors program, the College Park Scholars living-learning program, and the special focus programs Gemstone and Civicus.

• The University has a long and valued history of shared governance that remains strong and enjoys widespread support from the campus leadership. This principle pervades the decision-making process of all University policies.

• We have been designated by the State as the Flagship University of the University System of Maryland, named the number one priority for funding, and granted new levels of autonomy in our management.

• The University is a driving force in the State's economy through entrepreneurial incubator programs, partnerships with industry and government agencies that attract large amounts of funds to the State, and its contribution to the educated labor force required in an information-based economy.

• The University has a long tradition of research in environmental and agricultural sciences that directly impacts the well-being of citizens by promoting the best use and conservation of natural resources and the improvement of land and water-based industries in the State, and the services of Maryland Cooperative Extension are a well-established resource throughout the State.

• Our many outstanding alumni and loyal friends are increasingly active partners in our efforts to achieve excellence, and the impact of their support is growing steadily.

• Confidence, energy, and optimism are on the rise throughout the University community, and a strong and compelling momentum is driving us to higher levels of excellence.

Our Challenges

The University has advanced rapidly even during times of restricted resources. However, as these resources were focused on keeping and recruiting outstanding faculty and building innovative educational programs, the infrastructure, both physical and fiscal, was often neglected. Catching up and
keeping up in these infrastructure areas is a primary challenge. In the process of developing our physical infrastructure and facilities, reconciling our competing values related to land-use planning will also be a challenge. We need to improve facilities, secure the necessary external funding for endowed chairs, scholarships, and fellowships, and bring all levels of University activity to the same standard of high quality performance. Being able to follow through fully on our commitment to excellence is a second challenge, and creating the climate for continuing external support is another. Finally, we need to make better use of our network of alumni to champion the University's causes. In this section we identify key areas of special vulnerability where success is essential to achieving our goals and vigorous and concerted efforts are necessary.

- The University requires significant new space to meet the needs of our growing research enterprise and the requirements of our innovative educational programs.

- We need to increase efforts to renovate many of our older buildings and to equip and support a larger number of our classrooms for the technology required by modern instructional methods.

- Compensation packages for faculty and staff need to be more competitive to help us continue to attract and retain the most talented employees, and the University needs to increase the number of endowed faculty positions to support our recruiting and retention efforts.

- We need to raise the levels of assistantship and fellowship support available for graduate students and explore new ways to compete successfully to build a graduate student body characterized by talent, motivation, and diversity.

- Many departments need larger operating budgets so they can maintain the necessary infrastructure to support their burgeoning research programs and support educational programs of the highest quality.

- The University must continue to support the libraries' initiatives to keep pace with the increases in materials costs and to provide complete electronic access to materials as available.

- We need to deliver on our promises of a uniformly high quality undergraduate education to an increasingly talented student body, increase our efforts to improve the retention rates of our undergraduates, and provide sufficient financial support where needed for undergraduates to meet their educational and living expenses.

- The University has a large and growing number of outstanding academic programs, and we must work to spread this level of quality across all disciplines while continuing to increase the level of quality and faculty productivity in every program.

- In the face of legal challenges to traditional affirmative action programs and recent declines in the numbers of students and faculty of color, the University needs to seek new ways to maintain
and increase the diversity among its faculty, staff, and students that it counts as one of its strengths.

- We must accelerate our efforts to redesign the bureaucratic administrative systems and processes so that they facilitate the implementation of innovative and forward-thinking educational activities and programs.

- The University must seek to create a larger, more widespread body of alumni and friends to whom it can regularly look for allegiance and moral and financial support.

- In cooperation with the College Park city government and business community, the University must support efforts to increase local amenities such as restaurants, retail shops, attractive gathering places and neighborhoods, and to promote the special ambiance that is usually found in a college community.

- To remain a priority in higher education among the State's political leadership, we need to continue to fulfill our promise as a major contributor to the State's economic, intellectual, and cultural life and communicate effectively to the administration and legislative leaders our importance to the State as the flagship institution.

**Our Opportunities**

This area of the nation is fast becoming a leading center for the new knowledge and information economy, and the University is ideally positioned to become a major partner in its development. Our faculty can support new efforts with their expertise; we can provide the region with the educated labor force necessary for the new globalized economy; we can promote technology transfer and support start-up businesses and foster and participate in an entrepreneurial culture. Given the advantages of our location and special strengths, a wide range of opportunities exist that the University can seize to move to a new level of accomplishments.

The University can expand its role as a social and cultural force. Our strengths in the social sciences and public policy areas address issues that are of increasing importance to government agencies and other groups dealing with the problems society faces today and planning for the challenges of the future. Our faculty are leaders in the interpretation of history and culture, and we are poised to become a model center for the merging of academic preparation and community involvement in the creative and performing arts.

- As the prominent research enterprises in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area seek ways to pool resources, expand their expertise and maximize their productivity, the time is ripe for the University to enter into an increasing number of mutually rewarding partnerships with federal laboratories, corporations and other research institutions.
The growing potential of this area as a leading Internet and biotechnology corridor provides many new possibilities for cooperation between the University and commercial ventures in areas that are at the forefront of research, and opens unparalleled opportunities for the University to expand and enhance its bioscience programs.

Our traditional strengths and growing accomplishments in computational, mathematical, and physical sciences and engineering provide the basis for exploiting major federal funding and corporate relationships in these areas.

The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center creates the opportunity to invigorate the creative and performing arts at the University and offer new opportunities for cultural interaction and enrichment throughout the greater community.

The diverse make-up of our nearby communities, which range from urban to rural, provides a unique laboratory for the comprehensive study of cultural, social, economic, and political structures, while the diversity of the populations in the region offers a large pool of talented and diverse students and employees from which we can recruit.

The organization of K-12 education in the State, divided as it is into a small number of jurisdictions with a strong central authority, provides the potential for a very significant statewide impact of our engagement in this area.

Our significant emphasis on and accomplishments in research in the social and political sciences position us well to exploit the increasing opportunities for external engagement and an anticipated large increase in the funding base in these areas.

The State's reaffirmation of its commitment to a flagship university that is counted among the nation's best has resulted in financial support that opens new opportunities for achieving excellence across a broad spectrum of disciplines.

The growing number of international activities and outstanding international students and scholars at the University provides a foundation for a new level of international engagement that takes full advantage of our special location.

Given our rising reputation, the University has the opportunity to recruit a student body whose diversity and excellence will create an intellectual climate equal to that of the very best universities.

The increasing interest on the part of many alumni and friends in the University's advancement offers a major opportunity for new partnerships with these important members of the University family that can sustain us for years to come.