



164 of 250 DOCUMENTS

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**HEADLINE:** Freeman Hrabowski: Marylander of Year; UMBC president: Builder of a world- class research university with several special missions.

**BODY:**

A VISITOR returning to the University of Maryland, Baltimore County after a few years' absence would be amazed.

The Catonsville campus is crowded within its loop road. That thoroughfare is down to one lane, the other filled with diagonal parking. This place is busy.

Freeman A. Hrabowski III, president of UMBC since 1993 (after nine months as acting president), is The Sun's Marylander of the Year for his stewardship of this 36-year-old institution and his contributions to Maryland in that role.

Mr. Hrabowski uses his energy and missionary zeal to champion two trends that have transformed UMBC.

On one of these he is a national authority. That is recruiting and nurturing excellence in mathematics and science among African- American men.

The second is public university-private industry partnerships to spur technology, job opportunities and regional development.

UMBC was established in 1966 as a Baltimore-area branch with the ambition of becoming a second flagship of the University of Maryland. It was kept out of the city in part by jealous institutions, and restricted in program to protect the primacy of College Park. But it was given land for growth.

All that is water over the dam. UMBC is there, mature and comfortable in location and role. It has a broad area in which to conduct research and award doctorates, primarily the biological sciences, while barred from others. So with more than 10,000 students and 500 acres, it both is and is not comparable to other primarily undergraduate campuses of the University System of Maryland that are not College Park.

A native of Birmingham, Ala., Freeman Hrabowski graduated from Hampton Institute in Virginia at 19 and earned a doctorate from the University of Illinois five years later. He made his mark in Maryland for 10 years as professor, dean and vice president at Coppin State College.

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He was recruited to UMBC as vice provost in 1987 by the late Michael K. Hooker, who became his mentor. His mission was to start the Meyerhoff Scholars program, using a \$2 million gift from Robert and Jane Meyerhoff to identify, recruit and train future African-American scientists, engineers and mathematicians.

The need was national, to recruit this important segment of the U.S. population into the work force charged with inventing the future. It meant refuting the stereotype that African-American males are, on average, indifferent scholars and worse mathematicians. It filled an institutional need of UMBC, which had been seen as unwelcoming to blacks in nearby West Baltimore.

The Meyerhoff program succeeded from the get-go and stood all that on its head. African-American males on campus were soon stereotyped as high achievers. More African-Americans were attracted. The program was amended, upon accepting National Science Foundation money, to seek women scholars, too. It still required UMBC to beat out Ivy League rivals for the favor of the most highly sought high school seniors, which it routinely does.

Thanks to Dr. Hrabowski's incredible personal efforts -- not slackened on becoming university president -- this has succeeded year after year. The program has more than 400 graduates, almost all of whom went on to graduate programs at the most selective universities. UMBC is by most indices the campus in the University System of Maryland that comes closest to resembling the state's racial composition.

"Beating the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African American Males," a book by Mr. Hrabowski and two social scientists, Kenneth I. Maton and Geoffrey L. Greif, published by the Oxford University Press last year, examines what helped 60 Meyerhoff scholars to succeed. Other studies of African-American males dwell on what went wrong; this one concentrated on what went right. A companion book on the record of young women Meyerhoff Scholars is in the works.

The price of success was emulation. The University of Maryland, College Park's Banneker Scholarship was challenged in a landmark lawsuit. The U.S. Supreme Court let stand a Circuit Court ruling against race-based favoritism by public universities. But the point was made. The Meyerhoff Scholars criteria were broadened. Majority white candidates now share in it, though a large proportion of African-Americans continue to win the awards and enrich UMBC.

When Freeman Hrabowski became UMBC's president -- one of only a handful of blacks in the nation who run predominantly white research universities -- he took on larger concerns. He picked up the Hooker vision of research-driven high-tech development in the Baltimore-Washington corridor. Research and training contracts with industry exceed \$50 million. The university bought the 30-acre Lockheed-Martin research facility overlooking Interstate 95. It is now a humming technology center and incubator for scientific companies.

It is also a natural precursor to the fuller vision, using 41 vacant acres at the southern approach to the campus as a research park for industry. The first prospective tenant was signed and the park about to materialize when a Maryland Court of Appeals ruling in October stalled it again. The land was always intended for university purposes. A speedy resolution is in the best interest of the state.

Beyond that, UMBC has succeeded in creating all of the intellectual liveliness one expects of a university. Classics and theater are notable. While avoiding football, it fielded a distinguished men's soccer team last season. Above all, it is the nation's powerhouse in college chess, Pan-American champions in two years out of three, recruiting the best young players from Sri Lanka, Kazakstan, Belarus and the streets of New York.

The conductor of this symphony, the coach of this team, is the restless university president maintaining a frenetic pace as he approaches 50. The university has raised some \$40 million of its five-year \$50 million goal. The endowment grew from \$2 million to \$12.6 million in five years. The 1,423 freshmen constitute the strongest entering class and one of the biggest in institution history. Increasingly, national magazines and other raters notice UMBC as anything from a best buy to a powerhouse.

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Thanks in large measure to Freeman Hrabowski, UMBC is helping spark the regeneration of the Baltimore-Washington corridor by becoming a true university as well as a cauldron of technology. This it does by being true to itself, not seeking to become another College Park or MIT, but trying to be the best UMBC it can possibly be.

**GRAPHIC:** ILLUSTRATION(S) Sketch of Freeman Hrabowski

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