



The Universities
AT SHADY GROVE

USG 2.0

DEEP DIVE FINDINGS

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
UNIVERSITIES AT SHADY GROVE**

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OVERVIEW OF THE USG DEEP DIVE

As a part of USG's Strategic Planning process, an environmental scan was conducted to draw insights from three of USG's most important stakeholder groups: USG staff, students enrolled at USG, faculty members of USG-based academic programs. The data was collected to provide the Strategic Planning Committee with a stakeholder snapshot of the current perceptions of USG and its overall purpose, the unique services that USG offers, and how USG should move into the future to inform the planning process. Members of the USG staff across all functional areas provided extensive answers to 10 questions ([see appendix](#)), while surveys were administered online in February 2021 to students and partner institution faculty ([see appendix](#)).

The entire USG staff participated in the deep dive exercise either individually or as a member of a team. The students and faculty surveys were issued in Spring 2021. The key takeaways from each group as well as information on how these insights will be integrated into the strategic planning process (the strategic planning committee and the work groups that follow), are highlighted here. The survey data and the deep dive responses by the USG staff were incorporated into the Reflect, Reimagine and Rebuild Team Report ([see attached](#)) which captures lessons from the COVID-19 response. The items that each stakeholder group was asked to respond to can be found in the appendices.





USG STAFF DEEP DIVE INSIGHTS

Staff departments were asked ten questions, all of which can be found in [Appendix C](#), and their responses covered topics like the characteristics and needs of individual departments, who they serve and collaborate with, how data is utilized in the completion of tasks, what the USG brand is, and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from the Deep Dive were incorporated into the work of the [Reflect, Reimagine and Rebuild Team report](#). Several findings stand out:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are key to USG 2.0.
2. USG telework practices during COVID worked successfully and the opportunity to telework should continue.
3. USG staff positions and salaries need to be reclassified and realigned with growing responsibilities and work volume based on the reorganization of the strategic plan.
4. USG needs to become data-driven throughout the organization.
5. USG should collaborate with academic partners to incorporate career readiness into the student experience at USG.
6. USG needs to better articulate its vision and mission, and consequently its brand.
7. **USG needs to take the lead in redefining partnership opportunities with our USM academic partners as well as our Community College partners including Montgomery College, Frederick Community College, and other institutions.**

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are key to USG 2.0: Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) measures were noted throughout the staff deep dive comments. Staff noted that diverse hiring practices are key to bringing different lived experiences to the workplace and to serving the diverse student population at USG. Additionally, staff noted that DEI initiatives need to be at the core of USG's work, as USG continues to grow more diverse while serving the local student population.

Telework: A majority of staff members operated virtually for a significant portion of the past 16 months. The overwhelming sentiment on the topic is that some form of telework should remain commonplace, and at the very least, flexible work arrangements should be considered across departments. Going forward, the opportunity to telework and leverage its benefits should continue.



Staff responsibilities and increased workload: Hiring freezes and budget cuts have prevented USG to hire permanent replacements for staff members who leave. The workload for those who stay increases as they cover the additional work. Often the increased responsibilities are not accounted for in position descriptions or salary. USG needs a plan to reclassify positions and make appropriate salary adjustments that align with the strategic plan. The reorganization of USG staff is deeply connected to the strategic plan and developing fiscal model, as well as improved efficiencies in policies and procedures particularly in the USG partnership with College Park.

Data-driven organization: After auditing the strategic plans of USM partner institutions and of other institutions across the country, establishing a data-driven approach is one that many higher education institutions plan to adopt if they have not already, and it is an approach that many departments noted is a necessary one. Questions about the duplication of efforts by various departments and concerns about the cumbersome process that departments have to go through to obtain relevant data from across USG, let alone from campus partners, came up consistently in the deep dive data. As a tool to evaluate departmental progress, departments currently collect descriptive data like service usage, and it is important to consider how this information can be utilized in performance reviews to inform future work, for example. In terms of the student experience, programs like ACES and service centers currently collect information from students and academic partners, but how can that information be centralized in the case of collaborations? Several respondents cited the need for a centralized data platform to increase efficiency levels and set departments up well for future strategic collaborations. In terms of interactions with academic partners, several respondents directly serving students cited a desire for improved discussions and greater transparency on the part of partner institutions centered around data.

Career Readiness: Another important area and opportunity for USG is incorporating career readiness into the student experience at all levels and across all academic programs. USG needs to better articulate the value added of career readiness for student success, and collaborate with our academic partners to embed the program components across the student experience to meet the needs of the workforce.

USG Vision and Mission, and Brand: The deep dive data revealed scattered consensus in articulating USG's mission and vision, as well as its brand. Central to the work of the strategic planning process is the articulation of a shared vision across the USG team and all our stakeholders.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE MUST WORK TO FORM HEALTHY WORK/LIFE BOUNDARIES AND CREATE A CULTURE OF MEANINGFUL AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS THAT ARE IN LINE WITH AGREED UPON PRIORITIES.



From a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis perspective, the staff deep-dive revealed several valuable insights. In terms of strengths, USG's student-centered focus runs through every department, and it is something that was highlighted by students and program directors in their respective surveys as well. USG staff members are also extremely good at making the most of the resources provided to them, and departments have managed to remain fairly cohesive. However, that maximization of resources appears to be out of necessity: the biggest pair of weaknesses are understaffing and underfunding concerns, both of which indirectly impact the quality of services provided to students. The current inability to quickly analyze data and expand data collection needs is another weakness, as is the lack of professional development and advancement opportunities for staff members.

In terms of threats, the sentiment among several departments is that staff members are punching above their weight through completing tasks outside of their job descriptions, taking on more work than departments of their size can take, and there are widespread concerns of burnout. While this highlights the high-performance levels of USG staff members compared to similar departments at partner institutions, it is important to address burnout concerns and assist staff members. This could be done through opening CCC service offerings to staff members, offering sessions centered on adjusting to the new normal USG is entering or augmenting departments with more student workers.

The greatest opportunity that is highlighted in the Deep Dive data is defining a new, more vigorous and collaborative partnership between USG and its nine university partners, and between the USG pathway partners in Montgomery County: Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College, as well as with other community college partners such as Frederick Community College (FCC) and Howard Community College (HCC). Important discussions about establishing more pathways to meet the workforce demands of the region, and more directed pathway agreements can enhance USG's stance in the region.





STUDENT SURVEY INSIGHTS

Students enrolled at USG were asked eleven questions, all of which can be found in [Appendix A](#), and their responses reflected a wide range of perspectives about the USG student experience. Approximately 45% of respondents have attended USG for less than one year (i.e. they first enrolled in Spring 2020 or later), meaning that nearly one in every two respondents have experienced USG primarily amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. A further 19% have only attended USG for one year, meaning that 64% of respondents have spent the majority of their time at USG in a time of high uncertainty. This sharpens the significance of this deep dive in the context of informing the strategic planning process.

The USG student experience is characterized by several things: small class sizes, on-site services, proximity to home, and the faculty and staff that work there. These aspects were highlighted as the most rewarding parts of the USG experience, with the most common response (33% of respondents) highlighting the faculty and staff that students learn from and work with. With many attendees being non-traditional students (e.g. underrepresented minorities, first-generation college students, those working part-time or full-time, parents, etc.), the importance of the resources provided to them becomes more pronounced. This response serves as a vindication of the work that is currently being done and quantifies the return on investment that students make in their education. Additionally, approximately 83% of respondents have previously visited the USG campus while only one out of every two (52%) have made use of USG services before and/or during the pandemic.

“

WHETHER YOU'RE JUST OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL OR YOU'RE A SINGLE MOM RETURNING TO SCHOOL, USG FITS ALL LIFESTYLES.

”

The proximal nature of USG reflects the students that attend it, as the myriad experiences brought together here reflect the communities that surround USG. In this sense, the role that USG's standing in the community plays is significant, with 33% of respondents indicating that they heard about USG at their respective community colleges (mainly through Montgomery College and ACES). This exemplifies the richness of the MC-USG pipeline and the potential that lies in articulating strong partnerships with other local community colleges (e.g. FCC and PGCC). In a broader context, 36% of respondents indicated that the USG brand is seen as affordable, convenient, and a home for multiple institutions. It is seen as a place where non-traditional students are welcome and where opportunities are to be capitalized on for them. This infuses the diversity of experiences that students encounter in the classroom, and the intimacy of the small class sizes and faculty and staff along with the convenient location near many notable organizations representing the life sciences, health sciences, social sciences, IT, engineering, and more, and that present future career opportunities for students. The benefits of engaging in a community where students are exposed to others studying a variety of majors across the partner institutions are myriad and were also highlighted by respondents. Conversely, 16% could not pinpoint what USG's brand is, which points to the need for improved and consistent communication about this.

As noted above, 64% of respondents have spent the majority of their time at USG amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and with that comes its own set of challenges. Among the main issues are lack of connection, work/school/life balance, and troubles navigating degree requirements. However, these issues are nothing new; indeed, these concerns have been highlighted by students long before the pandemic and have likely only been exacerbated by the pandemic. The accessibility of resources for students with disabilities and lack of recognition for their accomplishments were also noted. With most having attended entirely remote classes over the past year, respondents believe that irrespective of USG's reopening timeline, there should continue to be a virtual option for student service delivery and expanded online course offerings to increase accessibility.

FACULTY SURVEY INSIGHTS

Faculty were asked five questions, all of which can be found in [Appendix B](#), and their responses highlighted the current state of program and service delivery at USG, as well as lessons for future program delivery borne out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Amongst these responses, two responses stood out as USG's biggest strengths: the fact that it is student-oriented (40%) and has great facilities and resources (45%). As noted in the student survey insights section, the foundations for success laid by the USG staff, particularly in the people-facing departments like CSEF, the CCC, the CISC, and MCAS, are to be celebrated and should be capitalized upon going forward.

“

**MAKE SURE THAT THE HOME CAMPUS KEEPS US
IN MIND WHEN MAKING MAJOR DECISIONS.**

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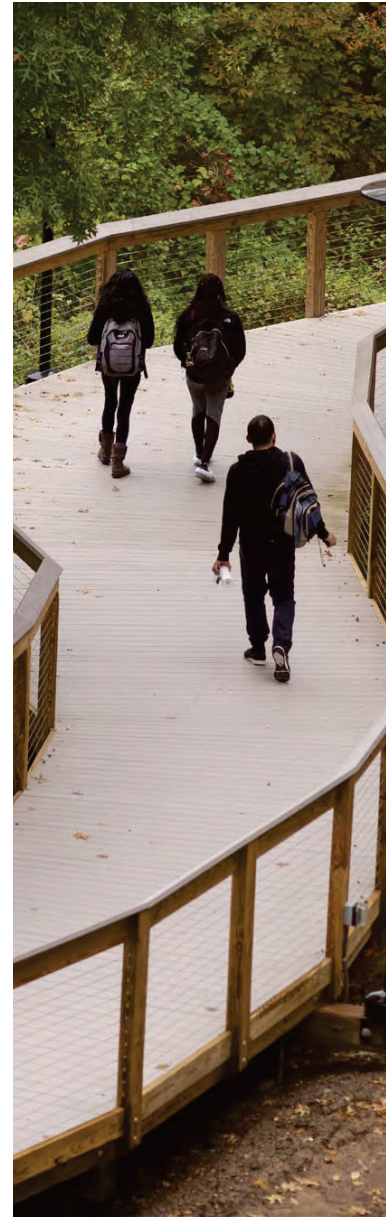
Conversely, the greatest challenges to successful program delivery at USG were consistent communication with USG, a stunted inter-institutional course sharing set-up, and a desire to see USG have a firm long-term strategy. In terms of consistent communication, some respondents indicated that there was a need for faculty, USG, and main campuses to get on the same page. Main campuses influence their USG-centered programs through resource allocation and curriculum development, and the failure of many main campuses to recognize the unique state of affairs at their USG-centered programs have massive ramifications for program success. Course sharing is another concept that was highlighted in terms of capitalizing on the collaborative nature of USG, and the interdisciplinary learning that course sharing offers was seen as something that should be expanded to further enrich the student experience. Wide-reaching opinions about the role USG currently plays and the role it should or could play in the future were also mentioned, which highlights the importance of a new and unified USG brand going forward. Integrating less of a bias towards STEM programming was also mentioned as a means to not alienate non-STEM programs offered at USG.

“ **WE CAN BE WAY MORE FLEXIBLE WHEN IT IS NEEDED. WE SHOULD BE WAY MORE PREPARED AND PAY ATTENTION TO THE SHIFTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.** ”

COVID-19 provided its own form of instruction, and in that sense, two key lessons came to light for respondents: be adaptable (noted by 67% of respondents) and be intentional (noted by 44% of respondents). The first lesson of adaptability came from a recognition of how even though teaching remotely came at faculty quickly, the ability to rapidly acquire new skills in course delivery will only benefit teaching in the future. The second lesson of intentionality is connected to adaptability in terms of posting class content in multiple formats, and it also includes a need to effectively connect with students, whether in an in-person, hybrid, or online manner. In terms of future service delivery, 46% indicated that at least some virtual programming and services should be maintained. Additionally, 27% noted that telework should be considered on a more long-term basis for professors when not needed on campus and that there should be more online offerings of course material that don't necessarily require classroom space.

NEXT STEPS FOR **THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

USG has been a successful Regional Higher Education Center and is at the forefront of innovative and transformative higher education through partnership in the University System of Maryland. As USG 2.0 moves forward, the essential insights gathered from the stakeholder groups represented here and across the data gathering and engagement efforts of the strategic planning process, will greatly inform how USG builds on the progress that has already been made. The Strategic Planning Committee, and subsequent work groups will draw upon these findings in forging the vision for USG 2.0 – a hub of innovation in the University System of Maryland, Montgomery County, and the State, to deliver the highly skilled professionals to meet the workforce demands of today and the future.



APPENDIX

APPENDIX A (STUDENT SURVEY ITEMS)

SURVEY ITEMS

1. What is your home institution?
2. What is your program?
3. How many years have you been at USG?
4. Have you ever visited the USG campus?
5. Have you ever used USG services before or during the COVID-19 pandemic?
6. How did you learn about USG?
7. What do you see as the USG brand?
8. What do you like best about your experience at USG?
9. What do you think makes USG unique?
10. In your experience, what are the greatest challenges for students at USG?
11. How do you feel the pandemic and switch to primarily remote instruction and services may change the way that you receive academic instruction and support services at USG post-pandemic?

APPENDIX B (FACULTY SURVEY ITEMS)

SURVEY ITEMS

1. What is your home institution?
2. In your experience, what do you view as USG's greatest strengths that facilitate strong program and service delivery?
3. What are the greatest challenges for program delivery at USG?
4. What could programs offered at USG take away as a lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What services/programs/etc. created as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic would you like to continue into the future?

APPENDIX C (STAFF DEEP DIVE ITEMS)

SURVEY ITEMS

1. What are the strengths of your unit? What are the weaknesses? What lessons or opportunities do current challenges present?
2. Who is your primary customer, or who do you serve? How does your team define success and how do you measure it?

APPENDIX

APPENDIX C (STAFF DEEP DIVE ITEMS) CONTINUED...

SURVEY ITEMS

3. How does your team collaborate? What is an example of a successful collaboration with your team?
4. How is data utilized to carry out the mission of your unit? What data is available and how is it used? What data should we be collecting, particularly post-pandemic? What are the challenges for securing the data that is needed?
5. How would you assess your funding, staff, and space needs? What resources are needed to do the work of your unit today? Funds, staff, space? Be specific.
6. Describe your relationship with USG's academic partners and USM. What roles and responsibilities does your unit have in service to our academic partners? What would it take to better coordinate with our academic partners, or integrate the academic partners with the work of your team?
7. Discuss your relationship with our educational pathway partners and what would it take to better coordinate with them?
8. What is needed and what are the opportunities to expand or create partnerships with USG's external stakeholders (feeder institutions, regional employers, community groups, etc.)?
9. Based on the perception and experience of your team, what is the USG Brand? Is it the right brand?
10. What are the lessons learned or key takeaways/ideas from responding to the pandemic? Please offer any ideas/opportunities to modify services in the future.

INSIGHTS, DETAILS AND ACTION ITEMS RELATED TO THE SEVEN TAKEAWAYS IN THE DEEP DIVE:

APPENDIX D (IMBUING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION THROUGHOUT USG 2.0)

The need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) measures were noted throughout the staff deep dive comments. One recommendation from the Deep Dive is to centrally fund and hire a leader for DEI work at USG, in order to focus on and imbue this work across the planning and implementation of USG 2.0.

Staff noted that diverse hiring practices are key to bringing different lived experiences to the workplace and to serving the diverse student population at USG. USG serves many non-traditional students: first-generation, working, those with families, and more. USG could work proportionately better to align staff demographics to the student population through a well-articulated plan. Just as important as representation, however, is a culture built on equity and inclusivity for all students, USG staff and university partner staff and faculty. Respondents noted that DEI initiatives need to be at the core of USG's work, as USG continues to grow more diverse while serving the local student population.

In the Deep Dive, some respondents highlighted a continuation of the social justice-facing events in order to represent the lived experiences of students, faculty, and staff; encouraging members of the USG staff to have those conversations would also help imbue DEI. Workplaces that effectively recognize and appreciate DEI are

APPENDIX

APPENDIX D (IMBUING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION THROUGHOUT USG 2.0) CONTINUED...

ones who think critically about the role they place in fostering and hindering its progress, and have difficult conversations in healthy ways. Continuing to be vocal about these topics is extremely important as USG seeks to scale, and as one staff member noted:

“ **IN ORDER TO SUPPORT OUR STAFF, USG MAY NEED TO TAKE A MORE EMPATHETIC APPROACH BY OFFERING GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN WORK ARRANGEMENTS, INCREASED COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY, FREQUENT CHECK-INS FROM SENIOR LEADERSHIP, MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT, ETC.** ”

Checking in on staff members more often can play a role in addressing issues of inclusion. This can be done using a more formal approach (e.g. encouraging staff to attend individual or group counseling through CCC, destigmatizing seeking help with tending to mental health, or senior leaders can hold “drop-in” hours for staff to encourage open discussions about work or personal struggles), or an informal approach (e.g. scheduling an off-site meeting or happy hour for staff connect). Even though USG teams and departments reported feeling very well connected, having workplace traditions (e.g. an icebreaker before meetings, themed “competitions” within and/or between departments, etc.) would also help enhance our efforts in the area of inclusion. Training leaders to understand and manage through the lens of diversity, equity and inclusion would also reduce the power distance between leaders and the staff they oversee.

From an equity perspective, encouraging staff to attend professional development workshops and seminars would highlight the importance of being life-long learners and reinforces USG’s commitment to providing its staff with the resources that they need to be successful now and in the future. Effectively advertising internal position openings to staff members also serves to increase advancement and promotion opportunities, particularly for employees from historically underrepresented populations. Making sure that internships, research (the American Institutes of Research, Pew Research Center, APA, Westat, Social and Scientific Systems, and more are all in Montgomery County and DC), community-based learning, and other related activities are accessible to all students serves to bridge the gap as well; stipends for internships provides greater opportunities for all students to participate in vital experiential learning.

APPENDIX E (IMPLEMENTING ENDURING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS)

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the need to re-evaluate what a normal day working at USG looks like sharpens. What does that mean for how USG should move forward?

The USG staff were very clear and poignant on their thoughts in the USG Deep Dive around flexible work arrangements and telework. Staff members said the following with regard to flexible work arrangements and telework:

- “One of the key takeaways in response to the pandemic is that the remote work model works.”

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APPENDIX E (IMPLEMENTING ENDURING FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS) CONTINUED...

- **“Social distancing guidelines due to the pandemic allowed us to understand the benefits of teleworking (when possible), rethinking the traditional ‘must be in the office to be working’ corporate business model that has been in place (and outdated) for many years.”**
- **“Teleworking and flex-scheduling could work to our advantage when it comes to office assignments and space crunches during times of growth.”**
- **“One specific idea would be to continue to deliver some events in a virtual format, in addition to those we do in person.”**

As noted above, the vast majority of faculty and staff have operated virtually, and the effects of virtual work include increased productivity, employee satisfaction and reduced carbon emissions. On that note, USG must take advantage and implement more enduring flexible work arrangements. This can be done through evaluating how departments operate and how much space they require on-campus (if any) and re-evaluating current telework policies.

Just as organizations across the world have been forced to take a closer look at employee well-being, USG must do the same. Burnout concerns are rife, and USG must plan for staff well-being in the strategic planning process.

APPENDIX F (RECLASSIFYING AND REALIGNING USG STAFF POSITIONS AND SALARIES)

“CHRONIC LEVELS OF UNDERSTAFFING WHICH ARE INEQUITABLE AND INADEQUATE TO FULFILL CENTER RESPONSIBILITIES, OPERATIONS, AND SERVICES”

The above sentiment is echoed by almost all of USG’s departments throughout the deep dive. USG staff have been operating at a very high level relative to the size of their respective departments for several years. However, ultimately, this level of work is not sustainable in the long-term. As one department noted, “...the current team has absorbed an enormous amount of workload” as members left. Another team noted “despite being short-staffed. I am proud to serve on a team that gets big (seemingly impossible) projects done as a unit.”

Additionally, turnover from prior years that has not led to the reclassification of staff positions has introduced role uncertainty amongst staff; this strategic planning process provides the perfect opportunity to re-evaluate exactly that. Staff noted the systemic nature of the problem throughout the Deep Dive. One department noted that “As budget challenges were encountered, positions lost in turnover were not approved for rehire and one-time funds in support of expanding services were eliminated.”

There is a need for USG to highlight the unique value that it adds to the University System of Maryland; USG can focus and reimagine the work that divisions and centers are doing to match the number of employees they have. This re-evaluation should also include a careful look at compensation structures, the current state of professional development opportunities (e.g. training sessions and workshops), and advancement opportunities. As noted in the Deep Dive, “data from our exit interviews show that lack of progression and compensation is one of the top reasons for leaving.” Effective job analysis and position description revamping goes hand in hand with ensuring that staff are paid appropriately given the work they do, ensuring that staff are paid appropriately for their work and the current market rate for similar positions.

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APPENDIX G (BECOMING A DATA-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION)

Becoming a data-driven organization is about more than collecting more data; indeed, many organizations actually collect too much data that is not relevant, or not utilized to move them forward. So how can USG make sure that the information they collect is integral to meeting strategic priorities, demonstrates the value add of USG innovations and services, and begins to reshape the way higher education measures impact?

Some staff noted the critical nature of data and becoming a data driven organization in the following quotes:

- **USG needs “enhanced technology to better collect, track and report dashboard metrics”**
- **USG at all levels needs “dedicated staff to conduct thorough and meaningful data analysis, assessment and reporting for both short- and long-term outcomes”**
- **“Commitment from academic partners to consistently provide critical data items needed to track student engagement, growth, and outcomes”**
- **“More data conversations with pathway and USG program partners to understand how/what can be shared, what the benefits are, and who is accountable for proper delivery and management of the data. This should be reflected in official agreements that can be established and maintained”**

Two additional themes emerge when looking into the Deep Dive reports:

- **Data is integral to the day-to-day operations of units across USG:**
 - Centers in SAS pursue a number of data strategies to better gauge the student experience, the impact of the pandemic and future programming, and managing the shared responsibility with our academic partners for student success.
 - Facilities utilizes data to track service calls, work orders, staff hours, utilities and building performance, service contracts, the budget, and unforeseen repairs.
 - OIT utilizes a range of data to pin-point and address specific issues within the technological ecosystem, to track project workload and project/task time allocations, to plan and assess.
 - Advancement utilizes data to track connectivity, programming assistance with educational partners, experiential learning opportunities and research opportunities with faculty, website, marketing and social media analytics.
 - The research and data coordinator manages a significant volume of data for purposes of institutional research and reporting, supporting workforce development and academic planning, student services, and more.
- **Centers, teams and divisions have great suggestions about the kind of data USG should collect, what could be measured, and how the data gathering and analysis could be managed. Some examples include:**
 - “Metrics for success” should be integrated into performance reviews on a collective level (targeted to improve the team) or individual basis (tailored to highlight personal contributions to success).
 - An emphasis on measuring USG’s progress in sustainability could result in significant savings for energy use, promote innovation, reduce USG’s carbon footprint and help us find collaborative solutions to a sustainable future.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX G (BECOMING A DATA-DRIVEN ORGANIZATION) CONTINUED...

- USG could join with other partners in Montgomery County to designate one entity to develop data regarding workforce needs in our region. Building a capacity to map and assess workforce demands and academic partner programs and plans will be essential for USG moving forward.
- Post-graduation career placement and alumni information would be helpful to see the full pathway experience of students.
- The need to strategize on minimizing the overlap in data collection processes, increase collaboration and planning around strategic goals, and utilize common technology or a central system for all of USG.

APPENDIX H (USG SHOULD IDENTIFY AND BUILD ON UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE, SUCH AS CAREER READINESS)

LACK OF CAREER PLANNING, AWARENESS, AND SUPPORT WITHIN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS (ADVISING OFTEN FOCUSES ON DEGREE COMPLETION WITHOUT CONNECTING TO THE LARGER PICTURE OF POST-GRADUATION EMPLOYMENT)

A common refrain by USM and some of our academic partners is the need to reduce duplication and overlap in services provided at USG for students versus those provided by our academic partners. This is a layered and complex challenge. USG is recognized for the high quality, wrap-around services provided to students on the USG campus. Nevertheless, a unique distinction of the student educational experience at USG is the emphasis on preparing students to be career ready. Developed as a pilot in the ACES program, in partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College, as well as with employers across the County, career coaching, experience, and competency training to develop career readiness has resulted in higher GPAs for students, stronger graduation rates, and experiential learning participation.

Building on this framework with academic partners will continue to add value to the overall student experience and strengthen pathways into and out of USG for student success — a USG-to-career pathway that is not only embedded in USG-provided programming, but is embedded in their academic programs as well. This model of collaboration to deliver a unique value adds to the student experience, academic partnerships, and employer collaboration can inform other strategic efforts at USG.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX I (ARTICULATING A CLEAR MISSION, VISION, AND BRAND)

USG LACKS BRAND EQUITY AND AWARENESS. THIS REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER (RHEC) HAS BEEN IN EXISTENCE FOR OVER 20 YEARS AND SERVES AS MARYLAND'S LARGEST RHEC. A MAJORITY OF THE REGION IS NOT AWARE [OF] USG, THE COMMUNICATIONS CAN BE CONFUSING, AND MESSAGING IS ALL OVER THE PLACE. THE USG STORY DOES NOT HAVE A CLEAR FOCUS, A DEFINED MISSION, OR ESTABLISHED METRICS TO DETERMINE SUCCESS. THE STAKEHOLDERS OF THE ORGANIZATION HAVE AN INCONSISTENT MISSION STATEMENT AND NO VALUE PROPOSITION.

It is imperative for any organization to have a clear idea of its mission, vision, and brand. Furthermore, successful organizations effectively communicate the aforementioned principles to their employees through not only the written word, but have those principles embedded in their culture. As USG moves into its next stage, it is necessary that each department is aware of USG 2.0's mission, vision, and brand, as well as their role in the realization of those pieces.

From a branding perspective, tapping into the success stories of USG alumni, whether that is students, faculty, or staff, is a cost-free and organic way to do so as noted by the following quotes from the USG deep dive:

- **"Resurrect the cultivation of an alumni network to help in building on and spreading the USG story."**
- **"Similar to alumni, those within the USG community who are passionate about our students and believe in the USG mission have the potential to be the best advocates."**

USG has done many things very well over the last 20 years; however, maintaining strong connections with alumni is certainly an area for improvement. UMBC recently opened a platform called Retrievers Connect that provides an insulated environment for current students to meet alumni working across a variety of industries; while USG may not need to develop a separate platform for this type of networking, there is a definite need to bridge the gap between students and the workforce. This facilitates networking and potential employment positions, and doing so will create a culture where there is a clear investment in student success in and out of the classroom. Dovetailing with the data-driven action item, this will require an evaluation of what information is currently being collected on alumni and how long it is collected for (e.g. right after graduation, two years after graduation, five years later, etc.). Alumni scholarships are also an option.

APPENDIX J (ARTICULATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARTNER USM INSTITUTIONS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES)

At a basic, transactional level, the partnerships between USG and partner institutions in the University System of Maryland are clear. USG provides space and services to students from partner institutions, while those partner institutions rent space and use fee money to pay for service delivery at USG to their students. It is necessary for USG to further develop and capitalize on these partnerships. For example, the Marketing & Communications Department has quarterly meetings with the University System of Maryland's Vice-Chancellor of Economic Development and Workforce to discuss collaboration opportunities. In addition, USG Administration and Finance, as well as Student and Academic Services also sit in on USM Vice Presidents Council. How can other USG departments assert their own opportunities for collaboration?

APPENDIX

APPENDIX J (ARTICULATING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARTNER USM INSTITUTIONS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES) CONTINUED...

SOLIDIFY THE CONCEPT OF A TRUE PARTNERSHIP WITH MONTGOMERY COLLEGE (MC) AND FORGE SIMILAR, IF SMALLER ONES, WITH FREDERICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE (FCC) AND HOWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE (HCC).

As a regional higher education center that offers upper-level undergraduate courses, it is necessary for USG to be intentional in its efforts to attract ambitious and hard-working students, and well-established partnerships with community colleges is an excellent way to do so. The robust connection between MC and USG highlights the progress that has already been made in that area, and the development of specific transfer pathways between MC and the programs offered by partner institutions (e.g. Raptor to Retriever, Terp Transfer Partnership, and Hawk Line) also increases USG's visibility.

Developing similar, robust partnerships with FCC, HCC, and PGCC will be key to expanding enrollment. This is highlighted through results from the 2021 edition of the annual USG Climate Survey, where 48.9% of respondents to the student survey reported transferring to USG from MC, while a total of 5.8% came from either FCC, HCC, or PGCC; in other words; there are over eight times as many former MC students here than students from the aforementioned three schools combined. USG's location in Montgomery County and the long history of direct collaboration is key, but growth for USG 2.0 must include better communication with additional partner schools about the four year degree completion opportunity through USG. Involving partner institutions in these discussions to communicate the unique value of having prospective students educated at USG will also increase buy-in while strengthening the role USG plays in success across the University System of Maryland.

INSTITUTIONALLY, IF WE DO NOT MAKE A STRONG CASE ABOUT USG'S VITAL AND UNIQUE ROLE WITHIN USM – AS AN ASSET TO THE UNIVERSITY PARTNERS – WE RUN THE RISK OF BEING SEEN AS COMPETITION AND COULD ULTIMATELY FACE ADDITIONAL LOSS OF REVENUE AND AN UNSTABLE FINANCIAL FUTURE.

From another perspective, how can USG better serve the faculty members of academic partners? There is not currently a faculty teaching, learning, and development center at USG. The development of such a center could serve faculty, but also could support USG in advancing itself as an innovative and dynamic teaching and learning environment.