

**CASE
STUDY**



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE

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THE CHALLENGE:

When Dr. Heidi Anderson became president of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) in 2018, she [immediately noted](#) the institution's commitment to excellence in student service. "As a first-generation student," Dr. Anderson said, "I am particularly impressed by the university's strong emphasis on student success."

Recognizing the power of higher education as a catalyst for economic mobility, Dr. Anderson saw an opportunity to expand the enrollment at UMES to reach more students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and expand efforts to support student retention and graduation. Under her direction, the institution began several new initiatives to widen its reach to more prospective students, set up additional transfer pathways for students coming from regional community colleges, and adopted a new customer relationship management system to support communications to prospective students.

The COVID-19 pandemic complicated these efforts: Enrollment [dropped noticeably across the majority of University of Maryland system schools](#) in fall 2020 and slipped again in 2021. In 2023, overall postsecondary enrollment in Maryland [was 8% below](#) pre-pandemic levels — significantly below the national average of a 5.8% decline.

To support the strategic priorities that Dr. Anderson set prior to the pandemic as well as to shore up enrollment following the pandemic-era decline, UMES partnered with Ed Advancement in 2021 to support its recruitment, admissions and student success objectives as well as find new opportunities to support institutional growth.



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AN ENGAGEMENT FOCUSED ON STUDENT ACCESS AND SUCCESS

To help UMES accomplish its goals, Ed Advancement addressed resource gaps and provided solutions that strengthened campus operations, optimized enrollment and enhanced student success — ultimately driving economic mobility for students and long-term sustainability for the institution.

The initial needs analysis undertaken through the partnership with Ed Advancement identified 29 areas for initial exploration through campus workgroups, focusing on topics ranging from career services to online learning to fundraising and advancement. Through both these initial sprints and additional campus insights, UMES identified 15 projects to tackle with Ed Advancement's support.

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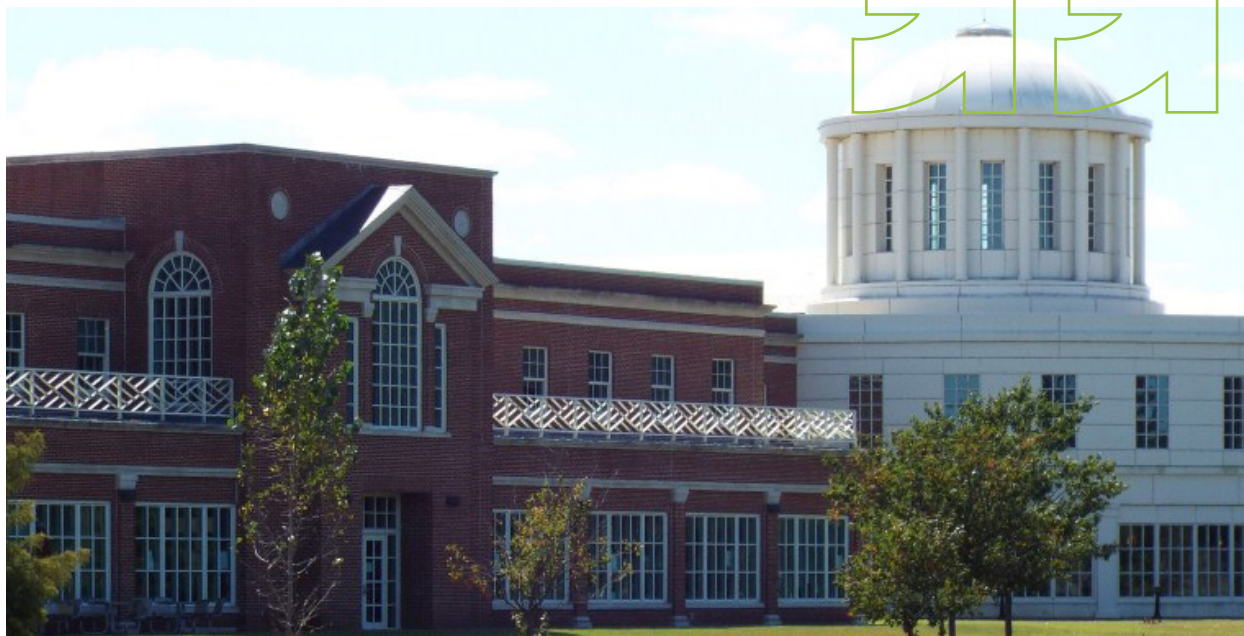
Dr. Darryl Isom | Assistant Vice president for Admissions and Recruitment

Among these were several projects related to financial aid, like personalized financial aid videos for prospective admitted students and a true cost calculator (with more functionality than the Department of Education's net price calculator), both of which help demystify the cost of attendance for each individual student. Both students and parents found the videos, in particular, to be helpful in understanding how financial aid offers work.

"A majority of students at University of Maryland Eastern Shore are first-generation college students," explained Dr. Darryl Isom, assistant vice president for admissions and recruitment. "They don't have experience with some of these areas, and their parents don't either."



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“We serve an underserved population,” agreed Latoya Jenkins, vice president for enrollment management and student experience. “They don’t always know what steps will get them into the door of admissions or onto the grounds of campus. We need to reduce all barriers to enrollment, whether in admissions or financial aid or resident life.”

One institutional pain point identified was unresolved holds. At the time, hundreds of students faced holds on their account each semester, creating a stressful period for both staff and students working to remove holds in time for students to register for classes. In many cases, these holds were relatively simple to fix: missing required forms, for example. Ed Advancement supported the implementation of an artificial intelligence-powered chatbot, which allowed UMES to proactively reach out to students with holds well in advance of the registration period and offer them personalized guidance on the steps necessary to have the hold removed.

“It’s allowed us to remove barriers for enrollments for our students without them being on campus, without them having to stand in a line.

Dr. Latoya Jenkins | Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Experience

UMES also used the chatbot to reach prospective and admitted students, to increase applications and to decrease summer melt. “We created messages tailored to our prospective student population, based on their needs and what they were doing. If they haven’t filled out the FAFSA form, we’re reaching out to them. If they’ve done a FAFSA and health form but not completed a resident life form to secure a room, we’re reaching out to them,” Jenkins explained. “It’s allowed us to remove barriers for enrollments for our students without them being on campus, without them having to stand in a line.”

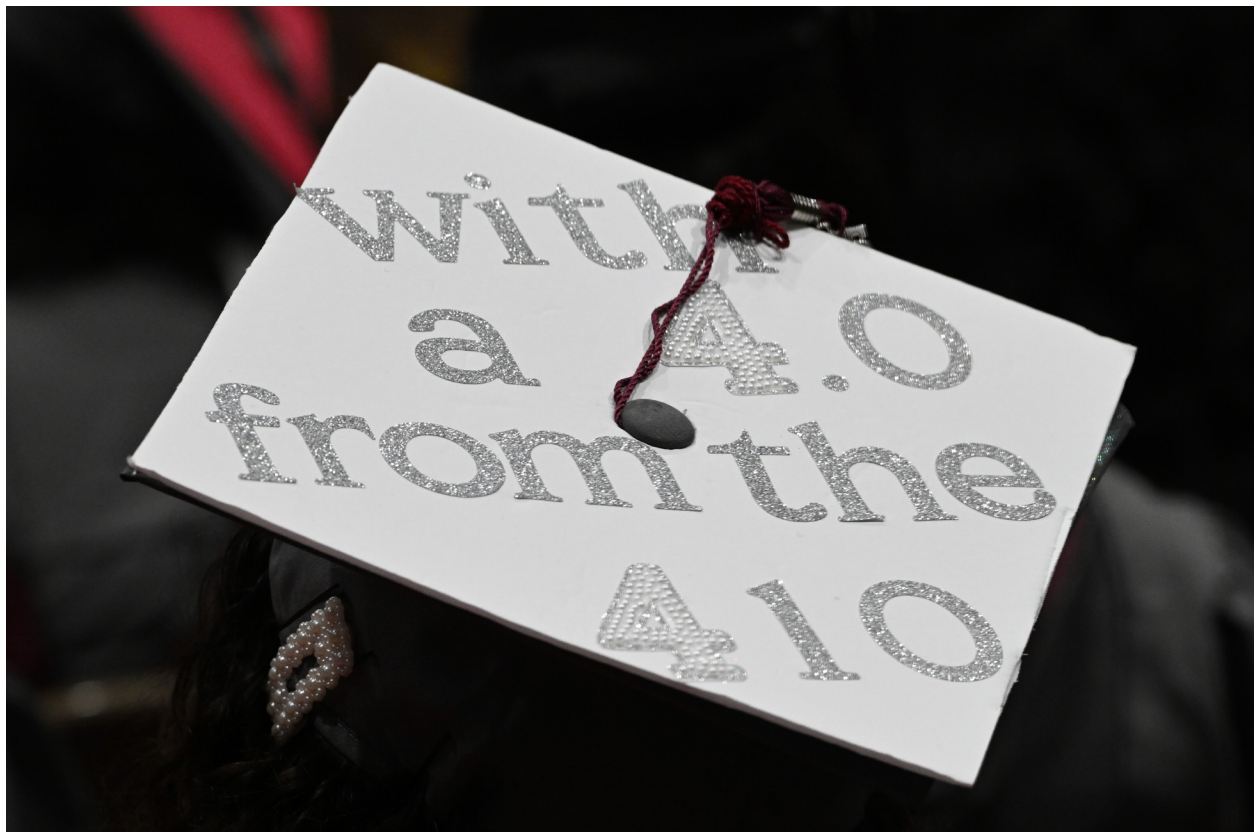
Other areas of work identified through the initial sprints included customer service training (using a train-the-trainer model that allows UMES to continue training new staff as they are hired), search engine optimization, and building out strategies and scenarios for using scholarships and other internal resources to most effectively recruit incoming students.

To ensure that the delayed rollout of the 2024 Better FAFSA form didn't negatively impact the hard-won gains in enrollment from other areas of work, Ed Advancement also provided UMES with financial aid consulting support. These financial aid experts stepped in to help UMES with the influx of student questions arising from the new form and supported UMES with financial aid processing, given the tight time frame that the delayed rollout created.

THE UMES ADVANTAGE: THE TRANSFORMATION TEAM

Key to the success of the relationship between UMES and Ed Advancement was the university's transformation officer triad, comprised of Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Experience Latoya Jenkins, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Rondall Allen, and Executive Vice President and Chief of Staff Robert Mock.

Every transformation project Ed Advancement undertakes requires close partnership with the institution: These individuals on campus are an important part of the engagement model. Most institutions name one point of contact, a "transformation officer," as a liaison between their university and the Ed Advancement team for implementation, but UMES chose to put together a team representing all major areas of interest.



Source: [University of Maryland Eastern Shore Spring Commencement](#) © Joe Andrucyk, [CC BY 2.0](#)

“It was very helpful to have them as a team,” said Vikki Walker, director of partnership engagement at Ed Advancement. “They work with their respective departments: It wasn’t top-down decision-making; it was inclusive of those who would need to implement the solutions.”

In many ways, this triad has set the partnership with Ed Advancement up for success. The transformation team has been able to work quickly with its respective departments to attain buy-in and consensus on new projects, making the transition from concept to practice smooth across initiatives.

OUTCOMES

Since the beginning of these initiatives, enrollment at UMES has increased significantly. In 2024, the University [reported its highest enrollment numbers](#) in five years — part of a larger trend of enrollment growth at the university.

UMES is the only university in Maryland to report four consecutive years of [enrollment growth](#) (2021-2025) post-pandemic — including [a 19% increase](#) between 2021-2023. This is driven by both increasing applicant numbers and an increasing yield: UMES saw its yield increase by seven percentage points from 2021 to 2024. “That growth is because we were able to utilize resources provided by Ed Advancement,” Dr. Isom noted. “We take everything that’s provided and we really work to scale it and get the most return on investment — get the biggest bang from the buck out of each one of those projects.”

Not only is the student body growing, it’s also highly engaged. Also through the work with Ed Advancement, UMES began using a digital platform to connect prospective students with current students, enabling interested students to ask questions about campus life, academics and more. UMES, despite being smaller than many other institutions using the platform, has ranked among the top engaged campuses, sending over 1,100 chats in a single day.



We were able to implement these tools, and now have the data and the students on campus to show for it. All the leading indicators, from deposits to student engagement to the number of inquiries we’re getting, show indications we will have another year of enrollment growth. We’re excited and better prepared because of our partnership with Ed Advancement and the tools we have been utilizing.

Dr. Latoya Jenkins | Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Experience

UMES is building upon existing successes by expanding several digital transformation projects, extending them beyond the grant period. This willingness to invest is perhaps the clearest signal of the value these digital transformation projects bring to the university.

The chatbot, for example, created a 95% decrease in student holds — [from 500 to just 27](#) — without requiring any additional staffing costs. With students able to largely resolve their holds independently, staff had more time to support the 27 remaining students. UMES is now considering how to expand the chatbot to support other student populations, including online learners and transfer students.

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From the beginning of this engagement, UMES has committed itself to wide-scale transformation. Thanks to its internal team, which has dedicated itself wholeheartedly to the process, and its ongoing partnership with Ed Advancement, UMES has built a suite of solutions that communicate with students in a personalized way at every step of the enrollment process and throughout matriculation. They’ve built an infrastructure of customized student support that has increased student faith in the institution. And the institution has experienced enrollment growth beyond what its team imagined was possible.

With Ed Advancement’s partnership, UMES was able to translate its vision into measurable progress. The collaboration not only expanded the university’s recruitment pipeline and strengthened communications with prospective students but also reinforced a culture of student success at every stage of the journey. “The leadership team was already aligned around Dr. Anderson’s vision,” shared Jim Runcie, CEO of Ed Advancement. “Our partnership and resources provided a catalyst to help UMES turn post-pandemic challenges into opportunities for long-term growth and transformation.”