As always, I am delighted to be here this evening…as we celebrate yet another successful CTL Summer Institute. And I would like to thank those among you who so thoughtfully planned this year's agenda. It has indeed been a cooperative effort among the many academic entities here at UMUC…and I want to commend all of you for facilitating what has been an extraordinary meeting of the minds.

I would also like to recognize our esteemed colleagues from Terbuka University…with whom we have developed a remarkable faculty exchange…and one that will undoubtedly grow even more rewarding in the months and years ahead. We appreciate this wonderful opportunity to share promising practices and new perspectives with each and every one of you who has traveled here for this Institute.

As educators…we have all ended up at this great university because we share a special passion for and commitment to adult learners…who by their sheer numbers alone are rewriting the rules and transforming the landscape of higher education as we know it.

Needless to say, UMUC plays a unique role within that landscape. For starters, we are truly experts in adult education…as one of only a handful of public universities in the United States, dedicated entirely to meeting the academic needs of busy, working professionals.

We are also a worldwide leader in distance education…with more than 17 years of online education experience behind us and over 220,000 online enrollments. On top of that…we are still the largest four-year public institution in the country…and certainly one of the most diverse.

And thanks to your leadership, as well as your entrepreneurial spirit, this university is providing its students with intellectually rigorous and globally relevant academic opportunities. Opportunities that not only challenge them...but also empower them to transform knowledge into action…and action into innovation.
Not surprisingly then…UMUC is now and will continue to be a powerful force in the lifelong learning revolution.

In truth, the concept behind this revolution is hardly radical or even new…having first been fully articulated in 1929 by Basil Yeaxlee and Eduard Lindeman…both of whom were key figures in the adult education movement.

In promoting their theories, Yeaxlee helped the British Ministry of Reconstruction author a groundbreaking report that referred to adult education as “a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong.”

Now…more than eighty years later…at a time when job promotion and security is increasingly a function of continuing education…American colleges and universities are scrambling to embrace this concept…in an effort to capture their piece of the adult education market.

So they look to universities such as UMUC for valuable insight and direction…around how adult students learn and what they must have to succeed. And believe me…given your unwavering commitment to academic excellence and innovation through research and practice…we have a great deal to share. As experts in this burgeoning field, we know that adults generally come back to college with clear academic goals in mind…which are, more often than not, tied to professional advancement.

Consequently, they are looking for career-ready programs… with learning objectives that clearly reflect 21st century professional expectations…and learning content that is readily applicable in the workplace. And because time is of the essence when it comes to achieving the results they want, these students will simply move on to other, more promising academic options when their needs go unmet.

With that understanding, hundreds of you…in both schools…have rolled up your sleeves and gone to work…devoting thousands of hours over the past several years…to the arduous task of reengineering program curricula, realigning program outcomes, and streamlining degree completion timelines.

You have also invoked your vast network of industry and academic partners to ensure that our programs are up to speed…and our graduates, up to the job. Equally important…you have now developed structured systems for change that are not only soundly conceived, but also easily replicable going forward…as workforce demands change and additional program revisions are needed.
These remarkable efforts are adding tremendous value to our degrees…by actively engaging our students in a learning experience that is both relevant and results-driven. And I have no doubt that UMUC will reap healthy returns on your enormous investment of time and energy…in the form of expanded student enrollment and improved student retention.

We also know that adult learners have already acquired a tremendous store of knowledge and experience. So they are most likely to choose academic options that allow them to connect the dots between what they already know and what they need to learn.

In addition, they generally prefer to learn by doing…and are far more comfortable in collaborative environments where they feel like equal partners in the learning process. And although they are, for the most part, self-directed in their learning process…older students appreciate having meaningful and frequent interaction with both their instructors and their fellow students. So in valuing your students’ experience and honoring their learning process…you have used your vast ingenuity to design learning environments…choose learning technologies…and devise learning experiences that meet all of these criteria.

For example, in his efforts to maximize retention…while also improving performance…Dr. Les Pang is exploring the use of cloud computing…in the form of Google Docs…to provide information technology students with even greater capacity for creating and sharing new knowledge.

As a result, they are now productively engaged in any number of collaborative learning activities…from team brainstorming and research…to blogging and project presentation.

Over in UMUC’s Department of Education…our forward-thinking faculty members have created the UMUC Teachers Press…which enables graduate students to publish their own research…with the help of their professors, who serve as peer reviewers.

Working with a just-in-time printing and distribution service…our students have actually produced a textbook…entitled Models of Applied Research in Educational Technology…which will be used in both the university’s Master of Arts in Teaching program and its Master of Education program.

And when it comes to experiential learning, Dr. Jim Chen has become a trailblazer in the use of remote access technologies. In fact, his innovative learning labs provide UMUC’s information assurance and cybersecurity students with a unique
opportunity to practice and refine their newly acquired skills from a distance…by accessing hands-on applications and real-world scenarios.

Of course, given the fact that most adults return to college after being out of school for long periods of time…we must also be prepared to help them sharpen sometimes rusty skills and overcome academic deficits…both of which can be especially problematic in the online environment.

Therefore, your remarkable efforts to identify, implement, and evaluate customized virtual learning resources and enhancements are empowering our students to successfully meet these challenges.

Dr. Susan Malone found a way to help online MBA students master difficult statistical concepts that are foundational for advanced business study. After taking an in-depth look at student persistence in an MBA fundamentals course…she discovered a number of potential obstacles to success…which are inherent among adult learners.

For starters, far too many of her students had forgotten basic and certainly necessary math functions…while often substituting personal experience for data. Equally problematic…they were uncomfortable with the ambiguity involved in learning concepts that often seem counterintuitive.

So in searching for strategies to overcome these obstacles and enhance the learning process…Dr. Malone discovered ALEKS…an artificially intelligent assessment and learning system that produced outstanding results. Not only was student feedback generally positive…but those who used this system in conjunction with regular classwork were also twice as likely to successfully complete the course. Suffice it to say…multiple efforts such as this one…have laid the groundwork for additional research projects around student success.

Indeed, with your extraordinary input…UMUC has received significant grants from three of higher education’s six most influential foundations in less than a year…a record by any measure. And each of these grants will be used to develop new and more effective academic support strategies for adult learners of all ages, abilities, and educational backgrounds.

Finally, universities such as ours understand and certainly appreciate the many constraints that adult students have on their time and resources…as well as the wraparound support they need to work within them. That said, you have all stepped up to the plate time and again to accommodate your students…devising more than a few innovative services and systems for making their academic journey easier and more fulfilling.
UMUC’s Center for Student Success in the School of Undergraduate Studies is one such faculty-driven invention…which serves as an around-the-clock virtual repository and central point of contact for any number of student-centered academic services. From tutoring, mentoring, and writing assistance…to study skills classes and scholarship support. And using a variety of innovative design principles and outreach strategies, it has built an impressive track record over the past three years.

In fact…with this Center in place…SUS is now able to provide online tutoring services…in such difficult subjects as accounting, economics, and statistics…to more than one hundred students each semester. In addition, The Effective Writing Center has advised more than fourteen thousand undergraduate and nearly two thousand graduate students over the past two years.

What’s more…the Allies Mentoring Program has paved the way for seventy-five student and alumni mentors to help over one hundred and fifty incoming students balance the demands of school, while mastering UMUC's unique campus culture.

The student success team has also connected some two hundred fifty students with special scholarship programs. And since 2008, this outstanding undergraduate resource has enrolled more than six thousand students worldwide in UMUC’s EDCP 100 course…as well as another forty-five thousand students in the Introduction to Research class.

To be sure, collaborative efforts such as the CTL Summer Institute are vitally important to UMUC's “big picture” going forward. Because in addition to facilitating an extraordinary exchange of information and ideas across departments, divisions, and disciplines…it also provides us with a unique opportunity to consider both the long view and the broad perspective…in planning ahead for the future. Which is why I will leave you this evening with what I hope are a few thought-provoking questions to consider over the coming year.

Given the tremendous need for additional research around adult and distance education…are there any serious gaps we can fill or exciting new directions we might take in further expanding this critically important body of knowledge? Moreover, how can we do an even better job of sharing this research with our colleagues…both within the university and beyond?

And as UMUC begins its trajectory toward a next generation learning management system…what systems and strategies must we have in place to ensure that these new technologies are effectively implemented and evaluated?
In the meantime…I want to commend all of you for everything you do to provide our students with the very best that higher education has to offer. Now, please enjoy the rest of this wonderful celebration. You have certainly earned it!

Thank you,

Susan C. Aldridge, PhD.
President
University of Maryland University College
3051 University Boulevard
Adelphi, Maryland 20783