

From “Maryland” to “University of Maryland Global Campus”

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July 2020

In October 1968, I responded to a University of Maryland public service announcement on the Armed Forces Network in West Germany. The University sought faculty to teach courses in its programs on U.S. military bases. This possibility appealed because I was planning to take a European discharge from two-year Army service to see more of Europe. That made sense, too, because academic positions in the U.S. for the 1968-69 year had long been filled.

I interviewed in Heidelberg and landed an adjunct teaching job, two courses per eight-week term, starting at Bitburg army base in January 1969. Everyone I met in Heidelberg and later in Bitburg referred to my new academic home as “The University of Maryland” or more often simply “Maryland.” I don’t recall any mention of “University College” or even “European Division” until I went to College Park in August 1969 for a brief orientation before beginning my first annual appointment. It would be a good time to visit my parents, native Marylanders, who lived nearby.

Neither my parents nor friends knew the University of Maryland offered courses in Europe. In fact, no Marylander I talked with had heard of our state university’s far reaching connection. Only after a day in College Park did I begin to get some idea of my employer’s extent and overseas history. Ellie Seidel, a member of Chancellor Ehrensberger’s staff, arranged my visit and briefing. She explained that “Maryland” operated three overseas divisions on military bases, the European, where I was employed, the Atlantic and the Far East Division. I was astounded to learn that these overseas divisions counted over 50,000 enrollments at 263 locations in 24 countries.

To add another layer of complexity, she explained that “The University of Maryland” would soon consist of five campuses, each with its own chancellor, and the one that employed me was named “University of Maryland University College.” That sounded a bit redundant to my untutored ears, two “universities” and one “college” in a four-word name. Ellie patiently explained that Dr. Ehrensberger selected the name some ten years earlier to replace “College of Special and Continuation Studies.” He liked British usage of the term “university college” to describe the college of the whole university, one that took its courses beyond their usual venues. I had to agree that “University of Maryland University College” carried more weight than “College of Special and Continuation Studies.”

Nevertheless, in the overseas locations where I worked for many years everyone, students, faculty, staff and military education officials referred to our program as University of Maryland or, more often, Maryland. Faculty might call themselves The Academic Foreign Legion or Gypsy Scholars, but speaking of their employer, they almost always used the name Maryland, never University of Maryland University College. Sometimes facetiously, or in frustration, they might pervert “UMUC” to “U Muck.”

One name change occurred during my second time in Asia, 1981-1990 when I served as director of The Far East Division. Several Asian Studies faculty came to me soon after I took the position with a suggestion: “Shouldn’t we retire the name ‘Far East Division,’” they asked. One China specialist told me the current name bore vestiges of the colonial era of Western domination. Another said it sounded like

something out of a Joseph Conrad novel. I saw their point and so did my boss in College Park, Ben Massey. We agreed on a new name: The Asian Division.

After I retired from UMUC in December 1997, another name change appeared: the location of our campus. Adelphi, MD., replaced College Park in our address although no physical change in location had occurred. So overseas staff began to ask “Adelphi” for guidance or support rather than “College Park.” Still sounds a bit odd to my ears. I gather the change related to postal zones and to campus identity.

Earlier the small Atlantic Division had been absorbed into the European Division, but otherwise the old names persisted until 2019. During that year, President Javier Miyares ordered a marketing study of the University of Maryland University College name and received data suggesting it was not well understood by students and potential students. In fact, some just disliked its redundancy and refused to use it in describing the institution where they took courses or from which they graduated. President Miyares’ team came up with a new name and sought the several permissions, the University System Board of Regent and State Government among others, to make the change.

Soon everyone rallied behind the University of Maryland Global Campus, UMGC. It is more descriptive of what the campus does, of course, and includes both military programs and international programs. It also gets rid of the redundancy, to American ears at least, of University of Maryland University College.

Although members of the Overseas Marylanders Association, myself included, may occasionally stumble over UMGC as we write our memoirs about times when it was UMUC, all those I’ve talked with are pleased with the new name.