



Ronald Mason, Jr., J.D.

*President*

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Dear Editor,

We at the University of the District of Columbia view this response to a recent Washington Post article and editorial about us as an opportunity to help District residents see us more clearly, and to better understand their public institution of higher learning.

UDC is unique in many ways. Unlike most universities, we offer multiple points of entry, providing students pathways to workforce training, professional certification, associate degrees, more selective bachelor and graduate degrees, law degrees, and more. We are congressionally mandated as a historically black university, and as the nation's only exclusively urban land-grant university. We are the largest enroller of D.C. public high school graduates, while also enrolling significant numbers of students from around the nation and the world. It is our mission to serve all aspects of the communities of the District.

Our highly motivated students are often the first in their families to attend college. Many face financial and other hurdles that have prevented them from seeing higher education as an option. Half enroll part-time, or stay out a semester or two while they work to earn tuition, or deal with life, family, or community challenges. Most have little experience navigating the system. Others pursue more direct paths, becoming full-time students at UDC's demanding School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, its School of Business and Public Administration, or its College of Arts and Sciences – all of which are the most affordable in the District. Whatever the route traveled by UDC students, their journey leads to higher-than-average-paying jobs, according to the federal College Scorecard.

Some of our students come unprepared even for the demands of an open enrollment community college, or prefer to go directly to work. We find places for them in our workforce training programs. Others dream of attending medical school after UDC. Our D.C.-University Partnership merit-based scholarships drew to UDC nearly 50 high-performing DCPS and DCPCS graduates this year, including 12 valedictorians and salutatorians. Still others study with our land-grant unit, which touches over 30,000 lives each year, and is creating food security models across the District that can be replicated worldwide.

Of course, much work remains to be done. Everyone knows the challenges imposed by UDC's history, including a legacy of outdated technology and infrastructure. While financial support from the District has increased, it currently stands at 1 percent of the District's budget, and could be better in comparison to that of similar institutions. Our graduation rates must improve, which is why we have launched a program that monitors the progress of all students and assigns advisers who intercede when they are in danger of getting off track.

We have, however, a different perspective from the Post's on the future of UDC. Much as we appreciate the confidence in my leadership expressed by the paper, we maintain that UDC's greatest hope lies not in its president but in its students and in the residents of the District that we serve. Because of them, we see UDC as brimming with possibilities. And as long as we focus on providing them with quality, affordable, accessible public higher education, then their future, the future of UDC, and the future of the District will be bright.

As the District endeavors to be a model of urban sustainability and resilience, it is difficult to see how that vision can be realized without a university such as UDC at its center. Building and supporting our institution is a responsibility we all should share. So in that sense, we are all Team UDC!

Ronald Mason, Jr., J.D.

President, University of the District of Columbia

**ASPIRE. ACCOMPLISH. TAKE ON THE WORLD.**

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