Disability Resources ensures that individuals with disabilities enjoy equal access to the programs, services, and spaces available at UMD. To achieve this, we primarily rely on students self-reporting disability-related barriers to access so we can then engage in the interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations to reduce or eliminate these barriers. Disability Resources served just over 500 students in 2019-2020 academic year. This is generally on par with usage from the previous year. As with other years, it is important to bear in mind that the number of students accessing DR services alone does not tell the full story of demand for accommodations. For example, in FY20, Disability Resources engaged in a higher number of individual interactions with students than in FY19. Analyzing usage data from a 360 degree view is important in understanding the true demand for services, which helps Disability Resources better understand how to invest strategic efforts to advance access more globally.

In other news, FY20 marked the inaugural year for the Recognizing Access awards. DR received 20 nominations recognizing the efforts of faculty & staff at UMD who have made an effort to advance access and inclusion for people with disabilities. Nominees were recognized electronically through UMD Business Announce and an e-certificate. DR received feedback from several nominees that preferred this strategy of recognition.
Summarize the impact of COVID-19 on your unit’s operations.

COVID impacted Disability Resources in many ways, but these three stand out as carrying the deepest impact:

1. Provision of service: Disability Resources typically proctors 3000+ exams in an average academic year. When the University shifted to remote learning, the direct provision of accommodated exams was reduced. Similarly, with the shift to remote learning the need for in-person note taking services was sharply reduced. This is because many faculty were now posting notes online, or providing recordings of lectures, thus eliminating the need for peer note takers. DR tracks annual usage of accommodated exams and note taking services as some key metrics in evaluating demand for services. This number will be skewed for FY20. Further, COVID revealed some gaps in the ways we provide service. Disability Resources has been endeavoring to create more independent strategies for managing accommodations. As an example, just two years ago our intake process was entirely paper-based. Now students can complete an intake form online. However, much of what we do still relies on in-person interactions. To respond to COVID, Disability Resources overhauled our note taking request process so that it is available electronically. Another area for consideration is our process for scheduling accommodated exams. While in-person provision of accommodated exams dropped off to near nothingness in Spring 2020, there were a few instances in which exams needed to be accommodated by Zoom. We still rely on a scheduling procedure for such instances, but that procedure is dependent on in-person, paper-based interaction. A workaround was identified, but the need for a more sustainable and systemic approach is necessary moving forward.

2. Engaging in the interactive process: As noted above, students are invited to engage in the interactive process when disclosing disability-related barriers to access. Best practices encourage DR professionals to continually engage students in the interactive process, as needs may shift over time. When the University shifted to remote operations, DR adhered to best practices and engaged in two outreach efforts during Spring 2020. Given the new learning and living environments, Disability Resources staff has done more outreach with students to ensure access continues to be available in this new environment. We further recognized that the uncertainty and fear associated with a global pandemic could exacerbate mental health conditions and may trigger the need for additional accommodations. As a result of the need to re-engage in the interactive process, and as a result of students seeking additional support from DR, another key metric in analyzing demand for services - contact counts - increased by 19% in FY20.

3. Communication & Continuing Access in the Remote Environment: COVID created rapid changes to our living and learning environment at the University. A critical consideration in these changes was what the impact would be for those with disabilities. With support from VCSC and VCAA, Disability Resources had an opportunity to send an email advising of accessibility considerations for faculty shifting to a remote learning environment. It felt vitally important to communicate with students, too, that accommodations continued to be available in the range of course modalities. This was challenging in particular, as students were generally assumed to be overwhelmed with the rapid shift to a new learning
Impact of COVID-19, continued

environment, managing the anxiety of a pandemic, and managing a high volume of communication from other stakeholders.

Disability Resources worked quickly to adapt our website to reflect access considerations for students and faculty. Given the volume of important information pertaining to access, it was critical to have our website content organized more effectively. DR staff worked with ITSS to create accordion menus for our website to organize content in a more useful fashion. Website updates were a critical component of communicating about access, particularly as DR anticipated frequently asked questions from students and faculty, and then anticipated the accessibility needs of folks returning to campus.

Provide an assessment result that was important and informative for your department. What did you assess and what did you learn?

Despite not engaging in assessment of student learning outcomes (more on that in the next paragraph), there continues to be data available that guides the way for improvement in Disability Resources. During the late spring and early summer, the system disability support offices collaborated to engage students with disabilities in a survey to better understand the impact of COVID-19 and the shift to remote learning. The goal of the survey was to identify themes that may impact provision of services and/or help make the case for inclusive teaching practices. One metric that stood out from this survey was the impact of COVID on managing distraction and attention. Students responded to questions asking to quantify their ability to manage distraction pre-COVID and during COVID. Prompts measured the pre-COVID impact of managing distraction at a mean score of 3.97, compared to a mean score of 7.22 during COVID. Similarly, prompts measure the pre-COVID impact of maintaining attention at a mean score of 4.59, compared to a mean score of 6.19 during COVID. These data points, along with robust amounts of anecdotal evidence from individual student interactions, indicated that students were immensely struggling with executive functioning skills in the new remote learning environment. In response, Disability Resources researched and published to our website a curated guide of apps designed to address a range of learning concerns, including time management, organization, and managing distractions. This resource was shared broadly with students by email, and during individual consultations. The guide can be accessed here.

Assessment of student learning outcomes typically occurs in the spring semester. This workflow fits the reality of demand for services in Disability Resources. Typically the fall semester is busy orienting new students to the disability accommodation process, and reacquainting returning students with procedures related to implementing disability accommodations. For many (but not all) students, the fall semester is the first time in which they are learning to use accommodations in the post-secondary setting. Because many of DR’s student learning outcomes center on self-awareness of the impact of disability in the post-secondary setting, and advocacy skills related to seeking and
Assessment results, continued

implementing accommodations to remove these barriers, our assessment of student learning generally occurs in the spring. As we know, our University faced a seismic shift during Spring 2020 and so assessment of the planned student learning outcome was tabled in favor of re-engaging in the interactive process and developing timely communications regarding accommodations and access.

Summarize the condition of your departmental budget at the end of the year. Discuss revenues, expenses, and (if applicable) refunds in broad terms.

The DR departmental budget is subject to fluctuation that is dependent on the demand for specific disability-related accommodations. With this in mind, the DR budget ended largely on target based on planning for anticipated demands for access. Despite the shift to remote learning in March, some of the accommodations that bear an expense continued to occur. For example, the demand for ASL services remained present; the delivery method did change to include provision of remote ASL services. With that, there were some additional unanticipated expenses including acquiring new computers that had processing speeds and higher quality video capacities and materials to configure home office settings for provision of ASL services (ex: appropriate lighting, backdrop, adjustable height work station). The DR budget does not rely on student service fees or other student-generated revenue.