



**ST MARY'S**  
COLLEGE of MARYLAND

2025 Self-Study Report Executive Summary  
*Submitted to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education*



*The* **NATIONAL PUBLIC HONORS** *College*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM), the National Public Honors College, is the first of only three public liberal arts colleges designated as an honors college. It is also among just 21 public institutions nationally with a Carnegie classification of Baccalaureate - Arts and Sciences. With a commitment to "Honors for All," SMCM brings together talented students, outstanding faculty, and committed staff to create a close-knit community rooted in high academic standards, a rigorous curriculum and small classes. This collaborative environment prepares graduates to lead and make meaningful impacts. Through our innovative Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery (LEAD) initiative, we integrate professional skills development across four years, ensuring students are ready for the workforce and equipped with the unique skills cultivated by a liberal arts education. This self-study highlights SMCM's ongoing efforts to enhance these core strengths, fostering social mobility and equity while empowering thoughtful, responsible global citizens.

President Tuajuanda Jordan is the seventh president of SMCM and the College's first African American president. She began her leadership in 2014 and has been widely recognized for her contributions to higher education, both in Maryland and nationally. President Jordan announced her intent to retire at the end of the 2024-25 academic year; the search process for SMCM's eighth president is actively underway. SMCM is in the second year of a three-year strategic plan, *The Rising Tide*; the third strategic plan of Dr. Jordan's presidency.

*This self-study report establishes how SMCM has met all the expected criteria in the seven standards and requirements of affiliation for reaffirmation of accreditation; the achievements are supported through an evidence inventory comprising quantitative and qualitative data. Each chapter focuses on evidence demonstrating compliance with the specific standard. Each standard has been placed in the context of the St. Mary's College community.*

## Standard I: Mission & Goals

St. Mary's College of Maryland was designated as the state's Public Honors College in 1992 and charged to "offer the combination of 2 ideals: the promise of public education, affordable to all and thriving on diversity, and high standards of academic excellence" (703; I.1). These two tenets have

shaped SMCM's mission statement and strategic planning endeavors; they represent the way SMCM explains its identity and goals as a Public Honors College.

## Standard II: Ethics & Integrity

Since 1998, the St. Mary's Way has been the guiding ethos of campus, emphasizing the importance of respect, responsibility-taking, lifelong learning, dialogue, tolerance, honesty, integrity, and trust. It affirms the commitment to service, acting ethically, and contributing positively to the local SMCM community and the world. Developed in 2021 and read aloud at the start of large campus meetings and campus events, the Land Acknowledgment and Pledge reminds the community of its responsibility to learn from the history of both SMCM and the local area and to actively work to address societal inequities. As regular touchstones, these frameworks cue SMCM to be faithful to its mission, honor its contracts and commitments, adhere to its policies, and represent itself truthfully, as expected under Standard II.

## Standard III: Design & Delivery of the Student Experience

This chapter outlines the signature elements of the academic experience at SMCM and foreshadows how it overlaps with co-curricular activity and curricular support described in Standard IV. SMCM's institutional learning outcomes emphasize critical thinking, information literacy, communication skills, disciplinary expertise, cultural literacy, and professional literacy, all key to preparing students as scholars and professionals. High-Impact Practices (HIPs) are found throughout the curriculum, with all students required to complete a seminar course at the start of their journey and a capstone experience in their senior year, framing their academic experience. During the self-study period, SMCM expanded its course and program offerings, academic calendar, and modes of instructional delivery. The introduction of the LEAD initiative has further advanced this mission by offering coursework that helps students translate liberal arts skills into professional settings and approach their foundational disciplinary requirements through a central thematic lens. The Honors College Promise guarantees students the opportunity to engage in an internship, research or creative experience, or study abroad,

enhancing access to HIPs and fostering a dynamic academic environment.

#### **Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience**

SMCM consistently maintains some of the highest retention and degree completion rates among its public and private peers. During this review cycle, SMCM has strategically revised and reshaped its retention efforts to enhance students' success in attaining their degrees and transitioning into meaningful post-college endeavors. This commitment aligns with SMCM's long-standing efforts to provide personalized attention to every student, reinforcing its duty to support student achievement and holistic growth.

#### **Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment**

Since its last MSCHE reaffirmation, SMCM has fully integrated student learning assessment into academic program processes and expectations. The assessment framework is systematic, centralized, organized, and documented, and contributes meaningfully to conversations about curriculum, teaching, and student experiences. This approach has transformed assessment into a forward-thinking and intentional element of student-centered teaching and curriculum planning, moving beyond a compliance-focused model.

#### **Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement**

SMCM's ongoing attention to its effectiveness in achieving its mission is anchored to a series of planning processes and structures within and across various levels of the institution, assuring accountability to our internal communities, to the Board of Trustees, and ultimately to the state of Maryland and its citizens. Strong strategic planning efforts over the past 10 years have resulted in enhanced infrastructure, new and renovated facilities, improved student programming, new curricular offerings, and robust increases in student interest and enrollment. SMCM's effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic showcased its resilience with increased enrollment and improvements in technological infrastructure and operational flexibility. A strong commitment to affordability is evident in SMCM's flat tuition rates over the past five years, enhancing accessibility to its rigorous liberal arts education.

#### **Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration**

SMCM is one of two public four-year institutions of higher education in Maryland that is led by its own Board of Trustees. The Board is responsible for SMCM's academic, administrative, governance, and financial affairs. The College Bylaws, adhered to by the Board and executive leadership, defines how SMCM governs itself and levels of authority and responsibility for the institution. Additionally, the faculty senate, staff senate, and student government association (SGA) all have governance structures and bylaws. Key initiatives and progress on strategic goals are communicated through established structures, and a proactive review of shared governance was conducted in 2024.

#### **Conclusion**

SMCM's strategic initiatives continue to establish its position as a college of choice and national leader in liberal arts education, preparing graduates with the comprehensive skills and values needed to excel in any environment. As a public honors college committed to access, excellence, affordability, and diversity, SMCM offers talented students from diverse socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds the opportunity to benefit from an all-honors liberal arts education. SMCM consistently maintains some of the highest retention and completion rates among Maryland's public institutions. Through its academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs, SMCM embraces its rich and unique historical, cultural, and natural heritage as part of Maryland's first capital city and remains a living memorial to the state's founding ideals of tolerance and innovation.

At a time when many small institutions are struggling significantly or facing closure, SMCM is proud that within this review period, it has launched the transformative LEAD initiative, doubled its applicant pool, garnered increased state support, held tuition flat for the last five years, and launched and successfully completed a comprehensive campaign. In addition to these major accomplishments, the self-study results demonstrate that SMCM has met the standards for reaffirmation of accreditation by the MSCHE. Importantly, to enhance the long-term success of SMCM students, the self-study has provided insight into areas of growth and improvement.

## Initiatives Already in Progress

- Continue to enhance efforts to recruit and retain diverse, honors college-aligned faculty and staff. (Standards II, III)
- Continually evaluate and implement processes and systems that enhance inclusive and equitable access to all campus policies, procedures, and processes. (Standards II, IV, VI)
- Continue to refine the various assessment systems used across campus (i.e., student learning assessment, institutional effectiveness/administrative assessment) to support timely and informed decision-making about campus initiatives and/or resource allocation. (Standards III, IV, V, VI, VII)
- Continue efforts to reduce or eliminate equity gaps in retention and graduation rates. (Standards II, IV, VI)

- Continue to refine the infrastructure for student support on campus, with attention to wellness, academic success, belonging, and professional preparation. (Standards II, III, IV, V, VI)
- Enhance the Honors College Promise by continuing to bolster international, research and internship choices for students (Standard III)

## Future Initiatives

- Engage in a review of the St. Mary's Way to ensure its relevance to all members of the campus community and their daily work. (Standards I, II)
- Foster a shared understanding of governance principles and practices based on the 2024 review. (Standard VII)
- Assess the impact of the LEAD initiative, particularly the professional pathway courses, on post-college student success. (Standards III, IV, V)

## SMCM Self-Study Priorities



**Academic and Professional Excellence**



**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**



**Strong Communities**



**Institutional Adaptability**

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## Self-Study Co-Chairs and Steering Committee

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