



**BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
SEPTEMBER 22, 2025**

**OPEN SESSION  
AGENDA**

- I. CALL TO ORDER**
- II. DISCUSSION ITEMS**
  - A. Faculty Senate Report
  - B. Dean of Faculty Report
  - C. 2025 Performance Accountability Report (PAR)
  - D. 2-credit course initiative
  - E. Title II and Digital Accessibility
- III. ACTION ITEM**
  - A. Vote to Approve the 2025 PAR
- IV. INFORMATION ITEM**
  - A. Minutes of June 12, 2025



BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT OF THE FACULTY SENATE'S REPORT

September 22, 2025

Introduction

It promises to be an exciting and eventful Fall 2025 semester at St. Mary's. I want to start by welcoming President Rhonda Phillips to St. Mary's College of Maryland. I'll say on behalf of the Faculty Senate and the Faculty that we're excited about this new chapter for the college and we look forward to working with President Phillips. Thank you as well to Peter Bruns for his service as Chair of the Academic Affairs Committee and welcome to the new Chair, Kim Kelley.

President Rhonda Phillips

In the April 2025 Faculty Pulse Survey, faculty were asked about the issues they wanted the incoming president to focus on. High among those issues was a restoration of a sense of community at the college. Given that, it is worthy of note that President Phillips has a background in community development. In her co-edited volume, *An Introduction to Community Development*, President Phillips and her co-author wrote in Chapter One "without people and the connections among them, a community is just a collection of buildings and streets." They then offered a comprehensive definition of community development that I thought appropriate to share here:

"A process: developing and enhancing the ability to act collectively, and an outcome: (1) taking collective action and (2) the result of that action for improvement in a community in any or all realms: physical, environmental, cultural, social, political, economic, etc."

A college campus is not only a member of the broader community, it is a community in and of itself and we look forward to working with Pres. Phillips to enhance our abilities to act collectively and take collective action to improve all aspects of the St. Mary's College community.

New Presidential Initiatives

President Phillips met with the Faculty Senate on September 10, 2025 to brief us on several new initiatives. Those initiatives include:

**Leadership Council:** A Leadership Council has been established that will meet monthly to discuss challenges and opportunities, sharing ideas and reporting back to their respective units. This group includes wide leadership representation from across campus, with the members selected from faculty, staff, and the administration. I serve on that council in my capacity as Faculty Senate President

Shared Governance: A working group will be formed with representation from faculty, staff, students, trustees, and the senior administrative team. Their task will be to create a statement and recommendations on shared governance to be approved by the Board, and which is unique to St. Mary's College of Maryland -- incorporating best practices and capturing our traditions and special status in the State's higher education system. The group will formally convene soon to begin its work, with its recommendations by the end of this semester to present at the Board of Trustees February 2026 meeting.

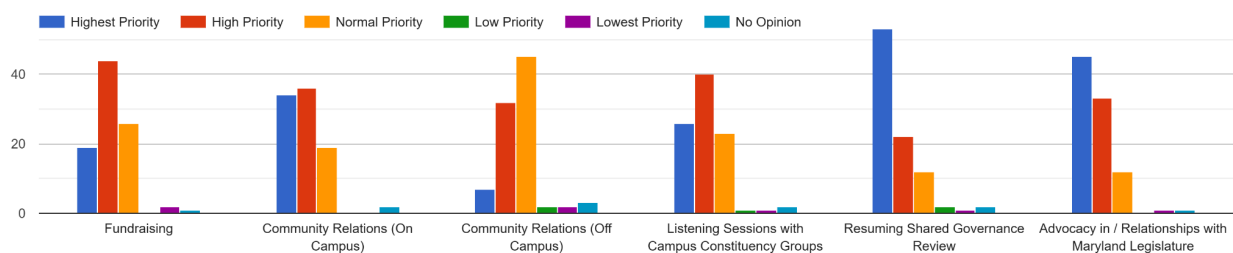
Space Advisory Committee: To identify our current and future campus space needs and assess utilization, this group will compile a detailed listing of needs; identify inefficiencies and configurations; and determine if there are creative solutions to our current space challenges and make the best use of existing facilities. Alongside this committee, a working group of faculty, staff, and administrators has been identified to study options and opportunities to address faculty, staff and student housing needs on or near campus.

Campus Budget Advisory Committee - This cross-campus group will be charged with making recommendations for aligning revenue with expenses and space needs, and to engage in annual budgeting exercises, including exploring projections of future needs. By doing so, this group will make recommendations and help further understanding, transparency and accountability to the wider campus. Among the members of this group will be three faculty members (one from each of the three divisions to be nominated by the Faculty Senate).

Collectively, these four initiatives will provide multiple opportunities for a broad cross section of the campus community to work together to address critical issues for the college moving forward. We welcome these opportunities.

### Pulse Survey

The Faculty Senate launched The Faculty Pulse survey to get a better, more timely sense of faculty perspectives on important topics. In addition to gathering responses to new issues, the Faculty Pulse Survey also tracks trends over time to better understand changes in faculty opinion. In the April 2025 Faculty Pulse Survey, we asked faculty members on which priorities should the new college president focus?



Faculty indicated that resuming the shared governance review should be the highest priority for the incoming president with 58% deeming it to be the highest priority. This was followed by advocacy in Annapolis with 49% ranking it as a highest priority (categories were not mutually exclusive).

Fundraising, community relations on campus, and holding listening sessions with campus constituencies were each deemed to be high priority items while community relations off campus were considered to be a normal priority issue.

Among the written comments, many faculty cited the need for the new president to defend academic freedom and freedom of speech against attacks on both coming from Washington. Others cited a desire for the new president to revisit the Administrative restructuring that took place several years ago as well as a desire for the new president to drop the transition to Anthology. A strong desire for the incoming president to rebuild a sense of trust and community on campus was cited by many respondents.

I'll note as well that faculty were asked if they were satisfied with the level of transparency involved in the presidential search. Nearly 70% of faculty said that they were not satisfied with the level of transparency in the presidential search. 16% were somewhat satisfied. Only 5% of faculty were satisfied with the level of transparency.

#### Chair Workload and Compensation

Faculty Senate leadership met with Chairs on April 9 to discuss the Chairs' workload. The objective of that conversation focused on a few central issues: 1) what's going well in Chair interactions with the Associate Deans; 2) where are the points of friction; and 3) how might we brainstorm about the work that chairs do to redistribute, reprioritize, or eliminate some of those tasks all together? The Senate followed up by attending the Chairs' retreat in August.

As announced at that meeting and expanded further in a follow up meeting with Senators, Dean of the Faculty Katie Gantz announced the following initiatives to support the work of Chairs:

- \$300 annually to pay for leadership training;
- an additional \$300 towards professional development; and,
- chairs who complete an entire four year term can accelerate their sabbatical timeline by one year (this will be retroactive).

These are welcome initiatives and conversations about Chair workload will continue.

#### Title II and Digital Accessibility

On April 24, 2024, the Department of Justice (DOJ) ruled that all digital content will need to be accessible regardless of space (public-facing or behind a login), in alignment with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This rule sets the standard that state and local governments (including colleges like SMCM) must meet guidelines to legally meet digital accessibility standards. The deadline for SMCM to meet this standard is April 24, 2026.

Multiple members of Academic Affairs have been active in early informal collaborations with other campus offices about SMCM's efforts on Title II compliance, including the Director for the Center for Inclusive Teaching & Learning, Dr. Samantha Elliott, Director of the Hilda C. Landers Library, Amanda VerMeulen, and Associate Provost Katy Arnett. They've worked informally with Web Services and the Office of Accessibility Services and more recently, OIT. Jeanette Modic, Director of Web Services, Kelly O'Grady, Director of OAS, and Amy Baker Coordinator of OAS were the driving forces behind pulling the informal group together. Samantha Elliott has taken the lead on training and has developed Digital Accessibility Training for the college. Professor Elliott briefed the Faculty Senate on this initiative at the September 10, 2025 meeting of the Senate and

briefed the Faculty at the September 15, 2025 Faculty Meeting. Professor Elliott acknowledged the potential time commitment that is required to get digital course materials in compliance by April 2026. She referenced the COVID pandemic, how there was churn for a while until we ended up settling on technologies and workflows. The same is likely to be true for this endeavor. The heaviest lift will be for materials such as video and audio. Some faculty are already working on their materials. Statistics show that CITL's Google Classroom for asynchronous learning has seen increased traffic from the campus community, and she will be holding monthly drop-in sessions for people to work on their materials and get assistance. As of right now, we are waiting for further clarity about the scope of resources and tools that that college will acquire or hire to help with this work. Although an informal group has been meeting about digital accessibility, a more official group, chaired by Vice President for Student Affairs Jerri Howland, has been formed.

The College has been in conversation with various vendors. OIT and OAS are looking into products, while Web Services has already procured a product. In the 18 months since the new federal rule was announced, software vendors have really scaled up what they can provide.

#### Transition to Anthology Student

The transition to Anthology continues to be a major problem for students and faculty. The Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management team continue to work with Anthology to address the myriad problems and have created multiple “bridge sites” to offer work arounds for the problems encountered. The most recent problem became apparent while advising new students in late August. Transcripts were not available via Anthology for approximately 25% of the entering student cohort. Within a week of this problem being identified, the Enrollment team—Bhargavi Bandi, Liam Ross, Jacqui Rogers-Frere and Keisha Rolla—developed a workaround that made test scores (AP/IB) and official transcripts for any transfer credits available to advisors. But the problems experienced during those initial meetings with new students and the need for ever more workarounds and bridge sites only serve to emphasize the ongoing problems with the transition to Anthology.

#### Conclusion

I have no action items to present in this report, but I anticipate a very busy Fall semester as we work with the new President and participate in her new initiatives. It is quite likely that some of this work, especially the new Shared Governance workgroup, will result in recommendations being brought to this committee and the full Board of Trustees in the Spring - including revisions to the Faculty Bylaws.

Respectfully submitted,



Todd Eberly, Ph.D.  
President, Faculty Senate

# ST MARY'S

## COLLEGE of MARYLAND

*The National Public Honors College*

### **BOARD OF TRUSTEES ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 22, 2025**

#### **PROVOST AND DEAN OF FACULTY'S REPORT**

##### **Charge:**

The Academic Affairs committee shall: 1) receive and consider recommendations of the President for appointments, promotions, and dismissals to and from the faculty; 2) consider all major plans for and changes in the curricular policies and organization when presented by the President; and 3) recommend to the Board of Trustees the adoption, modification, or rejection of proposals emanating from the faculty, as proposed by the President.

##### **Unit Mission:**

Academic Affairs works to cultivate a rigorous and equitable academic environment where the St.Mary's College community thrives.

Below, I offer an update on multiple facets of our work supporting faculty excellence and innovative educational experiences: the FY27 faculty search season, an update for year two of the "Program Student Ambassadors" program, and upcoming community-wide events from Academic Affairs.

##### **Hiring Updates**

As we move into the fall semester, I will begin my report to AAC with plans for our FY26 faculty searches. This year, we will conduct a total of 9 searches for 11 tenure-track faculty and four termed lecturers. These positions include the following:

- Art (art education)
- Business Administration (financial accounting)
- Biology (developmental biology, part of the Life at the Molecular Scale cluster hire)
- Biology (microbiology, part of the Life at the Molecular Scale cluster hire)
- Chemistry (analytical chemistry, part of the Life at the Molecular Scale cluster hire)
- Economics
- International Languages and Cultures (Spanish)
- Marine Science
- Neuroscience
- Political Science (international relations)

Our tenure-track searches were prepared over the summer for launch between Aug. 1 - Sept. 1. We continue to shift our hiring season to early fall to reach the most qualified and competitive candidates. Hiring will continue through the academic year; as is our practice, the committee will be updated on our progress at each meeting.

### **Updates on national grants and external funding**

The Office of Sponsored Research and Programs continues its excellent work to support faculty and staff as they prepare, submit, and implement a range of grant-funded endeavors. Since the last meeting of the Board of Trustees, multiple grants have officially launched and several faculty have been notified of positive funding decisions.

#### *Launched*

- Matt Breece, Assistant Professor of Marine Science
  - \$500,301, from NASA, via a sub-award from the University of Delaware, for the project, *Expanding the geography and user base of the Atlantic Sturgeon Occurrence*
  - \$23,393, from Department of Defense/Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, via a sub-award from the University of Delaware, for the project, *Target Detection and Identification using Multimodal Imagery and Machine Learning*
- Abby Beatty, Assistant Professor of Biology, \$612,209, from the National Science Foundation, for the project, *What's in a game? The use of evolution-based video games to enhance biology education.*
- Christina Goethal, Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology, \$182,756, from the National Science Foundation, for the project, *Collaborative Research: The Distributed Biological Observatory (DBO) - A Change Detection Array in the Pacific Arctic Region*
- Jerry Gabriel, Associate Professor of English, \$82,500, from the Maryland State Art Council, for the project, *The Southern Maryland Folklife Network.*
- Julie King, Professor of Anthropology, \$9,637 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for *Archaeological Curatorial Services*
- Julie King, Professor of Anthropology, \$40,852, from Historic Sotterley Inc., for the project *Community Archaeology at the Sotterley Quarter for Enslaved Families.*
- Jess Jolly, Director of Counseling Services, \$7,500, from Active Minds Inc., for the project *Send Silence Packing.*
- Lorena Torres Martinez, Assistant Professor of Biology, \$3,500, from the Maryland Native Plant Society for the project *Incidence and genetic variation of the invasive plant pathogen *Rafaella lauricola* in native *Persea* species across the United States.*
- Elizabeth Hamman, Assistant Professor of Biology, \$3,500, from the Maryland Native Plant Society for the project *The effects of the marsh periwinkle (*Littoraria irrorata*) on *Spartina alterniflora* fungal communities and consequences for snail grazing.*

#### *Awarded, still onboarding:*

- Lorena Torres Martinez, Assistant Professor of Biology, \$342,188, from the National Science Foundation and the Paul Allen Family Foundation, for the project, *Developing a*

*new framework to understand the evolution of specialization in plant-endosymbiont response to climate change*

- Barry Muchnick, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, \$56,465, from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, for the project, *Ecological Restoration Curriculum Development with Community Engagement Component*
- Emily Brownlee, Associate Professor of Biology, \$19,103, from the National Harmful Algal Bloom Observing Network for the project *Consolidating Mid-Atlantic Management Efforts for Phytoplankton Image Libraries*

As the funded research landscape continues to evolve in the current presidential administration, OSRP continues to respond and support our faculty and staff with grants. To date, only one project was discontinued due to the changed landscape, a grant wholly funded by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

### **Update on Program Student Ambassadors**

Launched in fall 2024, the Program Student Ambassador (PSA) Internships represent a campus-wide collaboration that provides leadership opportunities for St. Mary's College students who have shown a history of excellence within their declared program (major or minor). In AY 24-25 we had 30 PSAs (one allocated to each program) selected from a competitive application process and vetted by the individual programs.

To assess the PSA program's first year, we reviewed the work that had been accomplished in AY24-25 by these students. The PSAs logged roughly 3,000 hours of work for their programs; in addition to planned engagements (such as open houses, Admitted Students Days, campus fairs, programs' social media accounts, and Giving Tuesday), the PSAs also answered campus calls for assistance. Last year, they supported community outreach and engagement, enrollment operations, transfer recruitment, marketing/communications, student affairs, and more.

When polled at the end of the semester, the vast majority of the PSAs reported that the leadership experience positively or very positively impacted their:

- Time management skills;
- Project management skills;
- Interpersonal communication;
- Their understanding of their program's discipline;
- Their professional relationships with program faculty/staff;
- And the likelihood that they'll stay engaged with their program as an alum.

AY24-25 PSAs reported that they would like additional clarity in the expectations of the positions and guidance on how to manage their time towards the many goals associated with their work. Additional training in these skills will be provided in AY25-26 in response to these requests.

In AY 25-26 we added one additional PSA for the Chinese minor as it was determined that having a student who spoke each of the three languages represented in the International Languages and Cultures program (Spanish major/minor, Chinese minor, and French minor) was important to the recruitment efforts of those programs. This resulted in 31 PSAs hired and onboarded for AY25-26.



The most significant addition to the PSA program this year is the addition of the PSA Passion Project (described in this [White Paper](#)). Each year, the PSAs will identify a topic that the following year's PSAs will focus on for their Passion Project. The topic will be something that is cross disciplinary in nature, and has the potential to provide useful information for all SMCM academic programs. The AY25-26 Passion Project topic asks: How do SMCM academic programs and their students (current and recent graduates) interact with Generative AI? Through this project the PSAs will become a group of informed students on this timely topic from which College offices can pull information and/or student perspectives.

### **Updates from the Center for the Study of Democracy**

Following two successful terms by Associate Professor of Political Science Antonio Ugues, Jr., the Center for the Study of Democracy will begin a search for a full-time external director. In the interim, Associate Professor of Spanish Argelia Gonzalez Hurtado has assumed the role of interim director of the CSD. Dr. Gonzalez Hurtado has been a committed member of the consultative board, and brings with her multifaceted and interdisciplinary experience in media studies and international politics.

On September 16, internationally recognized constitutional expert and journalist Jamelle Bouie delivered the 2025 Judge William O. E. Sterling Constitution Day Lecture As the CSD's opening event for the 2025-2026 academic year. Acclaimed columnist for *The New York Times*, former CBS News political analyst and chief political correspondent for *Slate Magazine*, Jamelle Bouie covers U.S. politics, public policy, elections and race. He has appeared on CBS's *Face the Nation*, and his writings have appeared in *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *TIME* and *The New Yorker*. In 2021, Bouie received the Hillman Prize for Opinion & Analysis Journalism. In 2022, he was inducted into the Society of American Historians, and in 2024, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

This year, our event format shifted from past practice; instead of a pre-event reception with VIPs, the speaker agreed to participate in a post-lecture "talk back" with selected classes from Political Science. The goal was to maximize our students' contact with visiting speakers, and also to reduce the expense and frequent food waste of the pre-event reception.

The Judge William O.E. Sterling Constitution Day Lecture is an annual lecture held on or around September 17 to commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution. Previous Constitution Day speakers have included Sherrilyn Ifill, Nina Totenberg, Neal Katyal and Congressman Jamie Raskin.

### **Installation and Opening at Boyden Gallery: *Sharing our Common Humanity from Common Ground***

Our Fall 2025 exhibit at the Dwight Frederic Boyden Gallery is an important collaboration and moment for our local community. Opening on Tuesday, September 30, 2025, *Sharing our Common History from Common Ground* features artist Nicole Stewart's first 38 portraits of descendants of Historic Sotterley, in Hollywood, Maryland (including a portrait of SMCM's Community Affairs Liaison, Kelsey Bush). The Sotterley Descendants Project began in 2017; the portrait project emerged in 2020. This is the first time these portraits are being exhibited as a collection, and it is the hope of the artist and Historic Sotterley that the exhibition will travel the state.

In addition to the portraits, the exhibit will feature works from textile artist Dr. Joan Gaither, vignettes about Historic Sotterley, and the Commemorative to the Enslaved Peoples of Southern Maryland. The opening reception will feature a panel discussion of descendants, which will be facilitated through a collaboration with one of our history courses.

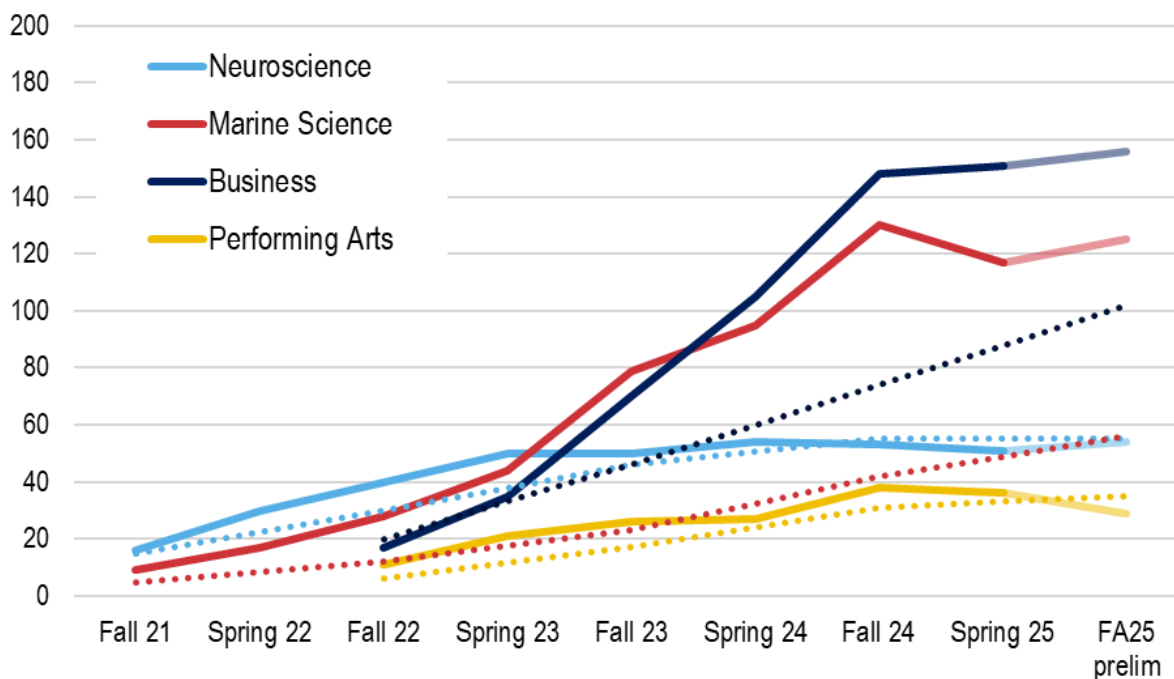
Two days after the exhibit opening, Professor Emerit of Theater and Dance, Merideth Taylor, will give a reading from her recent book, *Making a way out of no way: Lives of love, labor, and resistance*, in the Gallery. It is a work of fiction which endeavors to offer, in her words, “suggestive glimpses” into the everyday lives of those who were enslaved at Sotterley.

### Progress in fulfilling the Rising Tide

Academic Affairs continues to align priorities in fulfillment of the Rising Tide. This spring, Prof. Libby Williams is piloting our first credit-bearing course on wellness and well-being (“Cultivating and Evaluating Wellness,”). While the pilot is presently housed in the Psychology class schedule, the course embraces an interdisciplinary approach to the neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and public policy behind human wellness. In addition, a group of three faculty and staff were funded to attend a webinar by The Chronicle of Higher Education on the subject of mental health in higher education.

The four programs launched in 2021 and 2022 continue to perform well, as seen in the table below:

### Declared Majors in New Programs



The Neuroscience major is performing at par with projections for fall 2025; the search for a second dedicated hire in the program will support more aggressive recruiting efforts and expanded course offerings. The growth of the Performing Arts major has slowed in the last year, slightly underperforming as compared to original projections. We will continue to monitor enrollments into the spring, following the much-anticipated musical. As has been the case, both Marine Science and Business continue to far outpace expectations; regarding the former, enrollments have rebounded after the dip last spring. Regarding the new Data Science minor, we have successfully staffed our Introduction to Data Science gateway, as well as two sections of Algorithms & Data Structures. As was our practice after the launch of the four most recent new programs, AAC will begin receiving updates on Data Science enrollment numbers in Fall 2027.

Finally, the National Fellowships and Awards Office continues to make exciting strides. Following last year's remarkable Fulbright successes, our director is expanding outreach and mentoring for the prestigious Goldwater Award, The Goldwater Scholarship Program—one of the oldest and most prestigious national scholarships in STEM—seeks to identify and support college sophomores and juniors who show exceptional promise of becoming this Nation's next generation of research leaders in the natural sciences, psychology, mathematics, and engineering. Each Goldwater Scholar receives an amount equal to the cost of tuition, fees, books, and room and board minus the amount provided by other sources, up to a maximum of \$7,500 per full academic year, for up to two years. The Office is actively collaborating with our STEM faculty to identify and support outstanding students for this application process.

# ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

## 1. MISSION

St. Mary's College of Maryland is Maryland's honors college, a selective, public liberal arts college—a vibrant community of scholars and learners. We foster a rigorous and innovative curriculum; experiential learning; scholarship and creativity; close mentoring relationships; and a community dedicated to honesty, civility, and integrity. We are committed to diversity, access, and affordability. Our students, faculty and staff serve local, national, and global communities and cultivate and promote social responsibility.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

### A. Analysis of Goals and Objectives (*Aligned with State Plan Goals*)

#### **Goal 1: Ensure a high quality and rigorous academic program. (*Success, Innovation*)**

Objective 1.1: SMCM places intentional emphasis on student completion of high-impact practices (HIPs), setting aggressive targets and providing opportunities to meet them. Students in the Class of 2025 completed an average of four HIP experiences each, and both targets were met or surpassed (100% completed at least two and 96% completed at least three HIPs). This high level of participation (first observed last year) likely reflects both the second full class to graduate under the LEAD curriculum, which emphasizes experiential learning, and continued recovery from the decline of pandemic-affected graduating classes. SMCM continues to actively increase and encourage HIP opportunities for all students, particularly internships, research experiences, and international experiences, three HIPs that are guaranteed as part of the [Honors College Promise](#).

*Peer Benchmarks:* The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) used to release annual benchmarks regarding the completion of HIPs among graduating seniors at institutions participating in the survey. Data has not been updated since 2020, when NSSE reported that 87% of seniors at participating Carnegie Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institutions completed two or more HIPs. SMCM's rate among graduates has exceeded this for the past nine years (2020 level, 99%; five-year average, 98%). (*Source: NSSE*)

Objectives 1.2 and 1.3: SMCM is committed to offering a rigorous curriculum taught by qualified faculty. Full-time faculty continue to teach the great majority (83%) of undergraduate credit hours. Since 2020 there has been an increase in part-time faculty, largely due to SMCM's engagement of expert practitioners in a variety of fields to teach courses in the professional pathways course sequence of the LEAD curriculum. Students benefit from learning with these professionals while taking the majority of their traditional coursework with full-time faculty. Finally, the undergraduate student-faculty ratio has been at 10:1 for the past three years, more pedagogically favorable than the target of 12:1 yet more financially sustainable than the 9:1 ratio reported in 2020 and 2021. The increase in part-time faculty teaching the professional pathways courses has contributed to keeping the student-faculty ratio low; without those adjunct faculty, the ratio would be approximately 10.5:1.

*Peer Benchmarks:* According to the most recent available data (Fall 2023), at 10:1, SMCM has one of the lowest (most favorable for the student experience) student-faculty ratios among the traditional four-year public institutions in Maryland, which average 14:1. The SMCM student-faculty ratio is third lowest among the 27 Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) institutions, which also average 14:1; and is on par with Maryland private institutions and peer institution's average of 11:1, and aspirant institutions which average 9:1. (Source: IPEDS Data Center)

**Goal 2: Recruit, support, and retain a diverse and qualified group of students, faculty and administrative staff. (Access, Success)**

Objective 2.1: The percentage of incoming students who identify as students of color has remained at or above 30% for the past six years, a substantial and sustained improvement from about a decade ago when the percentage averaged only 20% (data not shown). Over the next two years, we expect to exceed the target of 33% which was reset two years ago. Entering class targets were exceeded for first generation college students for the eighth consecutive year, for the out-of-state population for the fourth consecutive year, and for Pell recipients for the fifth out of the past six years. Encouragingly, the percentage of out-of-state students has slowly been rising and is expected to hold steady above the target of 10% for the next few years. High school academic performance of the entering class remains strong; the average GPA of incoming students (3.51, unweighted) continues to surpass the target of 3.40, and is projected to hold steady near this level with the next entering class.

Objective 2.2: Both four-year graduation rates (Fall 2021 cohort graduating by Summer 2025) and six-year graduation rates (Fall 2019 cohort graduating by Summer 2025) were below targets for all groups. Note that graduation targets for students of color, African American students, first generation students, and Pell recipients were reset to aspirational levels three years ago to reflect SMCM's commitment to narrowing equity gaps in student success. Note that based on currently available data, the four-year graduation rate is on track to meet the 70% target in two years. To ensure this success, SMCM will focus on providing all students with resources and strategies to support timely graduation, with particular emphasis on students from historically underrepresented groups. SMCM's current strategic plan, [\*The Rising Tide\*](#), contains initiatives aimed at improving student retention and persistence to graduation, including expanding access to global opportunities, promoting holistic student wellness and belongingness, increasing student leadership activities, and enhancing student advising and degree-planning experiences. As of Summer 2025, we have just launched the Integrated Retention Strategic Plan which explicitly engages faculty and staff across the institution to enhance community cohesiveness, create a broader system of student support and mentorship, and cultivate a service-oriented culture. For entering first generation students, we continue to support the growth of the *Sum primus* ("I am first") program which offers extended pre-orientation activities, focusing on academic, financial, social, and cohort-building.

*Peer Benchmarks:* Based on the most recent national comparison data available (FY21), SMCM's overall four-year graduation rate (58% for the 2017 entering cohort graduating by 2021) exceeded or equaled those of other COPLAC institutions and other Maryland public and private four-year institutions, and was close to rates at SMCM's peer institutions, many of which are private. The average four-year graduation rate at aspirant institutions (all

private) represents a benchmark well above our target. As shown below, SMCM's four-year graduation rates for African American and Hispanic students were consistently above the corresponding rates at other COPLAC and Maryland public institutions, but fell below the comparison rates at Maryland private and peer institutions. Benchmark four-year graduation rates for Pell recipients are not available from IPEDS.

Because of the lag in reporting four-year graduation rates to IPEDS, additional comparison data are shown below from 37 Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institutions (36 private, 1 public) that participate in the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium ([HEDS](#)). These data are three years more recent than IPEDS (2020 cohort graduating by 2024) and additionally include Pell student data. These comparisons reveal that SMCM's four-year graduation rates for all groups generally lag behind these mainly private institutions, similar to the findings in IPEDS when compared with peer and aspirant institutions. *(Sources: As shown in tables below)*

Four-Year Graduation Rates, FY21 (Fall 2017 cohort)					
Institution(s)	N	Overall	Students of Color	African American	Hispanic
<b>SMCM</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>44%</b>
COPLAC	27	40%	32%	26%	34%
MD Public	11	32%	29%	27%	30%
MD Private	9	56%	49%	45%	53%
Peer	12	62%	56%	51%	57%
Aspirant	6	81%	80%	77%	79%

Source: IPEDS Data Center

Four-Year Graduation Rates, FY24 (Fall 2020 cohort)					
Institution(s)	N	Overall	African		
			American	Hispanic	Pell
<b>SMCM</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>56%</b>
Bacc A&S	37	64%	51%	57%	61%

Source: Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium

For six-year graduation rates, the most recent IPEDS comparison data available (FY23) reveal that SMCM's overall rate in that year (68%, for the 2017 entering cohort) equaled or exceeded that of other COPLAC, Maryland public and Maryland private institutions. As shown below, SMCM's six-year rates for students of color, Pell recipients, and need-based aid recipients also met or exceeded rates at COPLAC and Maryland public institutions, but were more variable in comparison to Maryland private and peer institutions. *(Source: IPEDS Data Center)*

Six-Year Graduation Rates, FY23 (Fall 2017 cohort)							
Institution(s)	N	Overall	Students of Color	African American	Hispanic	Pell	Need-Based Aid
SMCM	1	68%	54%	44%	52%	48%	63%
COPLAC	27	53%	46%	42%	48%	47%	49%
MD Public	11	51%	49%	49%	48%	47%	48%
MD Private	9	64%	58%	53%	62%	60%	61%
Peer	12	72%	66%	62%	66%	65%	69%
Aspirant	6	90%	89%	87%	89%	89%	89%

Source: IPEDS Data Center

**Objective 2.3:** The second-year retention rate rebounded to a seven-year high of 86% in FY25. While still not meeting the target, this year's retention rate still exceeds many benchmarks, and retention is a key focus of *The Rising Tide* strategic plan.

*Peer Benchmarks:* Based on the most recent data available (FY24), SMCM's first-to-second year retention rate last year (81%) continued to match or exceed those of COPLAC institutions (average = 73%), Maryland public four-year institutions (average = 74%), Maryland private institutions (average = 80%), and peer institutions (average = 82%), many of which are private. Retention rates at aspirant private institutions averaged 93%, supporting SMCM's aspirational target of 90%. (Source: IPEDS Data Center)

**Objective 2.4:** SMCM continues to work to maintain a diverse faculty and staff. Gender parity was down in FY25 for the second year in a row but is expected to return in FY26. Employee diversity targets were reset to 33% two years ago to match the student diversity goal, and this goal was met for the first time this year for full-time staff. SMCM has been making steady progress toward this goal in the tenure-track faculty, and the FY25 measure of 28% represents a notable improvement over last year's 21%. In addition to SMCM's portfolio of faculty mentoring and professional development resources, recent efforts to advance an inclusive learning environment (the Ross Fellows cluster hire initiative) and to diversify search processes have been successful in advancing toward this goal; over the past five years, 50% of newly hired faculty (ranging from 33% to 70% per year) have been faculty of color, and 90% of them have been retained to date.

**Objective 2.5:** Between FY14 and FY20, SMCM met or exceeded the target of an entering class that contains 20% transfer students each year. However, as the size of the first year entering class has rebounded, the percentage fell to 17% in FY21 and has remained under the target since then; a reconsideration of the target will be undertaken next year. We will continue to devote resources toward recruiting transfer students, and efforts by the Transfer Recruitment, Admission, and Services unit (established in 2023) to enhance the transfer student experience have successfully resulted in increased transfer student enrollment for the entering class in Fall 2025.

**Objective 2.6:** Among transfer students, the three year-graduation rate (71%, Fall 2022 entering



students graduating by Summer 2025) exceeded the target for the fifth time in six years, while the four-year graduation rate (69%, Fall 2021 entering students graduating by Summer 2025) fell just 1% below the target. Analysis of all transfer students' degree progress suggests that three- and four-year graduation rates will remain high over the next two years. Continued development and refinement of articulation agreements with Maryland two-year institutions will facilitate transfer students' timely progress toward the baccalaureate degree.

*Peer Benchmarks:* Benchmark information for transfer student four-year rates is available from IPEDS, but with quite a delay. The most recently available data is from transfer students who entered during 2015-16 and graduated by 2019. In that year, SMCM's four-year graduation rate for transfer students (69%) met or exceeded the average rates for Maryland public (53%) and private four-year institutions (61%), COPLAC institutions (56%), and peer institutions (69%). The average at aspirant institutions was 81%. (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

**Goal 3: Ensure access for students with financial need through a strategic combination of federal, state, private, and institutional funds. (*Access, Success*)**

Objective 3.1: This objective has consistently been met or exceeded as SMCM has focused on meeting the financial needs of entering first-time students.

Objective 3.2: Both four-year and six-year graduation rates among students receiving need-based aid (Pell grant or Direct Stafford loan) were low this year, similar to other cohort groups as discussed above for Objective 2.2. Given the particularly sensitive financial situation of students receiving need-based aid, this gap warrants increased attention. On the other hand, the leading indicator of retention to the second year, while not meeting the target of 90%, remained steady at 84% and was close to the all-student level of 86%.

*Peer Benchmarks:* Discussed under Objective 2.2 above.

**Goal 4: Increase student contributions to the Maryland community and to the state and national workforce. (*Success, Innovation*)**

Objectives 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4: Community service participation in FY25 did not meet the target for the sixth year in a row after many years of consistently higher levels. It is unclear whether this is a lingering effect of the pandemic, changes in student priorities, or related to the availability of community service opportunities. The recently established (August 2024) Office of Community Outreach and Engagement is specifically focused on expanding community leadership and service opportunities for students, through such efforts as Volunteerism Day, Days of Service, and programming at the annual Career Week. The Office of Community Outreach and Engagement is also partnering with the Dean of Students and the Center for Career and Professional Development to incorporate community service opportunities into new student orientation and professional pathway courses, respectively. Internship participation increased to 53% participation, surpassing the 45% target. This is likely attributed to the continued expansion of the professional skills component of the LEAD curriculum and expanded support for internships. The six-month employment rate declined from 65% to 53% this year; however, as



observed in past years, there was an increase in the six-month continuing education rate (30% to 36%) for the Class of 2024, which continues to surpass the target. Together, these shifts suggest that SMCM graduates remain on target for success after graduation; a total of 90% of graduates are either employed or continuing their education, consistent with the past several years.

*Peer Benchmarks:* Benchmarks for the six-month employment and continuing education rate come from the nationally administered First Destination Survey and are for Carnegie Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institutions. For the Class of 2023, the most recent graduating class for which benchmark data is available, SMCM's employment rate was 65% and the national rate was 67%, while SMCM's continuing education rate was 30% and the national rate was 21%. The total Career Outcome Rate (rate of graduates with a "positive career outcome", such as employment, continuing education, fellowship, or service experience) for the SMCM Class of 2023 was 94%, exceeding the national rate of 91%. These numbers illustrate that SMCM graduates enjoy a high rate of post-graduate success, and are more likely than similar college graduates nationwide to choose to continue their education (rather than enter the job market) just after graduation. (Source: *National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) First Destinations for the Class of 2023 Report*)

## **B. Response to Commission Questions**

### **1. Given the complex needs of today's students, what innovative supports (academic, financial, mental health, basic needs) has your college found most effective in boosting student success? How might these be expanded or reimaged to support long-term degree completion goals?**

To improve each student's academic experience and promote timely graduation, SMCM has implemented several initiatives regarding academic, financial, mental health, and basic needs to boost student success. For example, within the past three years the College has introduced a "Winterim" session – in addition to the regular fall, spring, and summer sessions – that enables students to add flexibility in their scheduling or remain "on-track" for a four-year graduation. Moreover, these accelerated courses are taught remotely, which permits students to continue their education from the comfort of their own home. The College's Sum primus ("I am first") Initiative also provides dedicated support for first-generation students – including an on-campus support and mentoring network of other first-generation students, faculty, and staff. Since 2023, Sum primus has been expanded to a full-scale living-learning community, and offers extended pre-orientation activities on crucial topics such as time management, major exploration, campus technology, financial literacy, and more.

The College's most recent innovative support system – the Seahawk Success Network – was launched during the Fall of 2024 for first-year students, and assigns each student four individual on-campus advisors in key institutional touchpoints, including faculty advising, co-curricular advising, financial aid, and academic success. This network reorients the College's existing student engagement and support structure from "reactive" to "proactive," and builds upon prior successful efforts to centralize student support services (including

academic coaching, tutoring, parent/family outreach, and an “early alert” system for students encountering academic or personal challenges) under a single office: The Office of Student Success Services.

The College also remains keenly aware that students’ ability and willingness to persist to graduation are significantly impacted by their perception of, and belief in, the relevance of a liberal arts honors education and a strong financial return on their investment. To this effect, SMCM’s updated core curriculum, LEAD (Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery), is designed to specifically and intentionally address those concerns. Key aspects of LEAD include the reorganization of general coursework requirements into thematic Inquiries, the expansion and revitalization of the Center for Career and Professional Development, and significant funding to support students achieving the Honors College Promise - a guaranteed opportunity to participate in research or a creative endeavor, complete an internship, or study abroad. Finally, increases in the College’s need-based and merit-based financial aid budgets provide additional support to students in completing their degrees.

All of the above initiatives are intended to both support short-term student success, and long-term degree completion goals. In the future, SMCM will continue to promote, improve, and expand these programs as appropriate. To that end, increased investment in the College’s private fundraising apparatus will assist in expanding and sustaining the funding base used to support these programs.

**2. In what ways has your institution changed (e.g., structures, policies, practices, or culture) as a result of pursuing the 55% completion goal? What lessons have you learned about sustaining institutional change over time?**

Overall, SMCM has become a much more flexible and supportive institution in guiding students through an honors-level curriculum and coursework load. In addition to the Winterim initiative discussed above, the College currently programs “off sequence” offerings of two-semester courses to fill important gaps for transfer students, and plans to pilot two-credit courses to further increase scheduling flexibility in the future. The College has also implemented a new scheduling matrix as of 2022, with dedicated “community meeting time” – when no classes are scheduled – built into the middle of the day to provide students more regular access to student support officers.

The College’s LEAD and discipline-specific curricula now integrate the proven, long-term benefits of a traditional liberal arts education with the practical and applied skills necessary to achieve their post-graduation plans. During their first semester at SMCM, all students, not just those from more privileged backgrounds, are immersed in personal and professional development exercises based on their post-graduation interests, and students are provided the opportunity and means to systematically explore these interests – as well as their alignment with various career paths. This curriculum design also places an emphasis on high-impact practices. For the past five graduating classes, nearly every student (98%) has completed at least two high-impact practices compared to the national average for baccalaureate arts and sciences institutions (87%). Among the graduating class of 2025, 100% of students completed at least two high-impact practices, and the average was four; moreover, 87% completed an experiential learning course, 70% engaged in faculty-mentored research project

or creative experience, and 53% completed an internship (the highest percentage to date) – with no significant participation gaps between students from historically underrepresented groups and all SMCM students.

One of the keys to sustaining institutional change over time is to remain proactive in identifying and addressing student needs, rather than reacting after the fact. Such an approach is not only more beneficial for students, but facilitates a positive faculty and staff culture to engage with students to boost their success instead of working backwards to solve problems. Another key is to develop and maintain a culture of assessment and continuous improvement. SMCM is regularly conducting comprehensive assessments of student learning, administrative effectiveness, student satisfaction, and employee satisfaction to monitor the effects of change, and to ensure that all constituents have a voice in shaping the institution's policies and practices.

# St. Mary's College of Maryland

## MISSION

St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) is Maryland's honors college, a selective, public liberal arts college—a vibrant community of scholars and learners. We foster a rigorous and innovative curriculum; experiential learning; scholarship and creativity; close mentoring relationships; and a community dedicated to honesty, civility, and integrity. We are committed to diversity, access, and affordability. Our students, faculty and staff serve local, national, and global communities and cultivate and promote social responsibility.

## VISION

St. Mary's College of Maryland will increasingly serve as the liberal arts college of choice for intellectually ambitious students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds, attracted by a rigorous, innovative, and distinctive curriculum that integrates theory and practice; a talented, professionally engaged, and student-centered faculty and staff; and a strong infrastructure. Students will be part of a collaborative learning community that embraces intellectual curiosity and innovation, the power of diversity, and the College's unique environment. Our graduates will thrive as responsible and thoughtful global citizens and leaders.

## KEY GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

### Goal 1. Ensure a high quality and rigorous academic program.

- Obj. 1.1** All graduating students will participate in at least two high-impact practices, and at least 80 percent of the graduating class will participate in at least three high-impact practices. High-impact practices are defined by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U).
- Obj. 1.2** Maintain a full-time faculty of which 98 percent have terminal degrees. Maintain the proportion of undergraduate credit hours taught by full-time faculty at 88 percent annually.
- Obj. 1.3** Maintain an environment that promotes individual contact between faculty and students by maintaining a student-faculty ratio of no more than 12 to 1.

Performance Measures	2021 Act.	2022 Act.	2023 Act.	2024 Act.	2025 Act.	2026 Est.	2027 Est.
Percent of the graduating class successfully completing at least two high-impact practices	95%	97%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Percent of the graduating class successfully completing at least three high-impact practices	72%	76%	83%	96%	96%	96%	96%
Percent of all full-time faculty who have terminal degrees	98%	97%	96%	93%	95%	95%	95%
Percent of undergraduate credit hours taught by full-time faculty	82%	80%	84%	86%	83%	85%	85%
Undergraduate student to faculty ratio	9:1	10:1	10:1	10:1	10:1	10:1	10:1

### Goal 2. Recruit, support, and retain a diverse and qualified group of students, faculty and administrative staff who will contribute to and benefit from the enriched academic and cultural environment provided by St. Mary's.

- Obj. 2.1** Recruit a qualified and diverse entering class with the following attributes: Average high school grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.40 (4 point scale), enrollment of students from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups at least 33 percent, out of state student enrollment of at least 10 percent, students from first generation households enrollment of at least 20 percent, and Pell Grants disbursed during their first semester student enrollment of at least 20 percent.

# St. Mary's College of Maryland

**Obj. 2.2** Achieve and maintain 4-year graduation rates for all students (70 percent), students from all historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups (65 percent), African-American students (65 percent), Hispanic students (70 percent), all first generation students (65 percent), and all students with a Pell Grant disbursed during their first semester (65 percent). Achieve and maintain 6-year graduation rates at 80 percent for all students and all student subgroups, including students from all historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, African-American students, Hispanic students, first-generation students, and students with a Pell Grant disbursed during their first semester.

Performance Measures	2021 Act.	2022 Act.	2023 Act.	2024 Act.	2025 Act.	2026 Est.	2027 Est.
Average high school GPA	3.44	3.45	3.5	3.49	3.51	3.49	3.50
Percent of entering first year class who identify as members of historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups	32%	31%	31%	30%	32%	38%	38%
Percent of entering first year class who originate from outside of Maryland	9%	11%	13%	14%	13%	13%	16%
Percent of entering first year class from first generation households	25%	21%	25%	28%	23%	28%	28%
Percent of entering first year class receiving Pell Grants disbursed during their first semester	24%	18%	20%	22%	23%	29%	29%
Four-year graduation rate for all students	58%	60%	56%	60%	64%	58%	70%
Four-year graduation rate for students from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups	44%	41%	50%	49%	56%	53%	68%
Four-year graduation rate for African-American students	38%	37%	41%	54%	64%	41%	57%
Four-year graduation rate for Hispanic students	44%	42%	52%	50%	45%	63%	76%
Four-year graduation rate for all first generation students	44%	57%	44%	53%	57%	51%	63%
Four-year graduation rate for students with a Pell Grant disbursed during their first semester	43%	58%	46%	56%	60%	51%	60%
Six-year graduation rate for all students	73%	71%	68%	70%	65%	69%	70%
Six-year graduation rate for students from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups	64%	60%	54%	53%	57%	59%	61%
Six-year graduation rate for African-American students	69%	59%	44%	42%	51%	71%	67%
Six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students	58%	50%	52%	58%	60%	53%	52%
Six-year graduation rate for all first generation students	71%	63%	58%	67%	55%	59%	62%
Six-year graduation rate for students with a Pell Grant disbursed during their first semester	76%	65%	48%	67%	61%	64%	64%

# St. Mary's College of Maryland

**Obj. 2.3** The first to second-year retention rate will be 90 percent.

**Obj. 2.4** The College will strive for diversity in the faculty and staff so that the composition reflects the aspired diversity of the student body. The aspirant goals for full-time faculty and staff will be: 33 percent from historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and 50 percent women.

**Obj. 2.5** Ensure access for transfer students, particularly those from 2-year institutions. Achieve and maintain transfer students at 20 percent of the entering class each fall.

**Obj. 2.6** Achieve and maintain degree completion rates for transfer students at 60 percent for three-year graduation rates, and at 70 percent for four-year graduation rates.

Performance Measures	2021 Act.	2022 Act.	2023 Act.	2024 Act.	2025 Act.	2026 Est.	2027 Est.
First to second-year retention rate	83%	85%	82%	81%	86%	82%	85%
Percent of all full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty who identify as members of historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups	16%	18%	19%	21%	28%	31%	33%
Percent women of all full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty	51%	50%	50%	48%	46%	50%	50%
Percent of all full-time (non-faculty) staff who identify as members of historically underrepresented racial/ethnic groups	27%	30%	27%	31%	33%	33%	33%
Percent women of all full-time (non-faculty) staff	57%	58%	61%	60%	60%	60%	60%
Percentage of entering fall class who are transfer students	17%	18%	15%	14%	15%	16%	16%
3-year graduation rate for all transfer students	68%	64%	56%	62%	71%	74%	77%
4-year graduation rate for all transfer students	74%	74%	70%	62%	69%	77%	78%

**Goal 3. Ensure access for students with financial need through a strategic combination of federal, state, private, and institutional funds.**

**Obj. 3.1** 72 percent of entering first-year student need is met by awarding any need-based aid.

**Obj. 3.2** Support persistence to graduation of students receiving need-based aid at entry. Achieve and maintain first-to-second year retention rates at 90 percent, four-year graduation rates at 70 percent, and six-year graduation rates at 80 percent for students receiving need-based aid in the first semester.

Performance Measures	2021 Act.	2022 Act.	2023 Act.	2024 Act.	2025 Act.	2026 Est.	2027 Est.
Average percent of first-time full-time degree-seeking student need met by awarding need-based aid	84%	78%	78%	82%	76%	79%	79%
First-to-second year retention rate for students receiving need-based aid in the first semester	78%	87%	84%	83%	84%	79%	80%
Four-year graduation rate for students receiving need-based aid in the first semester	54%	54%	46%	57%	63%	54%	65%
Six-year graduation rate for students receiving need-based aid in the first semester	69%	64%	63%	62%	55%	65%	66%

# St. Mary's College of Maryland

**Goal 4. Increase student contributions to the Maryland community and to the state and national workforce.**

**Obj. 4.1** 65 percent of graduating seniors will have performed community service while at SMCM.

**Obj. 4.2** 45 percent of graduating seniors will have participated in a paid or unpaid internship.

**Obj. 4.3** The rate of employment within six months of graduation will be at least 67 percent.

**Obj. 4.4** The rate of continuing education (at any level) within six months of graduation will be 25 percent.

Performance Measures	2021 Act.	2022 Act.	2023 Act.	2024 Act.	2025 Act.	2026 Est.	2027 Est.
Percent of graduating seniors who will have performed community service while at SMCM	50%	39%	37%	40%	40%	42%	45%
Percent of graduating seniors who fulfilled a paid or unpaid internship	44%	47%	38%	49%	53%	53%	53%
Employment rate of graduates within six months of graduation	53%	61%	67%	65%	53%	65%	65%
Percent of graduates continuing their education (at any level) within six months of graduation	34%	35%	28%	30%	36%	35%	35%