

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. FY18 Highlights

Significant changes and events occurring at St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) during FY18 included the following.

- Based on enrollment to date, the entering class for Fall 2018 is nearly 15% larger than that of Fall 2016 or Fall 2017, confirming the success of the new leadership in Enrollment Management, improved marketing and enhanced recruiting, which signals a potential stabilization of enrollment that continued to decline over the past two years.
- A new minor was implemented in Applied Mathematics in 2017-18, and new programs were approved in Business (minor), Astrophysics (minor), and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (major) to begin in 2018-19.
- SMCM completed the second year of implementation of the 2016-19 strategic plan, *A Time for Rebirth*.
- SMCM was invited to join the American Talent Initiative, a consortium of colleges which are committed to the collective goal of enrolling 50,000 additional talented, low- and moderate-income students at top colleges and universities by 2025.
- President Tuajuanda Jordan established the First-Generation Student Initiative, a program enabling students who are the first in their families to attend college (like President Jordan) to be part of an on-campus support network including other first-generation students and faculty.
- SMCM was named to several college ranking lists, including: Top Public Liberal Arts Colleges (U.S. News & World Report), Colleges of Distinction, Best 380 Colleges (Princeton Review), Top 50 Green Colleges (Princeton Review), Best Colleges for Your Money (Money Magazine), Best Value Colleges (Kiplinger's), Fiske Guide to Colleges, Top Colleges Doing the Most for the American Dream, and Top 25 Hidden Gems for Women in STEM.

B. Analysis of Goals and Objectives

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

Objective 1.1: SMCM students continue to complete one-on-one learning experiences with faculty at high rates. The 2016-19 Strategic Plan includes a number of objectives related to expanding opportunities for high-impact practices, as we continue to strive toward the target of 80% of the graduating class participating in a one-on-one learning experience. Relatedly, for the second year in a row, we expect to meet the Strategic Plan target of 100% of graduates completing at least two high-impact practices (research with faculty, first-year seminars, capstone experiences, international experiences, internships, etc.)

Objectives 1.2 and 1.3: SMCM is committed to offering a rigorous curriculum taught by qualified faculty. For four of the past five years, SMCM has met or exceeded the targeted percent of full-time faculty who have terminal degrees, and full-time faculty teach the great majority of undergraduate credit hours as indicated by meeting or exceeding the target for the past four years. Finally, the undergraduate student-faculty ratio has remained at 10:1 for the past five years, well below (better than) the target of 12:1. This combination of a consistently low student-faculty ratio with a faculty of qualified full-time professors is essential to the success of achieving and maintaining a high quality academic program.

Peer Benchmarks: SMCM has by far the lowest student-faculty ratio (10:1) among the traditional four-year public institutions in Maryland, with the next lowest being Coppin State at 13:1 and the average being 15:1. The SMCM student-faculty ratio (along with New College of Florida) is also the lowest among COPLAC institutions, which average 16:1; and is on par with peer and aspirant peer institutions, which range from 9:1 to 14:1 (with an average of 11:1) and include many private colleges. (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

Goal 2: Recruit, support, and retain a diverse and qualified group of students, faculty and administrative staff.

Objective 2.1: In FY18, SMCM was able to recruit a first-year class that exceeded the target for the percentage of minority students for the fifth year in a row, and met the target for those receiving Pell grants for the third time in the last five years. Notably, SMCM continues to attract a significant portion of its entering class from first generation college students, with the FY18 class consisting of 25% first generation, well above the target of 20%. High school academic performance of the entering class remains strong, with an increase in GPA projected for FY19. After several years of declining SAT scores among incoming SMCM students, the scoring of the test changed, preventing direct comparisons with previous years; however, SAT scores using the new scoring method are projected to increase for the FY19 entering class. Finally, SMCM continues to face challenges in recruiting and enrolling students from outside of Maryland, and this is a critical aspect of the overall Strategic Plan.

Peer Benchmarks: While the metric for SAT scores uses the median SAT score, the available benchmark data uses the mean (average). Based on these data, the average SAT

score of SMCM entering students (1169) continues to exceed that of most other Maryland four-year institutions (FY18 average = 1086), and our students rank well against high school seniors both in Maryland (FY18 average = 1060) and nationwide (FY18 average = 1060). (Source: MHEC 2018 Data Book)

Objective 2.2:

Four-Year Graduation Rates. Four-year graduation rates for FY18 (Fall 2014 cohort graduating by Summer 2018) increased for all minorities (59%) and Hispanic students (68%). However, overall four-year graduation rates (63%) were once again lower than previous years, as were four-year rates among African American students (46%), first generation students (59%), and Pell recipients (55%). Based upon current projections, overall four-year rates are predicted to recover to FY17 levels (68%) over the next two years (Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts). While African American four-year rates are projected to recover strongly to exceed targets, rates for Hispanic students, first-generation students, and Pell recipients are projected to remain below targets, in the absence of additional intervention.

Recent analysis (called a *pathway analysis*) of historical student characteristics that predict retention and persistence have revealed several potential avenues for action, particularly among students from underrepresented groups. For example, students who attempt less than 16 credits in their first or second semester (representing timely progress toward the 128 credits required for graduation) are substantially (15-30 percentage points) less likely to graduate in four years, and this effect is amplified for minority students (22-37 percentage points, e.g., 67% vs 31% four-year rate for minority students who do vs do not attempt 16 credits in the second semester). We are in the initial stages of preparing materials to equip faculty advisors and academic support staff with this information so that they can have informed conversations with their students about the importance of registering for (and completing) a full load of 16 credits per semester whenever possible.

The pathway analysis also offers some potential insight into the lower four-year graduation rates reported and projected here. For example, 16% of students in the Fall 2014-2016 cohorts (average actual and projected four-year rate of 64%) attempted fewer than 16 credits in their first semester, compared to 12% of students in Fall 2010-13 cohorts with an average four-year rate of 70%. This tendency toward lower credit enrollment in later cohorts was observed among all examined subgroups where four-year graduation rates have declined and/or are predicted to decline, including minority students, African American students, first-generation students, and Pell recipients. The effect is especially striking for Hispanic students, where the proportion of students failing to attempt 16 credits doubled from 15% among Fall 2010-13 cohorts to 33% among Fall 2015-16 cohorts – and accordingly, the FY19 and FY20 four-year graduation rates are projected to decline markedly for these cohorts. These data underscore the importance and the likely positive impact of our upcoming advising initiative to strongly encourage students to register for 16 credits every semester.

Furthermore, a separate analysis indicated that far fewer students of color, particularly African American students, enter SMCM with advanced placement credits, placing them at a disadvantage in achieving four-year graduation. In light of both of these analyses, SMCM is investigating expanding course offerings outside the traditional fall and spring semester schedule

(e.g., expanded summer offerings, a winter term, online course offerings) to provide opportunities for students to make up missing credits and graduate in a timely fashion.

Peer Benchmarks: Based on the most recent comparison data available (FY14), SMCM's overall four-year graduation rate (65% for the 2010 cohort) exceeded those of other public liberal arts colleges (COPLAC schools, average = 39%) and other Maryland public four-year institutions (average = 27%), as well as peer institutions (average = 62%), many of which are private. The average four-year graduation rate at private aspirant institutions was 87% in FY16, representing a benchmark well above our target. Four-year graduation rates for African American students, Hispanic students, and all minority students combined were 14-44 percentage points higher at SMCM than at other COPLAC or Maryland public institutions. Compared to peer institutions, four-year rates for Hispanic students were 11 percentage points higher at SMCM, while four-year rates for all minority student and for African American students lagged behind by 4 and 15 percentage points, respectively, and four-year rates for these groups ranged from 12-36 percentage points lower than at aspirant institutions. These comparisons with peers and aspirants, which are our primary programmatic and curricular competitors, underscore the need for SMCM to direct additional attention and resources toward underrepresented students. (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

The pathway analysis referenced above also informs our strategy for improving the four-year graduation rates for students receiving Pell grants. Historical evidence shows that for Pell recipients, those who earn 32 credits in their first year have a four-year graduation rate 41 percentage points higher than those who do not.

Six-Year Graduation Rates. The most recent overall six-year graduation rate (Fall 2012 cohort graduating by Summer 2018) is 80%, a four-year high that meets the target for this critical metric. Notably, six-year graduation rates for Hispanic students (81%), first generation students (85%), and Pell grant recipients (84%) remain strong and well above individual targets. However, the rate for African American students (56%) was once again low this year, below the target and well below the overall six-year rate for all students. Most six-year graduation rates are projected to remain high over the next two cohorts, with the notable exceptions of projected declines among African American students and first-generation students.

SMCM has historically reported strong six-year graduation rates, particularly among many underrepresented student groups, which is a marker of our students' success and ability to persist. However, the financial implications of taking five or six rather than four years to complete the baccalaureate are substantial, and could be especially challenging for underrepresented students, first-generation students, and Pell recipients. As discussed above, recently begun retention initiatives will focus on academic advising and encouraging students to attempt 16 or more credits each semester to stay on track toward four-year graduation.

Peer Benchmarks: The most recent comparison data available (FY16) show that SMCM's overall six-year graduation rate in that year (81%, for the 2010 cohort) far exceeded that of other COPLAC institutions (average = 55%), other Maryland public four-year institutions (average = 47%), and peer institutions (average = 75%). The average reported six-year

graduation rate at private aspirant institutions was 91% in FY16. SMCM's six-year rates for all minority students (68%) and for African American students (56%) were 12-23 percentage points above comparable rates from other COPLAC and Maryland public institutions, but were behind those of peer and aspirant peer institutions by 3-28 percentage points. Notably, the six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students at SMCM (82%) was 16-41 percentage points above that from other COPLAC institutions, Maryland public institutions, and peer institutions, and was only 4 percentage points behind the rate from aspirant peer institutions. Finally, SMCM's six-year graduation rate for Pell recipients in FY16 (69%) was well above that of other COPLAC institutions (average = 49%) and Maryland public institutions (average = 44%), and was close to the average rate at peer institutions (72%). The average six-year graduation rate for Pell recipients at aspirant institutions was 91%, equal to their overall six-year graduation rate. (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

Objective 2.3: While the specific target for the first- to second-year retention rate was not met in FY18, the rate has remained high and relatively stable for the past eight years. SMCM has implemented a comprehensive early-alert system (the Beacon Student Success module within CampusLabs) in an effort to reach our retention target moving forward. As discussed above, pathway analysis shows that successful completion of key milestones, like taking 16 credits in the first semester, is correlated with significant improvement in first-to-second year retention. The advising initiative described earlier is anticipated to lead to increased four-year graduation rates but also first-to-second year retention rates for all students, especially for minority students.

Peer Benchmarks: Based on the most recent data available (FY16), SMCM's first-to-second year retention rate (87%) was well above those of other public liberal arts colleges (COPLAC schools, average = 75%) and Maryland public four-year institutions (average = 74%), and also exceeded that of peer institutions (average = 85%), many of which are private. Retention rates at private aspirant institutions averaged 94% in FY16, which is well above SMCM's target but is a useful aspirational benchmark as we strive to remain competitive with those institutions. (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

Objective 2.4: SMCM continues to work toward its goal to maintain a diverse faculty and staff. Gender equity was achieved for both faculty and staff in FY18. The targets for diversity of race/ethnicity targets for both faculty and staff were not quite met, but were both increased from FY17 numbers. Notably, in Fall 2017, 43% (6 of 14) of newly hired tenure-track faculty members were members of minority groups, an impressive increase from the three previous years when the percentage ranged from 0-8%. Several strategies continued to be implemented in FY18 to work toward increasing faculty and staff diversity, which is also a prominent aspect of the Strategic Plan. For example, SMCM expanded its external recruitment venues to attract more applications from women and underrepresented professionals; faculty search committees were provided with a variety of materials and strategies regarding recruiting a diverse pool; and the Office of Human Resources streamlined and updated hiring processes and the Affirmative Action Plan.

Objective 2.5: SMCM has met or exceeded the target of an entering class that contains 20%

transfer students for the past five years, and levels are expected to maintain at 20% or higher over the next two years.

Objective 2.6: The three-year graduation rate for transfer students (56%, Fall 2015 entering students graduating by Summer 2018) declined this year, falling below the target, but is projected to rebound strongly in FY19 and FY20. The four-year transfer graduation rate (71%, Fall 2014 entering students graduating by Summer 2018) exceeded the target this year, and this rate is also expected to continue climbing over the next two years. We will continue to explore strategies to support transfer students and ensure their timely graduation. For example, all departments are in the process of preparing detailed, major-specific articulation agreements with Maryland two-year institutions, which will facilitate transfer students' timely progress toward the baccalaureate degree.

Peer Benchmarks: The IPEDS database only tracks six-year and eight-year graduation rates for transfer students; therefore, benchmark information for four-year rates is only available from those schools which voluntarily provide data to the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) initiative. Based on the most recent data available from SAM (mixture of 2010 and 2011 cohorts), SMCM's four-year graduation rate for transfer cohorts (67%) was well above those of other Maryland public four-year institutions (average = 55%). SMCM also compares favorably to COPLAC institutions that participate in SAM (16 of 24) which report an average four-year transfer graduation rate of 57%. No aspirant institutions and only 2 of 12 peer institutions (both also COPLAC institutions) participate in SAM. (Source: studentachievementmeasure.org)

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

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: The six-year graduation rate among students receiving need-based aid (Pell grant or Stafford loan) were strong (81%) and above both the target and the overall student population six-year rate. However, the four-year graduation rate (61%) was low, similar to four-year rates among most other Fall 2014 cohort groups as discussed above for Objective 2.2, and are similarly projected to remain low. Given the particularly sensitive financial situation of students receiving need-based aid, this gap warrants increased attention. Similarly, retention to the second year (80%) was below the target and lower than the rate for the overall population, although this rate is projected to rebound over the next two years.

Peer Benchmarks: Similar to findings for graduation rates among Pell recipients, SMCM's six-year graduation rate for students receiving need-based aid in FY16 (72%, most recent comparison data available) was well above that of other COPLAC institutions (52%) and Maryland public institutions (45%), and was nearly equivalent to the rate at peer institutions (73%). The six-year graduation rate for recipients of need-based aid at aspirant

institutions was 91%, equal to their overall six-year graduation rate. (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

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

Objectives 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4: SMCM prides itself in preparing students for life after college. Recently, we have focused on promoting community service (4.1) and internships (4.2) and these efforts appear to be succeeding. Community service participation has exceeded targets for the past three years. While the percentage of students reporting internships declined slightly this year, it remains strong and recent expansion of Career Development Center staff and programming are expected to support continued increases in student participation in internships. SMCM students continue to be employed at high rates five years after graduation (4.3), and the proportion of students continuing their education at the graduate level within five years (4.4) also continues to increase. Both of these measures have exceeded their targets for the past three years.

Peer Benchmarks: Similar, but not identical, benchmarks are available for community service and internships. The most recent available volunteer/community service rates for college students nationwide are from 2015. In that year, the Corporation for National and Community Service reported that the national volunteer rate for college students was 25.7%, and the rate for Maryland college students was 36.4%. The rate for SMCM seniors in 2015 was 62%. Although the methodologies underlying the calculation of volunteer rates likely differ in multiple ways (e.g., all college students versus graduating seniors), this benchmark suggests that SMCM students' volunteer rates are likely to be comparable to peers both nationally and in Maryland. With regard to internships, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported that among over 4,000 sampled graduates of the Class of 2017 from over 350 campuses, 58.6% had participated in an internship. Although this figure is a fair amount higher than the reported percentage of 45% among SMCM graduating seniors in 2017, it is important to note that NACE also reported that students most likely to have an internship most often majored in engineering, finance, marketing, parks and recreation, political science, and public administration. SMCM offers only one of those top six majors. (*Sources: Corporation for National and Community Service, www.nationalservice.gov/vcla; NACE Class of 2017 Student Survey Report*)

C. Response to Commission Assessment

In response to the 2017 Performance Accountability Report, the Commissioners expressed concern about the persistent statewide gaps in college success and completion when comparing African American students with their peers. To better understand the contributing factors and institutional responses to these persistent gaps, the Commission seeks additional insight from institutions tied to these indicators.

In its 2017 Performance Accountability Report, the College reported that its four-year graduation rate for African American students (48.7%) was lower than that of the total student population (67.4%). And similarly, the College also reported that its six-year graduation rate for African American students (55.8%) lagged behind the rate for the total student population (77.8%). The gap in both the four- and six-year graduation rates has widened over time.

Describe the factors the College has identified that affect these trends. What strategies are in place to reverse growing gaps and achieve the College's aggressive benchmarks?

As mentioned as part of the discussion of Objective 2.2 above, an analysis of historical factors contributing to retention and persistence was recently undertaken by the SMCM Retention Committee. The approach was to identify characteristics (“milestones”) that, if met, were linked to higher retention and graduation rates over the past several years. These characteristics were also investigated for their potential differential impact on students from underrepresented groups including students of color, first-generation students, and Pell grant recipients.

Several milestones were identified that both strongly impacted student retention and persistence, and also appeared to be actionable in terms of influencing student behavior. For African American students, the three most impactful factors appear to be the following. All numbers are derived from at least 2 years of data.

Milestone/ Characteristic	Percent of AA Students	Four-Year Grad Rate	Six-Year Grad Rate
Earned 32+ credits in first year	41%	68%	63%
Earned <32 credits in first year	59%	34%	52%
Declared a major by the sophomore year	70%	70%	85%
No major declared by sophomore year	30%	42%	56%
Enrolled in STEM Emerging Scholars Program	27%	68%	81%
Not enrolled in STEM Emerging Scholars Program	73%	43%	48%

1. Not surprisingly, earning 32 credits in the first year (timely progress toward a four-year degree) is strongly associated with higher four-year graduation rates, and less strongly with higher six-year graduation rates. A majority of African American students over the past several years have not reached this milestone. We plan to implement advising strategies aimed at encouraging all students, and particularly African American students, to enroll in 32 credits in the first year (16 credits per semester) whenever possible. We will continue to offer academic workshops and additional intrusive advising to provide further support. To this end, we recently

created a new Student Support Specialist position in the Office of Student Support Services to create and coordinate additional academic support programming.

On a positive note, four-year graduation rates are projected to increase for African American students to 57% in FY19 and 56% in FY20, for students in the Fall 2015 and 2016 cohorts respectively, based on current earned credits and progress toward the degree. Both of these rates would surpass our target for African American students, and would narrow the gap relative to the all-student population to within 10 percentage points. Interestingly, there appears to be a concurrent trend for more students in the later cohorts to complete 32 credits in the first year. Among African American students in the Fall 2010-13 cohorts, 62% did not complete 32 credits in the first year. This proportion is slowly declining, with 60% in Fall 2014, 57% in Fall 2015, and 44% in the Fall 2016 cohort failing to complete 32 credits. These historical data provide further support for our intention to focus on advising African American students to attempt and complete a full 16-credit load each semester.

2. Having declared a major by the fourth semester (end of the sophomore year) is associated with a nearly 30% gain in four-year and six-year graduation rates among African American students. Again, this suggests an opportunity for a wide range of advising-based interventions. It is unclear whether undeclared students have not chosen a major because they are indecisive, or are uninformed about their options. Proactively offering extensive and varied information about the different major programs at SMCM could be helpful in encouraging students to explore alternative majors that they may not have previously considered, and may increase persistence by strengthening their commitment to the college and to an academic “home”.

3. Among African American students taking gateway science or math courses their first year, those enrolled in an accompanying Emerging Scholars Program (ESP) course have persisted at substantially increased rates. Although enrollment in ESP courses is limited by resources and pedagogy (small class sizes), these data suggest it would be productive to explore ways to expand ESP offerings to additional students if possible.