

MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY

Joint Convention on the Status of Higher Education in Maine

Dr. William J. Brennan, President

March 3, 2015

President Thibodeau, Speaker Eves, legislative leaders, members of the 127th Maine Legislature, and guests, my name is Bill Brennan, President of the Maine Maritime Academy.

I'm pleased to be here today to provide you with an update on the Academy, and an understanding of our current accomplishments and challenges.

At the present time, Maine Maritime Academy is in a strong and vibrant position. Our applications are robust and many programs are already at capacity for the coming academic year; enrollment is extremely healthy.

On the outcome side, our job placement rate is exceptional. We are able to consistently place more than 90% of our students in jobs within their career fields within 90 days of graduation.

That is a major advantage that comes with a diploma from MMA; and it adds substantial value for our students.

We were recently recognized for *multiple* ways that we add value for our students and their families who are investing in an MMA education. Maine Maritime Academy was ranked the Number 1 Best Public College in America by Money magazine, on their inaugural Best Colleges list. In addition, out of over 650 colleges put to the value test, Money magazine rated Maine Maritime Academy the *fourth best* college in the country for returning value on the higher education investment.

There has been much attention paid to the input side, the cost, of a college education. But what Money magazine did was to use metrics that matter, unique measures, taking into account educational quality, affordability and career outcomes to determine their ratings.

We are extremely proud to be ranked so highly in educational quality, affordability, and career outcomes, and we believe there are a number of factors that contribute to that success.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, our 5-year average persistence rate is just over 91%. Our retention rate, which is a measure of the percentage of first-time students who return for their second year, is 75% percent, which is about 10 percent higher than the national average. And, I am very pleased to report that our graduation rate of 74 percent is nearly 17 percent higher than the U.S. average.

We have much to be proud of when it comes to these statistics, and I think the numbers become more substantial when you look at the ways that make us such a unique member of the higher

education partnership in the state of Maine. In this regard, we do, already, meet many of the strategies of the “Game Changers” Report.

Maine Maritime Academy is a small co-educational college located in Downeast Maine, established by act of the Maine Legislature in 1941.

A proposal for an institution devoted to nautical training was led by Senator Ralph Leavitt of Portland and educational and civic leaders in our state in the 1930s.

Our mission at the outset was to train mariners in support of the war effort and I am proud to tell you that my father and two of my uncles were members of the Academy’s first classes.

With the state’s support, Maine Maritime Academy has substantially diversified over the years. While adhering to our original purpose of graduating merchant mariners, we have, in true Maine spirit, worked to maximize what we have and what we do best.

We have matured to offer a contemporary college setting with a diverse student population and a special mix of midshipmen in uniform and students who follow a traditional college lifestyle.

Maine Maritime continues to embrace the role of the ocean as the core of our curriculum, but with an updated mission that is far broader than at our founding.

Graduates of our core curriculum—which encompasses Marine Transportation, Marine Engineering Technology and Operations, and Marine Systems Engineering—continue to be reputed as some of the best marine engineers and deck officers in their international industry.

But today we offer three degree programs and 18 majors, each providing truly hands-on learning opportunities for our students. We are a focused STEM institution offering a specialized program of study in engineering, management, science and transportation, prescribed by the U.S. Maritime Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard.

We are a unique part of the State’s higher education partnership also because we are one of only six such state maritime academies in the country that offer this specialized program of study.

We have an enrollment of just under 1000 students, approximately 65 percent of whom are in a regimental program of study and more than 70 percent are residents of the state of Maine.

Our students are focused and driven and, in many respects, that helps to define us and set us apart from many other colleges.

Another way in which we are unique is in how we select our students. Our admissions process is very keen to select those students who have the greatest likelihood of success in our very unique program of study. That is not to say that we accept only students with top high school academic scores, as we do not.

Instead, we select those students who have demonstrated the drive and focus necessary to be successful at this career-oriented institution. Many are the first in their family to attend college.

But, we also recognize that some applicants to our program need just a little help and, when they get it, they offer great potential to succeed in our program. It is for that reason that I am so pleased with the collaboration between Maine Maritime Academy and the Maine Community College System, referred to as the Maine Maritime Academy Prep program.

Modeled after programs used by several service academies such as Annapolis, we will hold a place for an applicant who needs a bit of remediation, if they successfully complete a program that we have jointly built with their local community college.

We also collaborate significantly with University of Maine System faculty and students in order to more fully and professionally engage in a host of research projects.

A couple of examples of collaborative research currently underway:

Working with UMaine and the University of Maine at Machias under a Maine Economic Improvement Fund grant, our faculty and students are conducting research to understand the species-specific roles of seaweed in the intertidal ecosystem.

Under a Department of Transportation Grant that is funding our Marine Engine Testing and Emissions Laboratory, our faculty and students are working with UMaine chemical engineering faculty to test the energy value of fuels we are developing. We have also collaborated on projects in hydrodynamics and offshore wind, deploying in the waters off our campus in Castine a wind generator built at the University's Advanced Structures and Composites Center in Orono.

Our students are working on thermoelectric energy generation, biodiesel development, biofouling countermeasures for ships, and energy efficient lobster boat design. Maine Maritime Academy is also proud to be the host institution for the only in-stream tidal energy testing facility in the United States.

It's all about the students, and this kind of hands-on experience enhances their opportunity for career success. It also maximizes our strengths and serves workforce needs for the industries that employ our graduates. Quite simply, the unique nature of our program works, and it creates competency in our graduates that positions them confidently for their future employers.

You should be gratified to know, that employers of our graduates recognize the value of an MMA education and they demonstrate that through generous financial contributions to the Academy.

At the outset I told you that we are a small college with a focused program of study and we operate in a very conservative fiscal fashion in an effort to attempt to keep our tuition costs such that any qualified Maine student who wants a Maine Maritime education can afford to attend.

We at Maine Maritime Academy are keenly aware of the fiscal challenges the state confronts and we recognize the new paradigm in higher education.

At its founding, the college's operational expenses were covered completely by the state and federal governments. Over time, that relationship changed such that the state's contribution to our operating expenses is about a quarter of our need.

There is no doubt that much work and commitment is necessary to address the fundamental challenges that you and I share in meeting the higher education needs of Maine students.

The Affordability Commission and others are doing good work to identify ways to manage costs and lessen the burden on students. We have seen proposals that include increased funding for scholarships and loans, all of which I support. But I'd like to share with you some comparative information to put our particular situation in perspective.

As I have pointed out previously, Maine Maritime Academy is one of six such state maritime academies in the country. All of these schools have essentially the same program of study; we have approximately the same number of students, faculty and staff, and approximately the same operational costs. We thus represent a perfect basis for assessing the difference in regional costs of higher education. California Maritime, for example, offers tuition at half of what I can offer because it receives 58 percent, or approximately \$22 million in annual state appropriations, whereas Maine Maritime receives about 25 percent, or less than \$9 million in state appropriations towards our budget.

All of the other academies offer a lower tuition than I can for this same reason -- Massachusetts Maritime Academy receives 42 percent of its budget from the state, New York receives 46 percent from the state, and Texas receives 43 percent of its operations budget in the form of state appropriations. That disparity makes it very difficult for Maine Maritime to compete.

Let me expand this comparison a bit further. I am proud to tell you that just last month, we opened for our students the first new classroom building to be built on our campus in over thirty years. Four and a half million dollars of the construction cost was covered by a State Bond Issue and I thank the people of Maine for their support. But it's important to recognize that three quarters, or another ten million dollars was raised from private sources, mostly the employers of our graduates, to construct a public building on public land to serve what is arguably a public responsibility. For comparison, two years ago, Massachusetts Maritime Academy opened a new 23 million dollar academic building paid for almost exclusively by state appropriations.

The three academic organizations represented here today are different institutions with different missions serving students with different ambitions. But where we are all similar is that we serve the people of Maine and the higher education aspirations of Maine students striving to better themselves and their state. The higher education books should not be balanced on the backs of students. The cost of maintaining the public infrastructure that our institutions represent should not be paid for by students and it is for that reason that I appreciate that the Governor has included, and the Legislature is considering, a modest increase in our appropriations to address critical infrastructure needs.

All of the institutions represented here work collaboratively as I mentioned previously, from the President's offices to the classrooms, through student and faculty exchanges. We seek each other's counsel and best practices in the fields of law and policies, business and administration, safety and security, facilities management, and even financial investment.

We at Maine Maritime Academy are governed by a Board with specialized backgrounds within the sectors that employ our graduates. Because of the uniqueness of our program, we depend upon a board that knows the field into which our graduates are entering. Our specialized board includes ship's pilots and captains, and former heads of large shipping companies, globally involved certification companies such as the American Bureau of Shipping, and shipyards including the Bath Iron Works.

Next year, we'll be celebrating the Academy's 75th Anniversary. We are very proud of our history, and especially proud of our alumni who are working here in Maine, and all over the world. Our reputation is reinforced by every student who graduates from the college.

We are increasingly recognized for our specialization and innovation in maritime education. Again this year, we have been listed by U.S. News and World Report as one of the top small undergraduate engineering schools in the country.

Our mission is to prepare young women and men for success. We are a game changer because we provide them with a wonderful education that prepares them for amazing careers. And the State of Maine derives value on both ends of the exchange – we educate Maine students and they, in return, contribute as productive members of society and of our economy.

Thank you again President Thibodeau and Speaker Eves, for the opportunity to address this Joint Convention. Due to the legislative support over the years, our students learn to embrace challenges, develop hands-on experience, and upon graduation, are prepared to achieve their goals as leaders in their fields; leaders who carry with them around the World the reputation of the State of Maine as a skilled, hardworking and dedicated people.

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