

# MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY

## Joint Convention on the Status of Higher Education in Maine

Dr. William J. Brennan, President

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President Thibodeau, Speaker Gideon, legislative leaders, members of the 128<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature, and guests,

I am pleased to be here today with my colleagues Chancellor Page and President Langhauser to talk about higher education, and to provide you with an update on the Maine Maritime Academy; 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 and their families who are investing in an MMA education. Maine Maritime Academy has been consistently recognized for providing a high-value education by organizations such as the Brookings Institution, U.S. News and World Report, and Money Magazine, which ranked MMA the number-one Best Public College in America in 2014 and 2015.

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 our success.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, our persistence rate, which is the number of first-time, full-time students who successfully complete their first semester and transition to the second semester, averages in excess of 95 percent. Our retention rate, defined by higher education enrollment managers as the number of students who successfully complete their first year and transition to their second year, is in excess of 82 percent and has risen from 74% over the last four years. Our 6-year graduation rate, which is the customary measure used by higher education institutions, is in excess of 66 percent for our entire student cohort and in excess of 78 percent for those students who transfer here from other institutions.

Another point of success that I'm very pleased to report is the collaboration that we engage in with the University and Community Colleges. From joint appointments, to graduate assistance, cooperative research, and other supporting endeavors including investment management and legal counsel, Maine Maritime Academy benefits significantly from the guidance and assistance that exists in the much larger sister institutions. I'm particularly pleased to highlight a very successful program that we have engaged in with the Community College System for a few years running.

Referred to as the MMA Prep and modeled after the U.S. Naval Academy Prep program, it enables high school graduates who want an MMA education, but who are deficient in some academic area, to be guaranteed admission to the Academy, provided they successfully complete a prescribed program at their local community college. Right now, on my campus, I have 27 students who are thriving in their academic pursuits. These are students from Maine who, without the MMA Prep program and our collaboration with the Community College System, would not have been able to attend Maine Maritime Academy.

We have much to be proud of when it comes to our programs and 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.

Maine Maritime Academy is a small coeducational college located in Downeast Maine. The school was established by act of the Maine Legislature in 1941. We just celebrated our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. With your help last year, we brought attention to our history and accomplishments. I want to thank you for your support.

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. After a career in the U.S. Navy, my father returned to the Academy in 1966 as its first Commandant of Midshipmen, so I literally grew up on the campus. I first sailed aboard the academy's training ship when I was fifteen and in the summers I worked at the Academy for the various crews constructing one thing or another. I literally have had a hand in building the institution for the past 50 years.

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, evolving into a contemporary college offering 22 programs of study.

We are a focused STEM institution, and we also offer a very specialized program of study in engineering, management, science and transportation, prescribed by the U.S. Maritime Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard. And Maine Maritime Academy is unique because we are one of only six such colleges in the country that offer this specialized program of study. We have an enrollment of about 1000 students, more than 70 percent of whom are residents of the state of Maine and more than 60 percent of whom are in a regimental program.

Nearly 40 percent of the students that make up the Class of 2020 are the first in their family to attend college; 80 percent of those students are from Maine. Given the nature of our specialized form of education, the majority of our students are in a compulsory drug-testing program due the requirement of the license they seek upon successful completion of their studies. Our students are focused and driven and, in many respects, that helps define us and set us apart from many other colleges.

We are successful for all of those reasons, including our dedicated faculty and staff. Another important reason for our success is the strong connection that exists between our students and MMA alumni, enabling us to have a job placement rate that other colleges envy. Our alumni provide coop and cadet shipping opportunities for our students and they provide job opportunities for our graduates.

As the academy moves into its 8th decade, the most important message that I can convey is that Maine Maritime Academy is doing great, we continue to maintain an extraordinary placement rate and we are providing amazing careers for young men and women. But we're at a critical crossroad, constrained as we are in the harbor village of Castine and facing the pressure to grow as would any business in difficult economic times.

As I pointed out, Maine Maritime Academy is one of six 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 66 percent, or approximately \$29 million in annual state appropriations, whereas Maine Maritime received last year 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 36 percent of its budget from the state and Texas Maritime Academy receives 45 percent of its operations budget in the form of state appropriations.

At its founding, the college's operational expenses were covered completely by the state and federal governments, and the state paid for the construction and maintenance of our facilities. Over time, that relationship has changed such that the federal contribution is primarily in relation to the 500-foot training vessel STATE OF MAINE that we operate in a custodial arrangement with the Maritime Administration.

The state's contribution to our operating expenses has declined over time from as much as 50 percent of the total 20 years ago, to less than a quarter of the total now. But the state has helped us in many ways, including the support of a \$4.5 million bond issue that enabled us to construct, in a public / private partnership, the first new classroom building the Academy has added to our campus in over thirty years. I am also pleased to acknowledge that the Governor has included in his budget an increase for the Academy, bringing the percentage of state contribution to our annual operating expense somewhat closer to what the University and Community College Systems realize. Of course, the scale and order of magnitude is significantly less than either, but

it does reaffirm that Maine Maritime Academy is considered an important component of the state's higher education partnership.

To some, the items laid out in our appropriations request would seem mundane, but they are critical to our effective and efficient operation. We at the Academy—the faculty, staff and students—are appreciative of your efforts to help us address some of the obstacles we confront. I especially appreciate that this budget proposal will make a critical difference in mitigating some of the impact of cost escalation and ultimately enable Maine students to enjoy both the intellectual and economic benefits of a Maine Maritime education.

Another important component of our operating expenses that I would like to share with you is the historic schooner Bowdoin that brought so much attention to the State of Maine for its role in Arctic exploration at the turn of the last century. Now the Bowdoin serves as a training and learning platform and, to the Academy, it is similar to a laboratory or a classroom; it just happens to be a classroom that floats, providing hands-on learning for our students.

Former Governor Kenneth Curtis was President of Maine Maritime Academy at the time the schooner Bowdoin was acquired. It was his view, and my view today, that this vessel is of historic significance to the State of Maine, is owned by the people of the State of Maine, thus the people of Maine share the responsibility for its preservation. To date, such has not necessarily been the case as the Academy, primarily with tuition dollars, has borne that responsibility almost exclusively and I hope that members of the 128<sup>th</sup> Legislature will give the Bowdoin legislation careful consideration.

At the outset I told you that we are a very 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. 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 our students so that they can be as successful as possible in their academic pursuits, in their careers and in their lives. Maine Maritime Academy, its Board of Trustees and I, and indeed all of our staff, faculty and students appreciate the commitment to our excellence demonstrated by you.

So on their behalf, let me thank you again President Thibodeau and Speaker Gideon, for the opportunity to address this Joint Convention. We are very proud of our 75-year history, and especially proud of our alumni who are working here in Maine, and all over the world. 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 the fields of engineering, science, management, and transportation. They are skilled, hardworking and dedicated leaders who carry the reputation of the State of Maine with them around the World.