



## FY 2025 Higher Education Overview

*Responses to Department of Legislative Services Analysis*

USM Chancellor Jay A. Perman

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee  
Education, Business and Administration  
Subcommittee  
*Nancy J. King, Chair*  
January 25, 2024

House Appropriations Committee  
Education and Economic Development  
Subcommittee  
*Stephanie M. Smith, Chair*  
January 29, 2024

**1. The chancellor, the presidents of MSU, SMCM, and MICUA, and the MHEC secretary should comment on efforts to increase the participation of recent high school graduates in postsecondary education.**

Foundational to the USM strategic plan, [Vision 2030](#), is the imperative that our universities' student populations reflect the full diversity of Maryland. To achieve this goal, we must reach communities historically underrepresented in higher education.

### COLLEGE AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

All USM undergraduate admissions offices have crafted strategies to engage young people from underrepresented groups—for instance, hosting workshops on how to apply to college and pursue financial aid opportunities. Additionally, every USM university works with community-based organizations and local school districts to deepen its impact.

Many of the activities offered with our partners meet students where they are, so that we're confident of our reach—for instance, college fairs held at Maryland high schools and regular classroom and church visits. But several other programs bring high school students to us—for instance, on-campus experiential learning and laboratory projects—so that we can give students an understanding of college expectations, college work, and college life.

For instance, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, in conjunction with the American Chemical Society, operates a Project SEED site. The monthslong summer research program for low-income and underrepresented students aims to diversify STEM participation. Coppin State University operates a public charter school, Coppin Academy High School, on its own campus, where learners interact regularly with university faculty and student mentors who enrich the

learners' academic strengths and intervene in areas of need. The University of Maryland, College Park participates in the STARS program to recruit high school students living in 18 Maryland counties classified as rural.

Illustrative of our approach to recruiting diverse high school learners is the one taken up by UMBC, a Minority Serving Institution, where the head admissions officer carries the title "Assistant Vice Provost for Strategic Undergraduate Engagement, Partnerships, and Pathways." The title highlights the many routes to college that UMBC—and *all* of our universities—cultivate.

Of course, many of our recruitment efforts extend to students *younger* than high school, because data show that reaching students earlier, and more often, is especially necessary to attract and enroll underserved students. The University of Maryland, Baltimore, which enrolls a majority-minority student population, offers holistic support to families in West Baltimore, including tutoring and mentoring to students starting in middle school. Even the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science—which offers no undergraduate programs of its own—conducts outreach to students as early as kindergarten, which is essential for cultivating interest and skills in environmental stewardship.

## DUAL ENROLLMENT

The Blueprint for Maryland's Future highlights dual enrollment as a means of opening equitable—and affordable—access to higher education. Many of our USM universities have been offering dual enrollment to Maryland students for years.

- The University of Baltimore, a Predominantly Black Institution, partners with Baltimore City Schools to provide dual-enrollment opportunities to several hundred students each year. This B-Power program focuses on high schools that enroll students who can succeed in college but have low participation rates.
- Bowie State University and the University of Maryland, College Park offer dual enrollment to students in Prince George's County high schools.
- In Western Maryland, Frostburg State University has launched the Bobcat Academy, which offers high school students college-credit courses that aren't available at local community colleges.

## CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION FOR ENGAGED INSTITUTIONS

Additionally, the USM strategic plan charges all of our universities to explore pursuing Carnegie Classification for Engaged Institutions, a recognition centered on mutual planning, programming, and partnerships that benefit the university and the communities surrounding it. This work often includes college-awareness programs that engage young people in higher education.

Towson University and Salisbury University have won this designation, and among their projects are programs in local schools that demonstrate to young learners the accessibility of higher education and the possibilities it enables.

## COMMUNITY COLLEGE PARTNERSHIPS

Lastly, partnerships with Maryland's community colleges—which are prevalent on every USM campus—have proved especially critical not only to growing our undergraduate population, but to diversifying it.

## **2. The chancellor and the presidents of MSU, SMCM, and MICUA should comment on efforts to increase enrollment of low- to moderate-income students and efforts to ensure their success.**

Many of the efforts already described—efforts encouraging more students to participate in higher education—also attract and prepare more low- to moderate-income students. Once these students arrive, their success depends a great deal on college affordability.

## USM NEED-BASED FINANCIAL AID

The financial aid we award to students is substantial. In FY23, our universities distributed \$100 million in institutional need-based aid, nearly \$90 million of which went to undergraduates, up from \$62 million in FY22. An additional 10,000 students benefited from that aid, bringing the total number of USM undergraduates receiving institutional need-based aid to 33,000.

It bears noting that all of this was accomplished *without* reducing the amount of merit aid we award to students.

## ENDOWMENTS TARGETED TO HIGH-NEED STUDENTS

A few years ago, the USM launched a \$20 million financial aid program targeted to students who demonstrate need but are just above the income threshold for Pell grant eligibility. This is the group of students who carry the highest loan balances.

Last year, with the authorization of the General Assembly, the USM expanded this effort, establishing a \$150 million quasi-endowment fund to grow need-based aid to students Systemwide. This fund is expected to increase the annual need-based aid we distribute to USM students by \$6.4 million.

## OTHER ASSISTANCE

I should add that our assistance doesn't stop at the sizable financial aid packages we award. Our universities offer assistance in other forms, too—emergency aid funds, micro-scholarships, food pantries, career closets—to help students meet their everyday needs.

And to defray textbook costs—each year, constituting a significant expense for students—we promote the use of open educational resources (OER). The USM leads the Maryland Open Source Textbook (M.O.S.T.) Initiative, in partnership with MarylandOnline, MACC, MICUA, and

the USM and Affiliated Institutions Library Consortium. Since 2016, M.O.S.T. has supported faculty at 29 Maryland colleges and universities in converting 210 courses to OER, yielding textbook savings of nearly \$23 million. These savings have reached 160,000-plus students.

## FINANCIAL AID AND COLLEGE COMPLETION

We know that the provision of financial aid has a positive impact on college completion. We're now undertaking a study to measure that impact. The first phase of the study looked at STEM students from UMBC and the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC). Preliminary results show that aid of any kind raises graduation rates across the board—that is, for all students—but yields the biggest change in graduation rates among high-need students.

For instance, aid to STEM students at UMBC—those admitted between 2013 and 2016—lifted graduation rates among high-need students from 38 percent to 71 percent, and the lift was significantly higher for African American students than for others. For both UMBC and UMGc, the amount of aid seems to correlate with success, but it's not a simple linear effect. Results suggest that support of \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year makes the most significant difference.

We're now expanding this analysis to assess outcomes Systemwide. While this study is young and the data preliminary, we believe they will eventually be instructive in shaping our financial aid practices.

## ACADEMIC AND WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

Of course, ensuring success among low- to moderate-income students relies not only on financial aid; it depends equally on academic support. Our universities proactively identify students who need support using technology platforms that help faculty track attendance and alert advisors when students have issues with absenteeism; identify midterm performance challenges for students; and track success patterns related to gateway courses. These monitoring mechanisms help universities understand patterns that need attention, connect students with academic services, and guide professional development for faculty.

All of our universities offer tutoring, academic coaching, and peer support to help students persist in college and, ultimately, graduate. Many such services are available both in person and virtually. For instance, the University of Maryland Global Campus, our largely online university, assigns each student a success coach, who provides advising and helps students navigate services.

The USM recently completed a study, supported by the Abell Foundation, tracking how students from Baltimore City high schools fare when they enroll at System universities. A critical finding was that the students who felt a greater sense of belonging were more likely to persist in higher education and complete their degree.

We leveraged this study to win a \$4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education to build and train a cadre of peer mentors Systemwide who will help new students—especially underserved students—navigate their first year of college by connecting them with the resources already available on our campuses: writing centers, math centers, mental health services, academic support services, and programs that nurture students’ sense of belonging and connection.

And in early March, we’re hosting a Systemwide student success conference so that campus teams can learn success strategies from one another and from national models, and dissect this work of providing wraparound support that helps students address their academic, social, and mental health needs and build a community of belonging.

**3. MHEC, USM, MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and MACC should comment on what steps are being taken to assist transfer students, specifically identifying actions that have been taken to facilitate the transfer process for these students and ensure their academic success.**

The pipeline from Maryland community colleges to the USM is strong and successful. Students who complete an associate degree prior to transferring to a USM university graduate at rates comparable to students who started at the USM. Moreover, students who start at a Maryland community college, in general, graduate at rates above the national six-year graduation rate for public four-year colleges (68 percent vs. 62 percent).

This success can be credited to several things: 1) Maryland’s longstanding regulations related to public college transfer; 2) close partnerships between the state’s two-year colleges and the USM; and 3) the enduring strength of Maryland community colleges.

## **TRANSFER WITH SUCCESS ACT**

Certainly, we’ve never been more focused on ensuring the success of our transfer students. Our universities are working hard to implement new regulations borne of the Transfer With Success Act—for instance, employing a transfer coordinator at each university who facilitates the transfer process, and accompanying all new undergraduate program proposals with at least one articulation agreement. Some of our universities have won national grants to help smooth transfer pathways and advance student success.

## **TRANSFER AGREEMENTS**

All of our universities work closely with their regional community college partners to structure program transfer agreements so that students know what courses to take prior to transfer and arrive on our campuses as well-prepared juniors. These agreements stipulate that advisors at the university will work closely with the transferring student. Our universities host transfer student

orientations and provide tailored academic support services, such as peer mentors who have gone through the transfer process themselves.

Moreover, many of our universities now have dual-admission agreements that allow community college students to take courses at their intended university *before* transferring—and, in some instances, transferring students even have the opportunity to live on the university campus.

Our regional higher education centers (RHECs) have long and deep experience working with transfer students, who comprise most of their enrollment. Undergraduate programs at our RHECs partner with nearby community colleges and high schools to develop pathways that serve the entire region. This is a cost-effective solution for students who cannot leave their area because of work or family obligations—or who simply want to earn their degree close to home.

## PROVOSTS TRANSFER COUNCIL

The Provosts Transfer Council includes representatives from all public higher education segments, including the USM Office. Members meet a few times a year to address questions and share challenges around implementation of the Transfer With Success Act. The council has charged several faculty groups to come to alignment on a number of high-volume community college courses that have not always transferred as directly equivalent to a four-year course (which often occurs when a lower-division course is similar to an upper-division one).

## GENERAL EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS

We are working to prevent our General Education requirements from acting as a barrier to transferring students. To that end, some of our universities have redesigned their General Education programs to be more transfer-friendly. Others—the University of Maryland, College Park and Salisbury University—are adhering to previously repealed regulations, affirming that they will accept that a student has completed the General Education curriculum if they transfer with an associate degree (AA, AS, AAT) from a Maryland community college. These students, consequently, do not need to map their coursework to the university's General Education requirements.

## THE NEW ARTSYS

The USM is partnering with all segments of Maryland higher education to implement the new ARTSYS transfer and articulation platform. This is a major technology and communication initiative that involves integrating the student information systems (SISs) of all 36 colleges and universities participating in ARTSYS.

Each SIS presents unique challenges, as there are several different systems in use—e.g., PeopleSoft, Ellucian—and each college has undertaken unique customizations. A multi-segment ARTSYS Advisory Council, which includes transferring students, works with the vendor

(Parchment) to guide decisions about design and functionality, so that the final result will be a product that serves students well.

“Serving students well” will entail enabling them to see which courses they should take in their first 60 credits to prepare for transfer to a four-year college or university, and *how* their individual courses and grades will transfer to their intended school. Features will be developed in the future allowing students to see the degree requirements for both the two- and four-year degrees they seek.

**4. The chancellor and the presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and MACC should comment on the potential impact the new simplified FAFSA will have on institutions—including on financial aid offices, students, and costs; and on the delay of receiving student data. The secretary should comment on the potential impact this will have on the State’s financial assistance programs.**

The FAFSA Simplification Act is a significant piece of federal legislation that brings substantial changes to the processes and systems used to award federal student aid. The act, which took effect with the 2023–24 and 2024–25 award years, aims to streamline the financial aid application process, make it more equitable, and expand access to federal aid.

Financial aid administrators are required to adapt their policies, procedures, and documentation practices to align with the new regulations, while simultaneously ensuring that they can effectively address students’ unique financial circumstances and maintain consistency and equity in their decisions. This migration requires significant technological changes to systems to ensure accurate, secure, and efficient data-sharing and coordination. Financial aid offices will also need to expand communication and outreach to students and families to ensure they understand the new process.

#### **DELAYS IN RECEIVING FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

The new FAFSA launched more than two months later than the usual FAFSA release, and technology platforms used to help process FAFSA data have yet to release some of the upgrades universities need to manage the new FAFSA’s data and package the aid awarded. Universities need significant resources to test and implement these changes on a compressed timeline.

Our universities won’t see data related to the FAFSA until February, which could mean students receive aid offers later than usual, delaying their ability to make an informed college decision. Many independent colleges and a few out-of-state public universities—for instance, Arizona State University—use the College Board CSS Profile for calculating aid, which will *not* be delayed. Therefore, USM universities competing with CSS colleges could be at a competitive disadvantage if we have to delay our aid offers—either because of the FAFSA itself or because of delays in

receiving estimated awards from MHEC-administered programs. Consequently, we can't know for certain what impacts the new FAFSA will have on our student yield rates.

#### FORMULA EFFECT ON PELL ELIGIBILITY

Maryland is projected to enroll an additional 7,400 Pell grant recipients, but the new formulas—moving from Estimated Financial Contribution to Student Aid Index—will also render some students Pell-ineligible who had previously received Pell grants. The new FAFSA does not, for example, take into consideration whether a family has more than one child in college. Our universities, therefore, expect to see more students overall who qualify for institutional need-based aid.

Given this flux in eligibility, our universities may have to increase the need-based aid they offer—if that's possible—or reduce aid to some enrolled students, which could, in turn, affect attrition rates.

#### **5. The chancellor and the presidents of SMCM, MSU, MICUA, and MACC should comment on programs or initiatives to re-enroll and ensure successful outcomes for those with SCNC.**

Students with “some credit but no credential” (SCNC) are most likely to re-enroll within their first year of stopping out. For that reason, our universities conduct extensive outreach to currently enrolled students, encouraging them to enroll for the upcoming semester in a timely manner. They conduct additional outreach to students who are late to register; it's not uncommon for these students to receive multiple “touches” through various media from advising and enrollment staff.

#### SIMPLIFYING READMISSION

USM universities have simplified readmission processes so that they don't deter returning students, and some have developed interdisciplinary majors with built-in flexibility that allow students to complete their degrees without starting over in a major. USM universities serving a higher percentage of older and working students have developed more flexible continuous enrollment policies at the undergraduate level, so that students who have had to stop out of their education for a few semesters can reenroll without reapplying for admission.

#### NEAR-COMPLETER PROGRAMS

Every USM university has some version of a near-completer program, aiming to lure back stopped-out students who are within about 30 credits of graduation. Some have reached out to students with outstanding balances and negotiated payment plans with them. In fact, the USM Foundation offers universities scholarship funds targeted to students in these near-completer programs.



## REVERSE TRANSFER

Our universities also help students through the reverse transfer process, transferring credits from their university to a community college. Reverse transfer helps prevent students from leaving a four-year university—even for a short while—with no credential to show for the time and money they invested in their education.

## **6. The chancellor and the presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and MACC should comment on what role they foresee for direct admissions at their institutions.**

Our universities are focused on extensive outreach to high school students and younger students, especially those in underserved communities; on making their admissions processes clear and fair; and on providing generous and accessible financial aid packages. Direct admissions can supplement these efforts, and prove effective in reaching students who may not otherwise apply to their university—or to any university at all.

Several of our universities have been using direct admissions in a limited way, reaching students in specific areas where admissions officers are familiar with the high schools they attend and therefore know what kind of supports prospective students are receiving and what they would need to be successful in college.

## COMMON APP

Many of our universities have moved to the Common App to simplify the application process for students, some use the Common App exclusively, and some use the Black Common App (allowing students to apply to dozens of U.S. HBCUs at once).

Four of our universities—including two HBCUs—participated in Common App’s direct admission pilot program rolled out over the past couple of years. Two of these universities (Towson University and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore) are paying for continued participation, and two (Frostburg State University and Coppin State University) used the no-cost pilot to develop internally driven direct admissions processes.

- The University of Maryland Eastern Shore has used direct admissions with some partnering high schools.
- Towson University launched its TU for Baltimore initiative last year, partnering with Baltimore City Schools to offer direct admission and support services to 23 students who have the characteristics of successful students but not a college-going profile. All of the Cohort 1 students have been retained thus far, and the university is working toward a second cohort of 30 students.
- Frostburg State University has developed its own direct admissions process, working with many schools in its region—in- and out-of-state—to offer admission to students who haven’t applied but who have characteristics suggesting they can succeed at the

university. Frostburg State continues to use the Common App, but prefers its internal process, which carries no fee and can reach out-of-state students.

These universities are evaluating early data, and will evaluate more when their initial cohorts of directly admitted students near graduation. That data will influence their approach to direct admissions going forward, and could well influence the approach of their sister USM universities.

# ST MARY'S

## COLLEGE *of* MARYLAND

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**Higher Education Overview**

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee**  
**Education, Business, and Administration Subcommittee**  
**Senator Nancy J. King, Chair**  
**January 25, 2024**

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**House Appropriations Committee**  
**Education and Economic Development Subcommittee**  
**Delegate Stephanie Smith, Chair**  
**January 29, 2024**



**Dr. Tuajuanda C. Jordan, President**  
**Ms. Paula Collins, Trustee**  
**Mr. Brandon Engle, Director of Government Affairs**

## Introduction – The Public Honors College

As the State's designated public honors college, St. Mary's College of Maryland provides a premier liberal arts education that is both affordable and accessible. The College awards a variety of undergraduate degrees, as well as a Master of Arts in Teaching graduate degree. With a faculty of gifted teachers and distinguished scholars, a talented and diverse student body, and a low student/faculty ratio, St. Mary's College provides a challenging curriculum within an academically nurturing environment. In addition, the College fosters a sense of social responsibility and community among its students through its curriculum and campus initiatives.

*The Nation's 1<sup>st</sup> Public  
Honors College*

Supporting the two goals articulated by the State's historical vision for the College - the educational requirements of an honors program and the promise of access - sets St. Mary's College uniquely in the State and in the national higher education sector. The College has been highly successful in supporting State-wide goals with among the highest retention and completion rates among Maryland public institutions, a commitment to diversity, and in providing financial resources for students with need.

As a public college that is both accessible and affordable, St. Mary's College provides the opportunity for academically talented students from a broad socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial spectrum to acquire a rigorous liberal arts education. This diversity creates a rich academic and social environment that enhances the education provided by the College.

The College continues to evolve as an innovator within the national higher education sector. Our recently revised core curriculum, Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery (LEAD), provides every student with theme-based integrated learning experiences, practical skills, internships, capstone projects, and other experiences that integrate career preparation with an honors curriculum within the context of the foundation of a liberal arts education. Our national standing and successes make us the leader among public liberal arts institutions. St. Mary's College has become **The National Public Honors College**.

LEAD

As always, the College is grateful to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Maryland Higher Education Commission for their ongoing commitment to higher education in general, and to St. Mary's College of Maryland specifically.

## Enrollment

In the past five years, enrollment at the College has increased notably. As shown Exhibit 1, overall **enrollment has increased 12% from Fall 2019 to Fall 2023**.

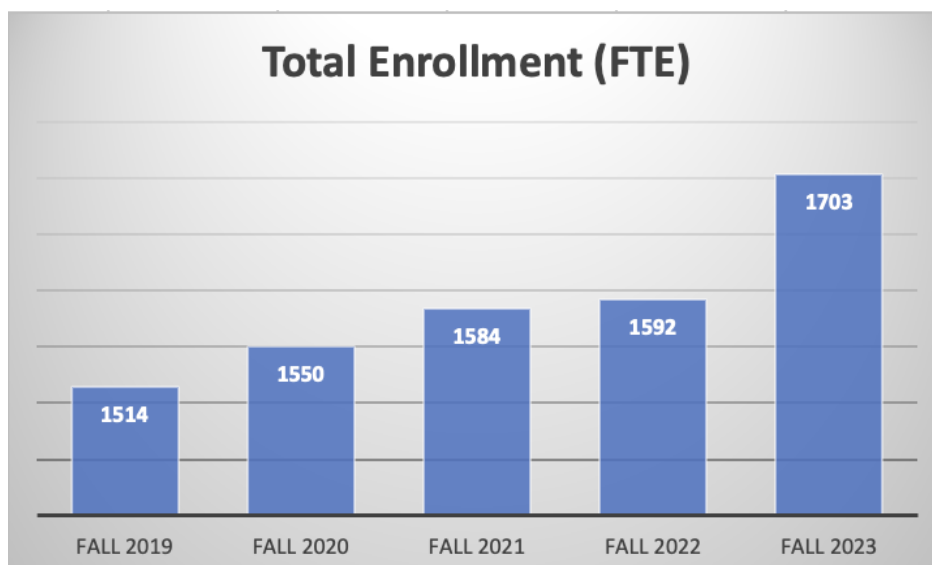


Exhibit 1

Enrollment increases are primarily the result of recruiting strong incoming classes of both first-year and transfer students. As shown in Exhibit 2, the number of **new first-year and transfer students has increased 27% since 2019.**

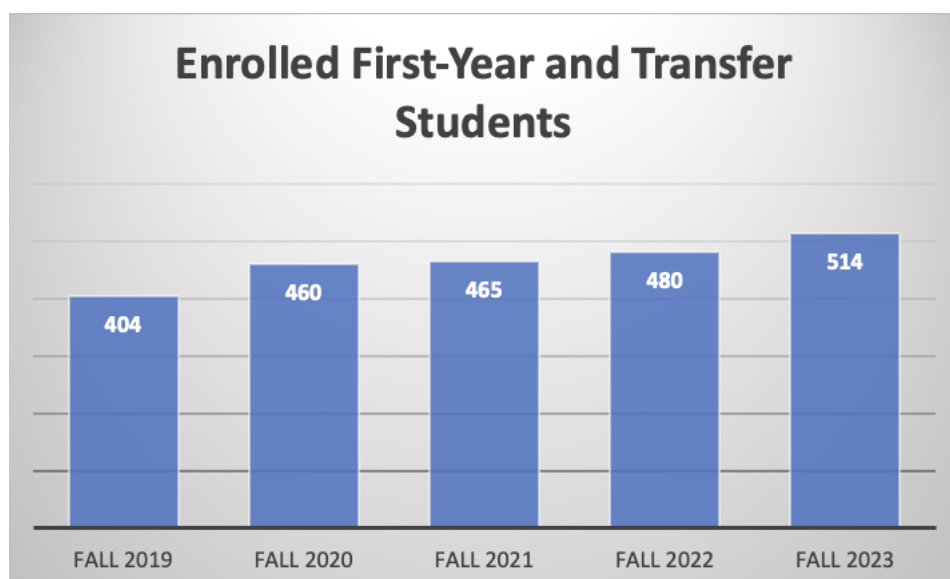


Exhibit 2

The increase in new students is the result of the College's varied efforts to enhance its position within the higher education market. These include:

- implementation of the *LEAD* curriculum, which integrates the proven long-term benefits of a traditional liberal arts education with the applied professional skills demanded in today's economy,

- implementation of new majors in Neuroscience, Marine Science, Business Administration, and Performing Arts, as well as integrating new curricula such as embedding Data Science in multiple majors, and
- enhanced marketing and recruitment efforts to launch the College's branding as *The National Public Honors College*.

Together, these initiatives have made St. Mary's College increasingly relevant and more competitive compared to our peer institutions. As shown in Exhibit 3, over the past five years **applications have increased by 71%**. Additionally, since their launch just two years ago, Marine Science and Business Administration have grown to become the College's third and fourth most popular majors among first-year students.

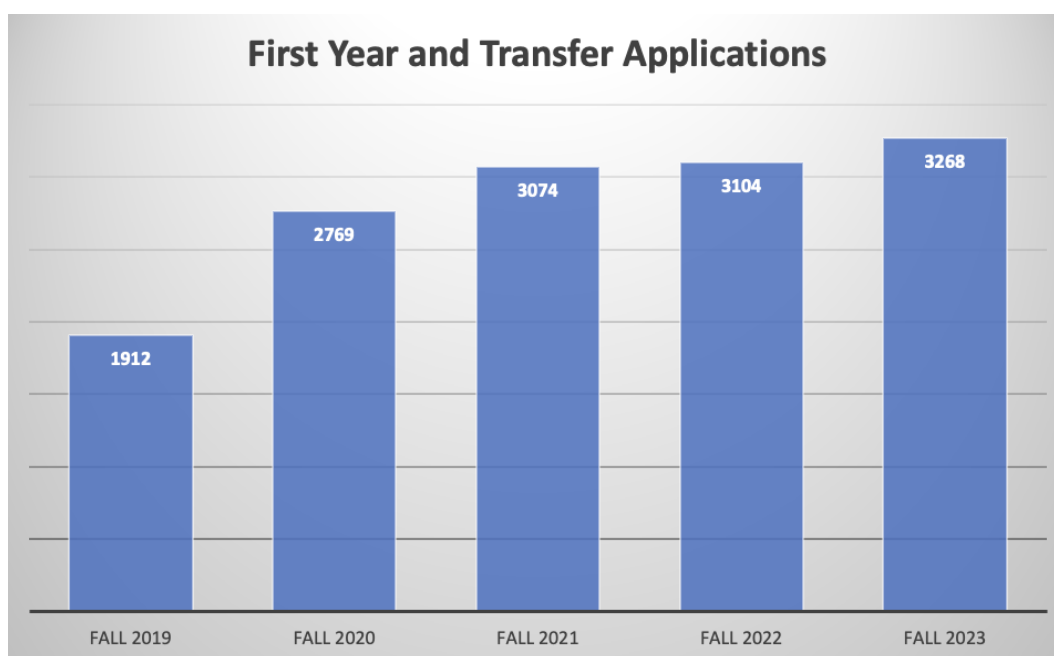
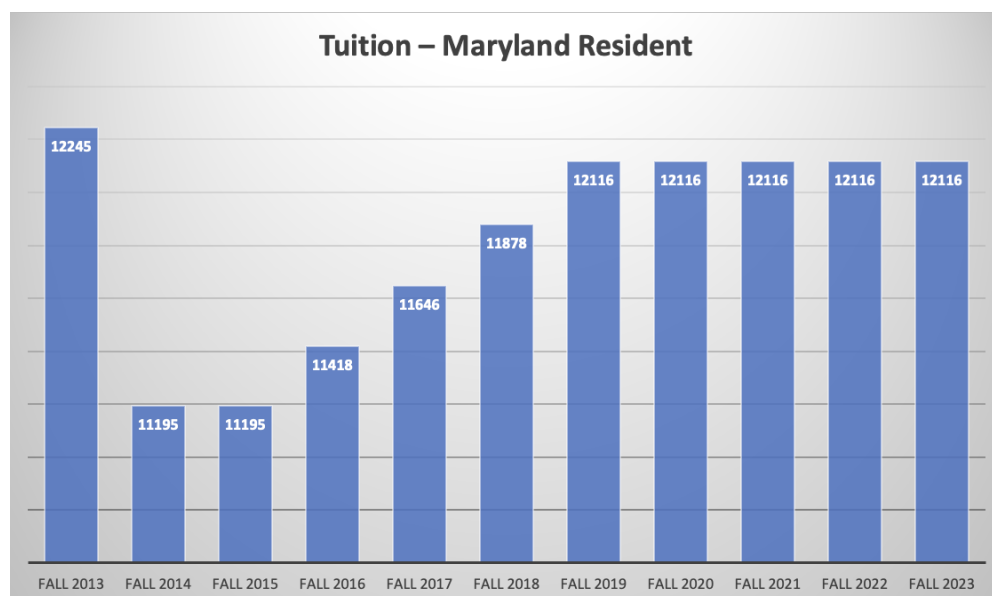


Exhibit 3

### Affordability

St. Mary's College of Maryland's unique mission, to provide an honors-level liberal arts education that is both accessible and affordable to all Marylanders, is challenging. Through a combination of institutional efforts to control expenses, coupled with State support, tuition pricing was lowered in FY15 and has since been successfully moderated, making St. Mary's College more affordable for Maryland families. As shown in Exhibit 4, in-state tuition for the 2023-2024 academic year (\$12,116) **was frozen for the fourth consecutive year** without State tuition relief funding, and **tuition remains less than it was for the 2013-2014 academic year**.



**Exhibit 4**

### Responses to Specific Questions in the Higher Education Overview:

- 1.) The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA), and the Secretary of the Higher Education Commission should comment on efforts to increase the participation of recent high school graduates in postsecondary education.**

St. Mary's College of Maryland is deeply committed to ensuring that prospective students from throughout the state are aware of and consider the College as an option for post-secondary education as part of our mission to provide access and opportunity to an honors-level educational experience. Additionally, as part of our new student recruitment strategy launched in 2018, the College has begun implementing a comprehensive communications campaign to build broader awareness and interest in the College. This includes outreach to prospective students, parents/guardians, college counselors, and transfer counselors, as well as expanded and enhanced campus visit offerings to highlight our academic and co-curricular programs, facilities, and beautiful waterfront location. In the past year, more than 3200 prospective students have attended recruitment programs, and our campus-wide open house series has been particularly successful, with more than 96% of students indicating that the program sustained or increased their interest in the College.

In addition to these visits, the College invests in several targeted outreach efforts for students who have previously expressed interest in the College, but who have not yet completed an application, as well as for those who are not currently enrolled in postsecondary education. Finally, each year the College's admission staff completes more than 300 recruitment visits to local high schools, community-based organizations, and community colleges throughout Maryland to meet with prospective students, college counselors and transfer counselors. This outreach is designed to 1) increase interest in the College's excellent experience as we



continue to increase enrollment, 2) engage in recruitment conversations with prospective students who may not currently be pursuing postsecondary education, and 3) ensure that the College is a sought-after option in the face of increased competition from out-of-state institutions due to less favorable student demographic trends.

**2.) The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SCMC, and MICUA should comment on efforts to increase enrollment of low- to moderate-income students and ensure their success**

As the state's designated public honors college, St. Mary's College of Maryland is committed to providing an honors-level education akin to the very best private liberal arts colleges while remaining accessible and affordable for Maryland students. Since 2018, the college has implemented strategic recruitment plans designed to increase awareness and interest in the College – especially among traditionally-underserved communities. Among other initiatives, these have included the development and expansion of partnerships with community-based organizations such as the College Bound Foundation in Baltimore City, College Track located in Prince George's County, and Dream.US which serves undocumented students. The College's Office of Admission also sponsors bus trips to campus for students from low-income areas to minimize transportation barriers, and our newly-reorganized Office of Equity Programming manages three distinct programs to recruit, retain, and graduate socially, culturally, and economically diverse cohorts of students – the DeSousa-Brent Scholars Program, the Landers Scholars Program, and Sum primus (Latin for "*I am first*").

This dual commitment to providing access and opportunity for students who are both academically talented and prepared to thrive in our honors-level curriculum is reflected in both Pillar II and Pillar III of our new strategic plan, "The Rising Tide." However, it is not enough to simply attract students from diverse backgrounds – we must also empower them for success. To this point, St. Mary's College is in the process of developing and implementing personalized, flexible, equitable, and inclusive institutional supports for students once they arrive. These include a cross-functional, team-based student success support structure, as well as an improved early identification and alert system to replace our existing Beacon Early Alert system, which will deploy holistic academic support services and preempt retention concerns in real time. To further reduce cost barriers for higher education, the College also provides robust financial aid packages of both merit- and need-based aid, including meeting 100% of tuition need for students in our Baltimore City Scholars Program. Finally, to ease low-income students' transition to residence hall life when they arrive on campus, the College's Feathering the Nest program provides residence hall room bedding and supplies at no cost.

**3.) MHEC, USM, MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken to facilitate the student transfer process for these students and ensure their academic success.**



As the College implements the requirements associated with the Transfer with Success Act of 2022, and to strengthen our recruitment, enrollment and retention of transfer students, the College has recently reorganized all transfer student services into one unit within our Enrollment Division. This unit is led by a dedicated Director of Transfer Recruitment, Admission, and Services, who oversees all of the College's efforts to offer a seamless experience from the moment a prospective student expresses interest in transferring to St. Mary's College. To promote their successful transfer and transition, the Office of Student Success Services and the Academic Affairs Division jointly advise each student during the pre-enrollment process, including credit evaluation. Transfer students are also provided with a dedicated orientation program prior to their first semester, as well as specific support programming during their first semester to enhance engagement with College events, resources, and offices.

**4.) The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA and MACC should comment on what role they foresee for direct admissions at their institutions.**

As a small institution by design, St. Mary's College seeks to actively recruit and enroll students who are both academically talented and well prepared to contribute to our diverse community of citizen-scholars. With a relatively small first-year entering class average of 450 students, it is paramount that our holistic admission process considers an applicant's academic achievements as well as their personal strengths and interests. Further, due to recent growth in enrollment, the College must carefully plan and manage our resources effectively to best provide for our student body. If the College's existing ability to shape admission decisions by incorporating several critical academic and personal factors is inhibited, this could result in class sizes which rapidly exceed our available student housing, financial aid, academic support, and classroom space capacity.

We understand that several states have already implemented guaranteed admission policies – including California, Texas, Illinois, and Florida – however, these policies vary widely across states and the requirements for students are typically more inclusive than just their secondary school class rank. St. Mary's College of Maryland remains committed to offering a premier liberal arts education that is both affordable and accessible to a broad spectrum of Maryland students and looks forward to future consideration with the appropriate House and Senate Committees to define the role of direct admission policies in Maryland.

**5.) The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and MACC should comment on the potential impact the new simplified FAFSA will have on institutions including that on the financial aid offices, students, and costs and on the delay of receiving student data. The Secretary should comment on the potential impact this will have on the State's financial assistance programs.**

In past years, St. Mary's College of Maryland has provided financial assistance awards immediately following offers of admission if a student's FAFSA has been submitted. This award is sent no later than December 1 for our Early Decision (ED) applicants, and by January 1 for our Early Action (EA) applicants. If a FAFSA is not on file by those dates, an award is

communicated as quickly as possible following receipt of the FAFSA information. Providing financial assistance awards as early as possible in the process is critical to enabling students to fully consider the affordability of college options.

Due to the delay and soft launch of the new simplified FAFSA at the very end of December 2023, students who were admitted as part of our ED and EA application plans did not receive financial assistance awards by our historical deadlines. Once FAFSA data are made available to the College, which we anticipate to be no earlier than the end of January, the College's Office of Student Financial Assistance will conduct their initial analysis and determine financial assistance awards for the Fall 2024 entering class. This analysis includes an assessment of how differences between the prior "estimated family contribution" (EFC) calculation and the new "student aid index" (SAI) calculation will impact the amount of aid awarded to ensure the College remains within our institutional financial aid budget while fully leveraging available resources at the federal and state level.

Current costs related to the delay of FAFSA data include work by external partners, who provide support to the College in determining appropriate financial aid awards, as well as the College's predictive modeling to determine the number of admitted students necessary to meet our enrollment goals are delayed. As soon as this work is complete the College will provide admitted students with their offers of financial assistance. While this delay is far from ideal and will impact student college choice timing, we remain in regular contact with prospective students to provide updates and set expectations. In the meantime, the College remains concerned that students who have also applied to colleges which utilize institutional financial aid methodology from the College Board's College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile financial aid form may already have their financial aid awards. This delay compared to others could negatively impact the College's overall yield.

**6.) The Chancellor and Presidents of SMCM, MSU, MICUA and MACC should comment on programs or initiatives to re-enroll and ensure successful outcomes of those with some college/no credential.**

Each year St. Mary's College of Maryland's Office of Admission specifically identifies and contacts students who have previously withdrawn from the College and not enrolled or completed their degree at another institution to gauge interest in, and provide a pathway for, re-enrollment. Then, to best support students who have indicated their interest in re-enrolling, the Office of Admission, Office of Student Success Services, and the Academic Affairs Division jointly advise each student to promote their successful return and transition. This scaffolded support structure operates similarly to the process for supporting transferring students, as well as students who return from other forms of leave.





**Wes Moore**  
Governor

**Aruna Miller**  
Lt. Governor

**Cassie Motz**  
Chair

**Sanjay Rai**  
Acting Secretary

**Maryland Higher Education Commission  
FY 2025 Operating Budget  
Higher Education Overview  
Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

**Senate Budget and Taxation  
Subcommittee on Education, Business, and Administration  
Senator Nancy King  
January 25, 2024**

**House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Education and Economic Development  
Delegate Stephanie Smith  
January 29, 2024**

**Page 17. - The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA), and the Secretary of the Higher Education Commission should comment on efforts to increase the participation of recent high school graduates in postsecondary education.**

MHEC has been engaged in several initiatives that will increase participation of recent high school graduates in postsecondary education. First, MHEC has actively participated in discussions with MSDE and institutions regarding revisions to the college and career readiness standard. MHEC is supportive of the standard; it embraces multiple pathways for students to demonstrate their readiness for post-CCR pathways. Similarly, MHEC has established standing meetings with MSDE to discuss expanding dual enrollment opportunities throughout Maryland. A guidance document, issued by both MHEC and MSDE, regarding dual enrollment is currently under development. The guidance document will ensure that all LEAs in Maryland are offering dual enrollment opportunities in accordance with Maryland law and in an equitable way. Third, recent changes in the FAFSA will increase student eligibility for financial aid. MHEC hosted a Virtual Financial Aid Open House to discuss these changes and help students and families navigate the changes. The recording and FAQs can be found on the MHEC website. MHEC continues to work with key stakeholders to ensure the new FASFA rollout is as smooth as possible. Similarly, there is more state financial aid available to students, making postsecondary education more accessible to recent high school graduates.

**Page 25. - MHEC, USM, MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken to facilitate the student transfer process for these students and ensure their academic success.**

Though regulatory changes that took effect a year ago, MHEC continues to work with colleges and universities as they implement the Transfer with Success Act. MHEC staff have presented at several statewide and institutional events and answered questions. Institutions have begun submitting program transfer agreements (through the academic program review process) and MHEC is reviewing those agreements. Currently, MHEC expects to ask institutions for revised implementation plans. Institutions will be asked to identify challenges in implementation. MHEC will evaluate if further regulatory changes are necessary in light of those challenges. Additionally, MHEC continues to evaluate the best approach for the required data collection. MHEC will be consulting with institutional representatives (transfer coordinators, registrars, institutional researchers, etc.) to ensure the drafted file layout is feasible. Finally, MHEC is in conversation with the Aspen Institute regarding a collaborative effort to elevate transfer in Maryland. The collaboration would establish a strategic council consisting of campus leadership, engage dyads or triads of institutions, and develop transfer goals for Maryland.

**Page 31. - The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and MACC should comment on the potential impact the new simplified FAFSA will have on institutions including that on the financial aid offices, students, and costs and on the delay of receiving student data. The Secretary should comment on the potential impact this will have on the State's financial assistance programs.**

**Potential Impact the new simplified FAFSA will have on the State's financial assistance programs.**

Among the students who submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to apply for the state financial assistance programs (i.e. Guaranteed Access Grant (GA), Educational Assistance Grant (EA) and Promise Scholarship (Promise)) in fiscal 2022-2023, almost 100,000 Maryland students were Pell Grant eligible, meaning they met the criteria established by the federal government to receive a Pell Grant award. Using data from MDCAPS, a simulation was run to provide a rough estimate of those students who would be affected by the FAFSA simplification/move to the Student Aid Index (versus the EFC). The simulation results show approximately 200 to 300 students (around 0.2 to 0.3 percent of eligible students) who were Pell eligible in 2022-2023 would lose their Pell grant eligibility under the new FAFSA simplification/FAFSA calculations to be implemented. The vast majority (over 99 percent) would continue to be eligible for a Pell grant award under the new calculations. Lastly, the model estimates that around 1,000 students would become Pell eligible who previously were not. For the 1,000 students who will become Pell eligible but were previously not, it is not expected to have an impact on the GA program since many of those students did not initially qualify for the GA program, however this may reduce the amount of EA funding the student is eligible to receive depending on what institution the student attends. Students who attend community college have lower costs of attendance (COA) than students who attend 4-Year Public or Independent/Private institutions. The additional Pell funds will cause the students' need to

decrease, which in turn will lower the amount of EA funds the students are eligible to receive. Additionally, the additional students who receive Pell and are eligible for the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship will receive less Promise funding based upon the additional Pell received.

The Department of Education Federal Student Aid (FSA) released the soft launch of the 2024-25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form at the end of December 2023, where the form was made available for periods of time while FSA monitored site performance and responded in real time to any potential issues impacting the applicant experience. Due to the new simplified FAFSA becoming available to students and families at the end of December instead of the usual October 1, as well as being aware that FSA has uncovered several issues affecting users at various points in the FAFSA process, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) extended the deadline date for Maryland residents to complete the FAFSA or MHEC One-App for undocumented students to June 1, 2024. By extending the required timeline for Maryland residents to complete the FAFSA or MHEC One-App so that applicants and families who experience issues are not as obstructed, it will increase the number of applicants who will become eligible for the GA or EA grant. Additionally, the decision to extend the deadline also extends the timeframe in which applicants may be awarded. Applicants who complete a FAFSA or MHEC One-App will receive notification of eligibility beginning on April 15, 2024, however notifications will continue to go out up until June 1, 2024 for any student who waits until the deadline to complete the FAFSA.

**MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION**

6 N. Liberty Street • 10<sup>th</sup> Floor • Baltimore, MD 21201

T 410.767.3300 • 800.974.0203 • F 410.332.0270 • TTY for the Deaf 800.735.2258

[www.mhec.maryland.gov](http://www.mhec.maryland.gov)



## **ISSUES**

***Comment 1 (Page 17): The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA), and the Secretary of the Higher Education Commission should comment on efforts to increase the participation of recent high school graduates in postsecondary education.***

### ***Response:***

Morgan State University is fully aligned with the state's desire to increase the number of recent high school graduates going to college. Between Fall 2019 to Fall 2023, the number of Maryland residents coming to Morgan as first-time, full-time freshmen has increased by more than 40% (from 801 to 1137). The Office of Undergraduate Admission and Recruitment is actively working to strengthen relationships with pre-college programs (TRIO, Upward Bound, The Summer Academy of Actuarial and Mathematical Science (SAAMS), etc.) and community partnerships (Collegebound, Collegetown, Kipp DC, DC Persists, Baltimore Persists, etc.) to support our efforts to further increase these numbers. We believe that engaging with students prior to senior-year recruitment efforts will build affinity to Morgan, provide education around our admissions process, and assist students in making meaningful connections with staff and faculty. We have also partnered with EAB on a robust marketing effort focused on sophomores and juniors to further support engagement with Morgan State at the early high school level. These efforts are targeted towards all Maryland high school students, but particularly among communities that have been historically underserved and advance our strategic goals around low-income, first-generation and multicultural student enrollment.

***Comment 2 (Page 22): The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SCMC, and MICUA should comment on efforts to increase enrollment of low- to moderate-income students and efforts to ensure their success.***

### ***Response:***

MSU remains committed to its efforts to maintain its recruitment and enrollment of low- to moderate-income students as well as its continuous efforts to ensure their retention and success. MSU's undergraduate student population is composed mostly of students that have one or more Historically Underserved designations, be it race/ethnicity, income status or both. Over the last three years, MSU has nearly doubled its incoming first-year student class, while retaining its historic commitment to serving a diverse student body. The vast majority of our undergraduate population are black, Hispanic, or multi-racial and currently 54% are Pell-eligible. We have a number of long-standing successful academic support and student retention initiatives such as our CASA Summer Bridge Program, our early alert program Starfish, centralized first-year advising, and more.

One of our newer student success initiatives is the Second Year Experience program (SYE) which provides students with experiential learning opportunities and career coaching. Students who participate in SYE have significantly higher second to third year retention rates than

students who do not. With help from a \$1M JP Morgan Chase grant, we have increased exponentially the number of students participating in the program—from fewer than 50 in 2018-2019 to over 500 in 2022-2023. Another is the addition of two Scholarship Coordinator positions to help our students match and apply for external funding opportunities. To further support our students, we are in the process of adding several additional full-time academic advisors, and implementing and implementing a peer mentoring program to new students with upper-class students in their respective academic pathways. We have reimagined our new student summer orientation program and our first semester orientation course to better support the needs of the post-pandemic generation.

Finally, MSU has secured a \$1.5 million grant with the National Institute for Student Success at Georgia State University which will support many of these new initiatives over the next three years. Outcome metrics will measure year-to-year retention data with a focus on Pell student achievement.

**Comment 3 (Page 25):** *MHEC, USM, MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC) should comment on what steps are being taken to assist the transfer student population, specifically identifying actions that have been taken to facilitate the student transfer process for these students and ensure their academic success.*

**Response:**

This past year, MSU has made investments in the transfer space by adding five (5) full-time positions to support transfer evaluation and articulation (3 Program Management Specialists and 2 Transfer Evaluators). In the past five years, we have worked to build a transfer equivalency database that now has 40,000+ equivalencies from colleges and universities around the world. A heat map of US Colleges and Universities is provided below to show where our transfer students are coming from.

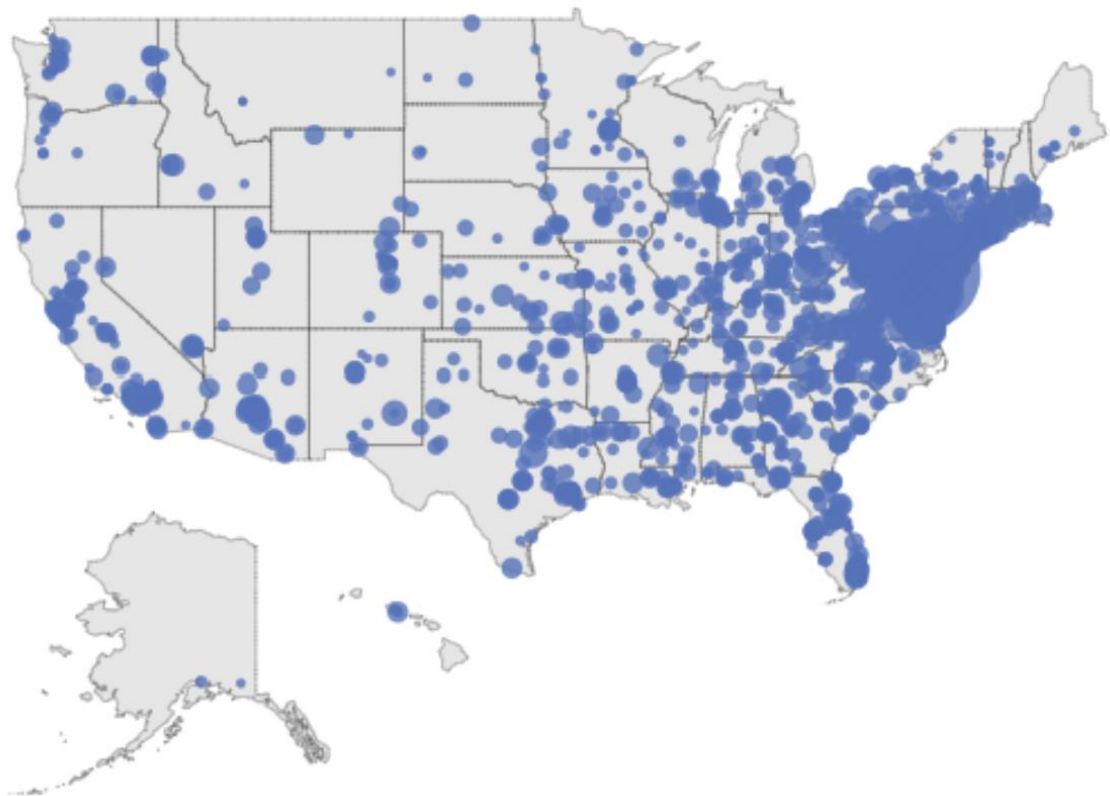
In addition to the work the team has done to build the equivalency database for efficiency in processing transfer credit evaluations, we have:

- Restructured the Transfer Student Programming team to include an in-house advisor to support transfer students in addition to their Transfer Coordinator.
- Created an online onboarding and orientation module for all new transfer students in our learning management system.
- Sponsored New Transfer Student Welcome Days to invite students to campus and acclimatize them to the campus, introduce them to the service team, and work with them to handle any outstanding affairs they may have as they transition.
- Sponsored Welcome activities and engagements throughout the semester, including the celebration of National Transfer Student Week.
- Signed the Degrees to Succeed partnership with the Community College of Baltimore County, a dual admission program providing a streamlined admission and evaluation process.



- Ensure compliance with the Transfer with Success Act 2.0 via the MSU Transfer with Success Implementation plan.
- Implemented a transfer student portal for prospective transfer students. This portal supports Maryland Community Colleges, in-state and out-of-state Colleges and Universities and allows students wishing to transfer to Morgan to review coursework that has already been articulated to see its applicability and submit new courses for review before applying to MSU.
- Launched a process that allows students/advisors transparency in tracking the status of their transfer credit evaluation; a process which has been enhanced from a 20+ business day turnaround to a 5 business day turnaround.

**Where are equivalencies distributed?**



**Comment 4 (Page 27):** *The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA and MACC should comment on what role they foresee for direct admissions at their institutions.*

**Response:**

We are not currently exploring direct admission to Morgan State. While we have reviewed opportunities with the College Board and EAB, there is not enough data to conclude if these opportunities would be right for the recruitment and admission of students at our institution.

**Comment 5 (Page 31):** *The Chancellor and Presidents of MSU, SMCM, MICUA, and MACC should comment on the potential impact the new simplified FAFSA will have on institutions including that on the financial aid offices, students, and costs and on the delay of receiving student data. The Secretary should comment on the potential impact this will have on the State's financial assistance programs.*

**Response:**

The new simplified FAFSA will require a significant overhaul of our systems, needs analysis, forms, and policy and procedures. Like financial aid offices across the nation, Morgan's Financial Aid Office is under immense pressure to process aid and send out award letters to new admits in a very condensed window of time while also servicing currently enrolled students. Students and families are experiencing challenges with accessing and completing the new FAFSA as technical bugs are being worked out. Students will have a much shorter time than normal to receive award letters and compare offers from various institutions in order to make an informed decision.

The FAFSA Simplification process will also impact how we process Professional Judgements (PJ), Dependency Overrides (DO), and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY). The new changes to the FAFSA will cause an additional increase in the number of requests on top of the increases already seen since the pandemic. This increase will cause an additional burden to the already overworked and understaffed Financial Aid offices.

On a positive note, many students from low-income families will now automatically qualify for the maximum Pell Grant. Based on our student population, we anticipate that the number of students eligible for Pell Grant funding will increase. This increase in eligible students will help lessen our students' costs and reduce the financial burden and stress that many families experience.

**Comment 6 (Page 48):** *The Chancellor and Presidents of SMCM, MSU, MICUA and MACC should comment on programs or initiatives to reenroll and ensure successful outcomes of those with SCNC.*

**Response:**

Morgan State University is fully aligned with the state's desire to re-enroll and graduate students with some college and no degree with the creation of the College of Interdisciplinary and Continuing Studies in November 2021. Morgan State University currently has 18 interdisciplinary degree programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels, as well as the Applied Liberal Studies degree through the College of Liberal Arts. All programs are fully online and provide students with the opportunity to leverage credits earned, as well as opportunities for credit for prior learning. In Spring 2022, the program enrolled 7 students. Since

then our enrollments have increased to more than 150 enrolled students across all of our programs. Since CICS was created, we have graduated 1 PhD student, 2 Masters students, and 12 undergraduate students. In addition, the Applied Liberal Studies degree graduates more than 100 students each year. A notable aspect of our approach is meeting students where they are and helping them navigate the range of choices and find the best fit for their personal and professional goals.

## RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

***Recommendation 1 (Page 49): Adopt the narrative requesting a report on instructional faculty workload.***

***Response:*** The University agrees to provide the requested report.