

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY**  
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May 27, 2015

Sen. Brian Langley, Senate Chair  
Rep. Victoria Kornfield, House Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Maine Legislature  
13 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0013

Dear Senator Langley and Representative Kornfield:

In its final report issued last December, the Commission to Study College Affordability and College Completion recommended that the Boards of Trustees of Maine's public higher education institutions, including Maine Maritime Academy (MMA), review the strategies detailed in Complete College America's "Game Changers" (GC) report for their possible application to their institutions. The GC approach is intended to motivate public institutions to improve performance, with its focus being on the dominant types of public institution – universities and community colleges. With foresight, the Commission acknowledged "the circumstances within each institution may or may not lend themselves...to adoption of these strategies." The Commission asked that a response to their recommendation be provided to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs by July 1, 2015.

At its meeting in February 2015, the MMA Board of Trustees evaluated these strategies and agreed to capture the discussion and the Board's conclusions in a document at its May meeting. After careful study and discussion, the Board's conclusion is that Maine Maritime Academy is already incorporating several of the GC strategies, and that the others are not applicable due to our unique situation within public higher education, for a number of reasons. The Board's findings are summarized below under the five GC strategies:

Performance Funding:

MMA is a particularly high-performing institution by GC measures, yet it is also quite small compared to many state universities and even public 2-year colleges, having an enrollment of fewer than 1,000 undergraduate students. Small changes in small populations can have significant impacts in terms of data measurements without necessarily indicating important trends, so MMA does not see this approach as beneficial in motivating higher performance. In addition, how "performance funding" would be defined is unclear, since the state does not have a history of funding higher education by specific metrics, such as enrollment, as many other states do.

Co-requisite Remediation:

Remediation is a national issue, one that is correctly identified as involving substantial costs to the student and the institution providing remediation support. Again, the unique nature of MMA's programs – all of which are career-based STEM programs – requires a higher level of math proficiency than most institutions for all incoming students, so students needing basic remediation would not meet admission requirements. For students who need a modest amount of remediation to be able to enter college courses at MMA, the Academy avoids the direct cost of providing a parallel path for students with these needs. Instead, MMA has created a partnership with the Maine Community College System called MMA Prep, which enrolled its first group of participants in Fall 2013.

MMA Prep refers applicants who are not academically ready to enter an MMA program, but who have the potential to be successful MMA students, to a community college in their area. The students follow a curriculum for one year of study that is tailored to the requirements of the MMA program they want to pursue. The year includes both the remedial courses they need and courses in general studies that can be transferred to MMA for credit toward their degree, if they are successful in completing MMA Prep. While it does not necessarily reduce the time students must spend achieving their degree because of program structures, it does provide a far less expensive way to accomplish their goal of entering the Academy because of the cost of community college and the transferability of credits.

The first participants in this program indicate the program's great promise. Of the 11 students who completed MMA Prep in 2013-2014, all 11 entered MMA as freshmen in Fall 2014 and all have persisted through the second semester. This unique arrangement achieves the goals of students and MMA through a successful higher education partnership.

Full-time is 15:

MMA programs have highly structured sequences of courses and, as a result, 97% of students enrolled full-time in Fall 2014. The majority of MMA students in fact carry 15 or more credits per semester as part of their academic plans. Part-time students run the risk of missing a course in their program sequence and, because of MMA's size, not all courses are offered every semester. This alone can delay the student's completion of their degree and entrance into employment. MMA's culture and structure are already providing what GC recommends.

Structured Schedules:

MMA students have very structured schedules with their degree plans mapped out for their entire college career. For those in license majors, the critical start of the first semester and transition from high school into college is highly structured, and this schedule dominates the college atmosphere for all new students. Thus MMA students usually avoid the time management

mistakes and poor decision-making exhibited by many first year students in the first months of the fall semester. MMA has a long tradition of this kind of rigor in its programs, thus already achieving the GC strategy.

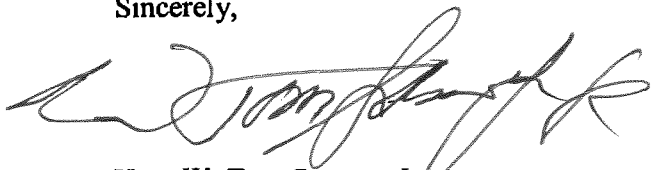
Guided Pathways to Success:

As stated earlier, curriculum and schedules for MMA students are defined for their entire program from the start. This allows little room for error and provides a considerable financial benefit to the student, both in avoiding unnecessary tuition expenditure and entering employment as soon as possible. For students who need assistance to stay on track, MMA has in place warning systems to alert faculty and administrators, as well as academic assistance systems such as extensive tutoring and advising to assure the student is supported.

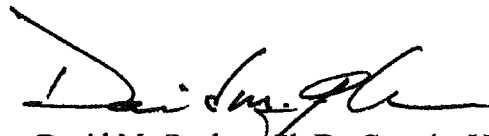
Finally, evidence of MMA's educational value can be easily recognized in a number of widely-accepted measures. While MMA's annual tuition and instructional fees are comparable to other public and private institutions of higher education, because of at-sea training requirements the average duration for instruction at MMA is equivalent to three semesters per year, compared to two at most colleges. Compared to the national data cited in GC, 54% of MMA students graduate in four years (actually a deflated number since some programs require five-years to complete) compared to 19% of all university students and 36% of flagship university students. By the end of six years, 69% of MMA students have completed their degrees. Lastly, MMA's student loan default rate (5%) and accelerated repayment of debt compared to other institutions is testament to the financial value that students benefit from, as well as our fulfillment of their needs in preparing for careers in marine-related industries. This has been and remains the primary focus of MMA's mission.

Review of the Game Changers article led to a valuable discussion among MMA's Trustees and a conclusion that adoption of the GC model would be neither necessary nor appropriate for the reasons above. We thank the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs for the opportunity to provide commentary.

Sincerely,



Hon. W. Tom Sawyer, Jr.  
*Chair, Educational Policy Subcommittee  
Maine Maritime Academy Board of Trustees*



David M. Gardner, Ph.D., Captain, USCGR  
*Vice President for Academic Affairs*