



Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal

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Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal

Executive Summary

Over the last 13 years, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) has reported on progress toward the state's goal to have at least 55% of Maryland's residents ages 25 to 64 holding at least one degree credential by 2025. The stated goal allowed the state and its institutions to progress in two, related pathways: 1) increasing the number of degrees produced by Maryland's colleges and universities (completion/production goals) and 2) increasing the number of educated Maryland residents.

In this final year of reporting, the state's degree attainment rate is 52.5%, which is 2.5 percentage points below the goal set. Despite falling short of the goal, Maryland's colleges and universities exceeded their degree production goal by over 60,000 degrees (779,240 produced versus a goal of 718,209 degrees). These institutional trends are commendable in light of the changes in college enrollments over time at Maryland colleges and universities. From 2013 to 2022, undergraduate enrollment, overall, decreased over 10% or around 30,000 students, yet institutions succeeded in consistently producing degree earners each year.

While the state did not reach its intended goal, it is notable the progress the state has made since the establishment of the goal. At the time the law was established (2013), 46 percent of Maryland adults ages 25 to 64 held an undergraduate degree; the state has seen a 6.5 percentage point increase and is recognized nationally as one of the most highly educated states in the US.

Maryland faced challenges ensuring equitable racial and ethnic outcomes for its diverse citizenry; there were racial and ethnic disparities in obtaining 55% degree attainment within a specific population. The data show progress has been made in degree attainment for all racial and ethnic groups but only white and Asian populations have exceeded the 55% goal.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is currently drafting the next iteration of the Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, due to the Maryland General Assembly July 1, 2026. As required by law, the State Plan for Higher Education is expected to detail "the long-range and short-range objectives and priorities for postsecondary education and methods and guidelines for achieving and maintaining them." New statewide goals will be detailed in the forthcoming Maryland State Plan for Higher Education.

Introduction

Over the last 13 years, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) has reported on progress toward the state's goal to have at least 55% of Maryland's residents ages 25 to 64 holding at least one degree credential by 2025. This reporting year, 2025, will be the Commission's final report on the progress toward the statewide goal.

This final report aims to do the following

- Summarize the successes and challenges institutions and the state have had in the progress toward the 55% goal;
- Provide details and data on the degree production and degree attainment goals; and

- Provide a summary of institutional reports submitted to MHEC, which include reflections of successes and challenges institutions had in their efforts to support the 55% attainment goal.

There are several sources of administrative and statewide data used for this report. First and foremost, statewide educational attainment and population data come from the United States Census Bureau and Maryland's Department of Planning. The degree counts that inform the model are taken from the 2025 Degree Information Systems (DIS) fileⁱ. The data provided in this report, as well as the submissions supplied by institutions, reveal that institutions have worked hard over the past 12 years in an effort to support the statewide educational attainment goal.

State and Institutional Goals and Targets

The following section discusses educational attainment and Maryland's progress towards its 2025 goal. In addition, factors affecting the state's progress are shared as well as information on the disparities in outcomes by racial and ethnic groups. It concludes with information about the forthcoming goals that will be tied to the State Plan for Postsecondary Education.

What is degree or educational attainment?

Degree or educational attainment refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed. Degree attainment data, collected by the Census, reflect the educational attainment levels of the adult population. Many states, including Maryland, have established degree attainment goals with the aim of ensuring more of its citizens obtain a postsecondary degree or other high-quality credential. Research shows that those with a postsecondary credential have higher lifetime earnings, lower odds of unemployment and better health outcomes.ⁱⁱ

What Maryland's 2025 educational attainment goal?

Maryland law established a goal in which "...at least 55% of Maryland's adults age 25 to 64 will hold at least an associate's degree by the year 2025."ⁱⁱⁱ This goal relies on 1) ensuring students who enroll in Maryland higher education institutions complete an associate's degree or higher, 2) ensuring educated Maryland residents continue to live and work Maryland, and 3) attracting educated residents from other states to live and work in Maryland.

What were the components of the 2025 goal established by the State?

The goal allowed the state and its institutions to progress in two, related pathways: 1) increasing the number of degrees produced by Maryland's colleges and universities (completion/production goals) and 2) increasing the number of educated Maryland residents. The former is measured by tracking undergraduate degree production for the state's higher education institutions and the latter is monitored by tracking Maryland population data and adult residents' highest level of education.

How have Maryland's colleges and universities contributed to the State's degree attainment goals?

The State's 55% goal relied, in part, on Maryland colleges and universities, and progress was buoyed by years of steady and increasing degree production (see Figure 1 and Table 1) Overall, Maryland's institutions exceeded the degree goals set in the model. In this final year of reporting, institutions awarded 52,147 undergraduate degrees, the second highest year of degree

production over the course of the 10+ year goal (there were 53,111 degrees awarded in 2020-2021).

For the cumulative degree production goal, the State’s institutions as a whole, met and exceeded the goals set in the model. The overall degree production goal established that Maryland colleges and universities were to generate at least 718,209 degrees between the goal’s establishment and 2025. The institutions have exceeded the goal for undergraduate degree production by over 60,000 degrees (779,240 as shown in Figure 2 and Table 1). See Figure 3 for segment-level comparisons of the 2025 final degree target counts and the actual degrees awarded for the final 2025 reporting year.

Figure 1: Trends in Annual Actual and Target Undergraduate Degree Production among Maryland Colleges and Universities

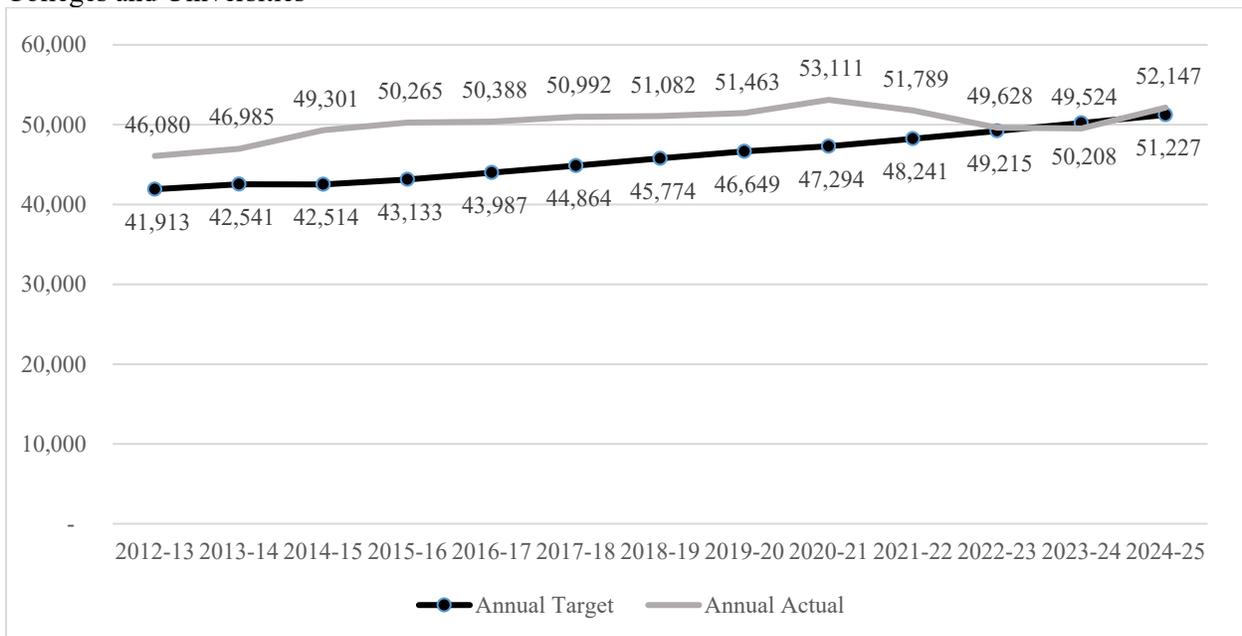


Figure 2: Trends in Overall Actual and Target Undergraduate Degree Production among Maryland Colleges and Universities

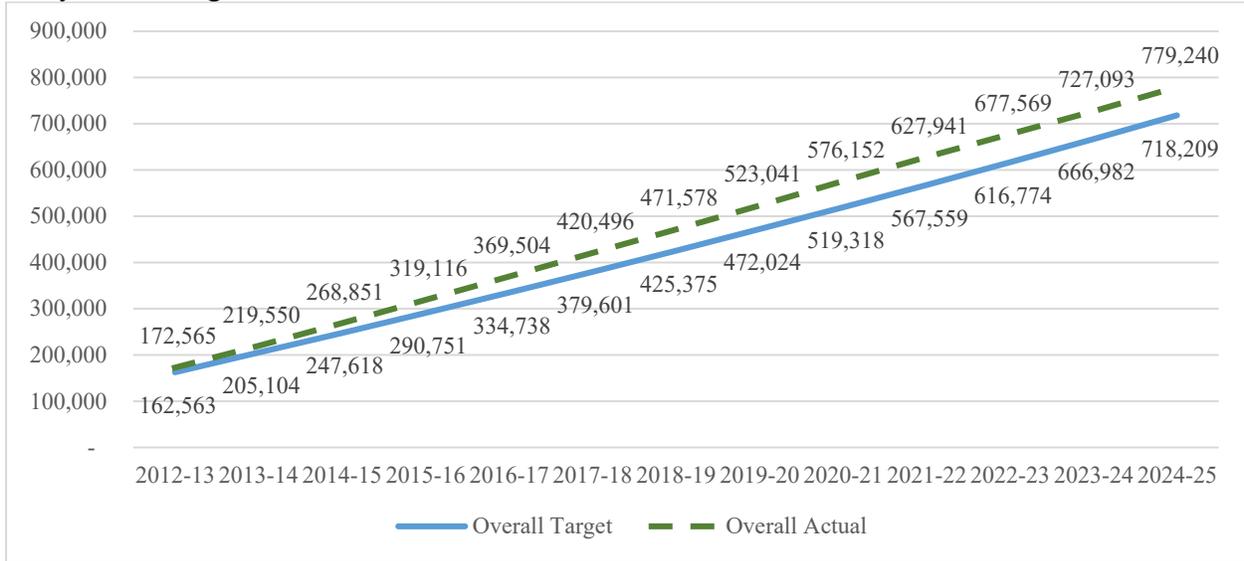
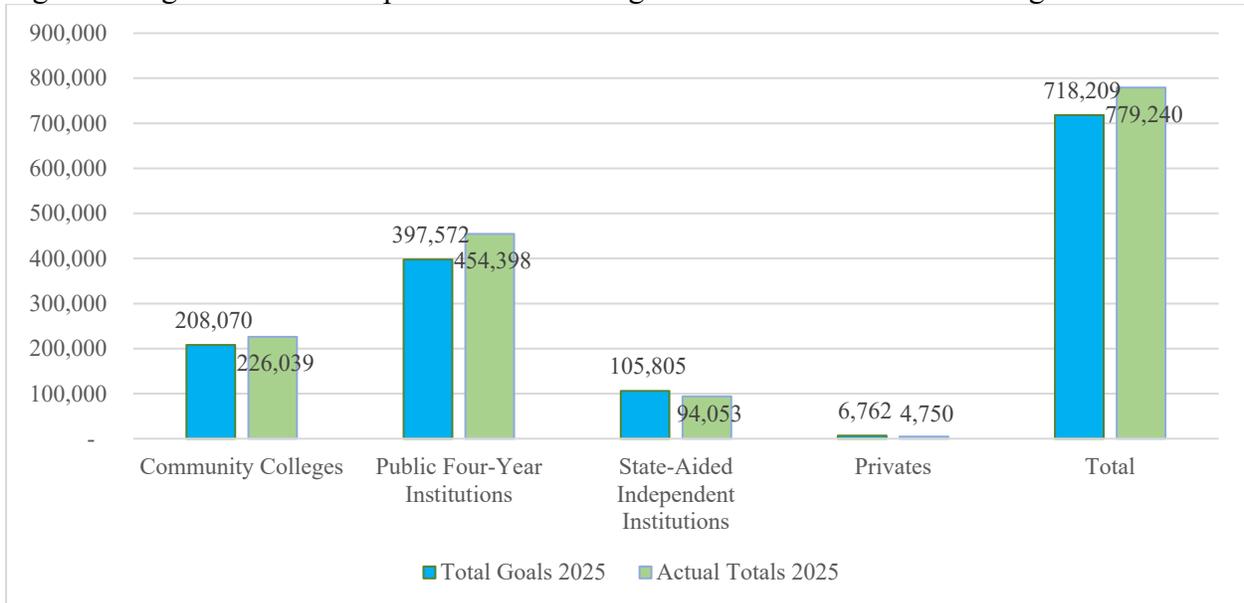


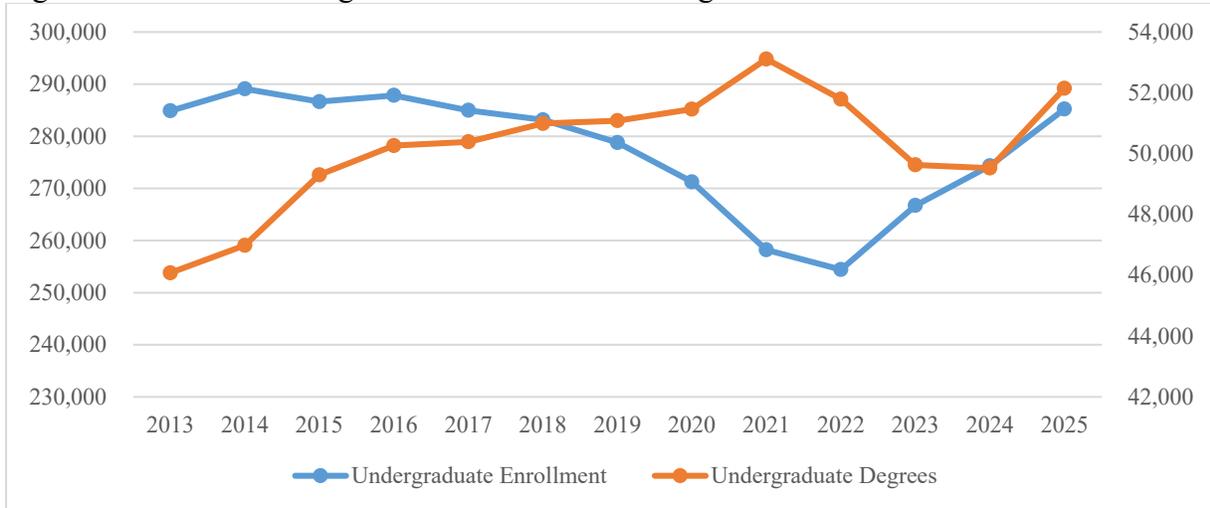
Figure 3: Segment-level Comparison of 2025 Degree Goals and 2025 Actual Degrees Awarded



These institutional trends are commendable in light of the changes in college enrollments over time at Maryland colleges and universities. Just as the attainment model’s baseline data was being established, undergraduate enrollment peaked around 302,000 students. From 2013 to 2022, undergraduate enrollment, overall, decreased over 10% or around 30,000 students from (284,882 to 254,418). Since 2022, enrollment has increased, and preliminary data for Fall 2025 shows that undergraduate enrollment has risen to pre-pandemic levels (over 285,000 students).

Despite these enrollment trends, degree production increased annually from 2013 to 2021, with a subsequent decrease between 2022 and 2024 (likely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic) and a rebound in 2025. See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Trends in Undergraduate Enrollment and Degrees Awarded 2013 to 2025



Tables 2, 3 and 4 at the end of this report provide detailed information for each public community college and four-year institution as well as well as targets for the entire period. Table 5, at the end of this report, shows targets and actuals for all sectors of higher education in the State.

Even though, overall, Maryland’s colleges and universities exceeded their mark, as exhibited in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 and Table 1, degree production by institutions is not the sole contributor to overall degree attainment rates in the state (see Appendix for model components). Having a state population that has a degree attainment level of an associate’s degree or higher is also affected by such factors as in-migration, out-migration, employment opportunities, and other dynamics that are tied to educating, attracting, and maintaining a talented workforce.

As the model demonstrates, it relies on: 1) a stable and educated Maryland population, 2) in-migration, especially of educated people, that exceeds out-migration, and 3) Maryland institutions graduating students who earn an associate’s degree or higher.

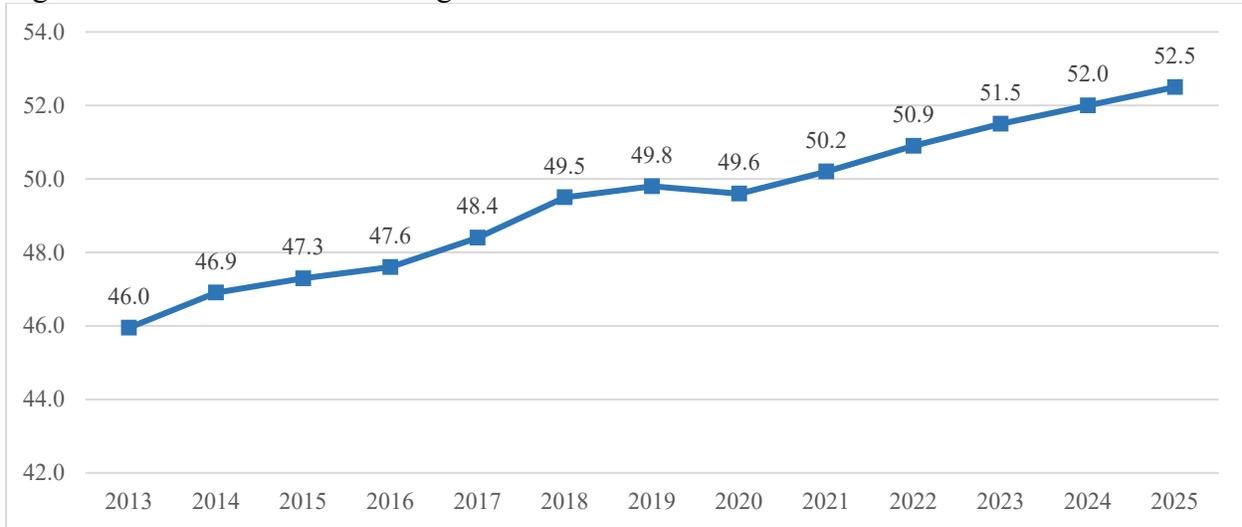
Table 1: Target and actual undergraduate degrees awarded, 2009-2010 through 2024-2025

Institutional Sector		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
		(base-line)															
Community Colleges	Target		11,386	11,614	11,846	12,083	12,325	12,571	12,823	13,079	13,341	13,608	13,880	14,157	14,441	14,729	15,024
	Actual	11,163	12,637	13,852	14,269	14,541	15,133	15,138	14,919	14,932	14,897	14,472	15,053	14,239	13,543	13,291	13,960
	+/-		1,251	2,238	2,423	2,458	2,808	2,567	2,096	1,853	1,556	864	1,173	82	-898	-1,438	-1,064
Four-Year Institutions	Target		21,876	22,301	22,736	23,179	23,630	24,091	24,561	25,040	25,529	26,028	26,374	26,891	27,418	27,956	28,504
	Actual	21,458	22,735	24,331	25,136	25,606	27,365	28,569	29,194	29,921	30,241	31,263	32,334	31,914	30,509	30,834	32,988
	+/-		859	2,030	2,400	2,427	3,735	4,478	4,633	4,881	4,712	5,235	5,960	5,023	3,091	2,878	4,484
Independent Institutions	Target		6,281	6,469	6,663	6,863	6,225	6,136	6,269	6,410	6,570	6,680	6,706	6,859	7,022	7,189	7,365
	Actual	6,098	6,174	6,303	6,442	6,395	6,572	6,327	5,991	5,915	5,644	5,576	5,581	5,474	5,410	5,192	4,959
	+/-		-107	-166	-221	-468	347	191	-278	-495	-926	-1,104	-1,125	-1,385	-1,612	-1,997	-2,406
Other Private Institutions	Target		668	668	668	416	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	334	334
	Actual	668	694	372	233	443	231	231	284	224	300	152	143	162	166	207	240
	+/-		26	-296	-435	27	-103	-103	-50	-110	-34	-182	-191	-172	-168	-127	-94
<i>Annual Total</i>	<i>Target</i>		<i>40,211</i>	<i>41,052</i>	<i>41,913</i>	<i>42,541</i>	<i>42,514</i>	<i>43,133</i>	<i>43,987</i>	<i>44,864</i>	<i>45,774</i>	<i>46,649</i>	<i>47,294</i>	<i>48,241</i>	<i>49,215</i>	<i>50,208</i>	<i>51,227</i>
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>39,387</i>	<i>42,240</i>	<i>44,858</i>	<i>46,080</i>	<i>46,985</i>	<i>49,301</i>	<i>50,265</i>	<i>50,388</i>	<i>50,992</i>	<i>51,082</i>	<i>51,463</i>	<i>53,111</i>	<i>51,789</i>	<i>49,628</i>	<i>49,524</i>	<i>52,147</i>
	<i>+/-</i>		<i>2,029</i>	<i>3,806</i>	<i>4,167</i>	<i>4,444</i>	<i>6,787</i>	<i>7,132</i>	<i>6,401</i>	<i>6,128</i>	<i>5,308</i>	<i>4,814</i>	<i>5,817</i>	<i>3,548</i>	<i>413</i>	<i>-684</i>	<i>920</i>
Cumulative Total	Target		79,598	120,650	162,563	205,104	247,618	290,751	334,738	379,601	425,375	472,024	519,318	567,559	616,774	666,982	718,209
	Actual	39,387	81,627	126,485	172,565	219,550	268,851	319,116	369,504	420,496	471,578	523,041	576,152	627,941	677,569	727,093	779,240
	+/-		2,029	5,835	10,002	14,446	21,233	28,365	34,766	40,895	46,203	51,017	56,834	60,382	60,795	60,111	61,031

Did Maryland meet the 55% educational attainment goal in 2025?

In this final year of reporting on the current goal, the degree attainment rate for Maryland is 52.5%.^{iv} This means that over half of Maryland adults age 25 to 64 hold at least an associate’s degree. While the state did not reach its intended goal, it is notable the progress the state has made since the establishment of the goal and the inception of the model. At the time the law was established (2013), 46 percent of Maryland adults ages 25 to 64 held an undergraduate degree; the state has seen a 6.5 percentage point increase¹ and is recognized nationally as one of the most highly educated states in the US².

Figure 5: Trends in Statewide Progression toward 55% Goal



Notes: The 2025 data, while reported as an actual, is calculated using the most recent five-year estimate figure (2019-2023 5 Year ACS Survey data from Census) and uses a standard .5% increase applied to the 2023 data; this is based on the average, annual increase in the attainment rate for Maryland since 2011 (ACS Community Survey, Census data).

Based on Census data from the American Community Survey, over the course of the model, the average annual degree attainment rate-of-change per year has been 0.5%.³ Therefore, if Maryland were to maintain that trend, the state would meet the 55% goal in 2030.

Are there equity gaps regarding degree attainment in Maryland?

Maryland faced challenges ensuring equitable racial and ethnic outcomes for its diverse citizenry (see Figure 6). In this context, equity would be visualized by each racial and ethnic

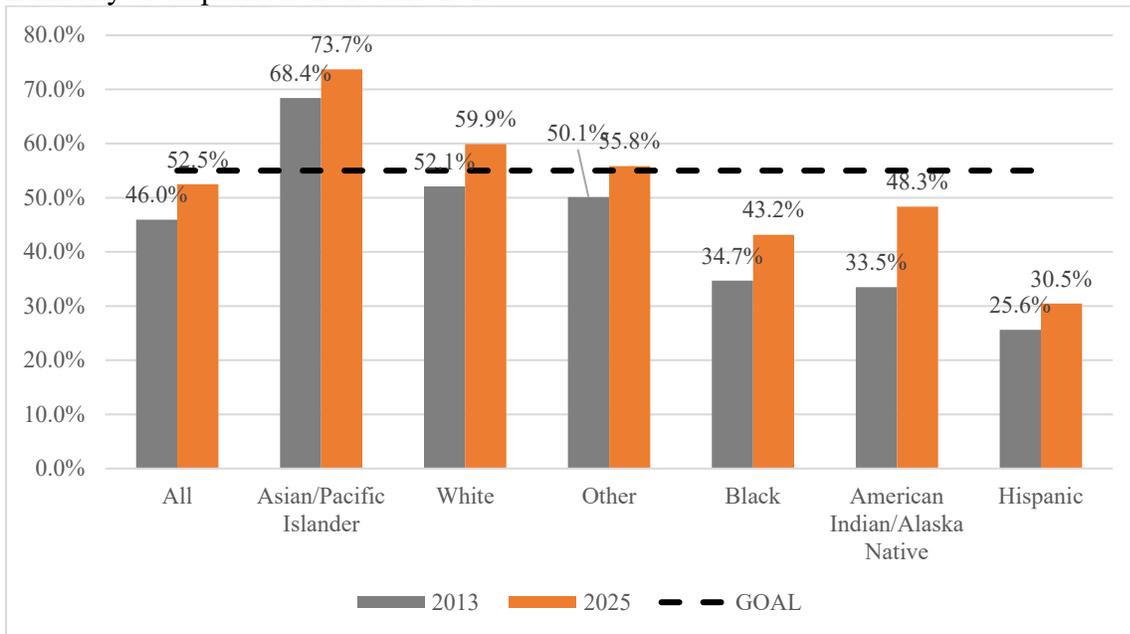
¹ Based on Census data, this means approximately 1.6 million Maryland adults have an associate’s degree or higher; this is up from the 2013 figure of 1.3 million.

² The national degree attainment rate is 49.6% (https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2024/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html?utm_campaign=20250903pio&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery). Maryland is ranked in the top five most educated states along with Massachusetts and Colorado (as well as the District of Columbia)

³ Degree attainment calculations rely on population data and educational attainment data from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) which relies on a sample of respondents and calculations to provide estimates. Degree attainment data from the US Census for Maryland is calculated by dividing the number of those who have earned an associate’s degree or higher (ages 25 to 64) by the overall state population of those ages 25 to 64. The rate change of .5% for Maryland over time reflects changes to these two populations and therefore changes to the rates.

groups having at least a 55% degree attainment rate within that specific population. Figure 6 highlights the racial and ethnic disparities in obtaining 55% degree attainment within a specific population. The data show progress has been made in degree attainment for all racial and ethnic groups but only white and Asian⁴ populations have exceeded the goal.

Figure 6: Degree Attainment Rates among Maryland Adults Ages 25 to 64 by Race and Ethnicity: Comparison: 2013 and 2025^v



Source: Lumina Foundation (2024; no longer in publication)

It is important to note how the demography of the state of Maryland has changed over time, which provides added context in relation to the state’s goal^{vi}. First, the state has become notably more diverse since 2013. In 2013, the state's racial and ethnic composition was 53% non-Hispanic White, 29% African American, 9% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 3% other races. By 2024, this composition had shifted dramatically: non-Hispanic White residents declined to 46.4% of the population (a decrease of 6.6 percentage points), while minority populations expanded significantly. The Hispanic population experienced the most dramatic growth, nearly doubling from 9% to 13.3% of the total population, with an increase of 4.1% between 2023 and 2024 alone. The Asian population grew from 6% to 7.1%, while the African American share increased modestly from 29% to 30.1%. In absolute terms, Maryland's non-Hispanic White population declined by approximately 140,000 residents between 2000 and 2013, and this trend has continued, with further decreases of 0.6% annually in recent years. The state's diversity index has increased from 0.65 in 2020 to 0.67 in 2024, meaning there is now a 67% probability that two randomly selected Marylanders belong to different racial or ethnic groups.^{vii}

Another significant shift has been in the average age of Marylanders. Maryland's population is aging, with the median age rising from 38.8 years in 2010 to 39.7 years in 2024. The elderly

⁴ While those in the category “Other” have also exceeded the goal, “Other” consists of smaller racial and ethnic groups in the state such as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and those who did not provide race/ethnicity information to the Census.

population aged 65 and above has grown from 15.8% of the total population in 2020 to 17.6% in 2024, with the 65+ age group expanding by 3.3% in just the past year. Conversely, the population under 18 declined slightly, and the prime working-age population (25-54) has shrunk as a share of the total, falling from 39.7% in 2020 to 39.0% in 2024. This creates a "beehive-like" demographic structure with fewer young people entering the workforce and more residents aging into retirement.^{viii}

Lastly, Maryland's population has experienced steady but modest growth since 2013, increasing from approximately 5.96 million in 2014 to 6.26 million in 2024, representing a gain of about 303,000 residents or 5.1%. While growth rates in the early 2020s were minimal, the state has seen stronger expansion recently, with 0.7% growth between 2023 and 2024.

These dynamics of an aging state population and slower population growth may have contributed to the state's challenges in meeting the educational attainment goal. Since the model relied on those between the ages of 25 and 64 as the basis of the rate calculation, fluctuations and decreases, especially of an educated populace, would result in lower-than-expected educational attainment rates. It is important to note that these demographic shifts reflect broader national trends of population aging and increasing diversity, with particular implications for Maryland's workforce, economy, and public services.

MHEC is currently drafting the next Maryland State Plan for Higher Education, due to the Maryland General Assembly on July 1, 2026. The Plan will set a shared statewide vision and goals for postsecondary education, with a focus on expanding educational attainment and degree production, affirming the value of credentials earned by Marylanders, and prioritizing research and innovation as drivers of economic and social impact.

Maryland's 55% Degree Attainment Model

In response to the Joint Chairmen's original charge, in 2012, MHEC developed a model that set initial state and institutional degree targets to help reach the goal of 55% of adults ages 25 to 64 holding degrees by 2025. At the time of the original model, the State's higher education degree attainment rate was 44.7%. MHEC estimated that in 2025, 903,511 people aged 25 to 49 who held associate's degrees in 2010 would have aged 15 years but would remain in the target group (between the ages of 25 and 64)^{ix}. Therefore, at the start of the model there was an assumption that 903,511 Marylanders would already have an associate's degree or higher. The sources of the remaining degree holders would come from Maryland colleges and universities and positive net migration of those educated outside of Maryland.

Over the course of reporting, the model was examined every few years to identify significant changes in the data that inform the model (e.g. population projections, migration data). MHEC performed revisions to the model in 2014^x, 2017^{xi} and 2023^{xii} based on updated Census data findings. See appendix for more about the model.

Institutional Best Practices

Since the inception of the 55% completion goal, institutions were asked to report to MHEC on the programs and initiatives aimed at student success and completion. These best practices were included as comprehensive compilations in appendices to recent reports.^{xiii}

For the 2025 report, MHEC sought to focus on the culmination of the original goal and the vision for the future. To that end, institutions were asked to report on the following prompt:

Maryland’s higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State’s degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor’s degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

All institutions were required to submit reports⁵. Below is a summary of their submissions.

Effective Strategies in Supporting Associate and Bachelor’s Degree Completion

Institutional responses reveal that success in degree completion is rarely the result of a single intervention but rather the cultivation of a cohesive student success ecosystem.

1. Academic and Curricular Reforms

- **Developmental Education Redesign:** A primary strategy has been the shift away from traditional remedial models to co-requisite models. This allows students to enter credit-bearing courses immediately while receiving "just-in-time" academic support, which significantly reduces the time to degree and prevents students from losing momentum in non-credit sequences.
- **Guided Pathways and Academic Mapping:** Institutions have reorganized curricula into Fields of Interest or Career Communities, providing students with semester-by-semester "roadmaps". These maps reduce excess credit accumulation and ensure every course taken advances a student toward their specific goal.
- **High-Impact Practices:** Embedding experiential learning, such as undergraduate research, internships, and capstone projects, has been proven to increase student engagement and persistence.

2. Proactive and Holistic Advising

- **Shift to Intrusive Advising:** Institutions have moved from reactive advising to proactive, case-management models. Advisors now use predictive data to intervene early when a student shows signs of struggle, such as missing assignments or declining grades.
- **Layered Support Teams:** Many institutions assign students a "Success Team" or use a dual-advising model that connects them with both professional staff and faculty mentors to ensure consistent guidance throughout their journey.

⁵ The following institutions did not submit reports: Baltimore City Community College; Coppin University; Bais Hamedrash and Mesivta of Baltimore, Ner Israel Rabbinical College and SANS Technology Institute

3. Removing Non-Academic Barriers

- **Basic Needs Support:** Recognizing that academic success is tied to life stability, institutions have established "wraparound" services, including food pantries, emergency grants for unexpected financial hardships, and transportation assistance.
- **Mental Health Services:** There has been a significant investment in 24/7 telehealth and virtual mental health platforms to support students balancing complex work and family responsibilities.
- **Financial Aid Optimization:** Strategic use of institutional aid and scholarship management platforms has been critical in improving retention for low-income and first-generation students.

4. Strengthened Transfer and Access Pipelines

- **Dual Enrollment:** Expanding opportunities for high school students to earn college credit has become a cornerstone for building a robust student pipeline.
- **Seamless Transfer Agreements:** Partnerships focused on block transfers and priority registration for community college graduates have helped students maintain momentum when transitioning to four-year institutions.

Plans to Sustain or Expand Institutional Efforts on "Best Practices"

Sustainability is being achieved by embedding successful pilot programs into the permanent institutional fabric and governance structures.

- **Organizational Restructuring:** Many institutions have created dedicated Divisions of Student Success or Enrollment Management to centralize support services and reduce administrative silos.
- **Data-Informed Decision Making:** Institutions plan to expand their use of predictive analytics and real-time dashboards to identify at-risk populations and measure the effectiveness of specific interventions.
- **Scaling High-Impact Models:** Several institutions are replicating national models, such as the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which provides intensive academic and financial support to significantly increase graduation rates.
- **Faculty and Staff Development:** Ongoing professional development ensures that faculty are trained in inclusive pedagogy and that advisors remain current in best practices for student-centered guidance.
- **Strategic Planning and Budgeting:** Completion goals are increasingly integrated into long-term strategic master plans, ensuring that student success initiatives remain a priority during budget cycles.

How are Institutions Balancing Degree Attainment with Growing Demand for Other Credentials?

Institutions are largely adopting a "both/and" philosophy, viewing short-term credentials as complements to, rather than replacements for, traditional degrees.

1. The Stackable Credential Model

The most prominent strategy is the development of stackable pathways, where students earn industry-recognized certifications (e.g., in IT, healthcare, or skilled trades) that count directly toward an associate or bachelor's degree. This provides students with immediate labor-market value while keeping them on the path to a degree.

2. Credit for Prior Learning (CPL)

To support adult and military learners, institutions are expanding their CPL policies, awarding academic credit for work experience, military rank, and existing industry certifications. This reduces the time and cost required to earn a degree.

3. Integration of Credit and Non-Credit Programming

For those institutions that offer non-credit, workforce and/or continuing education, institutions are increasingly aligning their continuing education and workforce training units with academic departments. This allows for "seamless course structuring," where non-credit work can be articulated into credit-bearing programs.

4. Anticipated Evolution over the Next Five Years

- **Increased Demand for Flexibility:** Institutions expect continued growth in the demand for short-cycle, workforce-aligned credentials, particularly among adult learners.
- **Digital Badging and Portability:** There is a move toward Comprehensive Learner Records (CLR) and digital badges that allow students to verify and showcase specific competencies to employers in a portable format.
- **Employer Partnerships:** Future growth will be driven by deepening partnerships with industry to ensure that both degrees and certifications align with real-time labor market needs.
- **AI and Technology:** Institutions anticipate leveraging AI for content-specific tutoring and exploring how to teach students to use AI tools effectively in their future careers.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, Maryland's higher education institutions have undertaken a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to advance the state's 55% degree attainment goal. By integrating academic reforms, technological innovations, and holistic student support, these institutions have transformed their operating models to move beyond mere access, focusing instead on measurable student success and completion.

Institutional reports are included, unedited by MHEC, as an appendix to this statewide report.

ⁱ Degree Information System collection reflects degrees and awards in credit bearing programs and reflect a July 1 to June 30 reporting cycle.

ⁱⁱ Bachelor's Degree Attainment in the United States: 2005 to 2019 American Community Survey Briefs. February 2021. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2021/acs/acsbr-009.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ The 2013 College and Career Readiness Act; Maryland Education Article [§10–205](#)

^{iv}Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2022.B15001?q=%22SEX%20BY%20AGE%20BY%20EDUCATIONAL>

[%20ATTAINMENT%20FOR%20THE%20POPULATION%2018%20YEARS%20AND%20OVER%20%22&g=040XX00US24](#) MHEC applied the annual growth rate of .05 to the value from the 2018-2022 ACS (50.9%) for 2023 and 2024 to obtain the 51.9% reported.

^v The 2025 race and ethnicity values are estimated using the most recent reporting year of data (2024) and applying the category's average annual rate of change.

^{vi} See Maryland Department of Legislative Services, Office of Policy Analysis. (2015). Maryland demographics: Summary of Maryland's diverse and growing population. <https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/InterGovMatters/Demog/Maryland-Demographics-January-2015.pdf> ; Maryland Department of Planning, Maryland State Data Center. (2024). Analysis of the 2024 population estimates for Maryland: Age, sex, and race characteristics.

https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/Trends_Report/Population_Estimates_Report_AGR.pdf; U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). 2010 Census.; U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). Population estimates program. Retrieved January 6, 2026, from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest.html> Analysis Of “The 2024 Population Estimates For Maryland: Age, Sex, And Race Characteristics Dept of Planning” https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/Trends_Report/Population_Estimates_Report_AGR.pdf

^{viii} See “Maryland aging slightly faster than US as a whole, Census numbers show Maryland Matters July 5, 2025 <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/07/05/maryland-aging-slightly-faster-than-u-s-as-a-whole-new-census-numbers-show/> “, Maryland Housing Needs Assessment Update Summer 2025 <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Documents/Research/Compiled-Report-SHNA-2025.pdf>

^{ix} This number is an estimate based on the percentage of Marylanders ages 25-49 within the 25-64 age group (65%), and that percentage multiplied by the number of Marylanders ages 25-64 with a degree. This model assumes a flat rate of degree attainment across age brackets and recognizes that this number is only an estimate.

^x Maryland Higher Education Commission, December 2014, “Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion

Goal. https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/AnnualReports/2014BestPracProgressCompletionGoal_020615.pdf the model was revised to reflect additional input from Maryland colleges and universities as well as additional information on migration patterns within the State and increased degree output at independent colleges and universities in Maryland.

^{xi} This assessment included an analysis of the trends in actual degree awards and the data that inform the model. MHEC also sought input from Maryland colleges and universities regarding the model's institutional targets. Additional details about the initial and revised models are provided in the 2012, 2014, and 2017 Best Practices reports. Maryland Higher Education Commission, December 2017, “Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal.”

<https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/AnnualReports/2017BestPractices.pdf>

^{xii} Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal, December 2023. https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Dashboards/p%20195_196%20Report%20on%20Best%20Practices%20and%20Progress%20Toward%2055%25%20Goal.pdf

^{xiii} Maryland Higher Education Commission, December 2014, “Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal – Appendix.”

http://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/2014Studies/2014_Best_Practices_Appendix.pdf and Maryland Higher Education Commission, December 2012, “Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal – Appendix”. <https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/2012Studies/2012BestPracticesAppendix.pdf>

Appendix A: The 55% Model¹

In response to the Joint Chairmen's original charge, in 2012, MHEC developed a model that set initial state and institutional degree targets to help reach the goal of 55% of adults ages 25 to 64 holding degrees by 2025. At the time of the original 2012 model, the State's higher education degree attainment rate was 44.7%. MHEC estimated that in 2025, 903,511 people aged 25 to 49 who held associate's degrees in 2010 would have aged 15 years but would remain in the target group (between the ages of 25 and 64)ⁱ. Therefore, at the start of the model there was an assumption that 903,511 Marylanders would already have an associate's degree or higher. The sources of the remaining degree holders would come from Maryland colleges and universities and positive net migration of those educated outside of Maryland.

Over the course of reporting, the model was examined every few years to identify significant changes in the data that inform the model (e.g. population projections, migration data). MHEC performed revisions to the model in 2014ⁱⁱ, 2017ⁱⁱⁱ and 2023^{iv} based on updated Census data findings.

In 2023, MHEC revised the model and in doing so estimated that there would be 3,179,039 Maryland residents between the ages of 25 to 64 in 2025.² This population estimate formed the denominator of the 55% calculation.³

Based on this new figure, MHEC estimated that the state would need 1,748,471 individuals to have an associate's degree or higher (55% of the 3,179,039 projected Marylanders between the ages of 25 and 64) to meet the 55% attainment goal in 2025.

The sources of those educated individuals were projected to be:

- *Public institutions, independent colleges and universities, and other private institutions:* The total degree production from Maryland's colleges and universities was projected to be 718,209 degrees over the course of the model.
- *Migration from other states and nations:*^v The estimated net positive migration of additional degree holders was projected to be 266,750^{vi} over the course of the model.⁴

¹ This is as of the 2024 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal (November 2024)

² See 2023 Report for fuller discussion of the changes to the model in 2023.

https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Dashboards/p%20195_196%20Report%20on%20Best%20Practices%20and%20Progress%20Toward%2055%25%20Goal.pdf

³ See "Projections to 2045 revised December 2020: Total Population Projections by Age, Sex and Race" at https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Pages/s3_projection.aspx This population estimate is currently the most recent population projections issued by the Maryland Department of Planning and was issued in 2020. which was calculated in 2020 is smaller than the original population estimate of 3,324,400 which was obtained from the MD Dept of Planning in 2010.

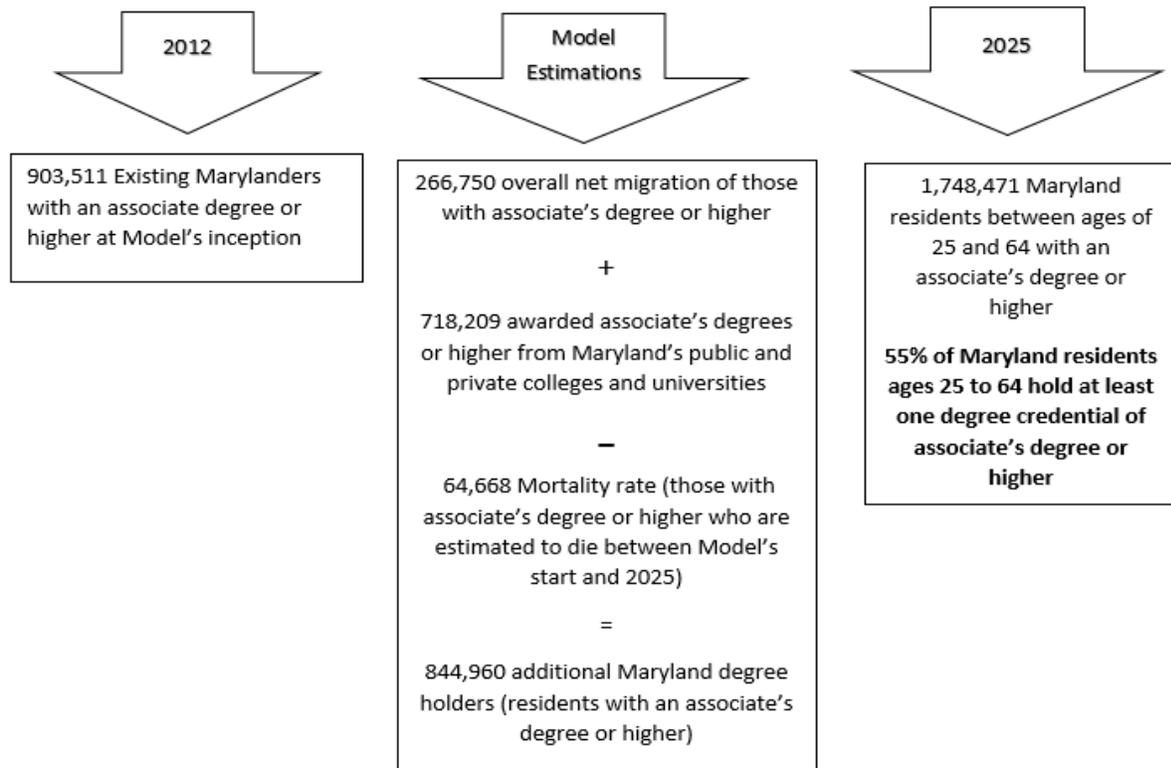
⁴ Calculated using U.S. Census Bureau. "Geographical Mobility in the Past Year by Educational Attainment for Current Residence in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B07009, 2021, and U.S. Census Bureau. "Geographical Mobility in the Past Year by Educational Attainment for Residence 1 Year Ago in the United States." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B07409, 2021. The calculation of net migration includes only the data for those with at least a

Finally, the model considered mortality. The mortality rate was estimated to remove 64,668 degree holders from the state total during the period of the model. ^{vii} ^{viii}

Taken together, the contributions from migration to Maryland, public, independent, and other private institutions minus estimated mortality would provide 844,960 of the degree holders needed.

The figure below outlines the main components of the model.

Figure 6: Progress toward 55% Completion Goal Model



ⁱ This number is an estimate based on the percentage of Marylanders ages 25-49 within the 25-64 age group (55%), and that percentage multiplied by the number of Marylanders ages 25-64 with a degree. This model assumes a flat rate of degree attainment across age brackets and recognizes that this number is only an estimate.

bachelor's degree, as the associate's degree level is not a measure provided by the Census for these tables (associate is combined with "some college").

ii Maryland Higher Education Commission, December 2014, “Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal.”

<https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/AnnualReports/2014BestPracProgressCompletionGoal020615.pdf> the model was revised to reflect additional input from Maryland colleges and universities as well as additional information on migration patterns within the State and increased degree output at independent colleges and universities in Maryland.

iii This assessment included an analysis of the trends in actual degree awards and the data that inform the model. MHEC also sought input from Maryland colleges and universities regarding the model’s institutional targets. Additional details about the initial and revised models are provided in the 2012, 2014, and 2017 Best Practices reports. Maryland Higher Education Commission, December 2017, “Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal.”

<https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Research/AnnualReports/2017BestPractices.pdf>

iv Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal, December 2023.

https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Documents/Dashboards/p%20195_196%20Report%20on%20Best%20Practices%20and%20Progress%20Toward%2055%25%20Goal.pdf

v Net migration figures were recalculated for the 2014 and 2017 reports, which can be found on the MHEC Office of Research and Policy Analysis website (<https://mhec.maryland.gov/publications/Pages/research/index.aspx> under Student Outcomes).

vi This is an alteration from the 2017 revision, which projected net positive migration of 275,088.

vii The 2023 analysis shows an alteration of the mortality rate to 0.4%; this rate is higher than the mortality rate used in earlier reports’ calculations (past rate was 0.2%).

viii This value was calculated by taking the average mortality rate of Maryland residents in 2012 between the ages of 25-64 (0.2%) and then multiplying this by the estimated total number of Maryland residents with degrees in this same age range in 2025 (1,828,420).

Appendix B

Efforts by the College to Support Student Success

Alliegany College of Maryland (ACM) has maintained Student Success as an institutional priority through its Mission and Strategic Plan for many years. This has allowed ACM to advanced Maryland's degree attainment goal by expanding access, strengthening completion pathways, and improving student success outcomes. The College is committed to sustaining its focus on Student Success by balancing the needs of industry and the expectations of students.

The College adopted multiple measures when admitting students instead of exclusively using Accuplacer and redesigned developmental education to make sure students are able to get into college-level courses as quickly as possible. The College now considers high school GPA, success in individual courses, and testing in conjunction to determine student placement. There are fewer levels of developmental education in each subject and a combined developmental and English-101 course was created to further improve student momentum.

Students needing additional development prior to entering higher education are provided the resources necessary to succeed through the College's Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Work Experience (WEX) programs with the goal of being able to transition to credit-bearing courses upon completion.

Starting in 2013, a Title III grant was implemented to develop an Advising Center, centralizing and making consistent advising received by incoming and ongoing students. To further grow students' capacity for success in higher education, the College created the Holistic Mental Health Network, helping students with lifelong skills to succeed in education and workforce. Included in this process have been creating a Unity Center, a Serenity Room, improving onsite counseling, paraprofessional counseling, creating a mental health care unit for advising, hosting national conferences, and introducing these skills to county high school students.

Another major student services realignment occurred in [2017] with the creation of the College's Learning Commons, combining services for testing, tutoring, and library services into a single location and under a single department. This includes the Reading and Writing Center, combined to reduce stigma for students who need assistance with reading but may not want to be public about it.

The College's Pathways for Success TRIO grant provides many students who are first-generation, low-income, or have a documented disability with a robust support network throughout their enrollment leading to substantially improved outcomes relative to comparable peer groups. TRIO advisors also assist in educating participant students on financial literacy.

Technology continues to supplement the College's ability to focus on student success outcomes, with the implementation of a new learning management system, D2L-Brightapce, and a student success platform, Navigate. These two allow for greater delivery of course content to students, better communication between student service areas and advisors, earlier academic intervention for struggling students, and improved access to data related to student learning outcomes. Online tutoring is available through the ThinkingStorm platform for all students and individual programs leverage specific software to help with content unique to their students.

Faculty and staff development has been a focus of the College. This has been advanced through an annual professional development day with internal and external presentations, technology days for

instructors to introduce and reinforce technologies available to them, and ongoing professional development funds for conferences and courses. Additionally, new faculty are required to participate in the Teaching and Learning Community (TLC) which helps them to become acclimated to a learner-centered environment and student-focused instructional techniques.

Helping students transition from K-12 education to higher education has been an important focus to their long-term educational success. The College partners with Allegany County Public Schools (ACPS) to offer a College and Career Coach position which assists high school juniors and seniors in understanding what's expected for applying to and succeeding in higher education – not just at ACM. ACPS students also have college opportunities through the PTECH program which makes it possible to graduate with an Associate's degree in computer technology at the same time as their high school graduation. At the same time, the College has expanded early college offerings with record enrollments from ACPS high schools.

Faculty and staff driven efforts to support students have also found purchase with the development of a student food pantry, student emergency fund, and peer mentorship programs. Athletics requires student athletes to attend advising sessions and has made mandatory study hall and tutoring sessions when necessary to ensure athletes have the same success as peer groups.

One of the College's greatest strengths over its history has been the ability to emphasize financial access for students. Students who do not have to be worried about their ability to pay for higher education are more easily retained, progressed, and eventually able to complete their education. Given the low-income resources prevalent in Allegany County and its surrounding region, this has always been a high priority for the College and therefore a key to student success. Over 85% of ACM students receive some form of financial aid each year and the College's foundation ranks 2nd in the state of dollars per FTE.

Renovating the College's Technology building allowed for the implementation of new technologies and improved physical plant facilities in programs needing them as well as realigning the location and distribution of academic programs in those areas. New simulation suites were installed to provide allied health students with a more robust and realistic learning experience to prepare them for clinicals and workforce. These include wireless training mannikins that provide students with programmed scenarios and application of appropriate clinical skills and care.

Sustaining Efforts for Student Success

All of the institutional initiatives, programs, and activities described in the prior section have been continued since inception and/or improved, demonstrating an institutional commitment to improving student success over a sustained period of time.

Space dedicated to the College's TRIO program – Pathways for Success – has been expanded nearly double, allowing it to provide more robust services to the students it works with. The grant has been successfully renewed through 2030 and is expected to continue putting up excellent student success outcomes.

Allegany College of Maryland began participation in the Aspen Transfer Intensive during the Spring 2025 semester with anticipated outcomes related to the successful transfer of ACM students to four-year institutions, most notably local partner Frostburg State University. College personnel have been in regular conversations with personnel from MHEC, the Aspen Institute, and Frostburg to develop action

plans, identify possible roadblocks to student success, and develop strategies for furthering student success at both institutions.

New technology will continue to present opportunities for the College to improve educational and support services provided to students throughout their higher education journey. ACM recently incorporated Packback, an instructional AI agent which students can use to get content-specific tutoring as well as assistance in report writing and editing. Further exploration into the services promised by AI is ongoing and will be evaluated throughout the 2025-2026 academic year for consideration.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Other Postsecondary Credentials

Allegany County and the surrounding region have been well-supported by the College's Continuing Education offerings and programs. Continuing Education (CE) has seen exceptional increases to FTE over the last three years and looks to continue growth as demand for workforce development remains ongoing and expanding.

Western Maryland Works is a 33-000 square foot facility containing state of the art training equipment and technology for workforce development. It contains classrooms, hands-on-labs, manufacturing areas, and more. With the expansion of equipment and facility space offered at Western Maryland Works, the College has been able to assist displaced workers, retrain industry partners, and assist in the recovery of economic partnerships throughout the county. Many of the classes offered do not lead to an Associate's degree or credit Certificate, but have been instrumental in allowing students to acquire skills that are immediately applicable to their work or to potential employers. Additionally, this makerspace has been featured in state and national media, attracting attention to and reinforcing the value of non-credit credentials.

Partnership between Western Maryland Works and Allegany County Public Schools has led to the development of an Advanced Manufacturing degree which help high school students graduate with credits towards an Associate's Degree while simultaneously earning ten industry recognized credentials (NIMS) during high school with ten more available post-high school through the College.

Continuing Education has additionally added programs for Cosmetology and Nail Technicians, in direct response to requests from community partners indicating a need for these trainings. Ongoing trainings are provided for state correctional officers, health industry partners, and more outside of traditional higher education credit offerings.

Looking Ahead: The Next Five Years

To expand opportunities in the realm of other postsecondary credentials in the upcoming years, the College is working on implementing robust opportunities for students to engage in stackable credentials across non-credit and credit programs, wherein the work from one component will cleanly transfer and apply to the other.

Digital badging is another area of conversation with industry partners that promises to provide expanded opportunities for students to receive credentials demonstrative of their ability to engage in the workforce. These programs represent seamless course structuring between credit and workforce with stackable credentials for students to flexibly construct an educational portfolio. Leveraging partnerships with industry and k-12 education, offering summer campus, and examining what new

industry recognized credentials are available to offer are areas of great promise for the College and its students.

Furthermore, the growth of Continuing Education into new programs and partnerships is expected to continue as new programs are explored, such as Heavy Equipment operation based on industry and local business demand.

Anne Arundel Community College
2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress
toward the 55% Completion Goal

MHEC Prompt:

Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) is committed to increasing the academic success, retention, and completion of students that enables them to achieve their educational goals. Student engagement and completion have been the focus of the College's three most recent strategic plans and have been recognized as an institutional priority over the past decade. In alignment with the State's goal of advancing degree attainment for higher education institutions, AACC has developed and implemented a series of strategies over the past 13 years, which facilitate associate-degree completion. The following comprise highlights of the five most effective strategies, based on the institutional assessments:

1. Organized majors by Fields of Interest (FOI) aligned with assigned advisors

At AACC, we believe every credit a student earns should advance their academic and career aspirations. Initiated by our strategic plan, *Engagement Matters: Pathways to Completion (FY2017–2020)*, to help students find the major that best fits their interests and goals, AACC reorganized its degrees and certificates into 11 Fields of Interest (FOIs), organized based on common curricula. To better engage students who are still exploring their academic and career calling, AACC also has an Undecided/General Explore option that allows students to explore different subjects while completing the Maryland general education requirements and working with faculty, academic advisors, and career counselors to identify a major.

In addition, students can take up to 20 credits before they choose a major. For students who choose a broad FOI but have not chosen a specific major within the field, advisors identify courses that apply regardless of the specific major students ultimately choose. Further, academic advisors dedicate themselves to specific FOIs, which allows them to build strong partnerships with FOI faculty. This collaborative approach helps advisors gain deep insights into the unique transfer and career pathways associated with each FOI. By focusing on a student's chosen field, advisors provide expert guidance, assisting students in selecting the right courses, exploring career opportunities, and navigating what can sometimes be a complex transfer process.

2. Facilitated faculty's involvement with student success through a Course Success Referral System

In Spring 2018, the College implemented a Course Success Referral System, designed to provide timely feedback to students when faculty have concerns about attendance, participation, or performance. In addition to providing written communication between faculty and students, the referral system allows faculty to recommend specific resources and actions for students to support their academic performance.

To fortify these efforts, the Office of Academic Advising, in collaboration with the Office of Planning, Research and Institutional Assessment (PRIA), analyzed course outcomes and the relationship between final grades and retention rates among students who received at least one referral. The Course Success Referral System, including referrals and subsequent support services, was proven to improve retention for those students facing academic challenges.

3. Implemented a Student Success Seminar (ACA-100)

In Fall 2018, the Achieving College-Career Advancement (ACA) Department piloted a one-credit Student Success Seminar (ACA-100) that helps students transition to college, understand how they learn best, and set their college and career goals. In addition, the seminar introduces students to college resources, faculty expectations, and strategies for academic planning. Students develop essential skills, such as effective study habits, notetaking, and time management, while also exploring learning strategies, career paths, and personal goal setting. For example, they create an academic plan and practice using tools that promote success in a diverse learning environment.

This effort proved worthwhile, as the program assessment data showed that Fall 2018 ACA-100 students had higher fall-to-fall retention than those who did not take ACA-100. Specifically, the difference was 68.4% vs. 49% and 57.1% vs. 44.7% for full-time and part-time students, respectively (Data Source: AACC PRIA). Starting in Fall 2019, the College scaled up this effort by requiring courses for several majors, including Transfer Studies and a number of health-professions programs. Additionally, advisors were given the authority to require ACA-100 as a condition of reenrollment for students returning after dismissal. Advisors continue to play an active role in ACA-100 by presenting in each class to emphasize the importance of degree mapping, transfer planning, and ongoing collaboration with an advisor.

4. Leveraged technology to facilitate student academic planning and track academic progress

As part of its strategic plan, *Engagement Matters II: Excellence through Innovation (FY2021-2024)*, the College implemented an Academic Planning, Scheduling and Registration module, which is embedded in the College student information system. The module is a self-service, online tool, which allows students to search for courses, register for classes, and track their academic progress. This system allows students to see a timeline of their academic plan, monitor their progress, create graduation and transfer plans, submit plans to advisors for approval, register for or modify courses, manage waitlisted sections, and access grades. Students are guided to begin with their degree audit, which presents only courses that satisfy their degree requirements, helping them stay on track to meet all graduation requirements.

This technological innovation benefits students by facilitating organizational and time-

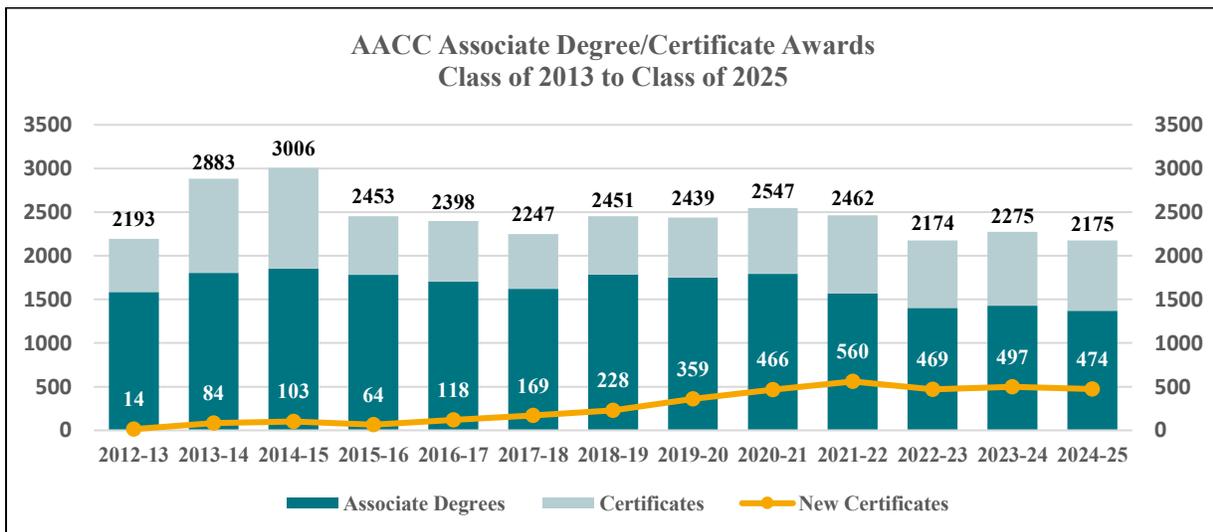
management skills, reducing stress, and improving academic performance and productivity. The module promotes responsibility, assists in subdividing larger tasks into smaller steps, and fosters self-discipline, all of which leads to greater focus, better concentration, and a more positive mindset for learning.

5. Helped students gain academic momentum through incremental goal completion and 60+ credit initiatives

At AACC, twice each year, advisors review potential graduates in two categories. The 60+ Completion Project focuses on students who have earned 60 or more credits but have not yet completed an associate degree. The Incremental Goal Completion Project targets students who have declared a degree that aligns with one or more fully matched certificates. For students who meet the requirements for a degree or certificate but who have not yet earned the credential, advisors work with the Records Office to notify students of the opportunity and guide them through the graduation application process. These initiatives have proven to be effective in helping students gain academic momentum towards degree attainment and ensuring their completion of those degrees.

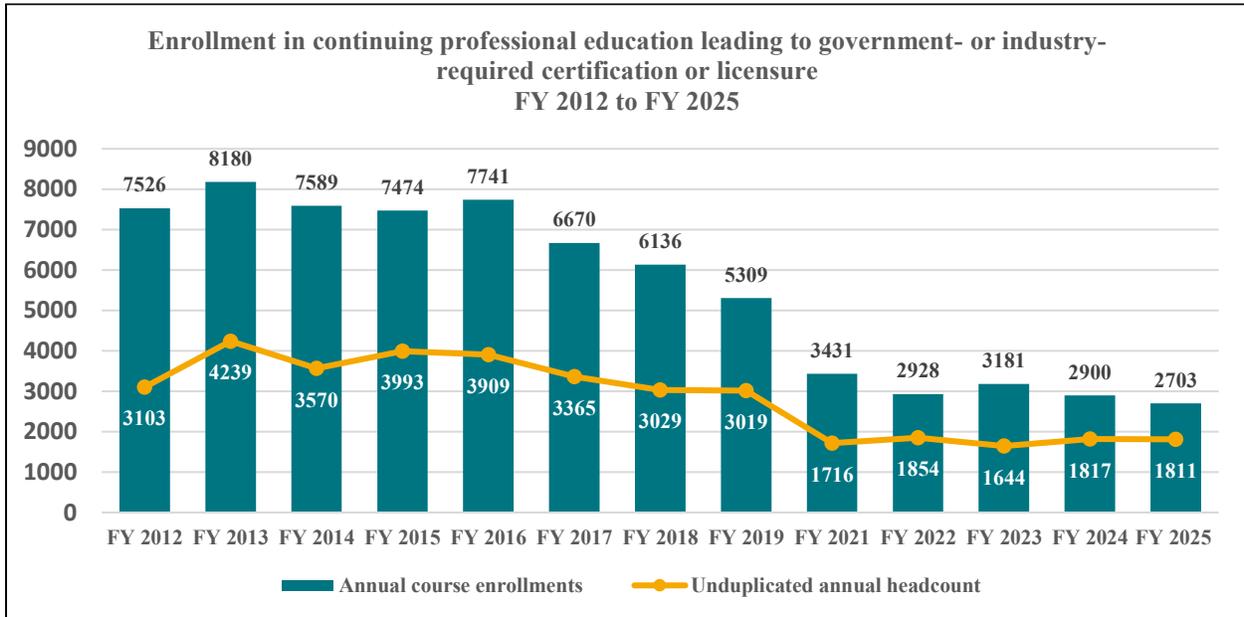
Further, to help address the growing industry needs and help students improve employability, the College has created certificate programs in various disciplines for other postsecondary credentials. Since 2012, AACC has developed 82 new certificate programs and industry recognized credentials across five academic schools. These programs have been designed to address labor market needs, career opportunities, and community engagement. Graph 1 illustrates AACC’s degree and certificate completion trend for the last 13 years.

Graph 1: Degree and Certificate Completion Trend at AACC



In addition, Graph 2 shows AACC’s course enrollment and unduplicated headcount in continuing professional education leading to government or industry-required certification or licensure over the last 13 years.

Graph 2: Enrollment in Continuing Professional Education Leading to Government or Industry Required Certification at AACC



Lastly, to address the evolving landscape of higher education and ensure the viability of its academic programs, in FY 2025, AACC revamped its Academic Program Review, which led to streamlining academic offerings, removing curriculum bottlenecks, aligning institutional resources, and ultimately paving the way for improving student transfer and degree-attainment outcomes. In FY 2026, the College launched its new strategic plan: *AACC Forward 2030 (FY 2026-2030)*. The new plan focuses on moving AACC forward as a dynamic and student-centered college that delivers exceptional learning experiences while protecting the long-term viability and sustainability of the College. The plan is grounded in the College’s core values, ensuring AACC remains committed to putting students first in everything we do. Over the next five years, the College anticipates continuing to balance degree attainment with the growing demand for other post-secondary credentials to meet the diverse needs of students and the modern workforce.

2025 Best Practice Report- Howard Community College

Prompt: Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

Strategies for Degree Attainment

Meeting the complex needs of today's students requires a holistic approach that addresses academic, financial, mental health, and basic needs. Over the last ten years, the college constructed a cross-functional integration of support programs for all students - linking New Student Orientation, behavioral intervention, executive functioning support, technology tools, and children's learning center services to create a cohesive student success ecosystem aligned with long-term degree completion goals.

Greater Focus on Equity and Access: The completion agenda has driven equity-based initiatives, leading to expanded support for underserved populations, such as students with disabilities, adult learners, and those facing basic needs insecurity. Policies and practices now prioritize holistic support alongside academic excellence.

Institutional Structures for Student Success: Howard Community College (HCC) formalized retention and completion efforts through **cross-functional task forces**, bringing together academic affairs, student development, and institutional research to coordinate strategies and assess impact. HCC reorganized service areas and adopted a case management model for all new students.

Data-Informed Decision Making: The college increased its use of analytics tools, such as Dropout Detective and Starfish, to monitor student progress, identify risks early, and deploy targeted interventions. This shift toward proactive engagement represents a major cultural change.

Expanded Mental Health and Basic Needs Services: HCC added **Uwill Telehealth**, a **full-time social worker**, and programs like **Fueling Dragons** (food pantry, garden, workshops), and reopened the **Children's Learning Center** in direct response to student needs identified during the completion initiative. These resources acknowledge that academic success depends on addressing non-academic barriers.

Collaborative Culture of Student Success: Faculty, staff, and administrators now share a collective responsibility for persistence and completion. The completion goal has shifted the culture from isolated interventions to a comprehensive, student-centered approach integrated across the institution

HCC has implemented several innovative strategies that have significantly boosted student success.

Parenting Scholars Program: Howard Community College’s support for student parents is showing measurable impact. Through our partnership with the Community Action Council of Howard County, 103 student parents with children in Head Start received \$21,500 in scholarships, directly reducing financial stress. Survey data from 124 student parents in our Yearly Evaluation of Services by Students (YESS) shows that 71.8% feel they have access to the resources needed to care for their children, an encouraging indicator of support effectiveness. The Parent Scholars Program, serving 148 students annually, had a waitlist of 23 in 2024–25, demonstrating high demand and perceived value. These students earned an average GPA of 2.81 in Spring 2024, suggesting academic persistence despite competing responsibilities.

Children’s Learning Center Reopening: One of the most impactful recent innovations is the reopening of the Children’s Learning Center (CLC) at Howard Community College in collaboration with Howard County’s Community Action Council. Access to affordable, high-quality childcare removes a critical barrier for student-parents, enabling them to attend classes, engage in campus life, and complete coursework with confidence. The CLC not only provides care but also incorporates early childhood education best practices, ensuring children benefit while their parents pursue educational goals. Since reopening in Fall 2024, our Children’s Learning Center has served 29 student parents, providing reliable childcare that enables academic focus. This support aligns directly with our mission to reduce equity gaps and improve persistence among adult learners and student-parents.

Support for Faculty and Staff Development: Howard Community College has made significant investments in the ongoing professional development of faculty and advising staff. The college’s faculty and staff leverage evidence-based teaching strategies and student-centered advising to help students make informed decisions about their academic pathways, promoting persistence and success. Programs like accelerated seven-week courses allow students to earn college credits faster, save time, and make more measurable progress toward completing their degrees.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate the power of comprehensive support systems in meeting diverse student needs and promoting retention and completion.

To further investigate national best practices, HCC joined the Achieving the Dream network in 2024 to interact with a vast network of colleges seeking institutional transformation focused on increasing student completion through high-impact strategies and support. To date two major projects are underway, one involved selecting the highest enrolled courses and offering them in seven-week sessions beginning in fall 2024 and then during fall 2025 HCC launched the second project- a co-requisite model- placing new students needing developmental help into college-level courses with scheduled support services. Both these initiatives should contribute to accelerating the student’s path to completion.

To sustain and scale impact beyond 2025, our innovative support systems can be expanded in several ways:

- Continue to invest in technology to assist faculty and staff in their support of students.
- Hire staff so that case management can be offered to all students.

- The Parenting Scholars Program can be expanded to support students enrolled in non-credit, Pell-eligible programs. The program is currently limited to degree-seeking students. Scaling the parent scholars program to include students enrolled in non-credit programs aligns with the college's institutional goal to eliminate barriers to success for all students.
- The Children's Learning Center can offer extended hours and weekend care to accommodate evening classes and nontraditional schedules, meeting the needs of working parents. Offer integrated academic support for student-parents, such as study spaces near the center or "parent study sessions" with supervised childcare, and engage in technology integration, such as mobile scheduling apps and progress notifications, to make childcare planning easier and reduce stress for parents. Lastly, offer learning opportunities for education majors, transforming the CLC into a practicum site for early childhood education students while serving the childcare needs of student-parents.

Institutional transformation is most sustainable when leadership, faculty, and staff share a clear, common goal. At HCC, aligning all units around student success and degree completion created a framework for coordinated action and accountability.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Other Postsecondary Credentials

In October 2023, HCC President Daria J. Willis launched a two-year, \$11 million capital campaign to support a trades center's construction and address a growing statewide shortage of skilled workers in trades and technical fields. In less than seven months, more than \$42 million in proposed county funding, preauthorized state funding, and private gifts were raised for the project.

In January 2025, Howard Community College (HCC) welcomed officials from government, industry, and community during a commemorative groundbreaking on its workforce development and trades center. The 50,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility will provide the county with its first public skilled trades training hub, and will offer practical training in cybersecurity, automotive, manufacturing, mechatronics, green technology, construction trades, and more.

National Cyber Director Harry Coker, Jr., delivered keynote remarks for the event, promoting the value of community college workforce development in support of national security, interdisciplinary training, and socio-economic equality for communities nationwide. "We are just over a year into implementing the National Cyber Workforce and Education Strategy, and we know we still have work to do," said Director Coker. "We need more Americans to see cyber careers as attainable to them, whatever their background or circumstances. Today, we're taking an important step with this groundbreaking, this convening, this dedication to the students and the future in Howard County."

The groundbreaking followed a National Community College Cyber Forum, hosted by the Office of the National Cyber Director and HCC. The forum convened more than 100 educators, cyber industry leaders, students, and faculty in addressing the national cyber workforce trends and training opportunities, and the role of community colleges in supporting the nation's data and network security objectives.

President Willis provided remarks. “We challenged our community to envision a future where all residents could have unique and rewarding pathways to professional success and earning potential. Our elected officials, business partners, donors, and campus community have worked together to elevate the skilled trades as a catalyst for this success. We are honored to lead our community and region in building economic equity for all hard-working residents.” The students will be able to earn A.A.S. degrees as well as certificates.

HCC is the top producer of registered apprenticeships in the State of Maryland, developing entry-level and managerial talent in cybersecurity, healthcare, childcare, hospitality and tourism, and construction.

The center is projected to open in fall 2026 and will complement the college’s steady enrollment growth over the last three years, and expansion of its liberal arts and skilled trades profile through its dual enrollment partnership with the Howard County Public School System.

HCC will continue to expand its program offerings in credit and noncredit areas to meet the regional workforce needs and the requests of its credit students to prepare them for transfer over the next five years.

Best Practices and Annual Progress Towards the State's 2025 Completion Goal Carroll Community College 2025

Over the past decade, Carroll Community College has implemented a wide range of strategies to advance Maryland's higher education degree attainment goals. These initiatives are grounded in a commitment to seamless transfer, student engagement, holistic support, and alignment with evolving workforce needs.

Strengthening Transfer Pathways

Seamless transfer opportunities remain a cornerstone of Carroll's completion strategies. The College created Transfer Plus, a dual admissions program designed to support students in earning their associate degree before transferring to a bachelor's program. Since its inception, partnerships have been established with McDaniel College (2023), University of Maryland Baltimore County (2024), University of Baltimore (2024), Stevenson University (2025), University of Maryland Global Campus (2024), Towson University (2024), and Coppin State University (pending 2025).

Through Transfer Plus, students receive advising from both institutions, ensuring curricular alignment and timely degree progress. They also gain early access to campus events, fostering belonging and a smoother transition to their transfer destination. Importantly, all partners, with the one exception of Towson University, offer Transfer Plus students priority registration with the rising junior class, securing access to required courses. This program reinforces completion of the associate degree prior to transfer and strengthens the baccalaureate pipeline.

In addition, Carroll maintains Reverse Transfer agreements with Frostburg State University, McDaniel College, Towson University, and Stevenson University. Over the past five years, the College contacted an average of fifty-five students annually who qualified for reverse transfer, resulting in sixty-four students (24%) graduating from Carroll with their associate degree through this pathway.

Enhancing Retention and Student Success

Carroll has adopted a proactive approach to retention and student success, as evidenced by the following initiatives:

- **Early Alert and Basic Needs Screening:** The College uses Starfish as an early retention tool, enabling faculty to flag concerns and initiate personalized outreach.

A systematic check each semester at week three allows for timely interventions. Complementing this, all applicants complete a Basic Needs Survey prior to entry, which has increased referrals by 40% and connected students with both campus and community resources.

- **Student Emergency Assistance Fund:** Recognizing the impact of unexpected life challenges on student attrition, Carroll established an emergency assistance fund for students, supported by the College's Foundation. In Academic Year 2024-2025, over two dozen students received awards ranging from \$150 to more than \$1,500, with a total of nearly \$19,000 disbursed. These funds covered housing, childcare, medical care, and other emergencies, enabling students to persist. Looking forward, Carroll will expand awareness of the fund and implement an online application to improve access and streamline processing.
- **Wellness and Mental Health Initiatives:** Carroll has integrated wellness into campus culture through strategies such as Wellbeing Wednesdays, Wellbeing Circles, a Relaxation Station, and a Spirituality Space. Participation in the Trauma-Informed, Resilience-Oriented, Equity-Focused Systems (TIROES) National Learning Community has informed a campus-wide awareness of resilience and empathy. Additionally, the College has partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to promote the #IWILLLISTEN campaign, reducing stigma and encouraging open dialogue around mental health.
- **Student Engagement:** Engagement plays a critical role in the retention of community college students. Finding belonging among clubs, organizations, and athletic teams, and through campus events and programs, allows students to build connections with their peers and college employees. Research studies have found that the more connected students are on campus, the higher their retention and success rate. In FY2025, Carroll's Office of Student Engagement began tracking student retention data in relation to attendance on trips and at large-scale events on campus. Preliminary data showed that students who attended events or trips sponsored by Student Engagement were retained at a higher rate. Staff also were able to identify which populations of students were not attending events and focus marketing and programming to engage them more fully on campus. A next step will measure retention rates related to club participation, tutoring, and fitness center usage. The College has also worked to integrate students in trade and workforce development certificate programs into Student Engagement activities to strengthen connections with those segments of the College community.

- **Targeted Outreach Efforts:** Carroll sends focused communication to students who have accumulated 45+ credits but are no longer enrolled at the College, encouraging them to reenroll and complete. The College also conducts special outreach to current students who are near completion. Registered students who have earned forty-five or more credits receive an email communication, recommending they meet with their academic advisor to review remaining graduation requirements and apply for graduation.

Balancing Degree Attainment and Workforce Credentials

While degree attainment remains a central priority for the College, Carroll recognizes the growing demand for postsecondary credentials that provide immediate workforce value. The College's technology pathways illustrate this balance. Many courses are aligned with industry-recognized certifications from CompTIA (A+, Network+, Security+), Microsoft, and Cisco Networking Academy. Students benefit from Credit for Prior Certification, allowing previously earned credentials to count toward degree requirements. Discounted vouchers, developed through partnerships between the College and organizations like CompTIA, further reduce financial barriers. Guidance from Carroll's Technology Advisory Board ensures programs remain aligned with evolving industry needs. By embedding certifications into degree programs, Carroll supports both immediate employability and long-term academic advancement.

Sustaining and Expanding Impact

Looking ahead, the College is committed to building on the progress of the past decade by:

1. Focusing on transfer, including expanding and leveraging Transfer Plus partnerships to increase associate degree completion before transfer, along with participating in the Maryland Transfer Intensive.
2. Scaling retention strategies by further integrating early alerts, holistic wellness support, and emergency aid into the student experience.
3. Enhancing engagement opportunities for both credit and noncredit students to ensure equitable access to the benefits of campus connection.
4. Strengthening workforce alignment by expanding certificate and industry-recognized credential offerings, guided by advisory boards and industry input.
5. Maintaining flexibility to adapt programs to shifting student and employer needs, ensuring Carroll continues to serve as a hub for both academic and workforce advancement.

Over the past decade, Carroll has advanced Maryland's degree attainment goals through a multifaceted approach that emphasizes transfer pathways, student retention, holistic support, and workforce readiness. By embedding certifications into degree programs, offering robust student supports, and engaging students both academically and socially, Carroll has created an environment where students are more likely to persist and complete their credentials. Over the next five years, the College will sustain and expand these efforts, striking a balance between degree attainment and the increasing demand for workforce-aligned credentials, ensuring students are well prepared for both continued education and meaningful careers.

Cecil College
2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress
Toward the 55% Completion Goal

Effective Strategies

Cecil College has found that strategies that remove barriers for student success are most effective for supporting degree completion. These strategies include dual enrollment opportunities; an improved transfer experience; effective early alert systems; achieving digital and physical accessibility for all; addressing basic needs such as food, transportation, mental health, and other emergency needs; academic support; and comprehensive academic planning.

Through the *Blueprint for Education* program, Cecil College collaborates with our local education agency (LEA) to meet their requested needs for dual enrollment courses. In addition, we host four Early College Academy (ECA) cohorts. We have notified our LEA that we are ready to expand ECA and dual enrollment at any time.

In FY25, Cecil College joined the Maryland Transfer Intensive facilitated by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. The Transfer Intensive is a multi-year initiative aimed at substantially improving transfer and bachelor's attainment outcomes for community college students across Maryland. There are three phases for the Maryland Transfer Promise: 1) Institutional reform, 2) Strengthening partnerships, and 3) State and regional practice sharing. Cecil College appointed a Transfer Intensive Team that is comprised of the president, vice president of student affairs, registrar, transfer advisor, and the associate dean for academic and community collaboration. The team has been attending statewide meetings, and several initiatives are underway to improve the transfer experience for Cecil College students.

In FY24, the College transitioned to a new learning management system, Canvas. Canvas offers the opportunity for the Advising Office to run reports to identify students who are struggling with poor grades, attendance or keeping up with assignments. Advising collects these data three times a semester and reaches out to students as needed. This proactive approach ensures that all students in all courses are included in these early alerts. Faculty may also contact advising directly at any time, if they have concerns that may not be shown through the data.

In conjunction with Canvas, the College uses Anthology Ally to facilitate accessibility of course materials. Ally allows students with different accessibility needs to access course materials in the most effective format for them, including tagged PDFs, braille, or audio formats. The College's Institutional Accessibility Committee is developing a policy on digital and physical accessibility and will develop procedures in FY26. Trainings for faculty and staff and a new Digital Accessibility Specialist support faculty in making courses accessible.

In response to increased hunger and food insecurity throughout our college community, Cecil College provides food pantry locations on both campuses, so students have easy access to snacks and meals. In addition to five "Grab & Go" locations, a "Groceries to Go" location provides bags of perishable and nonperishable food for students who are experiencing food insecurity. The College also has designated five employees who serve as SNAP coaches and are trained to help students navigate the county's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

In the past two years, Cecil College has applied for and received grant funds that directly support the complex needs of students. Students can ride for free on any route offered by Cecil Transit, which serves the entire county. In addition, the College has been awarded Emergency Grant funds through the Cecil County Video Lottery Terminal Local Community Grant Program. Emergency Grant funds are awarded to students who apply for the funding through the Financial Aid Office. Grants ranging from \$200 to \$500 are awarded for students who experience hardships that might prevent them from attending their courses and maintaining progression. In FY25, the College received a grant from Maryland Behavioral Health that supports mental health programming at Cecil, including access to virtual health and well-being resources through TimelyCare and the establishment of a Student WellBeing Office staffed by two part-time mental health experts.

Online and in-person tutoring services are provided in the Academic Success Center for math and writing assistance. While 95% of math tutoring occurs in person, more than half of writing tutoring visits in FY25 occurred online, either asynchronously through the Online Writing Lab (21.6%) or through synchronous video appointments (31.2%). Discipline-specific tutoring is available for most programs across campus. Students are informed about how to request discipline specific tutoring.

Looking ahead, Cecil College has begun the transition to a new student information system, Ellucian Colleague. This system has already influenced practices that will support degree and certificate planning for students to support long-term completion goals.

Sustaining and Expanding These Efforts

Cecil College roots these efforts in its mission, which is based on a commitment to provide a supportive learning environment. As such, planning and budgeting processes include discussions of how proposed activities support this commitment.

Another important component of sustaining and expanding these efforts is understanding the changing needs of the College's students. To do this, the College conducts the Community College Survey of Student Engagement and a Graduate Exit Survey. In addition, frontline staff share the needs that individual students have identified to them, and the College identifies trends among these requests.

Degree attainment vs. Demand for other postsecondary credentials

As a community college, Cecil College has offered lower division certificate programs to meet the needs of students and employers in the region; among students in the Fall 2020 entering cohort 6 students (5% of completers) earned a lower division certificate. Similarly, the College has educated students in non-credit programs to prepare them to take industry-recognized certification exams in healthcare and workforce fields such as nursing assistants, paramedics, medical assistant, automotive repair, diesel technology, HVAC/R apprenticeships, and marine service technology. These programs meet real needs in our community and allow students to pursue their field of interest. Over a quarter of all students (credit and non-credit) enrolled at Cecil College each year (27.6%) are enrolled in workforce programs. Lastly, some credit courses in fields such as Cybersecurity prepare students to take industry-recognized certification exams.

The College offers evaluation of prior learning options for students who apply their accomplishments in non-credit programs to associate degree programs. Most recently, the College developed an Associate of Applied Science degree program in Skilled Trades, intended to provide education to tradespeople who wish to move to management positions.

Approximately half of the College's credit students are enrolled in transfer programs and intend to continue their studies towards a bachelor's degree or more. As the only degree-granting institution in the county, the College provides an opportunity for students who want or need to remain close to home to complete an associate degree, whether this is a terminal degree or a step on the path for further education.

Both of these components of the College's offerings are important to the students and to the community and the College is proud to offer quality programs in both of these areas. According to the US Census Bureau, 37.6% of Cecil County residents have earned an associate degree or higher. This is a significant increase from the 22.4% reported by the Census Bureau for 2010.

How do we anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

Cecil College monitors labor market trends through data as well as through consulting with advisory board members, industry partners, and community leaders. These sources indicate that there will likely be an increase in demand for alternative postsecondary credentials over the next five years. At the same time, there will be a demand for students with traditional degree attainment. The College will continue to offer both types of programming and anticipates a continued increase in the number of Cecil County residents who have earned a post-secondary degree.

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Chesapeake College

Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

I. Introduction

Chesapeake College has made steady and measurable progress toward Maryland's degree attainment goals over the past decade. Through systemic strategies emphasizing retention, early academic momentum, equity, and student support, the institution has strengthened both associate degree completion and transfer pathways, while strategically expanding its workforce and noncredit programming to align with labor market demand.

II. Strategies That Have Been Most Effective in Supporting Degree Completion

1. Raising retention through intentional student-success infrastructure.

Chesapeake's fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time, degree-seeking students has improved by 6.4 percentage points (from 50.5% to 56.9%) over the past five years. This improvement is supported by purpose-built structures, including the return of the position of Vice President for Student Success & Enrollment Management, addition of CTE Navigators, and making Director of Student Access & Belonging a full-time position, along with expanded TRiO tutoring and advising. These structures are institutional rather than programmatic, ensuring sustainability.

2. Accelerating student momentum through smarter placement and gateway redesign.

Chesapeake's adoption of high school GPA in lieu of placement tests has significantly reduced time in developmental coursework, increasing early gateway course completion rates. The percentage of first-time students with developmental education needs fell from a high of 73.2% to 26.4% over a five-year period. Students placed through the GPA exemption placement policy perform as well as or better than placement-tested peers.

3. Strengthening completion and transfer outcomes.

Chesapeake's four-year graduation/transfer rate is 70.6%, and 94.2% of students who transfer to Maryland 4-year institutions maintain a 2.0 GPA or higher. The successful-persister rate (after 18 credits) is 85.9% across all students, including 81.6% for developmental completers. The IPEDS 150% graduation rate reached a ten-year high with the most recent cohort, achieving 35.0%.

4. Advancing equity and access as completion strategies.

Minority student enrollment meets benchmarks in both credit and noncredit areas, and minority professional staff representation (20.7%) exceeds targets. Expanded mental health access (e.g., TimelyCare 24/7), emergency aid, and the "Corner of Care" basic needs hub have reduced attrition linked to non-academic barriers.

5. Embedding these strategies in governance through SEMP.

These student-success initiatives are integrated into Chesapeake's Strategic Enrollment Management Planning (SEMP) structure, chaired by the Vice President for Student Success and Enrollment Management. The Retention and Student Success Subcommittee systematically monitors persistence, completion, and gateway success data, recommending targeted interventions to the Cabinet. This governance structure ensures that retention and degree-completion practices are coordinated across academic and student affairs, with shared accountability and continuous monitoring.

III. Plans to Sustain and Expand Degree Completion Efforts

Looking forward, Chesapeake plans to institutionalize and scale the practices that have driven degree-completion gains:

- Formalize retention as a college-wide process through SEMP, establishing outreach timelines, tutoring standards, and case management protocols.
- Maintain gateway acceleration policies and closely track outcomes, expanding corequisite models as needed.
- Tighten degree audit and auto-award processes to ensure earned credentials are conferred promptly.
- Sustain emergency aid programs, Corner of Care, and TimelyCare mental health services, evaluating their impact on persistence.
- Embed accountability through SEMP Steering and subcommittees, which analyze enrollment and completion data regularly to inform planning.

IV. Balancing Degree Attainment with Noncredit Credentials

1. Increasing noncredit workforce enrollment and credential-attainment.

Noncredit Workforce Development (WFD) enrollments grew 34.3% in the past year; licensure/certification enrollments increased 21.4%; contract training grew 155%. New programs in Marine Maintenance, Advanced Manufacturing/CNC and robotics, Welding (via mobile lab), CDL training, Drone Pilot Certification, and 3D modeling have been added to the WIOA Eligible Training Provider list, expanding funded access.

2. Credit–noncredit integration through SEMP.

Chesapeake’s Credit and Non-Credit Programming Subcommittee plays a central role in aligning credit and noncredit offerings with workforce demand. It evaluates enrollment trends, labor market needs, and regional competition to ensure workforce credentials complement degree programs.

3. Stackable pathways and CPL.

Chesapeake is actively developing stackable pathways that link noncredit credentials to degree programs through Credit for Prior Learning (CPL). This strategy is designed to create a workforce-to-degree continuum that shortens time to degree and encourages students to continue beyond the initial credential.

V. Anticipated Evolution Over the Next Five Years

Looking ahead, Chesapeake anticipates more stackable credential-to-degree pathways, increasing the number of students who articulate noncredit learning into credit-bearing programs; higher conversion rates of dual enrollment students into degree programs through targeted CRM strategies; stable or higher graduation and transfer rates supported by SEMP-led retention infrastructure; and continued growth in short-cycle workforce credentials, but increasingly tied to degree pathways through CPL and articulation agreements.

VI. Governance and Continuous Improvement

The Strategic Enrollment Management Steering Committee and subcommittees (Recruitment, Retention & Student Success, Credit & Noncredit Programming) meet regularly to review data and revise strategies. This ensures that degree-completion and workforce programming are planned together, with shared accountability for outcomes.

College of Southern Maryland

2025 MHEC Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

The College of Southern Maryland (CSM) enhances lives and enriches our region through accessible, high-quality instruction and services that support our students along their personal paths to success. CSM is dedicated to expanding access, increasing retention, and providing resources and support to ensure students accomplish their goals. Over the last decade, the strategies that CSM has found most effect in supporting degree completion are removing barriers, examining our culture policies and practices, and offering educational pathways to improve lives. CSM will continue to sustain these efforts through a yearly assessment of our Built for Success strategic plan and focusing on three core pillars: access, momentum, and mobility.

Access

Creating opportunities for all students to have access to a high quality education is a top priority at CSM. For example, the homeschool program exceeded its FY25 target of 1,030 registrations, growing to 1,052 students. The College's leadership in this area is nationally recognized. The program is expanding to the Prince Frederick campus in the fall of 2025 and will offer new classes for younger students. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established with the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) to assist autistic students. Disability Support Services (DSS) were expanded to support neurodiverse students, and the DSS website was enhanced and updated to reflect the College's commitment to these learners.

Early College and Dual Enrollment Programs at CSM provided tuition-free and low-cost opportunities to over 1,400 students through these programs. The program was recently expanded to career and technical education (CTE) pathways in fields like medical coding, pharmacy technology, and electrical trades. A new Early College team partnered with admissions and K-12 leadership in the Southern Maryland region to provide additional support. Joint professional development opportunities were held for CSM and K-12 faculty to support early college students.

CSM was again designated a Military Friendly® School for 2025-26, earning Silver in the small community college category and being named a Military Spouse Friendly School. The College hosted a Veterans Academic and Community Resource Day, which provided registration assistance, advising, and transcript evaluation to military-connected students.

The ADA Committee was reestablished to support neuro-diverse students, review policies, expand training for faculty and staff, and set accessibility standards for electronic and

information technology. A comprehensive facilities accessibility study was conducted by an external organization to examine all public spaces for accessibility and identified improvements include increasing accessible signage and enhancing emergency communication systems.

Momentum

CSM takes persistence seriously, examining culture, policies and practices to ensure a welcoming environment for all students and mitigate institutional barriers to progression. CSM collaborates with Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national organization focused on enhancing community college student success. This partnership helps CSM implement effective strategies to improve student outcomes. Our CSM Dream Achievers Team worked with ATD in FY24 to establish our strategic plan, Built for Success, and develop student centered initiatives to support retention and completion.

In FY25, CSM prioritized advising and expanded student support services to address and remove barriers to student persistence. For example, the new Student Resource Center was designed to centralize student support services, including the Hawk Hub, which helps students with frequently asked questions, registration, and navigating college platforms. The goal of the center is to simplify the entry process for students and connect them with the resources they need to succeed. CSM has created programs and initiatives over the last decade that removes barriers and provides more access to students. For example, Hawk Hubs were designed and introduced on all three campuses to support new and incoming students, as well as provide a central location for students to receive support and referrals. Hawk Hubs have replaced the former “Welcome Centers” to provide immediate assistance to students for general college navigation and to triage students requesting to meet with Academic Advisors. Since then, CSM opened a Student Resource Center. The recently renovated James C. Mitchell Student Resource Center serves as a centralized hub for admissions, advising, the Hawk Hub, counseling services, disability support services, and the testing center at the La Plata Campus. This \$7.6 million renovation was made possible through a combination of state and county funding, with 75% provided by the state and the remaining 25% from Charles County. More than 200,000 interactions with students occurred during the FY24 year with more than 100,000 student contacts from admissions.

The College also advanced momentum through student engagement, responsive policies, and extensive employee professional learning opportunities. Faculty and staff participated in learning communities and discussions focused on student focused pedagogy, campus climate, and teaching strategies.

CSM established a Student Leadership Team to help students self-identify their interest in additional leadership and representation opportunities. CSM is redesigning the early advising model to better coordinate between admissions and advising teams. A project using the Starfish system will allow for early alerts when students are struggling, supporting retention for first-year students. A comprehensive list of employee resources to help students navigate their success needs was created on the CSM website.

CSM joined the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and conducted an awareness campaign about Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) for high school and adult learners. Research and analysis were conducted to better understand adult learners who stopped their education before earning a degree. The College supported adult learners by offering Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) allowing students to earn credit for work experience and military service and launched a website and email address for students seeking more information.

Programs that address food insecurity included the Hawk Pantry, which distributed over 3,200 pounds of food, and the Gardening for Hunger initiative, which provided fresh produce and educational opportunities for students. And CSM improved physical access through a college-funded VanGo connector bus route serving the Regional Hughesville Campus and the La Plata Campus.

Mobility

In FY25 the WorkForce Center at CSM served 37 unique employees generating \$276,151 in revenue. CSM's ReUp Education initiative has connected with over 13,000 former students with unfinished degrees since its inception in 2022. To date, this program has successfully reenrolled 790 students and led to the graduation of 45, while also recovering \$1.7 million in tuition revenue. CSM developed a new Aviation Maintenance Technology associate degree program to provide a pathway to high-wage, high-skill careers and address urgent workforce needs. The program aims to give students access to hands-on training in a state-of-the-art facility.

The college served 26 unique employers through the Center for Career Development and Success resulting in 38 student internships. CSM enhanced mobility by creating pathways for social and economic advancement through curricular design, strategic partnerships, and professional development. Mobility initiatives were reinforced by community partnerships and programs directly aligned with regional workforce needs. Mobility was also enhanced by building sustainable relationships with schools, nonprofits, and local employers. These collaborations ensure students have clear pathways to mobility in Southern Maryland.

The Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CWD) offers training programs that equip individuals with the skills required for high-demand, well-paying careers. In FY24, CWD enrollment grew by 4.1% compared to the previous year, reflecting the increasing demand for affordable, accessible, short-term education. This growth was driven by a rising need for industry-recognized certifications and hands-on training to address critical skills gaps. Regional growth in sectors such as healthcare and transportation has further amplified the need for these essential workforce development programs.

CSM offers educational pathways to improve lives that lead to earning a degree, certificate, or workforce training. CSM is proud to have more than 300 articulation agreements with 71 transfer partners, providing priority enrollment or guaranteed access to four-year colleges and universities worldwide for eligible students. Recently, CSM and the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) renewed their transfer partnership, allowing CSM students to transfer credits seamlessly and earn a bachelor's degree at a discounted tuition rate. Future goals include incorporating apprenticeships into the associate-to-bachelor's degree pathway and utilizing work-based learning experiences as a retention strategy to encourage students to live, train, and remain in our service area.

UMGC is CSM's largest transfer partner and has a presence on the La Plata Campus. Two transfer summits were held in FY24, bringing together employees from various departments to review data on incoming and outgoing transfer students and discuss ways to better support this population. As a result of these summits, several initiatives were implemented, including adjustments to the Arts and Sciences degree to make it more accessible for incoming transfer students, the launch of Transfer 101 and transfer specific webinars for students, updates to our website to clarify transfer processes, and the integration of transfer-related information into classroom discussions.

All of these examples highlight CSM's intention to put our students first and continue the great work to support our southern Maryland region.

Community College of Baltimore County
2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Supporting Associate Degree Completion

Over the past decade, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) has awarded nearly 75,000 degrees, certificates, and workplace certifications. That includes nearly 21,000 associate degrees, nearly 9,000 credit certificates, nearly 13,500 non-credit certificates, and nearly 31,000 workplace certifications. In that time, CCBC has extended or implemented numerous strategies to support associate degree completion. Understanding that completion requires credit accumulation built upon on recurring course success and retention, CCBC has worked to identify and address obstacles to 1) enrolling in credit-bearing coursework, 2) successfully completing required courses, and 3) returning each term until program completion. Strategies for addressing obstacles have ranged from institutional-level initiatives to special interventions for target populations.

At the institutional level, examples include initiatives such as developmental education reform, advising enhancements, and expanded support for academic and non-cognitive needs. At the program-level, major initiatives include general education reform, curriculum mapping, and mentoring. Course-level initiatives often involve discipline specific instructional strategies, supplemental instruction, high impact practices, and learning outcomes assessment. Group-specific initiatives work to address the cross-cutting needs of special populations such as first-generation students, new first-time students, or students from historically underrepresented groups.

As the outcomes of these types of initiatives were evaluated and continuously improved, those with positive impacts became mainstays in specific areas of the college. Through steering committees, task forces, and work groups such as Student Success 101, Student Success 102, the “Pathways to the Future” team, and the Student Achievement and Success Steering Committee, CCBC has worked to document and scale-up practices that increase academic achievement, retention, and associate degree completion prior to transfer both broadly for the student population and for students needing additional support for either academic or personal reasons.

In the spring of 2024, CCBC formally outlined a new college-wide process for student engagement and support that distilled and build upon knowledge gained from prior efforts and investigations. This systematic approach was originally named the New Student Journey and was rolled out first for entering cohorts of new and transfer students. It is now known as the New Journey for Students (to clarify that the approach applies to all students).

The New Journey for Students focuses on meaningful interaction points along the continuum from inquiry to completion and uses technology-mediated workflows to ensure the visibility of

student needs and responsiveness to those needs. Through the New Journey for Students, CCBC has sustained or expanded the benefits of student supports such as:

- **Guided Pathways**, which promote connection, direction, and aligned with students' career goals.
- **First-Year Experiences** that orient students to higher education and to the CCBC environment.
- **Proactive Advising** that includes monitoring and outreach related to student engagement, performance, and progress.
- **Retention Outreach** that involves program leaders and faculty in contacting students who have not yet enrolled for the next term to encourage registration and help students resolve registration obstacles.
- **Placement Reforms** that reduce the number of required developmental courses, combined with CCBC's pioneering **Co-requisite Model of Developmental Education**, which allows students with developmental English and mathematics requirements to complete them in tandem with a credit-bearing course in the subject.
- **Academic Coaches**, who help students navigate academic decision making, such as whether to drop a course, and connect them with resources that broaden or deepen their academic skills.
- **Success Navigators**, who connect struggling students with resources for food, shelter, transportation, childcare, health, and wellness.
- **Honors Courses, Programs, and now, the Honors College**, which foster analytical thinking, encourage intellectual curiosity and independent discovery, offer mentoring and community, and provide academic and financial support.
- The **Student Integrated Finance Team (SIFT)**, which evolved from the CARES team implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, proactively identifies students eligible for 1) financial supports that would allow them to attend CCBC with no out-of-pocket tuition expenses (i.e., "tuition-free"), 2) funding incentives related to retention drives or other momentum goals such as math completion, and 3) temporary assistance for financial emergencies. SIFT members conduct outreach to encourage students to apply.

Many students have been able to remain at CCBC or return after stopping out due to these supports, helping them remain on the path to completion. In addition, CCBC has launched an initiative related to stackable credentials. Of relevance to the 55% completion goal, is that stackable credentials allow students who have completed a certificate program or earned industry-recognized licensure to get credit for their prior learning applied towards a related associate degree. This acceleration toward the associate degree and the gains that derive from full implementation of the New Journey for students are expected to increase our three-year graduation rate far beyond the ten-percentage point gain since 2016, despite nearly ninety percent of CCBC students attending part-time.

Balancing Demand for Degrees and Other Postsecondary Credentials

At the same time, CCBC has been balancing degree attainment with the growing demand credit certificate, workforce training certificates, and industry certifications through credit and continuing education integration. While CCBC's school of continuing education has long been a powerhouse in workforce preparation in the region and the largest source of CCBC awards, recent efforts to meet demand and create seamless student experiences have resulted in guided pathways that include both credit and non-credit programs related to the same field (e.g., computers and networks, or health professions), as well as to centralized student intake and customer service via the Student Central Welcome Center, to curriculum mappings that articulate between credit and continuing education programs, allowing credit students to earn workforce credentials and industry certifications along the way and continuing education students to stack them toward an associate degree.

As an institution dedicated to offering programs and credentials that help students compete successfully for initial employment and career advancement, CCBC will continue to monitor labor market conditions, credential requirements, and skills forecasts to help students attain the most valuable credentials for securing a family-sustaining income. Whether shifts over the next five years elevate degrees, certificates, certifications, or a combination, CCBC will continue to provide accessible, affordable, high-quality education that prepares students for transfer and career success, strengthens the regional workforce, and enriches our community.

I. Looking Back: A Decade of Student Success Strategies

Over the past decade, Frederick Community College (FCC) has expanded and refined a comprehensive set of supports designed to meet the evolving needs of today's students - many of whom balance work, family responsibilities, and financial pressures alongside their academic goals. These strategies, rooted in evidence-based practice, have been scaled to serve the entire student body and aligned with Maryland's 55% degree attainment goal.

Key long-standing practices include:

- **Dual Enrollment & Early College Pathways** that allow high school students to earn college credit through multiple access points. These pathways have become a cornerstone of the college's pipeline work with Frederick County Public Schools.
- **Completion-Focused Advising and Coaching**, which evolved into a caseload-based model using Navigate360 to provide proactive outreach to students facing complex barriers.
- **Financial Aid Access Improvements**, including an accelerated awarding timeline and FAFSA support workshops, that give students more time to plan and reduce enrollment attrition.
- **Wraparound Supports** in mental health, transportation, childcare, and emergency aid, which have been particularly impactful for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) students.
- **High-Impact Practices (HIPs)** embedded into teaching and learning through faculty development, strengthening the student experience in classrooms.
- **Student Wellness Initiatives** such as the LiveWell program, which tie physical, emotional, and mental health to academic persistence.

Together, these supports have created a more coherent and student-centered ecosystem that reduces barriers to persistence and fosters completion.

II. Sustaining and Expanding Practices

FCC has learned that sustaining innovation requires more than isolated pilots. Over time, the College has embedded reforms into its structures, policies, and culture.

Key examples include:

- **Organizational Restructuring:** FCC restructured key divisions to ensure that student success supports are not fragmented but integrated across the student lifecycle. The Student Financial and Support Services division was created to streamline aid, retention, and access functions, reducing silos and enabling more seamless, student-centered service. The Teaching, Learning, and Student Success division was reorganized into Career Communities to provide students with clearer pathways, stronger industry connections, and a more coherent academic experience. The Center for Strategic Innovation & Foresight (CSIF) was established to bring continuous improvement and foresight practices into every division, ensuring that institutional planning is both

intentional and sustainable. These changes reflect FCC's commitment to aligning structure with mission—helping students persist, complete, and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

- **Continuous Improvement Cycles:** Applying systematic Plan–Implement–Assess–Reflect models across divisions ensures accountability and alignment to institutional priorities.
- **Faculty Development at Scale:** Faculty cohorts are advancing through national high-impact practices certification to strengthen course design and pedagogy.

These structural changes ensure that student success is not dependent on short-term funding or individual champions but is embedded in the College's operating model.

III. Balancing Degree Attainment and Other Credentials

While degree completion remains central to FCC's mission, the College has also adapted to meet the region's demand for workforce-relevant credentials and short-term training. This work is guided by FCC's Workforce Growth Strategy, which sets a clear direction for aligning programs with regional labor market needs.

- **Industry-Recognized Credentials (IRCs):** Built directly into degree pathways, IRCs allow students to earn stackable credentials that carry immediate labor market value while progressing toward an associate degree. This dual value strengthens both short-term employability and long-term career advancement.
- **Certificates and Workforce Programs:** Designed to serve adult learners, career changers, and multilingual students, these programs provide accelerated pathways into employment and help close local skills gaps.
- **Work-Based Learning Partnerships:** Apprenticeships, clinical placements, and internships connect students to local employers, bridging classroom learning with workforce demand and ensuring graduates are prepared for high-demand occupations.

Together, these efforts balance FCC's commitment to degree attainment with its responsibility as the county's primary workforce training provider—ensuring that students not only complete their education but also secure sustainable employment in a rapidly changing economy.

Looking ahead, FCC anticipates that demand for short-term and stackable credentials will continue to grow, particularly among adult learners balancing work and education. At the same time, degrees will remain critical for long-term economic mobility. FCC's approach is to integrate - not separate - these opportunities, creating pathways that allow students to both enter the workforce quickly and continue toward higher-level credentials.

IV. Vision for the Future

As Maryland concludes its 55% attainment goal, FCC is positioned to sustain momentum through its Future-Ready Plan, which integrates long-range foresight with near-term action. This plan rests on four pillars: a 10-year horizon scan, near-term strategic priorities, a continuous improvement cycle, and the people - students and employees - who bring it to life.

Future Directions (2025–2030):

- **Scale High-Impact Practices:** Ensure every student engages with HIPs during their FCC journey.
- **Expand Supports for Multilingual and Adult Learners:** Grow bilingual advising and instruction, while expanding flexible course formats.
- **Leverage Predictive Data:** Use real-time dashboards and early alerts to anticipate barriers and intervene proactively.
- **Strengthen Workforce Integration:** Expand stackable pathways and deepen employer partnerships to connect learning with labor market demand.
- **Foster a Culture of Equity and Belonging:** Use disaggregated data and targeted interventions to close institutional equity gaps.

The most important lesson FCC has learned is that culture change is ongoing. Student success is sustained when accountability, equity, and collaboration are embedded into everyday practice.

V. Community Impact

FCC's partnerships demonstrate the College's role as an anchor institution in Frederick County and the State of Maryland.

- **K–12 Pipeline:** Four early access pathways and the training of 22 FCPS career coaches as Global Career Development Facilitators.
- **Employer Engagement:** More than 150 active employer partnerships; 19 Program Advisory Committees ensuring alignment with high-demand fields.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Partnerships with county economic development, Tech Frederick, Frederick Health, and others to align training with community needs.
- **Economic Value:** According to Lightcast, FCC generated \$307.8 million in added income to the regional economy in FY 2024, supporting nearly 4,000 jobs.

These efforts highlight FCC's dual role in strengthening individual student outcomes and contributing to the economic and civic vitality of the region.

VI. Conclusion

Frederick Community College has made meaningful progress toward the State's 55% degree attainment goal by scaling innovative student supports, restructuring to sustain institutional change, and balancing degree completion with workforce credentials. As FCC looks ahead, the College will continue to strengthen its Future-Ready Plan, ensuring that students achieve credentials of value while also advancing mobility, equity, and community vibrancy across Frederick County and the State of Maryland.

Garrett College: Final Report on Best Practices and Progress Toward Maryland's 55% Completion Goal

July 10, 2025

Introduction

Garrett College (GC) is engaged in a number of strategies and practices that impact the College's and the State's 2025 completion goals. As directed in the July 7, 2025 memo from Secretary Sanjay Rai, this report reflects on the culmination of the original goal and presents a vision for the future. The College has focused on increasing associate degree completion while also expanding access to workforce-aligned credentials. This narrative highlights the most effective strategies implemented over the past decade, outlines plans for sustaining and expanding these efforts, and discusses how GC is balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for certificates and industry-recognized credentials.

Strategic Planning and Institutional Context

Garrett College recently closed out its FY21–25 Strategic Plan, which was guided by the following strategic goals:

1. Provide Garrett College students, credit and noncredit, with innovative, relevant curriculum delivered by dedicated faculty/instructors who remain current in their field of study.
2. Implement innovative best practices, designed to increase enrollment, improve retention, and enable student success.
3. Deliver and assess innovative market-driven programs and services to stakeholders, and the community at large, leveraging the assets of Garrett County.
4. Ensure the sustainability of the College through innovations in managing human, fiscal, physical, and technological resources.

As part of the College's fall 2027 self-study preparation, GC undertook a comprehensive review of its mission, vision, and values. This process, launched in August 2024, included input from all employees through surveys and focus groups with Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and College Council. The resulting statements were approved by the Board of Trustees in November 2024.

Mission: Garrett College empowers our students, regardless of circumstances, to achieve their goals through accessible, high-quality education and support. We are dedicated to developing innovative and sustainable programs that adapt to a changing world, while respecting and supporting aspirations that benefit our community and students.

Vision: Garrett College is an institution committed to student success, real-world preparedness, and community enrichment.

Values: Accessibility, Excellence, Innovation, Integrity, and Sustainability.

During the development of the FY26–30 Strategic Plan, the College streamlined its planning framework by aligning institutional and strategic goals. The new strategic goals, approved by the Board of Trustees in January 2025, are:

- Goal 1: Enhance connections with the community.
- Goal 2: Offer innovative, sustainable programs that adapt to changing student and community needs to enable student success.
- Goal 3: Maximize human, technical, physical, and fiscal resources to support the College’s strategic objectives.

I. Strategies That Support Degree Completion

1. Corequisite Developmental Education Reform

In Fall 2023, Garrett College implemented a corequisite model for developmental education, integrating supplemental instruction with college-level coursework. This model allows students to earn credit while receiving targeted support. Initial outcomes showed that half of the students passed the developmental portion, with one-third passing college-level math and one-fifth passing college-level English. Faculty have since refined the model based on student feedback, including scheduling the remedial portion immediately after the credit-bearing class.

2. Advising and Academic Support Enhancements

The Advising & Academic Success Center (AASC) implemented early alert systems, flexible tutoring, and proactive advising. Students receiving early alerts or tutoring showed significant academic gains – averaging a 44-49% improvement between midterm and final grades. The College also launched a mentoring program and integrated Blackboard support into tutoring services.

3. Learning Commons

The transformation of the library into a Learning Commons has enhanced access to academic resources. The space includes tutoring, testing, and advising. Library usage, circulation, and digital engagement have all increased.

4. Open Educational Resources (OER)

Since 2017, GC has prioritized OER adoption. As of Fall 2024, 80% of courses use OER, up from 53% in the prior year. This ensures students have materials on the first day of class. The Garrett College Foundation’s “Pay It Forward” Textbook Scholarship further supports affordability.

II. Sustaining and Expanding Our Efforts

1. Integration of Institutional Effectiveness through Planning and Self-Study (PSS)

During the FY21–25 cycle, GC transitioned from Watermark’s Taskstream to the Planning and Self-Study (PSS) platform. This centralized assessment, strategic planning, and accreditation documentation into a single, integrated system. PSS supports outcomes-based planning, curriculum

mapping, and evidence-based reporting. It was instrumental in closing out the FY25 plan and launching the FY26–30 plan.

2. Mental Health and Student Wellness

GC expanded mental health services, including hiring a part-time counselor and training faculty and staff in mental health first aid. These efforts support student retention through holistic care. The College is continuing its work with the local health department to restore family planning/reproductive health services, and is in the process of installing a “Health Resources” vending machine which will provide the campus community access to no-to-low-cost over-the-counter health needs, including emergency contraception. The Students in Need Group (SING) continues to grow its funding sources, which allows Garrett to address things such as food insecurity, and other student needs. In the 2024-2025 school year, the food pantry saw 504 total student visits (100 unduplicated students). The pantry was staffed and accessible to students for a total of 72 hours. Total cost of food to stock the pantry is estimated to be over \$7000. Garrett continues to improve access and accommodations for students with disabilities, with a specific focus on improving its digital accessibility and compliance in response to the standard requirements under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

3. Climate and Engagement

The three goals are as follows:

1. Build infrastructure and develop capacity to enhance campus climate and student engagement.
2. Identify obstacles to student success and establish a network of support services that will help students overcome them.
3. Create a supportive learning and working environment for the campus community and beyond.

The College continues its Safe Space program and training on campus. Partnering with the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce, the College has held a New Student Welcome Reception for the last six years, which has increased to over 100 students, both new and returning, involved. Increasing international student recruitment and providing them with the opportunity to gain a different cultural experience continues to provide a great benefit to our campus community and beyond. Activities have been held on campus that highlight our international students and their personal experiences. Additionally, the College continues to grow its partnership with the local school system where international College students visit elementary school students, which provides the local community with a global/cultural experience that is very limited in this rural area. The Learning Commons hosts the “Laker Launch Party” at the beginning of each semester and the “Exam Jam” at the end of the semester. These events are attended by approximately 100 students and provide a variety of engaging activities with employees and external organizations.

Garrett College is fully committed to fostering an environment that embraces and celebrates individuality while ensuring that all students feel welcome and supported in their journey towards academic success.

III. Balancing Degree Attainment with Credentialing

GC has expanded workforce-aligned credentials through its Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CEWD) division. Recent initiatives include:

- ESL and foundational skills training for multilingual learners
- Career and Technology Education (CTE) dual enrollment with local high schools
- New concentrations in Professional Technical Studies (e.g., Welding, Veterinary Assistant, Marine Mechanic)
- Industry certifications in Culinary Arts and Machining

These programs meet regional labor market needs and provide stackable pathways to degrees. The FY26–30 Strategic Plan emphasizes aligning academic offerings with workforce demands.

IV. Vision for the Future (FY2026–2030)

GC's FY26–30 Strategic Plan builds on the past decade's progress and includes priorities such as:

- Scaling the corequisite model to improve gateway course success
- Expanding PSS usage to include assessment, unit-level planning, program review, and accreditation
- Enhancing career advising across credit and noncredit programs
- Increasing credential attainment through short-term, high-value programs
- Strengthening partnerships with local employers and K–12 systems
- Investing in student wellness and other support services

GC will continue to offer courses in multiple modalities – including face-to-face, hybrid, and online – to meet the needs of traditional and nontraditional learners.

Conclusion

Garrett College is proud of its contributions to Maryland's 55%-degree attainment goal. Throughout the FY21–25 strategic planning cycle, the College has leveraged data from IPEDS, the MHEC Performance Accountability Report (PAR), and Degree Progress Analysis to inform institutional strategies and monitor progress in graduation, persistence, and transfer outcomes. Students entering with developmental needs remain a key area of focus, particularly those who do not complete the developmental portion of corequisite courses, as they face significant barriers to success.

Through targeted reforms, strategic planning, and a sustained commitment to equity, innovation, and continuous improvement, Garrett College has strengthened student outcomes and institutional effectiveness. As the State transitions to a new postsecondary vision, the College remains dedicated to expanding access, supporting student achievement, and preparing learners for success in a dynamic and evolving workforce.

Hagerstown Community College: Advancing Maryland's 55% Completion Goal

Introduction: A Decade of Commitment

Over the last decade, Hagerstown Community College (HCC) has worked diligently to expand college access and student success in alignment with Maryland's statewide goal that 55% of adults hold a degree or credential by 2025. The mission, to provide accessible, high-quality education and workforce training, has been a guiding force behind every initiative. This report highlights HCC's journey, the strategies that have moved the needle on degree and credential attainment, and the vision that will carry the college forward.

Below is a recent snapshot showing trends in HCC's retention rates, graduation rates, and average graduation rates.

Fall-to-Fall Retention for First Year Full Time Students

	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
Undergraduate Cohort	356	399	406	458	440	444	476
Fall- Year 2							
Enrolled	190	250	236	266	264	257	292
Completed	16	23	17	17	9	19	29
First year retention rate	57.9%	68.4%	62.3%	61.8%	62.0%	62.2%	67.4%
<i>Four-year average retention rate: 63.3%</i>							

Source: IPED5 Fall Enrollment

Graduation and Transfer-out Rates

Graduation and Transfer-out Rates

	2016 Cohort		2017 Cohort		2018 Cohort		2019 Cohort		2020 Cohort	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Students in Cohort	356	100%	399	100%	406	100%	457	100%	462	100%
Completers (through 200%)	127	35.7%	159	39.8%	150	36.9%	176	38.5%	168	36.4%
100% normal time	65	51.2%	99	62.3%	90	60.0%	78	44.3%	108	64.3%
150% normal time	38	29.9%	39	24.5%	43	28.7%	81	46.0%	60	35.7%
200% normal time	24	18.9%	21	13.2%	17	11.3%	17	9.7%	--	--
Transfer-outs										
150% normal time	73	20.5%	80	20.1%	79	19.5%	80	17.5%	80	17.3%

"Cohort" refers to the fall cohort of full-time first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students, as defined by IPEDS.

Completions and transfer data follow the academic year (Summer, Fall, Spring). Elapsed time: 100% = 4 semesters (2 years).

150% = 5 semesters (2.5 years), 200% = 6 semesters (3 years). Counts are not cumulative over time.

Source: IPEDS Graduation Rates, IPEDS Graduation Rates 200

Student Right-to-Know: 4-year Average Graduation and Transfer-out Rates

	2013-2016 Cohorts	2014-2017 Cohorts	2015-2018 Cohorts	2016-2019 Cohorts	2017-2020 Cohorts
4-year Average:					
Graduation Rate	33%	33%	32%	33%	35%
(Total Completers within 150% / Adjusted Cohort)					
Transfer-out Rate	21%	21%	20%	19%	19%
(Total Transfer-out Students within 150% / Adjusted Cohort)					

"Cohort" refers to the fall cohort of full-time first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students, as defined by IPEDS. Completion and transfer data follow the academic year (Summer, Fall, Spring). Elapsed time: 150% = 5 semesters (2.5 years)
Source: IPEDS Graduation Rates

Building Momentum through Best Practices

HCC has evolved from focusing primarily on access to becoming a place where access is paired with measurable student success. Supported in part by a federal Title III grant, the college has introduced reforms and innovations designed to strengthen retention, persistence, and completion. These efforts have reshaped the student journey from the first term through graduation and laid the groundwork for long-term institutional change.

- **Retention Initiatives** – laid the foundation for student-centered change, including groundwork for an early alert system as well as a proactive advising model.
- **Enhanced First-Year Experience** – orientation and dedicated supports for developmental students that drive improved retention rates and forward momentum.
- **Quality Matters (QM) Certification** – ensuring online and general education courses, in particular, meet the highest instructional standards.
- **Developmental Education Redesign** – shifted to co-requisite remediation, allowing students to enter credit-bearing courses sooner and succeed at higher rates.

These reforms reflect a deliberate cultural shift. HCC is not only opening its doors wider but also ensuring that students who enter are equipped with the tools, guidance, and opportunities needed to persist and complete.

Meeting Students Where They Are

HCC understands that academic progress cannot be separated from students' lived experiences. Many students face challenges such as food insecurity, childcare needs, and transportation barriers. To address these realities, HCC has invested in expanded holistic support:

- **Emergency Assistance Grants** – rapid relief for unexpected hardships (transportation, housing, childcare) keeps students on track.

- **Scholarships and Targeted Aid** – address tuition, fees, textbooks, and transportation, often through community partnerships.
- **Food, Hygiene, and Transportation Support** – pantry services and Lyft codes address real-world basic need barriers.
- **Mental Health Access** – through the BHA TimelyCare grant, students in 2024-25 had access to 24/7 virtual support to balance academic and emotional well-being.

At the heart of this work is HCC’s student-first ecosystem, an integrated framework that blends academic support, financial relief, and personal well-being. This model recognizes that persistence requires more than strong academics. It also requires stability, encouragement, and a sense of belonging. Whether a first-generation student, a working parent, or a returning adult, every learner can find a pathway at HCC that is supported, flexible, and achievable.

Academic and Workforce Alignment

HCC’s adoption of structured academic and guided pathways ensures that students can see a clear map from their first term through completion. Advisors work alongside students to select the right courses and programs, minimize lost or excess credits, and provide early intervention when challenges do arise. This clarity accelerates degree completion and reduces the barriers that often slow or stop progress.

Student success at HCC is about clarity of those pathways and alignment with workforce needs. This alignment ensures that students are prepared for both transfer and employment. Programs such as allied health and cybersecurity link directly to high-demand careers in the region, often embedding short-term credentials within degree pathways. HCC’s approach to pathways and alignment allows students to earn while they learn:

- **Structured Academic Pathways** – intentional program maps reduce excess credits and speed completion.
- **Guided Pathways and Predictive Analytics** – allow faculty and advisors to intervene early and keep students on course.
- **Credential Balance** – HCC strategically links associate degree programs with short-term credentials and non-credit workforce training, ensuring students can advance step-by-step while meeting employer demand.

This comprehensive approach worked to strengthen both individual student success and the region’s economic vitality. These strategies have also positioned HCC as a key contributor to Maryland’s 55% goal. Each credential earned represents not only an individual achievement but also a step toward strengthening the state’s workforce and economy. HCC’s commitment to embedding short-term credentials within degree pathways and aligning academic programs with employer demand ensures that progress toward the 55% benchmark is both measurable and meaningful. By cultivating adaptable, work-ready graduates, the College is directly fueling the pipeline of skilled professionals that Maryland depends on to remain competitive in a rapidly changing economy.

Vision for HCC's Future

As Maryland reflects back on the 2025 milestone, HCC recognizes that the 55% goal is not an endpoint but a springboard for continued growth. HCC's next strategic plan will build on the progress already made and chart a vision for HCC's future. This vision will center on scaling what works, deepening partnerships, and ensuring access for all learners.

- **Sustaining High-Impact Practices** – embedding advising, co-requisite remediation, and guided pathways into the fabric of the College.
- **Scaling Innovation** – expanding proven models to meet learner needs.
- **Strengthening Dual Enrollment** – a continued commitment to creating and revising seamless pathways for high school students to earn college credit earlier.
- **Expanding Access Efforts** – ensuring that all student populations benefit from completion strategies.
- **Regional Leadership** – aligning with local employers and four-year partners to provide clear transfer and employment pipelines.

This vision positions HCC as a regional leader in higher education and workforce development. By cultivating adaptable, work-ready graduates, the College supports Maryland's 55% goal through competitiveness in a rapidly changing economy.

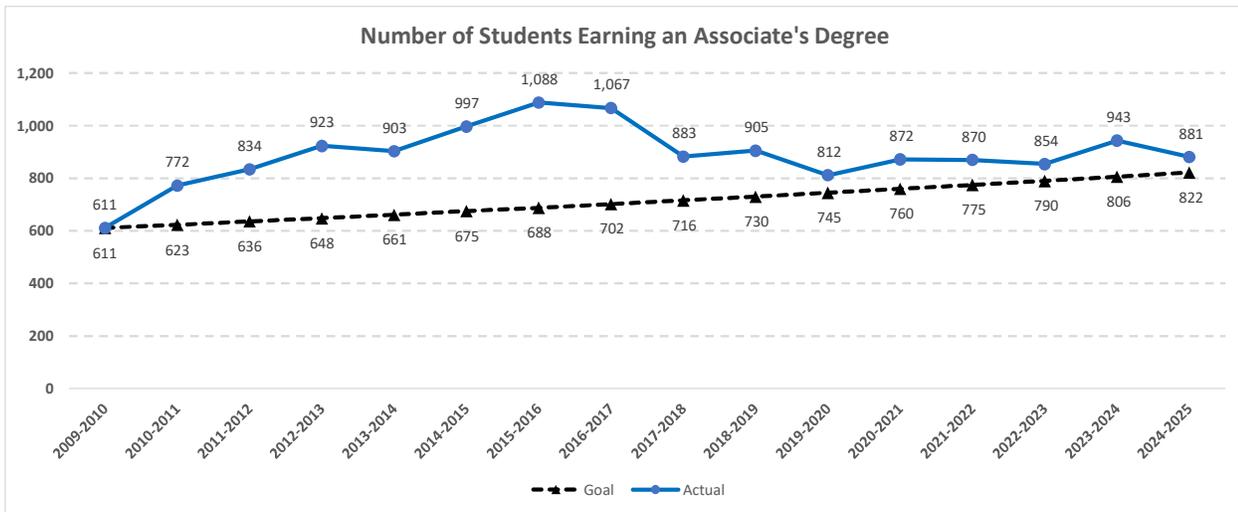
Conclusion: 13 Years of Progress, A Future of Possibility

HCC's story is one of resilience, innovation, and vision. From foundational reforms in developmental education to the cultivation of a student-first ecosystem and alignment with workforce needs, the College has made completion both possible and practical for thousands of learners.

Looking forward, HCC will continue to evolve. The future calls for a culture of completion that is both sustainable and accessible, where every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive.

The past thirteen years demonstrate what is possible when an institution commits fully to student success. The future offers even greater possibilities. HCC remains steadfast in its mission: to empower students, strengthen the community, and help Maryland not only achieve but surpass its completion goals.

Harford Community College (HCC) is pleased to present the final Best Practices report in the current reporting cycle. During the current cycle HCC has exceeded the goal each year by a minimum of 7%. Over the course of this initiative, Harford Community College awarded a total of 13,334 associate’s degrees, exceeding the goal of 11,388 by 1,946 degrees awarded or 17.1% above the goal. This excess of degrees over goals happened despite a decade of enrollment declines. The chart below shows the annual goals and number of degrees awarded.



Current Initiatives:

A number of student success initiatives have contributed to the success at HCC. A tremendous amount of planning, resources, and effort went into making the increases in degree attainment a reality. This document highlights some of the changes that demonstrate the effort and commitment of HCC to serving its students, not just now, but in the future.

Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream (ATD) is a national network dedicated to helping community colleges improve student success, particularly for low-income students and students of color. Its mission is to help more students earn certificates, degrees, and good jobs by promoting equitable outcomes through institutional transformation. The organization partners with community colleges to use data to identify barriers to student achievement, develop and implement evidence-based strategies to improve retention and completion rates, and build institutional capacity in areas such as leadership, teaching, student support, and equity practices. Through coaching, technical assistance, and a network of peer institutions, Achieving the Dream fosters a culture of continuous improvement and shared learning. Central to its work is a strong focus on equity, ensuring that all initiatives aim to close achievement gaps among different student populations. Many participating institutions have reported higher graduation rates, stronger student engagement, and more equitable outcomes as a result of their involvement in the program.



Developmental Education Redesign

Developmental education redesign is a critical effort to improve student success and equity by rethinking how underprepared students are supported in college-level learning. Traditional remedial models, which often required students to complete multiple levels of courses before enrolling in credit-bearing classes, have been shown to delay progress and increase dropout rates. In response, HCC has implemented redesign approaches such as corequisite models, where students receive additional academic support while enrolled in college-level courses, and accelerated pathways that shorten the time to completion. These reforms are guided by data showing that students, particularly those from underserved backgrounds, are more likely to persist and graduate when given early access to credit-bearing work and targeted, just-in-time assistance. HCC has also reexamined placement policies and integrated academic and nonacademic support services. Through these changes, HCC aims to create more equitable, efficient, and student-centered systems that remove barriers to achievement and foster long-term academic success.

Focus on Dual Enrollment

Dual Enrollment has had a major impact on HCC. Approximately twenty percent of HCC students are dually-enrolled students. By partnering closely with Harford County Public Schools, HCC is focusing on efficiently providing students with what they need to succeed. On the credit side, students are focusing on foundational courses in English and Math that research has shown contributes to overall success and completion. For students who are not interested in the traditional academic path there are non-credit options that are more focused on direct-to-work opportunities.

Redesigned Academic Plans

HCC has redesigned academic plans for all programs. In addition to generic recommended plans published as part of the college catalog HCC is creating academic plans for all students, including part-time students so that they have individualized plans that can be updated periodically so that they are aware of where they are in their educational journey. In addition to creating customized plans, HCC is using Degree Works to not only track students progress, but to offer alternative plans if students are considering a change of major.

Future Initiatives

HCC's new strategic plan was approved by the Board of Trustees and initiated in 2024 called *Vision 2030*. The plan focuses on increased student access and success. This new strategic plan includes many programs to be implemented by 2030 that will increase enrollment and student success.

Increased Access

HCC is committed to increases enrollment in parts of Harford County that have lagged. This includes partnering with community-based organizations to reach populations that are easily reached by traditional marketing methods. This is in addition to programs that have focused on majority-minority high schools already in development.

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First Year Experience Program

HCC is working toward launching a comprehensive First-Year Experience program that will support first-year success both in and out of the classroom. A great deal of research exists in higher education documenting how first-year success is a positive indicator of completion. This effort will be a collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. Some initial work has begun in Student Affairs toward this goal.

Mandatory Advising

Mandatory advising has been introduced for our first-year students requiring them to meet with their assigned advisor after their initial advising session during onboarding. A second advising appointment was strongly encouraged and those who participating persisted from Fall 2024 to Spring 2025 at a rate that was 11.7% higher than their counterparts. With the introduction of this initiative, there was also a higher rate of full-time enrollment compared to Spring 2024. Given that our students have complicated and demanding lives, requiring them to engage in activities that will boost their success and momentum is needed since they are unlikely to participate in efforts that are optional regardless of how helpful these efforts will be to them.

New Student Orientation Program

HCC has just introduced a New Student Orientation program that is required for first-year students and recommended for transfers and readmitted students. The first event, introduced in the fall of 2025, included approximately 500 students and 500 family and friends in attendance.

CUNY ASAP Replication Program

HCC is embarking on replicating the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP). ASAP is a comprehensive student success initiative designed to help community college students earn their associate degrees faster and more efficiently. Launched by the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2007, ASAP provides intensive academic, financial, and personal support to encourage full-time enrollment and timely graduation. Key features include comprehensive financial supports, dedicated academic advisors, career and tutoring services, and structured course schedules that promote steady progress. By addressing financial barriers and providing strong, personalized guidance, the program creates a clear and supportive path to completion. Studies have shown that ASAP dramatically increases graduation rates, often doubling them compared to similar students not in the program—and has become a national model for community college completion initiatives.

Maryland Transfer Initiative Program

The Maryland Transfer Initiative is a state-wide collaborative effort led by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) in partnership with the Aspen Institute's College Excellence Program. The purpose is to significantly improve transfer outcomes for community college students by strengthening pathways to bachelor's degrees. This is done by collaborating with transfer institutions to streamline transfer credit acceptance to reduce inefficiency in the transfer process. The program also helps increase graduation at community colleges prior to transfers which has both programmatic and financial benefits for students.



Increased Financial Support for Students

HCC has an active and growing foundation that supports both the work at HCC and provides direct support to students. From fiscal year 2020 to fiscal year 2025 the foundation increased scholarship support to students by 73%. In fiscal year 2025 the Foundation provided \$810,974 in scholarships to students. The Vision 2030 plan calls for over one million dollars per year in scholarships to students. To achieve this goal the Foundation will embark on a major gifts campaign focusing on student scholarships.

Early Alert Initiatives

In order to identify potential issues for students HCC is looking at implementing a number of strategies. This includes employing agents, or programs, within the colleges learning management system to identify behavior that indicates a student may be at-risk. This includes non-engagement or poor performance on early assessments or exams. The college's Institutional Effectiveness team is also developing statistical models that identify at-risk students before a term begins. Additionally, the college is evaluating student success platforms that track students across all aspects of their HCC experience so that information is shared across multiple areas of college so that the college is able to proactively support students.

Increased use of Analytics

Finally, the college is committed to using a data-informed analytics strategy to improve efficiency. This includes developing key performance indicators (KPIs) for all area of the college to measure if goals are being attained, providing disaggregated data to ensure that no group of students is left behind, and developing a data warehouse that combines data from the many college software systems in one place to eliminate data silos and improve the lag in data availability.

Summary

Harford Community College has performed well in terms of achieving its student completion goals. Despite this success, the college feels there are opportunities to do even more for students. The Vision 2030 plan focuses on these opportunities, specifically in the areas of access and completion. The plan is to introduce students and families to higher education that would have missed the opportunity in the past and to improve on successes to better meet the needs of Harford County and its citizens.

Montgomery College

Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Supporting Student Success: Past Strategies and Future Plans for Degree Completion

Over the past decade, Montgomery College (MC) advanced Maryland's degree-attainment goals, expanding academic advising to include program advising with guides and a full redesign of advising for student success; updating academic programs; strengthening entry and gateway success; and expanding flexible pathways that accelerate associate completion and transfer.

Advising Redesign

MC evolved its advising practices significantly over 13 years. In 2013, the College implemented a developmental advising model, primarily provided by counseling faculty, to help students establish goals, minimize barriers, and encourage student self-sufficiency. In 2014, an academic advising model incorporated a more cohesive advising approach.

In 2022, the College conducted a study entitled *FTEIC Retention into Spring: Predictive Factors & A Spotlight on Encounters Documented with Counseling and Advising Faculty*. Results showed that for the last three First Time Ever in College cohorts, the retention rate the following spring was 77.6 percent. The fall-to-fall retention rate averaged 63.7 percent. Critically, for all FTEIC students, the more advising encounters, the higher their retention the next spring term.

Progress continues to be made for advising transformation through expanded Starfish use, which includes extensive training, pilot programs, and system configurations. Starfish is now being used for documenting advising notes, referring students to support services, and streamlining communication. The Academic Advising Workgroup has also revisited foundational advising frameworks, ensuring they reflect best practices and align with the broader institutional shift.

The College is moving toward an integrated, holistic advising model centered on coordinated care, student success, and a common system to track advising and other student services. This approach emphasizes connections between students and their advising teams, proactive support services, and the consistent use of the Starfish system to enhance communication, document intervention, and create more collaborative case management.

Expanded Academic Program Offerings and Developed Online Offerings

The College refreshed its degree and certificate portfolio to align with regional workforce demand and clearly signal program outcomes. New offerings include Cloud Computing, Data Science, Digital Media, Web Technology, Business Analytics, Cell and Gene Therapy, Building Trades Technology, Homeland Security, Practical Nursing, Behavioral Health and Criminal Justice.

The College also scaled online learning, introducing online programs and zero-textbook-cost Z-degrees to reduce barriers related to time, place, and affordability. This developed from zero fully online degrees in 2015 to 22 fully online degrees and 17 certificates, including five Z-degrees and one Z-certificate. Online enrollment increased from 8,300 students in fall 2015 to 20,500 students in fall

2024. As the College continued to develop more fully online offerings, an infrastructure was built to include appropriate professional development and academic support services to support students.

Moving forward, MC's academic program advisory committees provide timely input into trends and skills needed by employers. Responsive to business and industry, the faculty renew curriculum on a recurring basis to position students for success in their careers after graduation.

Expanded and Developed New Dual Enrollment Programs

Dual enrollment has expanded significantly, enabling high school students to graduate with college credits. The Middle College program enables students to remain at their high schools while completing approved AP and IB courses. Enrollment grew from 31 students in fall 2016 to 719 in fall 2024. The Jumpstart program offers high school students the opportunity to take college-level courses at their high school, online, or at MC campuses. Enrollment increased from 754 students in fall 2016 to 1,956 in fall 2024.

The Early College program, launched in fall 2018, brings students to our locations beginning in their junior year. Students graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate degree. Enrollment grew from 50 students in fall 2018 to 536 in fall 2024, representing a 972 percent increase. Today, the program offers 18 degree pathways across our campuses.

Moving forward, dual enrollment programs remain a priority for both MC and Montgomery County Public Schools. The new Academic Master Plan and the Student Enrollment Plan include strategies to strengthen dual enrollment. Targeted outreach to schools with high Free and Reduced-price Meals participation and large English as a Multilingual Language learner populations has reduced barriers for underrepresented students.

Provided Additional Opportunities for Students to Enroll

MC added a winter session, launched in 2017 and delivered fully online, providing an opportunity to complete a gateway requirement, resolve a bottleneck, or distribute course loads across terms.

The winter session started with 258 students. When surveyed, students enrolled for convenience, to meet a pre-requisite, and to graduate early. Eighty-seven percent believed the learning experience effectiveness was good or excellent. Recent enrollments hit a high of 3,969.

Moving forward, winter session proved incredibly popular with MC students and has continued to grow. The College will continue to expand offerings.

Launched Academic Master Plans 2016-2021 and 2025-2029

All division initiatives are framed within the academic master plan which sets measurable objectives for gateway completion, credit momentum, affordability, and equity. Ongoing analysis of disaggregated outcomes informs continuous improvement and scaling of effective practices.

The Academic Master Plan (2016–2021) addressed specific areas of concern with objectives to increase graduation and transfer rates, decrease time to and cost of degree, and align curricula with K-12, 4-year degrees, and business and industry.

Introducing multiple placement measures, including high school transcripts, placed more students in college-level English and math, resulting in:

- Math completion increased from 23 percent to 38 percent
- English completion increased from 54 percent to 59 percent

These changes significantly impacted opportunity gaps compared with white students in college-level courses:

- African American students narrowed the achievement gap in math from 16 to 10 percent
- Hispanic students narrowed the achievement gap in math from 11 percent to 7 percent
- Hispanic students exceeded white students in English, 61 percent compared to 57 percent

Partnerships with business and industry were designed to connect the skills and knowledge that students attained with the needs of employers through the addition of new programs, partnerships with local organizations, partnerships with industries and increased training opportunities. New programs included Cloud Computing, Data Science, and Bioinformatics. New partnerships with industry included Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Holy Cross Hospital, and 150 biotech companies via Department of Labor grants. The College also expanded training opportunities that included short-term training with IT and biotech companies, Montgomery Can Code, BioTrac and the ignITe Hub.

Moving forward, MC has launched the Academic Master Plan (2025-2029), which examines academic affairs programs, services, and vision through the student lens, in partnership with Student Affairs, the Office of Advancement and Community Engagement, and the Office of Administrative and Fiscal Services, all in support of and in alignment with the College's Strategic Plan.

Access, completion, and post-completion success have been MC objectives for a long time and there have been a lot of successful strategies addressing needs of targeted student populations, but this plan seeks to meet academic and support needs of all students – something that cannot be done in a vacuum, and it cannot be done without the direct engagement of our excellent faculty.

Collectively, program modernization, expanded online and dual-enrollment opportunities, evidence-based placement and gateway redesigns, term innovations, and structured part-time pathways have strengthened MC's contribution to Maryland's degree-attainment goals and improved students' ability to persist and complete their credentials. This work is ongoing, and the Academic Master Plan continues review and assessment of the initiatives and changes made over time with student success at the forefront.

Launched the Student Outreach for Enrollment Support Initiative

In fall 2022, MC launched an initiative to provide students who were enrolled in courses but did not pay with enrollment support. Automated calls were made to students weekly, starting several weeks before the start of the semester, to help them understand their financial obligations and payment options. Since the start of these efforts, more than 42,000 calls have been made to students to help them remain enrolled. Approximately 80 percent of students who did not make timely payment arrangements successfully re-enrolled in classes.

The College also makes welcome calls to newly admitted students to enhance belonging, guide them through initial enrollment steps, and answer any questions they have. Since October 2023, more than 27,000 welcome calls have been made. Early analysis indicates that students who spoke with a representative were significantly more likely to complete subsequent enrollment steps. We plan to expand our enrollment supports by increasing educational outreach to new and prospective students about paying for college. This includes implementing a customer relations management (CRM) software system and including with it an updated student communications plan. The new system and communications plan will provide more personalized information and an improved student experience, making it easier for students to successfully complete their enrollment steps in a timelier manner.

Balancing Degree Attainment with the Growing Demand for Certificates and Industry Credentials

MC approaches the "degree vs. credential" conversation as a both/and, consistent with our identity as a comprehensive community college serving transfer-bound students and those pursuing career and technical education. The Academic Affairs realignment embeds noncredit workforce development within academic units so that short-term, industry-recognized credentials complement—rather than compete with—associate degrees and transfer pathways.

To sustain this balance, the College is designing and implementing collegewide program maps that make the full landscape visible to students from the start. Each map will clearly show on-ramps into programs—dual enrollment, noncredit workforce offerings, microcredentials, and credit for prior learning—as well as recommended course sequences, embedded certificates, and "off-ramps" to transfer and employment opportunities beyond graduation. These maps will be paired with predictable scheduling across modalities and terms, helping students plan their progression and choose the next best step, whether their goal is immediate employment, transfer, or both.

A robust, intrusive advising model underpins this work. Proactive, milestone-based advising—integrated across Academic and Student Affairs—will use program maps, labor-market information, and transfer guidance to help each student identify authentic program fit aligned with their needs, timeline, and aspirations. Advisors will support movement between noncredit and credit, evaluate opportunities for credit for prior learning, and ensure that stackable credentials keep students on track to degrees and high-value employment.

Over the next five years, we anticipate measured growth in short-term, industry-recognized credentials that are intentionally embedded within coherent degree pathways. We will expand co-listed (credit/noncredit) offerings where appropriate, increase opportunities for credit for prior learning, and strengthen employer partnerships to align curricula with in-demand skills. At the same time, associate degree completion and successful transfer will remain central outcomes. By integrating workforce credentials into mapped pathways and coupling them with intrusive advising, MC will continue to honor its mission as a comprehensive community college—advancing degree attainment while meeting the growing demand for certificates, microcredentials, and licensures that deliver immediate labor-market value.

**Prince George’s Community College
2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress
toward the 55% Completion Goal**

Prince George’s Community College (PGCC) has submitted Best Practices and Annual Progress reports to MHEC since FY 2012. Looking back over the past decade of these reports, we see trends in 1) curricular reforms having first to do with access, particularly in continuous improvement in developmental education, with more recent emphasis on completion, 2) ongoing and evolving efforts to meet as many basic student needs as possible, and 3) expansion of high school programs, including both dual enrollment and early middle college. Although many of these efforts began as grant-funded or externally motivated initiatives, most are now fully sustained as operational programs with dedicated budgets and staffing.

Curricular Reforms

PGCC efforts to redesign developmental math using a prerequisite format date back to 2013 and to 2015 for developmental English. These efforts did not address the flaw in prerequisite developmental education: that the majority of students in this model never complete a transfer-level English or math class. In spring 2024, PGCC began offering co-requisite English composition courses with four gateway math courses following suit in fall 2024. Preliminary data show students five times as likely to complete EGL 1010 (composition) with the current model than the previous model and that whereas 21% of developmental math students completed a gateway math course from 2018 through 2022, 49% of students in fall 2024 completed their gateway math course in the co-requisite model.

Initiatives to Support Student Well-Being

PGCC Cares, a coordinated system to identify students in serious need and ensure their access to college and external resources to address those needs, has existed, since 2011. It is only in the last two fiscal years, however, that we have focused on a coordinated care model to intentionally connect students to financial and supportive resources to undergird their holistic needs while enrolled at the College. This approach is backed by evidence suggesting that integrated services can improve student outcomes. These services include the OWL Market, which addresses food insecurity; Wellness Ambassadors, peer advisors who offer mental health, active listening, and crisis intervention support; and micro-grants, designed to provide just-in-time financial support that allow students to remain enrolled in classes. It is over the same period of time that we have been intentional in measuring the impact of these interventions on retention and completion and have developed metrics to do so.

Dual Enrollment and Early/Middle College

PGCC has seen a steady rise in the number of high school students enrolled at the College, the percentage of the overall credit student population they represent, the number of high school students who earn a credential, and the percentage of students receiving a credential who are high school students. The table below shows that while there is only a slight difference in the College’s headcount between the 2018 Fall Term and the 2024 Fall Term, there is a sharp increase in the number of high school students who were enrolled and the percentage of enrollment they represented.

Fall Term	Credit Headcount	High School	Percentage
2018	11,987	1,424	12%
2019	11,885	1,699	14%
2020	11,376	1,906	17%

2021	10,607	1,807	17%
2022	10,276	2,012	20%
2023	10,552	2,177	21%
2024	11,702	2,420	21%

Contributing to this increase are the seven Early/Middle Colleges that are run by Prince George’s County Public Schools in Collaboration with PGCC, one of which is on the PGCC Largo Campus. As this partnership has matured, the number and percentage of Early/Middle College graduates has kept pace with the growth in enrollment, having a positive impact on our completion numbers.

Spring	Spring Graduates Headcount	Early Middle College Graduates Headcount	Early Middle College Graduates Percentage
2023	939	198	21%
2024	967	140	15%
2025	945	180	19%

Growing Emphasis on Completion

Consistent with nationwide trends, PGCC has shifted its institutional emphasis from access to completion during the timeframe that the Best Practice reports have been collected by MHEC. In addition to the efforts already highlighted above, looking back over the last decade of reports, we would like to mention our work in guided pathways (2018), significant curricular reform that reduced our active inventory of credit programs from 217 to 97 (2019), the introduction of Prince George’s County Promise Scholarship (AY2017-2018 & ongoing), the integration of EAB Navigate into our practices of communicating with and about students, and the use of Autograd to award credentials based on completed coursework (2023 & ongoing). The sum total of this work helped to stem the tide of enrollment loss post-COVID and kept our rate of credit credential completion relatively stable in the succeeding years, as shown in the graph below.



Balancing Degree Attainment with Certificates & Industry-Recognized Credentials

As the state is expanding its definition of credentials to include institutional and industry certificates and other industry-recognized credentials, PGCC has been expanding its own understanding of what it means to prepare a student to earn a credential that leads to a family sustaining wage and document that credential. Like colleges nationwide, we have radically changed our information technology offerings and now have robust cybersecurity offerings with cloud computing and AI certificates under development. We have a waiting list of students to participate in the **Cyber Workforce Accelerator (CWA)TM Workforce Development (WFD) Program**, which began this fall, and already have 24 students who have completed BCR Cyber's SOC Operations Analyst I (SOCOA I) training and certification. As the College embarks on a redefinition of its overarching workforce development strategy in alignment with the next strategic plan (2026-2030), (re)developing credit and continuing education programs to include embedded and sequential training and certifications will be a top priority both for completion and workforce development purposes.

At the same time, we recognize that the traditional transcript cannot the dynamism and breadth of our current and planned offerings in the credit and non-credit arenas, nor does the traditional transcript provide the information that employers want and need to assess the competencies of the 21st-century worker. To this end, we adopted the Credly platform in 2020 to develop our internal capacity for awarding badges, which we are in the process of adapting to award continuing education certificates in FY26. This is a major operational undertaking, but one we think will improve our internal processes and state reporting efforts. The chart below shows how quickly the usage has become commonplace for internal and external documentation purposes.

FY	Number of Digital Badges Awarded
2023	4,366
2024	3,695
2025	4,313

Expansion of Efforts: The Next Five Years

The prompt for this report asked about our plans for sustaining or expanding these efforts. We can point to three initiatives that the College has recently embarked on with the express intention of moving the College more explicitly toward an orientation of completion *and* post-completion success.

1. Maryland Transfer Intensive (Aspen Institute): This is a statewide strategy focused on systemic redesign of transfer practices and processes. The goal is to dramatically reduce credit loss for community college students who transfer to four-year institutions and to facilitate their transfer into their program of choice at their target institution. Goals specific to PGCC include an increase in students who transfer to University of Maryland-College Park and a greater degree completion rate for those who do. (Sponsored by Aspen Institute)
2. Accelerated Student in Associate Programs (ASAP): Established by the City University of New York (CUNY) in 2007, ASAP was created to address the widespread challenge of timely degree completion. PGCC is one of four Maryland institutions that will incorporate this evidence-based model into its completion efforts with an expected replication of 11 to 15 percentage point gains in degree completion. (Underwritten by Arnold Ventures)
3. Through Unlocking Opportunity, we will develop and enact bold reforms to increase the number of students entering and completing high-value programs. The project's central goal is to ensure

that more students complete programs that lead directly to jobs that pay a sustaining wage or to transfer and completion of a bachelor's degree.

Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Best Practices and Progress toward the Completion Goals: A Retrospective (2012–2024)

Over the past decade, Wor-Wic Community College has consistently advanced Maryland's higher education degree attainment goals by implementing a series of innovative and student-centered strategies through Maryland's Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal. The college's efforts reflect both long-term commitments and timely pivots in response to evolving student needs, economic conditions, and workforce demands.

Effective Strategies in Supporting Associate and Bachelor's Degree Completion

In 2012, Wor-Wic focused on developmental education reform, piloting developmental writing and gateway English co-requisite courses. By 2014, the college expanded placement reform through multiple measures, enabling students to progress more quickly into credit-bearing courses. Co-requisite courses in gateway mathematics courses were introduced in Fall 2022 and are now offered in most required entry math courses to reduce time of progression through degree pathways. Co-requisite courses were expanded in Fall 2025 to link developmental reading and writing with college-level psychology. These reforms yielded measurable increases in gateway course completion, a critical milestone toward degree completion.

To maximize credits earned and reduce length of time towards degree completion, Wor-Wic began exploring the implementation of Guided Pathways and proactive advising. Learning Pathways were introduced to guide students more effectively through selected programs of study. Academic departments created program maps and aligned course sequencing to include earlier completion of English and math courses providing students with fundamental knowledge before progressing to more challenging course work. By 2020, Wor-Wic strengthened its academic advising model by integrating educational planning software and requiring early academic planning. This shift allowed students to select clear pathways, reducing excess credits and improving on-time completion rates. The college expanded dual enrollment partnerships with local school districts, enabling high school students to earn college credits before graduation, reducing time-to-degree and lowering costs for students and families

Wor-Wic intentionally emphasized wraparound student support, particularly tutoring, supplemental instruction, and early alert systems. This support proved crucial for first-generation and part-time students, who represent a significant share of enrollment. Wor-Wic also expanded its use of open educational resources (OER), easing another financial burden impacting students. The college adopted a new mathematics placement tool, ALEKS PPL, to support accurate placement into developmental, college-level, and advanced mathematics coursework.

Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Best Practices and Progress toward the Completion Goals: A Retrospective (2012–2024)

In 2020, a Title III grant enabled the college to implement enrollment coaching as part of the new student on-boarding process and build a professional advising staffed advising center. Enrollment coaching is now a core component of Wor-Wic's innovative student onboarding, reflecting the institution's commitment to a pre-enrollment retention strategy. The goals of the one-on-one enrollment coaching session are to review the student's career assessment results and discuss educational options at Wor-Wic that span non-credit and credit offerings. Through these discussions, a student's program of study is declared, and the next steps are determined. As a continuation of the advising experience, the college built in rules for advisor check-ins that made advising mandatory at key milestones, such as a near-completion advising that included preparing for graduation, post degree plans and/or transfer guidance.

Recognizing the holistic needs of community college students, academic, financial, and social resources are introduced to new students to proactively anticipate issues that may become barriers to continued enrollment. The college consistently added ways to support prospective and current students inside and outside the classroom, and has been awarded external grants, including TRiO, Veterans Upward Bound, CCAMPIS, Title V Disability Innovation Grant, and Maryland Department of Health Innovation. Internally the college built out the tutoring services and established a food pantry. Wor-Wic deepened its commitment to mental health and holistic student well-being by hiring a licensed clinical social worker to provide on-campus counseling, adding the 27/7 BetterMynd telehealth platform, and offering Mental Health First Aid professional development training to faculty and staff.

The COVID-19 pandemic required the college to seek quick and innovative solutions to maintain serving students and the community. New instructional modalities were introduced, including virtual, online, and hybrid options to meet the diverse student learning needs. Wor-Wic scaled up (and continues to use) online support services, provided emergency financial aid, expanded laptop loan programs, and increased access to virtual tutoring, including 24/7 tutoring through the implementation of Brainfuse. These actions ensured continuity of learning and protected students' progress toward degrees during a time of unprecedented disruption. Instructional modalities launched during the pandemic were maintained providing students the ability to earn select degrees fully online or in an alternative learning format.

In Fall 2023, Wor-Wic welcomed its third President, Dr. Deborah Casey. Upon her arrival the college set three Big Goals with the mindset of "Students First, Excellence Always". The goals are: 1) Increase student headcount to 10,000, 2) increase the percentage of full-time students to 26%, and 3) increase the graduation rate to 24%.

Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Best Practices and Progress toward the Completion Goals: A Retrospective (2012–2024)

Most recently, Wor-Wic has been intentional about finding best practices that have been shown to improve student success. In summer 2024, the college was named one of seven community colleges in the nation to participate in the Accelerating Equitable Outcomes initiative of Achieving the Dream (ATD) to look at student retention and persistence initiatives. In fall 2024, the college implemented a pilot of 7-week courses. The initial data showed the success of this format and has resulted in the increase of 7-week courses in the spring 2025 and moving into the fall 2025 semester. The college is exploring opportunities to enroll more students into full-time status. Through a Maryland SUCCESS grant, the college created the “Fins to the Finish Line” program to enroll students as full time and provide direct advising support with financial incentives. This pilot resulted in positive results, and the college is looking to grow this approach through a partnership with Arnold Ventures and CUNY’S ASAP Replication project.

Through the Aspen Institute Maryland Transfer Intensive, the college is partnering with our regional, and other, four-year institutions to ease the transfer process. In 2022-2023 the college partnered with the University of Maryland- Eastern Shore to increase transfers and attainment of bachelor’s degrees. Currently, the college is working with Salisbury University to establish a smoother process for a Wor-Wic student to transition to Salisbury. This process is looking into more direct pathways into specific programs without losing academic credit.

Sustaining and Expanding Degree Attainment Strategies

Wor-Wic’s future plans focus on scaling and deepening these proven strategies. Guided Pathways will be fully embedded across academic and technical programs, ensuring that all students follow clear, efficient routes to graduation. Dual enrollment will continue to expand, particularly through equity-focused outreach in underrepresented school districts. The college is investing in predictive analytics, allowing advisors to identify and intervene with at-risk students earlier. Additionally, wrap-around support services will be sustained as core elements of the student success infrastructure.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Certificates and Industry Credentials

Wor-Wic has been responsive to the growing demand for short-term certificates and industry-recognized credentials. Since 2015, the college has steadily expanded workforce-oriented programs in healthcare, criminal justice, welding, and information technology. By 2018, Wor-Wic had formalized its approach to stackable credentials, allowing students to earn short-term certificates that count toward associate degrees.

Wor-Wic Community College on Maryland's Best Practices and Progress toward the Completion Goals: A Retrospective (2012–2024)

During the pandemic, demand for rapid workforce training surged. Wor-Wic responded by expanding noncredit-to-credit bridges, apprenticeships, contract training, and employer partnerships, particularly in healthcare and skilled trades. By 2024, pathways connected workforce credentials directly to degree programs, enabling seamless transition between employment and continued education.

Looking Ahead: The Next Five Years

These efforts have resulted in positive impact on serving students and the community. A 2024 Lightcast study found the college generates \$148.9 million in annual economic impact, supporting 2,076 jobs—about one in every 54 on the Lower Shore. Graduates earn, on average, \$7,200 more annually than peers without an associate degree. Including student income gains, operations, business growth, and social savings, Wor-Wic's total contribution reaches \$251.3 million. These findings underscore how sustaining student success also advances regional prosperity.

Wor-Wic anticipates that the balance between degrees and credentials will continue to evolve. Degrees remain central to Maryland's attainment goals, but workforce-aligned certificates will expand, especially as state and federal policy supports short-term Pell and other funding models. Wor-Wic will expand stackable credentials, micro-credentialing, and apprenticeships while ensuring degrees remain central to Maryland's attainment goals. The college will continue to work with industry partners through the program-specific Program Advisory Committees (PAC) to identify trends to ensure students are learning the future needs and skills of each specific industry, allowing the college to remain nimble and responsive to shifting workforce demands while maintaining its focus on student success. These efforts will be embedded into the first Strategic Enrollment and Retention Management Plan (SERM), aligning enrollment strategies with institutional goals to boost access, retention, and completion. This will create a clear vision that is intentional and deliberate using data and best practices to set goals and action items. The SERM will foster campus-wide collaboration and a forward-thinking mindset to meet college goals. By sustaining proven strategies in advising, developmental reform, wraparound supports, and expanding workforce-aligned credentials, Wor-Wic will continue to play a vital role in advancing Maryland's degree and credential attainment goals while strengthening the Lower Shore's economy and community.

Bowie State University
2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal
Prepared for the Maryland Higher Education Commission

The following *Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal* was prepared at the request of the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). This document summarizes selected key strategies that accelerated degree completion and provides information about initiative sustainability and how the university is meeting workforce needs with shorter credentials/certifications. Most of the information shared below was also in the institution's 2025 Performance Accountability Report.

Between FY 2011 and FY 2025, Bowie State University awarded 11,786 baccalaureate degrees, 491 more than MHEC's projections. The growth in bachelor's degrees is directly linked to increasing the number and throughput of new freshmen and transfer students, thus solidifying the student pipeline. The complex needs of today's students require coordinated, cross-functional interventions. Bowie State has made significant progress in bringing together academic affairs, enrollment management, student affairs, and administration and finance personnel to continuously improve academic and non-academic supports throughout the student enrollment cycle. The highlighted below are selected scale initiatives that have had a significant impact on degree completion. However, Bowie State recognizes that smaller-scale initiatives and personal interactions contribute just as much to student success and degree completion.

Select Academic Supports

- Varied Tutoring Options – Bowie State offers in-person, online and embedded tutoring to support student success. Bowie State's Embedded Tutoring Program links tutors and faculty throughout the course to help students understand course concepts and enhance student engagement. The program has evolved from short-term initiatives to a sustainable model supporting student success across multiple disciplines. Originally focused on frequently failed courses, the program has expanded to include historically difficult and research-intensive courses. The Smith Vidal Literacy and Language Center and the Math Lab leverage a combination of peer tutors and professional staff to help students overcome challenges in writing and mathematics. 24/7 tutoring services are available through CircleIn. These programs serve as a cornerstone of Bowie State's academic success strategy.
- College-based student success efforts - to encourage sustained student engagement in academic support activities, the university has shifted its student success efforts from a university-based model to one that focuses on individual colleges and the academic departments within. College-based retention coordinators, professional and faculty advisors, and graduate program coordinators support this effort as they often have a direct connection and relationship with the students.

Select Non-Academic Student Supports

- Multifaceted Mental Health Services – since the pandemic, Bowie State has invested more fiscal and human resources towards student mental health services. In addition to one-on-one services, the Counseling Center offers online tools tailored to college students such as Therapy Assistant Online (TAO) and the Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms (CCAPS). These mental health screening tools help students to identify potential areas of distress or concern. Additionally, the Counseling Center has a support group for neurodivergent students that meets in a sensory-friendly environment and includes social skills training, academic support, and peer mentors. It also hosts De-Stress Fest, a weeklong series of mental health programs, workshops, and activities such as mindfulness training, calming rooms, meditation, art therapy, and a mental health symposium.

Bowie State University
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- Strategic use of institutional financial aid – data prepared by USM each year demonstrates that Bowie State’s institutional aid awarding strategy positively impacts retention and graduation rates. Recently, additional multi-year merit awards were made to students in selected disciplines. The impact of this new strategy will be monitored as well.
- Access to financial aid - Bowie State implemented the **ScholarshipUniverse platform** to manage applications for institutional, private donor, and merit scholarships. Since December 2023, the platform has provided uniform access for students to apply to and be considered for internal private donor and merit scholarships, allowing all awards for the academic year to be made by May 1st before the start of the academic year. Understanding the increased financial need across the student body, this platform also reviews thousands of external national scholarships. It provides students with a ‘click and apply’ process for applying to external/third-party scholarships that match critical qualifying criteria.

In pursuit of the 55% completion goal, Bowie State University made significant structural, policy, practice, and cultural changes designed to strengthen student success and institutional sustainability. These efforts include reorganizing divisions to create more seamless student support, revising admissions and placement policies to expand access, investing in new technologies to enhance recruitment and retention, and embedding experiential and research opportunities into the curriculum. At the same time, the university has cultivated a more inclusive and supportive campus culture by promoting belonging, expanding mental health services, and enhancing decision-making through data-driven insights. Together, these changes reflect not only a commitment to improving degree completion but also a deeper understanding of how to sustain institutional transformation through collaboration, innovation, and a student-centered approach.

Structures

- Established the Enrollment Management Division – In July 2018, the university established the Enrollment Management Division as a separate Cabinet-level unit. The Vice President and the Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management lead the Office of Admissions, New Student Orientation (NSO), Office of Financial Aid, and the Office of the Registrar. Post-pandemic, the Student Affairs and Enrollment Management divisions were merged to provide a seamless support system that enhances the student experience and strengthens access to non-academic resources to cultivate a vibrant and inclusive campus life that promotes student success.
- Invested in recruitment and retention technologies to support comprehensive and coordinated support services – Bowie State continues to leverage technology to enhance the student experience. Examples of new platforms/technologies include: customer relationship management (CRM), financial aid, chatbots, ticketing/queuing, call center, early alert, LMS, tutoring, and peer-led learning.

Policies

- Revised admissions policy for greater access - Bowie State University’s move to test-optional allows prospective students to be admitted without SAT or ACT scores if the high school GPA is 2.5 or higher.
- Promoted timely FAFSA completion – The Financial Aid Office hosts numerous events to encourage timely FAFSA submissions so that new and returning students can make informed decisions about funding their education.

Bowie State University
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- Revised English and Mathematics readiness protocols – both the Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies (LLCS) and Mathematics departments revised college readiness standards during the pandemic and have maintained those standards since then. All students are now placed directly into college-level English. Math placement is determined by college major, high school GPA, and high school math course grades. Students can choose to take a placement test as well.

Practices

- Embedded undergraduate research and career-connected experiences into the curriculum – Bowie State has been intentional about adding experiential learning opportunities within new academic programs and is in the process of incorporating experiential learning opportunities at each student level. These experiences support enhanced academic and professional skills and promote community engagement.
- Sustained commitment for the One Step Away program – Over the past decade, Bowie State University has been a recipient of MHEC One Step Away (OSA) grants. OSA was developed to directly support the 55% completion goal. The MHEC OSA grant targets seniors who were in good standing and have been out of school for at least two consecutive semesters. Bowie State’s OSA program has supported over 85 seniors in completing their degrees.

Culture

- Promoted a sense of belonging – Bowie State continues to be intentional about building an inclusive community where all students feel valued and connected. Inclusive curricula, student organizations, peer mentorship programs, celebrating difference, targeted outreach, and safety monitoring are just a few examples of how the university promotes connections.
- Funded student mental health services – as described earlier, Bowie State continues to make investments in student mental health at the same time it promotes a culture that destigmatizes mental health discussions.
- Expanded decision-support information – Expanding decision support through a centralized data warehouse and accessible dashboards equips the university with timely, accurate information to guide student success initiatives. With clearer insight into patterns of enrollment, retention, and academic progress, challenges can be identified earlier. This leads to the ability to respond with targeted support. This not only improves the likelihood of students staying on track to complete their degrees but also creates a culture where decisions are consistently informed by evidence rather than assumptions. Over time, this transparency and shared access to information build a campus community more focused on collaboration, accountability, and a collective commitment to student achievement.

The key component to expanding degree completion is assessing initiative effectiveness. To facilitate continuous improvement in aligning student success strategies with current best practices, Bowie State engaged CREDO to complete a comprehensive review of retention-related activities during AY 2025. CREDO compiled core data as well as student, faculty, and staff focus group analyses to evaluate activities and identify opportunities for improvement. The analysis identified specific activities, including greater collaboration in student onboarding, revision of the freshmen seminar course, formation of academic care teams, ensuring transparent academic pathways, and refined assessment practices. The university embraced the recommendations. During the spring 2025 semester, a team of faculty, professional advisors, and staff revised the freshmen seminar course and implemented the revised course in fall 2025.

Bowie State University
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Prepared for the Maryland Higher Education Commission

Faculty in one college, working with technical consultants, the Registrar, and academic leadership, have completed the academic pathways alignment. The university is continuing to implement recommendations and assess their impact. It is anticipated that further gains in student success and completion will be made as a result of this comprehensive review.

Over the past five years, Bowie State has created new academic programs and expanded modalities and locations to meet student and workforce needs. The university has added 24 new credentials that support workforce needs in STEM, education, counseling, business, arts, and health care. Undergraduate upper-division and post-baccalaureate certificates were added to provide shorter-term credentials intentionally aligned with workforce needs. Nine undergraduate majors, 5 master's programs, and Bowie's first PhD program were added as well.

Through various partnerships, Bowie State provides targeted workforce training and certifications. For example, the university and the American Psychological Association (APA) partnered to create the Behavioral Health Public Policy (BHPP) program. The BHPP equips behavioral health students, trainees, and practitioners with the tools they need to drive behavioral health policy changes through intensive coursework in public administration, policy analysis, and program evaluation. The MHEC Cyber Warrior program incorporates industry certifications into computer science and computer technology programs. The recently announced USM partnership with the National Association of System Heads and Google provides access to Google Career Certificates and AI Essentials to faculty, staff, and students.

Bowie State received approval to offer online academic programs in 2021. Thirty programs are currently available online. During the same period, Bowie State's presence at regional centers has expanded to include the Laurel College Center, the Eastern Shore Higher Education Center, and the USM at Hagerstown.

Bowie State has made significant progress in bringing together academic affairs, enrollment management, student affairs, and administration and finance personnel to continuously improve academic and non-academic support that has led to increased student completion. Improvements in structure, policies, and practices have generally followed change management principles. To sustain institutional change, university leadership has committed to transparent communication, assessment and continuous improvement; dedicated leadership at multiple levels, and appropriate human and fiscal resources.



**Maryland Higher Education Commission
2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal**

Prompt: *Maryland’s higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State’s degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor’s degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?*

Institutional Strategies for Supporting Degree Completion and Expanding Credential Pathways

Supporting Undergraduate Degree Completion

Frostburg State University (FSU) continues to prioritize strategies that promote student persistence and degree completion, with focused attention on the later years of the undergraduate journey (years 3–6). With a six-year graduation rate of **49% for the Fall 2019 cohort**, FSU aligns with national averages for broad-access regional universities (45–55% range, per NCES/IPEDS). However, the institutional goal remains to exceed this plateau through intentional advising, data-informed interventions, and persistence-focused initiatives.

Dual Advising Model

One of the university’s most effective strategies has been the implementation of a **dual advising model**, designed to provide students with layered, continuous support from both professional and faculty advisors.

- **Early Engagement:** New first-year students are connected with a university advisor from the Center for Advising and Retention (CAAR) or TRIO/SSS as early as the summer onboarding period.
- **Faculty Mentorship:** During the first semester, students also engage with a faculty mentor—often the instructor for their *Introduction to Higher Education* course—who provides academic and disciplinary context.
- **Transition and Continuity:** In the spring, students transition to a faculty advisor within their major while maintaining their connection to their university advisor throughout their FSU journey, even if they change majors.

Positive data results are as follows:

- **95%** of students (Fall 2022) strongly agreed that their university advisor serves as a reliable resource.
- Students advised under the model registered earlier (74% registered during the regular window in 2021, up from 60% in 2019).

- **87%** of students reported understanding General Education Program requirements, and **92%** reported knowing which courses they must complete for their major.

This proactive, relationship-based advising structure supports both early academic momentum and persistence into the upper-division years.

Proactive Degree Auditing and Targeted Outreach

FSU's Registrar's Office has enhanced degree completion through proactive auditing and strategic communication:

- Students applying for graduation receive an early degree audit, allowing time to resolve missing requirements.
- Post-add/drop audits verify corrections, ensuring accuracy before conferral.
- Automated queries identify students who have completed requirements but have not applied for graduation, prompting personalized outreach.
- Students with 90+ earned credits receive portal notifications encouraging them to apply for conferral.

These steps have proven effective in identifying near-completers and improving degree conferral rates.

Retention and Persistence Efforts

First-year retention has risen to 73.3% (Fall 2023)—the highest since 2020—demonstrating improved onboarding and early support. The next phase of improvement targets persistence beyond year two, where regional comprehensive universities often experience attrition due to external challenges (e.g., financial stress, family obligations, and work commitments). To address these mid-journey barriers, FSU is expanding:

- Degree mapping and re-enrollment campaigns for stop-out students
- Micro-grant programs to remove financial barriers to re-enrollment
- Flexible course offerings, including hybrid and asynchronous formats, to accommodate working students

These interventions focus on keeping students connected, supported, and able to finish what they started.

Balancing Degree Attainment and Credential Expansion

Frostburg recognizes the growing importance of industry-recognized credentials and certificates as complements—not replacements—to traditional degree programs. Over the next five years, FSU aims to integrate credential pathways that enhance employability while maintaining the integrity and value of the associate and bachelor's degree.

Microcredential Initiative

Launching in fall 2025, Frostburg will pilot a microcredential initiative through the Google–NASH Community of Practice, using Google Certificates and AI courses hosted on Coursera. Two pilot groups will participate:

- Undergraduate and graduate students in Computer Science and Information Technology

These microcredentials—focused on Cybersecurity, Data Analytics, and AI Essentials—will strengthen workforce alignment, digital fluency, and lifelong learning across campus constituencies. The initiative is led by the university’s Instructional Design and Technology Manager, a senior faculty member in the Department of Computer Science and Information Technologies, and the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Workforce-Aligned Degree Programs

Frostburg’s most popular and workforce-relevant degree fields continue to anchor its contribution to Maryland’s talent pipeline:

Field/Major	Why It’s Notable
Nursing/Health Sciences	High demand, strong local placement, and high earnings
Business/Accounting/Management	Strong return on investment and steady employment
Psychology	Longstanding popularity and foundational skills
Criminal Justice and Safety Studies	Public sector relevance and employability
Computer Science/Information Technology	Strong online presence, workforce demand
Education	High-impact placements; doctoral program in Educational Leadership
Recreation, Parks and Sport Management	Strong master’s-level outcomes, national ranking

Regional Workforce Impact

- **72%** of graduates remain employed in Maryland (≈740 of 1,028 degrees annually).
- **25%** (≈200–300 graduates) remain in Western Maryland, supporting the regional workforce.
- Students complete 1,800+ in-state experiential placements annually, including:
 - 57 nursing clinical sites
 - 87 physician assistant clinical sites
 - 31 K–12 schools for teacher preparation

Healthcare Contributions

- *Physician Assistant Studies*: 66% of students are in-state residents; mission-driven preference for Western Maryland candidates.
- *Nursing*: Among spring 2025 RN-BSN graduates, 52% accepted positions in Maryland, including 18% in Western Maryland.
- *RN–BSN and MSN programs* continue to expand the professional nursing pipeline, with nearly all graduates residing and working in Maryland.

Sustainability and Future Direction

Over the next five years, Frostburg State University plans to:

- Scale the dual advising model to enhance persistence through the six-year completion window.
- Explore integration of microcredentials into degree pathways, allowing students to earn stackable credentials recognized by employers.
- Leverage data analytics to identify at-risk students earlier and personalize interventions.
- Strengthen employer partnerships in high-need regional sectors—especially healthcare, education, and IT.

By aligning degree programs with credential pathways and local workforce needs, FSU will continue to advance its mission as a regional comprehensive university dedicated to student success, applied learning, and community impact.

Salisbury University

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal

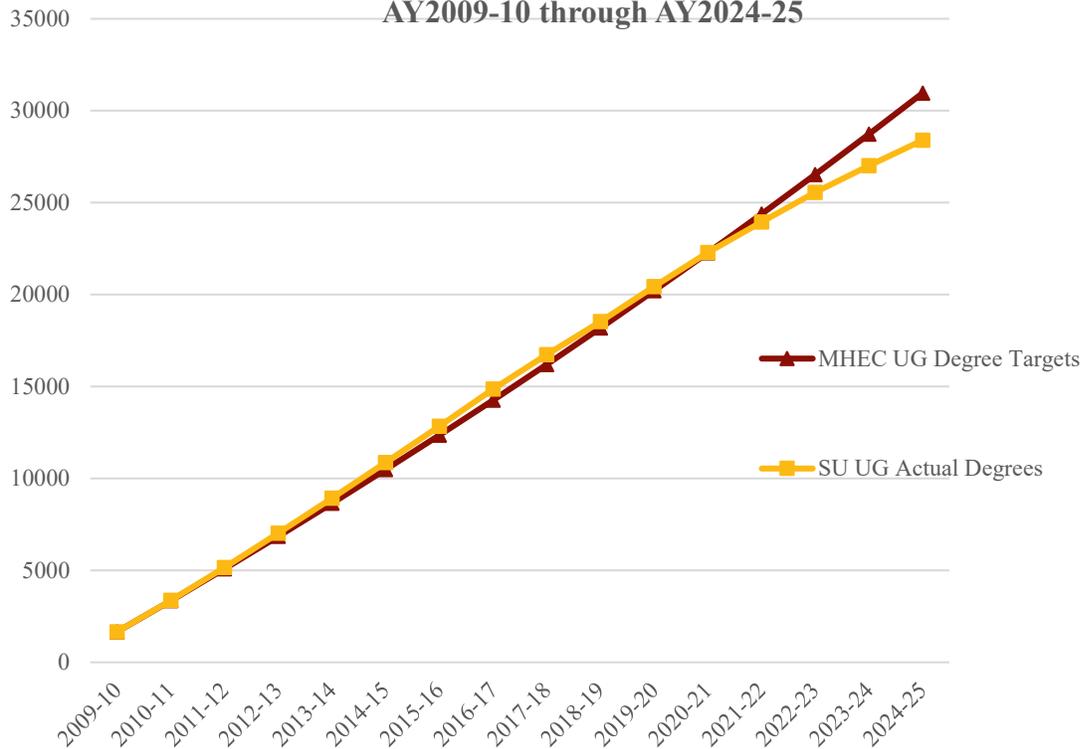
October 10, 2025

Comments on Salisbury University's performance on degree targets established by the MHEC

The number of undergraduate degrees awarded last year by Salisbury University (1,376) was less than targeted by MHEC (2,235) for AY24-25. The University has faced significant pressures on undergraduate enrollment over the past six years, as evident in this difference. Despite an 18% decline in undergraduate enrollment since fall 2019, undergraduate degree counts only decreased by 6.3% this year. By targeting larger first-time student cohorts, we hope to slowly grow our junior and senior cohorts which will in turn, increase the number of degrees granted. For fall 2024, we saw a 3.4% increase in our first-time student cohort. For fall 2025, we saw a 1.1% increase in our first-time student cohort, 3.9% growth in transfer students, and an overall enrollment increase of 3.2%.

As undergraduate enrollment has decreased over the past six years, SU degree targets have not been modified to account for this enrollment decline. The final degree goal (AY24-25) was based on a 2% incremental increase in degrees each year, despite an 18% decline in enrollment over the last six years. Ultimately, SU's 2024-25 cumulative degree targets became unrealistic as a result of enrollment declines overall. However, since the 2009-10 baseline year, SU has awarded 28,396 degrees. While we are 8% below the MHEC cumulative degree goal (28,396 vs 30,960), we are confident that our degree attainment will continue to grow as enrollment rebounds.

**Cumulative Undergraduate Degree Target vs. Actual:
Salisbury University
AY2009-10 through AY2024-25**



Effective Strategies for Degree Completion

Salisbury University’s most effective strategies for supporting degree completion have centered on three core pillars: retention-focused student support, targeted financial aid initiatives, and strategic enrollment planning.

In 2023, Salisbury University launched the new “Back to Flying” scholarship focused on encouraging students who were placed on academic probation for the first time to earn a spot on the Dean’s List in their subsequent SU semester. The goal is to entice students on academic probation with a monetary incentive to rebound from the prior semester academically. The incentive is a one-time scholarship of \$1,000 to be applied to the semester following the earned Dean’s List distinction. The scholarship is publicized in the initial probation notification, at the start of the following semester, prior to mid-semester grades, and leading up to finals.

The program's success is measured by looking at the persistence rate of students on academic probation before and after the scholarship program was launched. The program will run for two years to determine the impact on persistence with these

cohorts. As of August 2025, a total of 45 students has been awarded the scholarship, with eight students receiving the award most recently at the end of spring 2025.

The program also aims to encourage persistence regardless of a student achieving Dean's List. In the spring 2022 semester, there were 148 students on probation for the first time. Of that group, 97 students returned for classes in the fall 2022 semester, representing a 65% persistence rate. One year later, for the spring 2023 semester, there were 154 students placed on probation for the first time. Of that cohort, 111 students returned for the fall 2023 semester, representing a 72.1% persistence rate, well above the targeted 5% increased persistence goal that was listed in the program proposal. Since then, persistence rates for students on probation have continued to surpass those prior to the Back to Flying scholarship.

Mental health support remains a cornerstone of SU's retention strategy. The Counseling Center has expanded access through same-day appointments and 24/7 tele-mental health services through the platform TimelyCare. Internal survey data show that students who engage with counseling services report higher levels of academic persistence and overall well-being. These services are complemented by ongoing collaboration with Academic Affairs to better understand the relationship between wellness and student success.

Financial aid outreach has also played a critical role in supporting degree completion. In response to the FAFSA Simplification Act and its impact on families, SU launched targeted campaigns and in-person workshops to increase FAFSA completion rates. These efforts, previously supported by external funding, resulted in 700 additional FAFSA submissions between July and September 2024. With 92% of current SU students receiving some form of aid, proactive financial engagement remains essential to supporting access and persistence. Moving forward, a new initiative is underway in Fall 2025 to expand the number of students who register with Academic Works, SU's scholarship portal that matches students to any scholarship for which they meet the criteria.

Sustaining and Expanding Efforts

Salisbury University is committed to sustaining these initiatives through strategic budgeting and organizational alignment. The FY26 budget reflects a continued drive toward greater transparency and long-term planning.

Despite a \$6.6 million reduction in state appropriations, SU maintained its investment in student-centered services, including increased funding for Enrollment Management, Institutional Aid, and the Office of Access and Accommodations. These decisions reflect SU's prioritization of enrollment growth and student success, even amid fiscal constraints.

Organizational restructuring has also positioned SU for sustained impact. Enrollment Management now reports directly to the President's Office, signaling its strategic importance. The University continues to invest in transfer recruitment, expansion in outreach in new out-of-state markets, and graduate expansion to support long-term enrollment health.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Credential Diversification

As workforce demands evolve, Salisbury University is actively exploring ways to diversify its academic portfolio. The recent launch of the Coastal Engineering bachelor's degree highlights SU's ability to meet regional needs on the Eastern Shore. This program not only supports degree attainment but also aligns with industry demand for specialized credentials in coastal resilience and infrastructure.

SU continues to evaluate certificate programs and other credentialing opportunities that complement existing degrees and expand access for adult learners and working professionals. These efforts are guided by market analysis and regional workforce data, with an emphasis on programs that enhance employability and support economic development.

Over the next five years, SU anticipates a gradual expansion of non-degree credentials, particularly in areas such as health sciences, business analytics, and environmental sustainability. These offerings will be designed to stack with existing degrees, allowing students to build flexible pathways toward career advancement.

Equity, Access, and Affordability

Salisbury University's commitment to equity and access is reflected in its enrollment growth and student outcomes. For fall 2025, SU enrolled a total headcount of 7,243 students—a 3.2% year-over-year increase. Notably, new first-year, transfer, graduate enrollment all saw increases, as did retention rates. Minority student enrollment reached 31.7% of the total student body, the highest in SU's history, and Pell recipient rates among undergraduates remain at record levels.

Retention rates continue to trend positively, with second-year persistence for the fall 2024 cohort rising to 79%. Minority student retention increased by two percentage points; Pell students rose by one point; and first-generation student retention rates jumped by five percentage points. These outcomes reflect SU's strategic focus on inclusive student success.

Salisbury University's participation in the USM Transfer Intensive has further strengthened its commitment to access and affordability. Through this initiative, SU is implementing institutional changes to better support community college transfer students, streamline admissions processes, and improve advising practices. These

efforts are designed to reduce barriers and promote completion among a diverse population of learners.

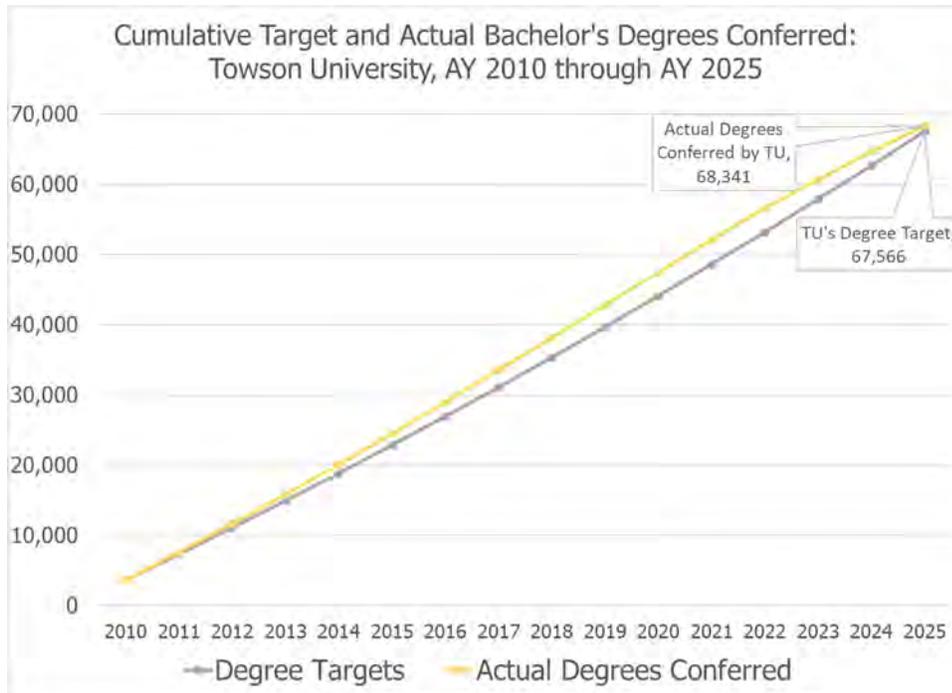
Looking Ahead

As Maryland transitions beyond the 2025 completion goal, Salisbury University remains well-positioned to contribute to the next chapter of statewide attainment efforts. With a renewed focus on enrollment growth, credential diversification, and sustainable budgeting, SU is building a foundation for long-term success.

The University's strategic investments in student support, academic innovation, and regional engagement reflect its mission to serve Maryland and beyond. While challenges persist, SU continues our upward trajectory through adaptability and change as guiding in the Salisbury Seven. As a fiscally responsible institution committed to student success, Salisbury University looks forward to continuing its leadership role in advancing postsecondary attainment across the region and the state.

Towson University's Progress Towards Maryland's 2025 Goal of 55% College Completion

Towson University (TU) is pleased to report on our progress and initiatives that support Maryland's 55% Completion Goal. In 2012, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) established a goal for TU to confer 67,567 bachelor's degrees from Academic Year (AY) 2010 through AY 2025. TU exceeded this goal, conferring 68,341 bachelor's degrees during this period. TU achieved this goal while making a high-quality education accessible to students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.



Prompt 1. Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts?

TU's commitment to evidence-based completion strategies has yielded exceptional results. Our comprehensive approach includes supporting degree completion through classroom success efforts, enhancing student engagement and belonging, and promoting health and well-being. This multi-faceted approach positions the university to continue exceeding state completion goals while serving a student population increasingly representative of the local Maryland community. Through sustained investment in these proven strategies and strategic expansion of successful programs, TU will continue to be a key partner in achieving Maryland's higher education attainment objectives.

Classroom success: TU continues to innovate and scale successful strategies to promote success in academic coursework, the cornerstone of degree completion. In the last decade, the university has launched and expanded services for students seeking additional support. Two programs of note are Supplemental Instruction and Writing Fellows. Students who engage with Supplemental

Instruction are 22% less likely to earn a grade of D, F, or W in their courses. Similarly, students in first-year writing courses with an embedded writing tutor earn higher grades (3.09 vs. 2.82).

TU understands the value of connecting students to their academic interest areas early in their academic careers. In 2023, the university launched the TIGURS undergraduate research summer project for first-year and new transfer students. In the last three years, TU has deepened its commitment to these students, almost tripling the number of participants while maintaining the same financial commitment per student, including summer housing, a meal plan, and a \$1,500 stipend for each participant.

TU also prioritizes proactive initiatives designed for students who are academically at risk of struggling in or disengaging from their coursework. The Progress Report Initiative identifies students based on historical analysis of student populations who have shown higher DFW rates and lower credit completion compared to their peers. Faculty report on these students' progress in the classroom, and appropriate interventions are implemented. TU has an exceptionally high faculty response rate of approximately 70% each semester. Final grades are 40% higher than progress report grades for students who receive interventions. Additionally, the number of first-year students not in good academic standing has decreased by 10% in the last three years.

The Academic Renewal Program is also highly successful. This program supports students with semester GPAs below the threshold for good academic standing. Students in the program receive substantial support, including academic coaching, study accountability programs, and specialized academic advising. On average, 70% of students in the program return to good academic standing.

Engagement and belonging: Students who feel a sense of belonging, engage in campus life, and build personal networks are more likely to persist to graduation. TU offers a variety of programs designed to help students make these connections. The most successful include Students Achieving Goals through Education (SAGE) and Living Learning Communities. Students in the SAGE program receive mentorship and support through weekly workshops. SAGE students have been retained at a rate of 89% over the past decade, compared to an overall TU retention rate of 84%.

TU supports approximately 2,300 incoming transfer students each year. The university works with community college partners to support students through the transfer process. The TU Admissions team offers personalized reviews of transfer credit and has worked with Maryland community college partners to build 132 articulation agreements to help students ensure they are not taking unnecessary courses that would prolong graduation. TU has reverse transfer agreements with Maryland community colleges to ensure students also earn their associate's degrees. The two-part transfer orientation program emphasizes both academic department connections and campus resource familiarity. Additional programs to support the transfer student transition to TU are currently in development.

Campus employment is another way TU supports student engagement and belonging by providing flexible jobs with supportive supervisors to foster student success. TU employs

approximately 2,000 or more undergraduate and graduate students each semester, many of whom work directly to support their peers' success.

Health and wellbeing: TU views student success holistically and recognizes the importance of student health and overall well-being to degree completion. In July 2021, TU launched Student Outreach and Support (SOS), where staff accompany students through life challenges using solution-focused, problem-solving approaches rooted in evidence-based interventions informed by national best practices. SOS has assisted TU in scaling mental health and basic needs support, handling a 55% increase in mental health referrals from Academic Year 2023 to Academic Year 2024.

TU's Division of Student Affairs also conducted a strategic reorganization in 2024 to create a subdivision of Student Health & Well-Being. This shift allowed for a refocus on well-being as a foundational element of the student experience. Since the reorganization, health education has been at the forefront of student-focused work. In addition to peer education programs, the health education and promotion team supports a wide range of student needs in health coaching, dietetics, and mental wellness. These services allow TU to scale support to a larger group of students through a proactive approach.

Sustainability: TU utilizes an annual assessment model to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of services intended to support bachelor's degree completion. To introduce new and expand existing supports, the university makes appropriate resource reallocations within divisions and offers new funding through internal grants. TU also prioritizes scaling programs with successful results through the use of group workshops, peer-to-peer models, and technology innovations.

Prompt 2. How is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

TU has begun to offer two undergraduate certificate programs: one in Entrepreneurship and one in Geospatial Technologies. The certificates are available to learners who already possess a bachelor's degree from any institution and to students who are enrolled in a degree-seeking program at TU. TU conferred its first certificates during AY 2025.

The certificate in Entrepreneurship is designed for learners who are interested in new venture creation, innovation, creativity and problem-solving in existing organizations, entrepreneurship basics, or working for a startup.

The Geospatial Technologies Certificate prepares candidates for roles in cartography, photogrammetry, data management, computer science, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Geospatial technologies are a high-demand, fast-growing occupational skill set for careers in various sectors, including private industry, government, nonprofits, and research institutions. Skills in the collection, creation, processing, analysis, and presentation of georeferenced data prepare candidates for careers in cartography and photogrammetry, database management and computer science, and geographic information systems (GIS) technician roles.

At the graduate level, TU has been developing and enrolling students in graduate certificates that help students advance their careers. TU's 49 graduate certificate programs are designed to help students advance in and enter careers in a wide range of in-demand professions and industries. These programs provide a concentrated path to expertise without the time and financial commitments of a master's degree. Many of these certificates are embedded within master's programs so that students have the option of applying their certificate credits toward master's degree programs, if doing so aligns with their professional and academic goals. TU conferred 439 graduate certificates during AY 2025.

TU has incorporated credentialing into some of our undergraduate and graduate programs. Undergraduate Business Administration and Accounting students graduate with professional certification in Microsoft Excel at the specialist level and Hubspot social media certification. Depending on the specific area of study, they can earn SAP recognition, Bloomberg Market Concepts (BMC) Essentials Certification for Equities, Google AdWords, and Hootsuite certifications. Our Accounting, Financial Planning, Finance, Investments, and Project Management areas of study are aligned with industry standards and meet the requirements for students to sit for professional exams, including CPA, CFP, CFA, and PMP. Within our Computer Science course offerings, certain classes align with CompTIA Network+ and CompTIA Security+ certifications. Other classes provide the opportunity for Amazon Web Services certification. We are exploring opportunities for increased credentialing and micro certifications soon. For example, our Computer and Information Sciences department is researching how to integrate Google micro credentials into their curricula.

Beyond the academic realm, TU's department of Continuing and Professional Studies (CPS) provides educational opportunities to working professionals to enhance expertise and advance careers. Programs are available for new professionals, people who want to re-enter the workforce or continue with professional development. Some CPS programs are instructor-led, while others are self-paced.

Although they are non-credit, CPS's courses align with the academic mission of Towson University and focus on business and management, information technology, and health professions. Current offerings include Project Management Professional (PMP), Six Sigma Green Belt and Black Belt, accounting and bookkeeping, certified medical assistant, pharmacy technician, CompTIA A+, CompTIA Network+, and CompTIA Security+.

MHEC's 2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Submitted By: University of Baltimore

“Maryland’s higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State’s degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor’s degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts?”

Over the past decade, the University of Baltimore has implemented a variety of best practice strategies to support student success and degree completion at all student levels. In alignment with Maryland’s 55% degree attainment goal, UBalt’s Strategic Retention and Student Success Plan specifically focuses on initiatives that support our unique student population. Our undergraduate student body is primarily composed of first generation (63%) and Pell students (66%). The average age of our undergraduates is 31 and we have more part-time students than full-time. Our greatest challenge remains student financial need. That being said, our strategies align with both the needs of our student population and our institutional priorities.

From the recruitment and admissions perspectives, our commitment to transfer-friendly practices remains strong, including active articulation agreements with community colleges and on-demand pre-transfer transcript evaluations. In response to the Transfer with Success Act, programs have revised key curricula to better accommodate transfer students and have redesigned aspects of our General Education (GE) requirements. Our participation in the Aspen Institute’s Transfer Intensive has refocused our efforts to make transferring as seamless as possible. Additionally, UBalt has placed increased attention on credit for prior learning, accelerated pathways, and decreased time to degree completion.

The Office of Financial Aid (OFA) has proactively supported near-completer students from a variety of funding sources with the goal of expediting degree completion. Recently, the University was awarded a Carnegie Foundation near completers grant that will allow us to sustain and even enhance our efforts to help more students achieve degree attainment.

The OFA has restructured the institutional fund awarding rubric and has leveraged University of Baltimore Foundation funding over the past three years to reach as many high-need and qualified students as possible to help them with the rising costs of education. Additionally, OFA has launched a scholarship seeking tool that students and prospective students can use to browse the many scholarships offered through the University of Baltimore Foundation (UBF).

Over the last decade, the University of Baltimore has been working to break down silos and encourage cross-divisional initiatives in support of our students. In AY2023-24, the Student Success Council was established to enhance student success through the implementation of best practices inside and outside the classroom; and to identify and remove obstacles to re-enrollment and degree attainment. Areas of focus have been improving the quality of teaching, enhancing financial empowerment programming, and revising policies and processes to support our students.

We have recently implemented a Student Success Hub model to connect students to needed resources. One Hub focuses on student life and the other focuses on student and academic success. The co-location of offices that support students presents opportunities for enhanced customer service, partnership, and resource sharing. A current example is the partnership between RLB Library and Office of Student Support to provide a section of the library that is intentionally focused on mental health resources.

To support the complex needs of our students, the University provides a variety of course modalities (hybrid, online, evening, in-person) and hybrid services that offer our students the utmost flexibility. This flexibility inside and outside the classroom aligns with the characteristics and needs of our student population – predominantly working adults who need options stay enrolled and complete their degrees.

Given our student profile, UBalt implemented a Basic Needs Online Virtual Center that serves as a one-stop shop for resources available on campus, in person, in the community and virtually. Information about the Campus Pantry that distributed 5,572 pounds of food across 470 visits in AY2024-25 and the Career Closet that provides students with professional attire can be found here. Another important resource for our students is the Student Emergency Assistance Fund that offers one-time emergency financial assistance to enrolled students. On and off campus resources are included on this site.

The 24/7, 365 days a year Student Assistance Program (SAP) provides students with free, confidential, accessible support to manage life's challenges and stay healthy and safe while at UBalt. The Mental Health Support resource in UBALT's LMS as well as the virtual Mental Health First Aid all reflect trainings or opportunities that have only previously been available to students engaged on campus. The expansion into virtual and hybrid offerings allows for a broader connection of resources to our diverse student learning community. Our focus continues to be on wraparound services that can provide timely and robust holistic support to students and has included the expansion of the Compass Case Management program for our students of concern.

Academic supports are offered in partnership with the Colleges/Schools, Tutoring Services, and the RLB Library. Of note, one of the most effective strategies related to student

success is embedded tutoring within high-challenge courses (high DFW). In addition to the creation of a Math and Statistics Center, UBalt implemented the Accelerated Math Program which allows students to complete developmental and credit math within the same semester.

The implementation of best practice academic advising initiatives such as milestone advising, Guides to Graduation, degree audit, and advising syllabi have yielded positive outcomes. Additionally, strategic integration of academic advising, career coaching, and mentoring have been key to students' success. Intentional and strategic efforts to better align these three areas via collaboration, USM support, and technology (Salesforce Advisor Link) have resulted in the development of individualized Student Success Teams. Now, when students log into their UBalt portal, they see their Student Success Team listed within their Student Success Hub and have direct access to these individuals.

Given our career-focused mission, the Career & Internship Center is a key resource for our students. In 2016, the CIC operationalized a Career Community model to provide high impact career development services. The Career Community model provides each UBalt student with access to an assigned career coach similar to the UBalt academic advising model. In addition to the Career Community model, the CIC partnered with faculty to integrate career development into the classroom. In 2017, the CIC implemented a curricular integration initiative with the Colleges/Schools whereby CIC staff provided classroom presentations to key core classes across campus. Additionally, there has been increased focus on paid internships through the CIC, the NextGen Leaders program, and the Community Development program.

Specific student populations engage with a variety of offices to access the supports they need, thus assuring they are connected to resources and increasing their sense of belonging. Veteran and military-affiliated students benefit from the Bob Parson's Veteran Center with tailored support services and guidance regarding veteran benefits. The Office of Diversity and International Services (DIS) engages with and advocates for all international students. And the Office of Disability and Access Services provides classroom accommodations and a community for an increasing number of students to ensure access to campus facilities and programs.

The way in which the University tracks and monitors students has evolved over the last several years. Course success metrics are disaggregated by course and student attribute, assessing student risk. Student Success Dashboards allow for monitoring cohorts holistically for first signs of attrition. Faculty and staff advisor actions are informed by early alert warnings and dashboard risks. Cross-referencing between our academic Early Alert

system and the Compass case management team have provided a more holistic student profile to determine enhanced risk.

Of note, even amidst budget cuts, the institution has prioritized student success thus leaving key units intact and allowing the important work outlined above to continue. In order to sustain or expand these collective efforts, this prioritization will need to remain. Through strategic planning, enhanced programmatic development, and alignment of resources, we will continue focusing on the implementation of our Strategic Student Success and Retention Plan. Sustainability will come from institutionalizing successful practices, leveraging collaborations, creating efficiencies, and seeking additional funding sources.

At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?”

UBalt develops and revises its portfolio of academic programs within a framework of workforce needs. We have developed a range of graduate certificates that provide specific targeted professional skills and that also stack towards graduate degrees so as to provide relevant credentials while also incentivizing postbaccalaureate degree attainment. Additionally, UBalt has established an Office of Continuing Studies through which we will be offering skill-specific noncredit training opportunities and certificates. We anticipate launching these micro credentials in early 2026.

Utilizing our accelerated pathways to UBalt Law School and our various graduate programs to attract high-achieving students and retain them for graduate school will be key. Streamlined transfer policies, expanded recognition of prior learning, and a cultural shift toward student-centered practices will be essential over the next several years.

Additionally, to sustain and expand these efforts, UBalt is strengthening partnerships with community colleges, aligning curricula, and scaling experiential learning and credential stacking to support lifelong learning. We will continue to integrate and improve best practices and evaluate the demand for additional post-secondary certificates moving forward.



*2025 Report to the
Maryland Higher Education Commission
Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal
October 2025*

Drawing from our institutional mission, UMGC's core purpose is to inspire hope, empower dreams, and transform lives ... one student at a time. This purpose statement serves as a motivational descriptor of how we support all students throughout their degree completion at UMGC. Further, UMGC's Strategic Plan establishes the following vision for the University: "UMGC aspires to be the school of choice for adults and business because we are learner-centric, data-driven, and skills-based."

As the capstone report for the thirteenth year of the State's completion goal, UMGC submits the following responses to MHEC prompt for the 2025 Best Practices report:

Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

- 1. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion?*

Alignment with Mission and Strategic Goals

Every aspect of UMGC's mission and strategic goals directly informs the academic programs we offer, the student services we provide, and the way these programs and services are designed and delivered. The university's Strategic Plan outlines institutional priorities that specifically address the needs of our military-affiliated and working-adult learners. These priorities include:

- Programs that evolve in response to learner and employer needs
- Skills-based learning that bridges educational and workplace experiences
- Personalized learning environments and support services that promote student success

Guided by both mission and state mandate, UMGC's entire learner experience is purpose-built to serve working adults and military-affiliated students. Our global learning ecosystem is designed for seamless access from anywhere in the world. Faculty selection, training,



and evaluation; our Success Coach advising model; virtual classrooms; academic resources; and flexible term structures are all grounded in adult-learning science and optimized for distance and distributed modalities.

Student demographics further shape our learning model. As of FY 2025:

- Median age: 31 for undergraduates; 37 for graduate students
- 28% for African American students
- 56% of undergraduates transfer in 30 or more credits
- 78% of all students work 40+ hours per week

Investment in Student Communications

In a global, predominantly online institution, effective student communication is both essential and challenging. Over the past two years, UMGC has significantly invested in building dedicated teams to enhance student connection and engagement. The Student Communications team leads a multi-channel strategy to foster community, belonging, and retention. This includes newsletters, social media, email and text campaigns, and other virtual resources that support initiatives across all university divisions.

A recent campaign initiated in November 2024 aimed to re-engage students who had not enrolled for three consecutive semesters. Results included:

- Over 500 survey responses yielding updated contact information and insights into student experiences
- More than 2,000 global enrollments for Spring/Summer 2025

Launched in Summer 2023, the HyperCare Team delivers targeted support to at-risk students within UMGC's stateside population. Collaborating closely with Success Coaches – professional staff trained to aid learners as they develop learning strategies, clarify education and career goals, and assist with selecting appropriate courses – the team helps ensure students remain on track and connected to vital resources that promote academic progress and retention.

Enhanced Advising

UMGC continues to innovate in student advising with plans to introduce new degree planning tools that help students map their path to graduation. In 2022, the university implemented multiterm registration, allowing students to enroll in courses up to a year in advance— supporting long-term academic planning. UMGC typically offers unrestricted course access, adding sections as needed to meet demand— so students can enroll when ready, assuming prerequisites are met.

- 2. How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts?*



Sustaining and Expanding Efforts

UMGC's mission has remained consistent over time, rooted in our institutional culture, identity, and values. Faculty, staff, students, and alumni recognize UMGC as a university that meets learners where they are—whenever and wherever they choose to learn.

The UMGC commitment to high-quality, accessible, and affordable education for career-focused adult learners continues to guide our work. We leverage diverse technologies and modalities and celebrate our global community.

To sustain and expand our efforts, we align our initiatives with both our historic strengths and forward-looking ambitions. Our Strategic Plan, developed through a collaborative and iterative process, serves as a framework for continuous improvement and responsiveness. The UMGC Strategic Priorities are:

Priority 1: Market-responsive portfolio management that continuously adapts to learner and employer needs.

Priority 2: A skills architecture that can be translated between educational and work experiences.

Priority 3: Targeted expansion that strengthens and diversifies our learner population.

Priority 4: A responsive, tailored, and seamless experience to maximize the success of our diverse learners.

Priority 5: Intentional study of and investment in our people's needs.

- 3. At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?"*

Balancing Degree Attainment with Credentialing

UMGC is actively responding to the growing demand for alternative credentials, including certificates and industry-recognized credentials, while maintaining a strong commitment to degree attainment.

Our teaching and learning strategies integrate workplace relevance with best practices in curriculum design and instruction. Faculty performance is evaluated through multiple channels, including peer feedback, syllabus review, classroom visits, and student satisfaction surveys. Academic Portfolio Directors and Course Coordinators also review online courses before each session to ensure readiness and engagement.



UMGC's skills-first strategy and modular curriculum ecosystem are central to this evolution. By embedding industry-relevant competencies throughout the learning journey, we ensure that students gain skills that are directly applicable to the workforce. UMGC aligns course outcomes with specific knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions (KSADs) to make the value of education transparent to both learners and employers.

A key initiative is the Credit for Military Rank (CMR) program, which awards academic credit for skills and experiences gained through military service. This program accelerates degree completion for active-duty and retired enlisted service members, reducing both time and cost. It builds on UMGC's long-standing partnership with the American Council on Education (ACE) in recognizing military learning.

Leveraging Technology to Advance a Skills-Forward Strategy

UMGC is harnessing technology to accelerate its transformation toward a skills-focused learning model. In collaboration with D2L, the university is developing a next generation learning architecture that supports modular skill development and enhances the overall student experience. This innovative framework includes tools that empower students to monitor their progress, articulate their skills in meaningful ways, and align their learning with career aspirations.

At its core, UMGC's skills-forward strategy is designed to prepare learners for long-term success in a rapidly evolving workforce. By aligning educational outcomes with employer expectations, the university is not only expanding students' career opportunities but also redefining the role of higher education in the 21st century.

Re: 2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Prompt: *Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?*

Background about the University of Maryland, Baltimore

Founded in 1807, the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) is a thriving academic center comprised of a 65-acre research and technology complex that encompasses 57 buildings in West Baltimore near the Inner Harbor. It is the founding institution of the University System of Maryland and brings 218 years of historic achievement to its mission of improving the human condition. UMB remains Maryland's only public academic health, human services, and law center and enrolls over 6,500 students each year throughout their six nationally ranked professional schools and an interdisciplinary graduate school. Combined, these schools offer 97 doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, and certificate programs and confer most of the professional practice doctoral degrees awarded in Maryland.

UMB's Annual Progress Toward 55% Completion Goal

UMB is comprised of 85% graduate and professional students with the remaining undergraduate students including nursing and dental hygiene. Over the last ten years, UMB averages a 91.1% graduation rate (150%) for undergraduate students and between 84.1% to 98% depending on discipline for professional and graduate students. To report on MHEC's enrollment targets of 2% growth, in FY25 UMB enrolled 6,570 students exceeding MHEC's goal of 6,110 students.

Supporting bachelor's degree completion

As a primarily graduate and professional institution, UMB offers a limited selection of undergraduate programs and does not confer associate degrees. Its academic focus centers on advanced education in fields such as law, medicine, dentistry, nursing, pharmacy, social work, and the life sciences.

While a few bachelor's degree pathways are available, most notably the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and a dual-degree track in dental hygiene, these programs are designed for students who have already completed significant undergraduate coursework elsewhere. Although standalone associate degrees are not offered, UMB maintains dual-admission partnerships with Maryland community colleges to facilitate seamless transitions from Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) programs into the BSN program.

To highlight an example of this, UMB's School of Nursing (UMSON) enhances degree completion and credentialing through strategic partnerships, innovative curricula, and expanded access. Dual-admission agreements with all Maryland community colleges and a fully online RN-to-BSN program provide flexible pathways for diverse learners. Holistic admissions further broaden access by valuing personal experiences alongside academic performance.

UMSON also collaborates extensively with healthcare employers across the state. A cornerstone of this work is UMNursing, a 17-year partnership with the University of Maryland Medical System that brings together academic and practice nurses monthly to advance education, research, and practice initiatives. Signature programs include the Academy of Clinical Essentials (ACE) and the Practicum to Practice (P3), which embed unit-based clinical instruction by practicing nurses, structured mentorship, and, in some cases, employment offers before graduation. Student engagement is further fostered through leadership programs and advocacy, while scholarships like Conway and Cohen reduce financial barriers.

In addition to nursing, UMB supports undergraduate degree attainment through its dental hygiene programs. These include the Bachelor of Science (BS) in Dental Hygiene and the dual-degree BS/MS Certified Dental Hygiene Leader (CDHL) program. Students in the BS program attend courses on the Baltimore campus and make extensive use of institutional resources such as Educational Support and Disability Services (ESDS), the Writing Center, and the Health Sciences and Human Services Library (HSHSL). Tailored academic support is provided through faculty advisors assigned via Student Academic Services (SAS), who meet regularly with students to monitor progress and address individual concerns.

The program's Progression Committee plays a key role in tracking student performance and coordinating academic counseling when needed. Students also benefit from access to the Office of the Registrar and participate in regular meetings hosted by the Office of Student Affairs, which facilitate communication across programs and provide a forum for announcements and student concerns.

Students enrolled in the CDHL program receive many of the same support, and since they primarily complete their training at the Universities at Shady Grove, they also benefit from location-specific resources such as the Shady Grove library, study spaces, and campus support services tailored to their academic environment.

Degree Attainment

Over the past decade, and in response to the evolving needs of learners the UMB has expanded its graduate education portfolio through both online and in-person formats, aligning with institutional and system-wide priorities. These flexible delivery models are designed to meet students where they are—whether learning from home, in a traditional classroom, or through regional partnerships.

To meet growing demand for alternative credentials, UMB integrates Post-Baccalaureate Certificates (PBCs) into academic pathways. These credentials serve as both standalone professional development opportunities and stackable components toward advanced degrees, allowing learners to build qualifications at their own pace. UMB's stackable structure enables progression from PBCs to master's degrees and some ultimately to PhDs, with each level designed around distinct learning outcomes and assessment standards to ensure academic rigor and alignment with industry expectations.

UMB has further expanded access for post-traditional learners by launching online programs tailored to working adults, career changers, and others outside the full-time, campus-based model. Examples include online degrees and certificates in Clinical Informatics, Global Health, Health Professions Education, Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics, and Palliative Care. These programs are intentionally designed to be accessible, affordable, and workforce-aligned—strengthening Maryland's professional pipeline in fields such as health, law, and social work.

To better serve adult learners, UMB adopted 8-week course formats that allow for deeper engagement and improved retention. This accelerated model supports focused learning experiences that fit within professional schedules, contributing to higher completion rates and enhanced academic performance.

In addition to an enhanced online strategy, UMB has also invested in regional development through its presence at the Universities at Shady Grove (USG), expanding access to graduate and professional education for students in Montgomery County and surrounding areas. This regional footprint reflects UMB's commitment to equity in educational attainment and to supporting Maryland's diverse communities.

Beyond credit bearing education, UMB is actively developing a comprehensive alternative credential ecosystem to complement its traditional degree programs. This initiative is designed to meet the evolving needs of learners and address critical skill gaps in Maryland's healthcare and human services sectors. Through the strategic expansion of microcredentials, including badges and pathway certificates, UMB is offering flexible, accessible, and workforce-aligned learning opportunities that serve both current students and external audiences such as clinicians, alumni, career changers, and organizational partners.

Microcredentials at UMB are structured to be stackable and modular, allowing learners to build toward larger qualifications at their own pace. These credentials are intentionally designed to align with labor market data, support continuing education, and foster career mobility. By integrating non-credit offerings with credit-bearing pathways, UMB ensures that microcredentials can serve as both standalone professional development tools and entry points into formal academic programs.

Over the next five years, UMB anticipates continued growth in microcredential offerings, supported by a governance model that emphasizes academic rigor, equity, and sustainability. This

balance between traditional degree attainment and alternative credentialing will enable UMB to continue to expand access for post-traditional learners, strengthen Maryland's workforce pipeline, and reinforce its role as a leader in innovative, mission-driven education.

Date: October 7, 2025

To: Dr. Sanjay Rai, Secretary of Higher Education, MHEC

From: Shannon Tinney Lichtinger, Director of Institutional Research
Institutional Research, Analysis and Decision Support (IRADS)

Subject: 2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Introduction

UMBC surpassed its 2025 target of 35,694 undergraduate degrees in FY24 with 35,832 of them awarded. As of FY25, we have awarded 38,190 degrees; this is 7 percent more than our target (Appendix A).

Early on UMBC established undergraduate degree completion goals to support the State's 55 percent completion goal. Critical to achieving these goals was thoughtful planning, data informed decision-making, and building productive collaborations to development initiatives with internal and external partners. Our 2016 strategic plan identified four key areas of focus, one of which was The Student Experience that included increasing degree completion and shortening students' time to degree. The Strategic Enrollment Planning (SEP) committee developed objectives and tactics to actualize this goal. Early SEP initiatives focused on collaborative enrollment goal setting and monitoring, short-term actions to support undergraduate student retention and persistence (including support for transfer students and a 90-credit audit process), and financial aid optimization strategies. In 2022-2023, we identified short-term enrollment goals and priorities that focused on transfer articulation/partnerships, undergraduate academic progressions, flexible class/term scheduling, and customer relations management. In 2023-24, we focused on improving transfer student success. The next round of long-range strategic planning is underway and student success is at the center of it.

Below, we highlight strategies and initiatives that UMBC found most effective in supporting degree completion and how we plan to sustain or expand these efforts. Following that is a brief explanation about how we will balance degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials and how we anticipate balancing this over the next five years.

Academic Success Center Expansion

Critical to making progress towards our completion goals was a major reorganization and expansion of student academic support services with the opening of our Academic Success Center (ASC) and the launching of the Academic Advocacy Program (AAP) in 2019.

- Faculty, staff, and peers refer at-risk students to the AAP. We use predictive analytics to identify academically at-risk students too. Dashboards and a case management system provide the advocates access to key data about students curated from multiple campus data systems. The team prioritizes risks at certain weeks in the semester, track outreach efforts, and coordinate care with the student across campus departments.
- Other services offered by the ASC include the Computing Success Center, The Writing Center, and Supplemental Instruction Peer-Assisted Study Sessions (SI PASS), which

provide regularly scheduled, out-of-class, review sessions for high enrollment courses with high D/F/W rates. UMBC-based assessment and national research demonstrate that participation in SI PASS correlates with positive student outcomes, including higher grades, increased retention, and student-reported gains in course learning and study skills.

- The ASC oversees the Early Academic Alert System that allows faculty to notify students at risk of receiving a D or F and provides students with resources to help improve their performance.

Academic Advising Supports

Over the past decade, we have continually improved our advising functions. A network of professional advisors, faculty advisors, and the Office for Academic & Pre-Professional Advising (OAPA) facilitate advising. Within *myUMBC*, students have access to online tools to explore and plan their academic pathway and degree progress. Four-Year Academic Pathways allows students and advisors to explore, design, and develop an individualized degree plan reflecting students' academic preparation, interests, and goals. Students map out a four-year plan to share with their academic advisors and are strongly encouraged to develop an individualized degree plan before earning 45 credits, updating it regularly. The Degree Audit tool allows students to track their academic progression, including completion of General Education Program (GEP) requirements and courses required for their majors, minors, and certificates. Degree Audit provides a detailed breakdown of completed and remaining requirements, along with an option to explore how one's completion status would change if switching a major, minor, and/or certificate plan.

In 2021, UMBC became a member of the University Innovation Alliance (UIA)—a national network of public research universities dedicated to increasing the number and diversity of college graduates in the United States. In fall 2023, as part of UIA, we engaged with the National Institute for Student Success Engagement (NISS) to identify and resolve institutional barriers to equity and college completion. In fall 2025, we will begin addressing four areas designated for improvement. First, we are standardizing advising systems, protocols, training, and practices for professional and faculty advisors to ensure students receive consistent, proactive support across all advising units, academic departments, and schools by establishing an Academic Advising Council. Second, we are coordinating student communications to prioritize and direct information to students in a timely, proactive, and personalized manner. Third, we are systematically leveraging academic outcome data as part of an institutional strategy to identify and remedy courses with high DFW rates, assess course sequencing and program design, and improve course scheduling. Fourth, we are strengthening students' financial support through better use of financial data, collaboration across units, and proactive student outreach.

Transfer Processes

The community college pathway can be a cost-effective and efficient way to earn a UMBC degree, particularly when students are well prepared and informed about transferable coursework. UMBC enjoys a fruitful relationship with Maryland community colleges. We have established several processes and resources to assist prospective transfer students in their academic planning and to ensure a smooth and seamless transition:

- UMBC's Articulation Work Group includes representatives from each of the academic colleges, Undergraduate Admissions, Undergraduate Education, Enrollment

Management, and the Registrar's Office. This workgroup has facilitated many college partnerships that have culminated in dozens of program-to-program articulation agreements and pathways.

- The articulation system for Maryland Colleges and Universities (ARTSYS) is a valuable tool. T2+2 Articulation Agreements define pathways to reduce credit loss, lower overall college costs and facilitate timely degree completion.
- We maintain our own course articulation database, the Transfer Evaluation System (TES). This interactive tool allows users to compare course descriptions and view classes previously evaluated by academic departments.
- The Transfer Student Alliance (TSA) bridges the gap between community colleges and UMBC by offering community college students access to UMBC resources and participation in cultural and recreational student activities. After transferring, TSA students can earn a \$1,500 merit scholarship per year for up to two years, on-campus housing at the UMBC campus, and priority advising and registration at orientation.
- Programs like Degrees to Succeed with the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) and TSA offer joint programming, pre-advising, and merit scholarships.
- The Credit When It's Due process facilitates students ability to combine credits earned at the community college and university levels to earn an associate's degree.

There are additional ways that we are sustaining and expanding degree completion.

- Currently, we are working with NISS to improve the transparency of articulation agreements and educate prospective transfer students earlier in the recruitment process. We believe this will help students choose the right four-year institution for their academic and career goals, leading to better outcomes.
- In 2024, UMBC was one of ten Maryland institutions joining the Maryland Transfer Intensive (MTI). MTI aims to enhance pathways from community college to and through four-year institutions that are affordable, timely, and barrier-free. This work is ongoing.
- We offer the Credit When It's Due program and can increase transfer students' awareness of reverse transfer credit. We will use this to increase enrollment.

FinancialSmarts Program

We are committed to developing students' financial literacy. FinancialSmarts offers online modules, workshops, and credit-bearing courses that address budgeting, saving, investing, and debt management. Students are encouraged to prioritize grants and scholarships, receive counseling on federal versus private loans and focus on interest rates and long-term repayment. Hundreds of UMBC students have earned one of three financial literacy badges.

Near Completer Initiatives

We have developed numerous initiatives to get students across the finish line. Near completers are undergraduate students who have earned at least 90 credits, but have not completed their degrees. Through a combination of targeted communication campaigns, flexible academic pathways, financial support initiatives, and innovative outreach strategies, we reduce barriers to re-enrollment and empower students to complete their degrees. Specific degree completion initiatives include, the:

- Finish Line Near-completers Initiative. This program focuses on students with 60+ credits who have not enrolled for more than two semesters and have not earned a degree

elsewhere. It provides a streamlined pathway for readmission and high-touch advising support. Approximately 120 students enroll each fall; 377 degrees conferred since launch.

- Flexible Degree Option (B.S. INDS-Multidisciplinary Studies Track). Returning students seeking flexibility to use previous coursework toward new goals can work with our Individualized Study Program staff to develop a degree program that does not overlap substantially with an existing major.
- Senior Degree Completion Grant. This program focuses on seniors within one year (two semesters) of degree completion with financial holds. UMBC offers last dollar grants to students unable to register due to financial holds. Approximately 25-40 students receive awards annually (~\$80,000 total) and these students have an 82% degree completion rate.

Expanding Access to Existing Undergraduate Upper Division Certificates

At UMBC, we recognize that while bachelor's degree attainment remains foundational for many careers and for the region's economic competitiveness, there is increasing demand from employers, working adults, and non-traditional learners for more flexible, shorter credentials — certificates, industry-recognized credentials, and undergraduate certificates. We are committed to meeting this demand in a way that complements our robust degree programs, expands access, and advances workforce readiness.

One of our newest strategic initiatives is aimed at expanding access to our *existing* undergraduate certificate programs such as accounting, business analytics, cybersecurity informatics, health information technology, intercultural communication, philosophy, ethics and values, just to name a few. Historically, these undergraduate certificates have been available only to degree-seeking undergraduate students enrolled in bachelor's programs. Under this initiative, we will open these certificates to *non-degree-seeking* students. This change allows individuals who do not wish to or are not yet ready to pursue a full bachelor's degree to enroll in certificate programs, gain valuable skills, and enhance their credentials.

UMBC has also invested in the development of extended learning programs, which serve learners who benefit from shorter, workforce aligned educational programs. Our non-credit professional development courses and certificates include a Diagnostic Medical Sonography program, courses in biotechnology and community leadership which stack into degree programs, and boot camps in flow cytometry and lab safety. We are advancing a comprehensive microcredential initiative. This effort defines microcredentials as unbundled, documented skills and competencies that students gain through existing curricular and co-curricular experiences. Each microcredential must articulate clear learning outcomes, align with assessments, and undergo review through UMBC's Microcredential Review Board, ensuring academic integrity and employer relevance.

Moving forward, we will expand upon this work by adding programming to the Institute of Extended Learning catalog and develop stackable credentials to form degree programs and thus create more flexible educational pathways. UMBC is also expanding work-based learning microcredentials and working towards a Learning and Employment Record (LER) infrastructure to ensure that learners can carry verified records across institutions and employers.

Appendix A: MHEC Degree Targets

**Bachelor Degree Awards at UMBC: Actuals vs. Targets
(AY 2009-10 to 2025-25)**

AY	Actual	Target	Diff	Percentage-pt. Difference from Target
2009-10	1,915	1,915		
2010-11	1,905	1,953	(48)	-2.5%
2011-12	2,140	1,992	148	7.4%
2012-13	2,230	2,032	198	9.7%
2013-14	2,250	2,073	177	8.5%
2014-15	2,432	2,114	318	15.0%
2015-16	2,521	2,157	364	16.9%
2016-17	2,572	2,200	372	16.9%
2017-18	2,578	2,244	334	14.9%
2018-19	2,658	2,289	369	16.1%
2019-20	2,632	2,334	298	12.8%
2020-21	2,643	2,381	262	11.0%
2021-22	2,674	2,429	245	10.1%
2022-23	2,419	2,477	(58)	-2.3%
2023-24	2,263	2,527	(264)	-10.4%
2024-25	2,358	2,577	(219)	-8.5%
Total	38,190	35,694	2,496	7.0%

Source: Institutional Research, Analysis and Decision Support Office, UMBC

Report on Best Practices and Progress Toward 55% Degree Completion
University of Maryland College Park
October 9, 2025

As a land grant institution, the University of Maryland (UMD) places access to high-quality higher education at the core of its mission. UMD prides itself on its strong graduation rates, as evidenced in its IPEDS Outcome Measures—the overall six-year graduation rate for all entering cohorts (first-time and transfer, full and part time) is 85%. Over the last decade, UMD has not only increased its overall graduation rates, but has also improved the four-year graduation rate for first-time students. Approximately three-quarters of first-time students graduate within four years (76%), an accomplishment that ranks in the top 10 of all public research institutions in the country, based on IPEDS data.

Student Success and Degree Production

The University provides students with a clear path for degree attainment. UMD's Student Academic Success-Degree Completion Policy provides advising, sample four-year graduation plans, and benchmarks for every major. Upon entry to the University, students work with advisors to develop individualized four-year plans. UMD prides itself on the provision of high-quality, holistic academic advising that goes beyond the selection of coursework. The University offers a wealth of resources for advisors' professional development and engagement. Additionally, UMD has invested in a technological ecosystem to facilitate students' engagement with advisors and monitoring of their progress to degree attainment, including a robust degree audit tool and a customized Salesforce platform, TerpEngage.

The Office of Letters and Sciences (LTSC) provides an academic home, with specially trained advisors, for students who have not yet chosen a major, who seek to enter a Limited Enrollment Program (LEP) with special entrance requirements, or who are transitioning between majors. Within LTSC, the Transitional Advising Program (TAP) provides high-credit, undeclared students (some who left majors in which they could not meet benchmarks) with dedicated resources to explore and declare a major. The University requires mandatory advising for all students on academic probation or with a cumulative GPA below 2.3. The Student Success Office communicates with those on academic probation as soon as grades are released and offers academic and other support. Additionally, the Registrar's Office and academic units contact students who did not register for an upcoming term to resolve any outstanding issues.

The University has implemented many high-impact supports to enhance student success. Within the Teaching and Learning Transformation Center (TLTC), the Learning Success Team offers peer-led Guided Study Sessions and Math Success coaching. Complementary programs like academic coaching and "learning about learning" programs help students build essential learning strategies, address impostor syndrome, and develop growth mindsets. These efforts foster academic resilience and are key to advancing long-term degree completion.

UMD has focused in particular on improving student outcomes and experiences in Fundamental Studies Math (FSM) courses. The FSM Success Initiative is a broad campus effort launched in 2024 to ensure accurate student placement in math courses, align course content and instructional practices, and provide accessible learning resources. At the department level, the initiative is changing the placement process; providing accessible face-to-face tutoring; ensuring conducive class spaces for learning; developing dashboards for monitoring; and using AI-powered course alignment tools. At the course level, efforts focus on creating more accessible course websites; offering retake resources and guidance; providing course-specific virtual tutors; and fostering instructor participation in learning communities.

UMD offers targeted programs for transfer students, which support our efforts to increase our four-year transfer graduation rate, currently at 85%. The University's Pre-Transfer Advising Office helps prospective transfer students to develop academic plans for transfer and to estimate time-to-degree. The program works with students in one-on-one appointments as well as larger information sessions and other advising-related events. To connect with students where they are, UMD pre-transfer advisors are placed on the campuses of partner community colleges. Additionally, UMD is partnering with Montgomery College and Prince George's Community College in the Maryland Transfer Initiative with the Aspen Institute. The goal of the Initiative is for every community college student who needs or wants a bachelor's degree to have pathways from community colleges to and through four-year institutions that will be affordable, timely, and barrier-free, and to improve the college and transfer student outcomes.

UMD continues to invest in high-quality undergraduate degree programs at the Regional Higher Education Centers designed to expand access and affordability to students who begin their education at community colleges. These programs allow students to complete a UMD bachelor's degree in a cost-effective, locally accessible format. At the Universities at Shady Grove (USG), UMD launched the new Mechatronics Engineering program in fall 2024. This interdisciplinary program prepares graduates for careers in robotics, automation, and advanced manufacturing—key areas of economic growth in Maryland. UMD continues to offer a range of undergraduate programs at USG. Fields such as Information Science and Cyber-Physical Systems Engineering have seen steady interest and growth, reflecting strong demand for talent in data and systems-related fields. At the University System of Maryland at Southern Maryland, UMD continues to offer programs in Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering, supporting students in Southern Maryland who seek locally accessible STEM degree pathways.

Innovation in Curricula and Teaching

The University has made reimagining learning one of its strategic commitments. This commitment is borne out in a variety of ways—redesigning instruction, meeting the needs of the state for a STEM educated workforce, providing opportunities for hands-on research and other experiential learning, and creating innovative new programs. UMD is focused on preparing graduates for increasingly technology-rich workplaces in Maryland and around the world.

The TLTC is the central point in a distributed network of pedagogic and curricular support, including college-level teaching centers, instructional designers, and other specialists who partner with faculty in their disciplines. The TLTC promotes and supports innovative, inclusive, and effective teaching and learning strategies and professional development. Digital badging is also offered to those completing micro-courses or other types of learning experiences, allowing for demonstration of a comprehensive range of competencies to prospective employers. The TLTC is also deploying new analytical tools to support program planning, measure impact, and monitor educational effectiveness. UMD launched the Teaching Innovation Grants in 2020 and has invested over \$2.5 million in projects that have focused on cutting-edge educational technology topics including AI, machine learning, gamification, and immersive learning environments.

UMD has seen continued growth in STEM fields, producing over 6,100 STEM degrees in FY24 and developing new programs to meet student and workforce demand. Such programs, launched over the last several years, include: Fermentation Science; Global Health; Immersive Media Design; Information Science; Neuroscience; Real Estate and the Built Environment; Social Data Science; and Technology and Information Design.

UMD partnered with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and 14 other institutions through a six-year, \$8.7 million shared grant to promote inclusive teaching practices in the natural sciences. Although funding was cut after year three, UMD work continues with previously unspent funds. This work in the College of Computer, Mathematical and Natural Sciences (CMNS) facilitates faculty learning communities, gathering student input and analyzing teaching data to improve student success and support evidence-based educational practices that are expected to lead to improved student success and degree completion.

The College of Education (EDUC) is creating new pathways and opportunities with school districts, community colleges, and cross-campus programs to increase enrollment in teacher education programs and respond to workforce needs. EDUC added an upper division certificate for the undergraduate program, and added a health education specialization to the MCERT program to begin by the 2026–27 school year. EDUC also expanded the Creative Initiatives in Teacher Education (CITE) program, which provides a pathway for conditional teachers in elementary classrooms to become eligible for licensure. To further address the state's teacher shortage, EDUC received a grant from MHEC to develop the USM Alternative Teacher Preparation Program, which will offer a flexible, affordable, and accessible pathway to licensure through asynchronous online learning opportunities paired with intensive instructional coaching. The application process is expected to open in spring 2026, with a pilot cohort of 70 participants launched in fall 2026.

As a land grant institution, UMD has a long history of providing training outside of the traditional academic credential. The Institute for Applied Agriculture and the University of Maryland Extension are two examples of how UMD provides support in both urban and rural communities related to agriculture, the environment, family and consumer science, and a variety of other topics targeted to meet the state's needs. More recently, UMD's Extended Studies (EXST) unit

has worked with a variety of colleges to develop alternative paths for students to access the knowledge they need to achieve their goals. The Science in the Evening (SIE) program, a collaboration between EXST and CMNS, offers post-baccalaureate coursework for students who wish to pursue medical education but do not have the requisite courses. The program consistently enrolls well over 100 part-time students per semester and, based on the success of this program, an additional program for hearing and speech sciences was developed.

2025 Best Practices and Annual Progress towards 55% State Completion Goal Report

For the 2025 reporting year and final report, MHEC seeks to focus on the culmination of the original goal and the vision for the future. To that end, the prompt provided allows institutions to reflect on the past 13 years of progress toward the attainment goal as well as share a vision for the future directions of the state.

Therefore, institutions should report on the following prompt:

Maryland’s higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State’s degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor’s degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

Institutional narrative reports should not to exceed four printed pages or approximately 1,500 words. Reports are due no later than Friday October 10, 2025.

Morgan State University: Advancing Maryland’s Degree Attainment Goals

Over the past decade, Morgan State University has made significant strides in advancing Maryland’s degree attainment goals through a comprehensive, data-informed, and student-centered approach to retention and graduation. These efforts have yielded historic gains, particularly among traditionally underserved populations. Fall 2025 marks 15 consecutive years with a first-to-second year retention rate above 70% (2010–2024 cohorts), surpassing the previous record of nine years (1992–2000 cohorts). Similarly, May 2025 marked seven straight years with a six-year graduation rate above 40% (2013–2019 cohorts), exceeding the prior record of five years (1996–2000 cohorts).

These outcomes reflect not only institutional commitment but also the deliberate implementation of high-impact strategies designed to support student success at every stage of the academic journey. The following initiatives—grounded in equity, collaboration, and continuous improvement—have proven most effective in advancing degree completion at Morgan State University.

Strategic University-Wide Campaigns

Launched in 2016, Morgan's "50 by 25" campaign aimed to raise the six-year graduation rate to 50% by 2025. Anchored in three strategic pillars—Advising and Degree Planning, Faculty Development and Course Redesign, and Beyond Financial Aid (BFA)—the campaign galvanized cross-divisional collaboration and accountability for student success. While the pandemic disrupted full achievement of the goal, the campaign fostered a culture of continuous improvement through semesterly check-ins with senior leadership. Building on this momentum, Morgan is launching the "60 by 30" campaign to reach a 60% graduation rate by 2030, reflecting a bold, long-term commitment to equity and excellence in degree completion.

Holistic Advising and Academic Support Systems

Morgan's advising model blends proactive, intrusive, developmental, and strengths-based approaches. Since Fall 2014, all first-year students have been advised by professional staff from the Center for Academic Success and Achievement (CASA) and the Office of Student Success and Retention (OSSR), with mandatory advising holds to ensure meaningful engagement. Advisors are trained to meet students "where they are," offering support that extends beyond course registration to include academic performance, mental health, basic needs, and campus engagement. Targeted campaigns address disaggregated student populations based on learning pathway, academic standing, calendar milestones, and communication needs. Advising notes are stored in the EAB Navigate360 platform for transparency and continuity. Once students earn a 2.0 GPA, complete 24 credits, and declare a major, they transition to departmental advising. Morgan is currently piloting professional advising for second-year students, with promising early results.

Integrated Advising, Early Alert, and Degree Planning Tools

The adoption of early alert and degree planning technologies has been transformative. Morgan first implemented Starfish in Spring 2014, transitioning to Navigate360 in 2023. This enterprise platform tracks students' engagement and progression across multiple student services units and allows faculty to trigger early alerts for students who are struggling or disengaged. Advisors follow up to provide timely interventions. Degree Works, adopted in 2016, offers students and advisors 24/7 access to degree progress and includes a "what-if" feature to explore the impact of changing majors. Together, these tools have strengthened advising precision and student agency.

Redesign of the First-Year Experience

In 2023, Morgan conducted a comprehensive review of its first-year initiatives, aligning legacy programs with national best practices and a service delivery model focused on continuity, engagement, and belonging. The redesign included updates to the orientation course, restructuring of summer orientation, development of a year-long peer mentoring program, migration to a new advising system, implementation of onboarding learning modules, and new cross-divisional partnerships. The philosophical approach to advising also shifted to emphasize holistic student development.

The first-year experience now begins at admission, initiating a self-directed registration process that launches the onboarding journey. Engagement continues through summer orientation and Fall registration, followed by traditional programs such as Move-In and Welcome Week, now enhanced by a New Student Induction Ceremony. The experience is sustained through the first-year seminar, Spring registration, and ongoing programming, concluding only when students are registered for their second year and prepared to return. As a result of these changes, Morgan achieved its highest first-year retention rate since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Equity-Minded Institutional Financial Aid

With more than 60% of students Pell-eligible, Morgan has prioritized institutional financial aid as a strategic lever for retention. Using an optimization formula developed with EAB, the university provides merit- and need-based aid to nearly all incoming first-time, full-time students. Aid is administered through a comprehensive scholarship management platform—Academic Works through Spring 2025 and Scholarship University beginning Summer 2025—allowing students to apply for nearly 400 scholarships through a streamlined process.

Coordinated by the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Success, offices across the university—including Bear Essentials One-Stop Student Services Center, Financial Aid, the Student Success Team, Bursar’s Office, Institutional Advancement, and others—collaborate intensively to support students at risk of stopping out due to financial hardship. Through institutional and external resources, Morgan works to ensure that financial barriers do not derail degree completion.

Sustaining and Expanding Successful Strategies

With documented effectiveness across multiple student success initiatives, Morgan State University remains committed to sustaining and expanding these strategies—resources permitting. Offices within the Division of Enrollment Management and Student Success actively pursue grant funding to scale high-impact practices. Current expansion efforts include transitioning to professional advising for second-year students, enhancing financial wellness through the hiring of a Student Financial Wellness and Aid Counselor, growing the peer mentoring program, and strengthening data infrastructure through the addition of a Chief Data Strategist and a Data Analyst. These efforts are anchored by the launch of the “60 by 30” campaign, which aims to increase the six-year graduation rate to 60% by 2030.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Postsecondary Credentials

In response to the evolving credentialing landscape, Morgan State University is actively expanding its offerings in certificates and industry-recognized credentials—while reaffirming a clear commitment to degree completion as the core of its academic mission.

In the 2024–2025 academic year, a university-wide committee convened to examine credentialing opportunities across higher education. The review identified a broad array of programs offered by peer institutions and private providers. While Morgan launched a partnership with Coursera Career Academy in 2022, early engagement was limited. However,

the committee's findings have prompted a renewed and more strategic integration of Coursera offerings into Morgan's credentialing ecosystem. Moving forward, students will have access to asynchronous, career-aligned learning focused on "last-mile skilling," job pathways, blended instruction, and lifelong learning. Career support services will provide completers with a capstone experience that includes resume development, interview preparation, job search guidance, and webinars.

As Morgan expands certification options for undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni, the university remains intentional about preserving the integrity of the degree completion process. Certifications are positioned as a complement—not a substitute—for traditional degree attainment, enhancing career readiness while reinforcing academic achievement.

Morgan is also sustaining and expanding its nationally recognized work in Comprehensive Learner Records (CLR), Learner and Employment Records (LER), and digital badges through a coordinated strategy that integrates technology, partnerships, and faculty leadership. As a selected participant in the national LER Accelerator, Morgan is embedding verified skill records across academic and co-curricular experiences, ensuring that every learner graduates with both a degree and a portable, employer-recognized record of achievement.

To support faculty and staff leading extracurricular and co-curricular activities, Morgan has expanded its Coursera license to Career Academy Plus, offering a wide range of credentials that can be integrated across the curriculum. A dedicated workgroup is currently exploring adoption strategies to support university-wide implementation.

In addition, Morgan was recently selected for the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) Accelerator, which enables faculty, students, and employer partners to co-design and pilot work-relevant learning experiences. A university-wide team will conduct empathy interviews and participate in a design workshop in October, with implementation planned for late Spring 2026. The WIL project aims to create direct links between coursework and workplace readiness, allowing students to demonstrate skills in authentic contexts while progressing toward degree completion.

By 2030, Morgan anticipates that most undergraduate and many graduate programs will include embedded credentials or certifications; 45% of students will complete at least one CLR-verified work-integrated learning experience; and employer partners will actively use LER data in recruitment. This evolving ecosystem positions Morgan State University as a national model for integrating degrees, digital credentials, and work-based learning—creating accessible, stackable, and career-relevant pathways for all learners.



Annual Report on Best Practices & Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal

St. Mary's College of Maryland – October 6, 2025

Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

To promote bachelor's degree completion and timely graduation, SMCM has implemented several initiatives to boost student success. For example, within the past three years the College has introduced a "Winterim" session – in addition to the regular fall, spring, and summer sessions – that enables students to add flexibility in their scheduling or remain "on-track" for a four-year graduation. Moreover, these accelerated courses are taught remotely, which permits students to continue their education from the comfort of their own home. The College's *Sum primus* ("I am first") Initiative also provides dedicated support for first-generation students – including an on-campus support and mentoring network of other first-generation students, faculty, and staff. Since 2023, *Sum primus* has been expanded to a full-scale living-learning community, and offers extended pre-orientation activities on crucial topics such as time management, major exploration, campus technology, financial literacy, and more.

The College's most recent innovative support system – the Seahawk Success Network – was launched during the Fall of 2024 for first-year students, and assigns each student four individual on-campus advisors in key institutional touchpoints, including faculty advising, co-curricular advising, financial aid, and academic success. This network reorients the College's existing student engagement and support structure from "reactive" to "proactive," and builds upon prior successful efforts to centralize student support services (including academic coaching, tutoring, parent/family outreach, and an "early alert" system for students encountering academic or personal challenges) under a single office: The Office of Student Success Services.

The College also remains keenly aware that students' ability and willingness to persist to graduation are significantly impacted by their perception of, and belief in, the relevance of a liberal arts honors education and a strong financial return on their investment. To this effect, SMCM's updated core curriculum, LEAD (Learning through Experiential and Applied Discovery), is designed to specifically and intentionally address those concerns. Key aspects of LEAD include the reorganization of general coursework requirements into thematic Inquiries, the expansion and revitalization of the Center for Career and Professional Development, and significant funding to support students achieving the Honors College Promise - a guaranteed opportunity to participate in research or a creative endeavor, complete an internship, or study abroad. Finally, increases in the College's need-based and merit-based financial aid budgets provide additional support to students in completing their degrees.

All of the above initiatives are intended to both support short-term student success, and long-term degree completion goals. In the future, SMCM will continue to promote, improve, and expand these programs as appropriate. To that end, increased investment in the College's private fundraising apparatus will assist in expanding and sustaining the funding base used to support these programs. Furthermore, a key to sustaining institutional change over time is to remain proactive in identifying and addressing student needs. Such an approach is not only beneficial for students, but facilitates a positive faculty and staff culture to engage with students to boost their success instead of working reactively to solve problems. Another key is to develop and maintain a culture of assessment and continuous improvement. SMCM is regularly conducting comprehensive assessments of student learning, administrative effectiveness, student satisfaction, and employee satisfaction to monitor the effects of change, and to ensure that all constituents have a voice in shaping the institution's policies and practices.

As a liberal arts college, SMCM will continue to focus primarily on the completion of a traditional four-year bachelor's degree, while also investigating pathways to assist students in obtaining disciplinary certifications and industry-recognized credentials.

- Students with a chemistry major can complete a specific course of study that is certified by the American Chemical Society.
- Through partnership with a local informational technology services company, computer science majors can earn an industry-standard certification in information security.
- In the recently established dual enrollment pathway in educational studies, students can begin Master of Arts in Teaching coursework in their senior year of undergraduate study, allowing them to be licensed to teach (through transcript analysis) at the completion of their bachelor's degree.
- The business administration and management program has plans to offer a number of industry-recognized Bloomberg certifications to students, and to offer students training to take the CFA certification exam.

Curricular innovation such as two-credit course modules is also underway to allow for specific focus on additional industry-recognized credentials, such as GIS proficiency. Development of such modules is currently being incentivized and will be piloted in the 2025-26 academic year.

Maryland Higher Education Commission - 2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal Narrative

Over the past decade, Capitol Technology University has played an instrumental role in advancing Maryland's higher education degree attainment goals by cultivating a learning environment that integrates academic excellence, student support, and workforce relevance. As a specialized STEM institution, we are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between education and industry, preparing students for high-demand fields such as cybersecurity, engineering, computer science, and construction safety.

Our graduation rate currently stands at 45%, with 826 students completing their degrees out of 1,827 total students. Completion timelines reflect strong persistence patterns, with 166 students graduating in two years, 208 in three years, and 271 in four years. Graduation rates vary by program; the highest enrolled programs—BS in Cyber and Information Security (176 graduates), BS in Electrical Engineering (137 graduates), and BS in Computer Science (104 graduates)—continue to demonstrate consistent demand and strong outcomes. Several programs, including the AAS in Computer Engineering Technology, AAS in Telecom Engineering Technology, and BS in Construction Safety, have achieved greater than a 75% graduation rate. These results underscore our ongoing commitment to program quality, structured academic pathways, and workforce alignment.

Sustaining and Expanding Degree Completion Efforts

To sustain and expand progress in associate and bachelor's degree attainment, Capitol Technology University has adopted a comprehensive and data-driven student success strategy grounded in five core pillars: proactive advising, inclusive teaching and faculty support, holistic student engagement, technology-enhanced learning, and wraparound services.

1. Proactive and Holistic Advising

The Department of Advising at Capitol Tech employs proactive, holistic advising models that emphasize early intervention, continuous monitoring, and personalized student guidance. Advisors utilize *Dropout Detective*, our early alert system integrated with the Learning Management System (Canvas), to identify at-risk students based on key indicators such as course grades, missing assignments, and activity levels. These analytics allow advisors to intervene in real time, providing individualized academic coaching, time management strategies, and referrals to tutoring or counseling resources.

In addition, structured academic planning tools ensure students have a clear understanding of their degree requirements. Regular advisor-student meetings help learners develop personalized academic roadmaps, empowering them to make informed decisions and assume ownership of their academic journey. To reinforce this model, our Student Success Center provides peer tutoring and collaborative learning support for all undergraduate students, regardless of modality. Peer tutors strengthen students' mastery of course content while promoting confidence and a sense of belonging within the academic community.

To maintain the effectiveness of these strategies, we are investing in ongoing advisor training on data literacy, inclusive advising, and culturally responsive student engagement. We also prioritize

cross-departmental collaboration to ensure academic, financial, and personal support systems are aligned to meet the evolving needs of our student population.

2. Holistic Student Life and Wellbeing

The Student Life team plays a central role in promoting retention, persistence, and degree completion through programs that support the whole student. Over the last decade, our focus on holistic development has expanded to include counseling, community engagement, leadership development, and co-curricular enrichment.

In partnership with Innovative Therapy, Capitol Tech provides on-demand counseling services, group workshops, and basic needs assistance. These services ensure that students have access to mental health support, stress management resources, and financial literacy programs—all of which are essential to maintaining academic progress and well-being.

We have also invested in cultivating a vibrant campus community that supports both residential and commuter students. Through a mix of academic-based events, recreational programs, and a nationally competitive e-sports program, students are encouraged to engage socially and intellectually. These initiatives foster a sense of belonging and community connection, which directly contributes to student retention.

Leadership development opportunities, such as on-campus employment, student organizations, and lab-based research experiences, enable students to build professional confidence and develop transferable skills. Looking forward, we plan to expand engagement opportunities for non-traditional learners and commuter students by offering flexible, hybrid leadership programs and targeted virtual engagement strategies. Sustaining these efforts will require ongoing assessment of student needs, integration of student feedback, and continued investment in wellness and belonging initiatives.

3. Academic Labs, Faculty Support, and Experiential Learning

Academic quality and faculty excellence are foundational to student success at Capitol Tech. Over the past decade, our academic strategies have been intentionally aligned with industry standards to ensure curriculum relevance and graduate employability. Project-based learning is a cornerstone of our academic model, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problems. Virtual and physical labs—such as our Cyber Lab and Engineering Research facilities—offer immersive, hands-on learning experiences that reinforce technical skills and foster innovation.

Recruitment and development of high-quality faculty remain a top institutional priority. Faculty are supported through ongoing professional development in instructional design, inclusive pedagogy, and technology integration. Through mentoring programs and collaborative teaching initiatives, faculty are empowered to adopt innovative teaching practices that strengthen student engagement and persistence.

To sustain and expand these efforts, Capitol Tech continues to evaluate its curriculum to align with evolving workforce trends, particularly in cybersecurity, AI, and advanced manufacturing. Investments in state-of-the-art lab spaces and simulation technologies further ensure that

students gain applied, industry-relevant experience. These initiatives collectively create a dynamic learning environment that blends academic rigor with practical application.

4. Teaching Innovation and Technology Integration

Capitol Tech has embraced technology-driven instruction as a key driver of access and success. Expanded asynchronous, hybrid, and hyflex formats have increased flexibility for working adults, military learners, and non-traditional students. Courses are offered in both 8- and 16-week terms to accommodate varying schedules and learner needs.

Our instructional design model adheres to *Quality Matters (QM)* standards, ensuring consistent quality and academic rigor across all online courses. Faculty receive training in QM-aligned course design and are supported by instructional designers who assist in embedding interactive and accessible learning components.

We have also integrated *Open Educational Resources (OER)* across multiple programs to reduce textbook costs and promote equity. The adoption of *Universal Design for Learning (UDL)* and scaffolding strategies ensures multiple pathways for engagement, representation, and assessment. Additionally, real-world labs such as *CyberScore* link online theory with authentic, industry-based experiences that promote applied skill development.

Our *Faculty Focus* development series provides regular workshops on emerging technologies, UDL best practices, and discipline-specific innovation, helping educators continually refine their craft and meet the needs of a diverse student body.

5. Wraparound Services and Student Support Infrastructure

Supporting degree completion extends beyond the classroom. Capitol Tech has invested in a robust ecosystem of wraparound services that address the academic, emotional, and practical needs of students. Through the integration of mental health services, financial literacy workshops, and career readiness programming, students receive holistic guidance to navigate academic challenges and prepare for post-graduation success.

The university is developing integrated student support centers that streamline access to advising, counseling, and career services. This “one-stop” model minimizes administrative barriers and ensures students can quickly connect with the right resources. By aligning academic and support services, we strengthen retention and promote timely degree completion.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Credential Expansion

As Maryland’s higher education landscape continues to evolve, Capitol Tech recognizes the growing importance of certificates, microcredentials, and industry-recognized credentials in meeting workforce needs. We view these credentials not as alternatives to degrees but as complementary pathways that expand opportunity, enhance employability, and encourage lifelong learning.

Our approach to balancing degree attainment with credential expansion focuses on *stackability and alignment*. We are developing stackable pathways that allow students to earn short-term certificates embedded within associate and bachelor’s programs, enabling them to enter the workforce quickly while maintaining a clear progression toward degree completion. These

pathways are particularly beneficial for adult learners, military veterans, and career changers seeking flexible, career-aligned options.

Admissions plays a strategic role in this initiative by automating application processes and integrating credential pathways into recruitment messaging. By highlighting microcredentials and stackable degrees, we appeal to non-traditional learners and working professionals seeking advancement without pausing their careers. These credentials also serve as re-entry points for students who previously stopped out, thereby improving overall retention and completion.

Over the next five years, Capitol Tech anticipates an increasing convergence between degree and credential pathways. We plan to:

- Expand partnerships with industry and government agencies to ensure credentials align with real-time workforce demands.
- Integrate digital badging systems that verify and showcase student competencies.
- Embed credential opportunities into general education and major coursework.
- Strengthen articulation agreements that allow transfer of credentialed learning into degree programs.

These efforts position Capitol Tech to remain at the forefront of Maryland's workforce and educational innovation, advancing both degree attainment and credential completion in a balanced, responsive manner.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, Capitol Technology University has demonstrated measurable progress in advancing degree completion while laying a strong foundation for future innovation in postsecondary credentialing. Our strategic focus on proactive advising, faculty development, inclusive pedagogy, holistic student engagement, and workforce-aligned learning ensures that students not only earn degrees but also develop the skills and resilience needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving economy.

As we look to the next five years, our commitment remains steadfast: to expand access, equity, and success for all students while strengthening Maryland's position as a national leader in higher education attainment and workforce readiness.

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Prompt: Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

Introduction

Over the past decade, Goucher College has concentrated on practical, data-informed practices that strengthen belonging, remove procedural and financial barriers, and keep students on a clear path to earning their degree. Recent gains in first-to-second-year retention, which rose two points for the Fall 2023 cohort, and a shrinking pool of near-finishees reflect the cumulative impact of these efforts.

What worked over the past decade

The most durable gains came from initiatives that emphasized belonging and skill development. Through the LAUNCH Network, first-generation and Pell-eligible students join a four-year cohort that begins with SummerLAUNCH, a two-week transition program combining advising, peer connection, and study-skills support. Internal assessments show higher persistence and stronger GPAs for LAUNCH participants compared to similar non-participants, underscoring the value of structured connection and coaching.

This emphasis on readiness is reinforced through the required Learning-to-Learn course for students on academic probation, taught by specialists in the Academic Center for Excellence. Students who take the course are more likely to move from probation toward good standing, showing that early alerts paired with targeted skill-building translate into persistence. Preliminary findings show GPA improvements for completers and marginal gains even for non-passers, compared with no change among peers who did not take the course. Together, cohort belonging and academic skills help students begin with clearer expectations, stronger habits, and immediate support networks.

Momentum is sustained term-to-term by an advising system designed to catch small issues before they block progress. Success Teams and a structured registration follow-up process managed by staff in the Retention & Student Success office bring together professional advisors, faculty, and Student Financial Services to resolve barriers, especially billing holds. Documented results show additional registrations equal to 30% of the not-registered cohort within two weeks (2020–21), 32% within four weeks (AY 2021–22), and 51% within four weeks (Spring 2023). More recently, 33% of the not-registered cohort in Spring 2025 enrolled within one week and 55% within one month; for Fall 2025, 14% enrolled within one week and 40% within one month.

Targeted financial interventions also prevent disruptions: federal COVID-relief funds cleared balances for eligible students from 2020 through 2022. Additionally, in Summer 2024, one-time re-enrollment grants totaling nearly \$55,000 supported 18 students who all returned in Fall 2024; in Spring 2025, seven additional students returned as a result of one-time re-enrollment grants. Together, these results indicate that proactive case management and precise aid sustain enrollment and reduce stop-outs.

As students near completion, flexible course access and clear degree-audit checkpoints reduce “last-class” bottlenecks. Expanded January, June, and July offerings, often online, along with course-sharing through Acadeum, give students more ways to complete requirements on time. In parallel, the Registrar’s six-month graduation protocol includes escalating outreach—emails followed by phone calls—to students who appear off track, with individualized maps that can include approved off-campus courses. These finishing-line supports have coincided with a smaller pool of almost-done seniors and more on-time awards, showing how structured degree checks reduce last-semester drift.

Across these efforts, Goucher has documented a two-point rise in first-to-second-year retention for the Fall 2023 cohort (77%→79%) and a much smaller pool of near-finishers, both evidence that friction along the path to degree has been reduced.

Sustaining and expanding what works

To extend recent gains, Goucher created the Student Success Task Force (SSTF) to design a college-wide roadmap for student success with a focus on retention and graduation. The SSTF has set goals that emphasize learning communities, a student-centered ecosystem of services, and a stronger sense of community and pride, and its work engages the entire campus.

Within this framework, the SSTF is exploring an honors learning-community model that could extend cohort benefits to more first- and second-year students. Early conversations focus on approaches tied to curriculum and advising cadence, with potential pilots designed to formalize early connections and regular advisor touchpoints while building on existing cohort practices.

Day-to-day execution remains central. Success Teams provide timed outreach to students who have not registered by checkpoints, while Student Financial Services helps resolve billing and documentation holds quickly. A modest re-enrollment aid pool, applied with clear criteria, will continue to preserve momentum for students whose only barrier is a small bill. The 2024 pilot, which saw all 18 grant recipients re-enroll, demonstrated the return on investment of this approach.

At the back end of the degree path, last-mile mechanisms will continue to ensure timely graduation. January, June, and July offerings will remain available, and course-sharing through Acadeum will be used as needed to fill short-term curricular gaps. The Registrar’s proactive graduation timeline also continues: outreach begins six months before the anticipated degree date, intensifies at three months, and includes individualized completion maps that may involve approved off-campus courses.

A light but consistent improvement loop keeps focus on outcomes that matter most. Each year, campus leaders review subgroup retention and persistence (Pell, first-generation, student-

athlete, and residency), pass rates in selected gateway courses, and degree awards. The SSTF serves as the forum for sharing findings and aligning adjustments to advising cadence, financial holds management, and course availability. Taken together, scaling cohorts, institutionalizing registration and holds management, and formalizing last-mile protocols will sustain momentum and extend it to more students.

Balancing degree attainment with other credentials

Goucher College continues to keep the bachelor's degree at the center of the academic experience while making the path more accessible and efficient, especially for transfer students. The college positions itself as a transfer destination for students seeking a strong liberal-arts education by emphasizing transparent credit mobility and predictable aid.

The Goucher Transfer Guarantee reduces friction at entry. Students who complete an associate degree from a Maryland community college (or equivalent) receive block satisfaction of the Goucher Commons Requirements, with only Study Abroad and one college-level foreign language course remaining. All admitted transfers are automatically considered for guaranteed merit scholarships based on GPA.

Policies are designed to minimize credit loss and time to degree. Up to 64 credits may transfer toward the 120 required for the B.A., generally for 100-level-or-higher coursework completed with a grade of C- or better. A preliminary evaluation is provided during admission, and a final evaluation is completed by the Registrar and relevant departments. The curriculum also acknowledges transfer realities: incoming transfers are exempt from the First-Year Seminar.

Affordability is addressed through published, GPA-banded scholarships of up to \$35,000 per year, with additional awards for associate-degree completers, Phi Theta Kappa members, and students covered by honors-linked agreements. Guaranteed-admission partnerships with community colleges provide further clarity for transfer pathways, reinforcing transfer as the main flexibility tool.

Within this degree-first approach, flexibility takes the form of efficient transfer processes, transparent credit evaluation, and predictable aid, supported by established last-mile options such as intersessions and course-sharing. Over the next five years, the balance will evolve through deeper transfer pipelines, updated articulation maps with Maryland community colleges, and consistent scholarship policies so students who begin elsewhere can finish their bachelor's degree at Goucher without relying on non-degree credentials.

Conclusion

Goucher's approach to degree attainment is pragmatic and cumulative: build early momentum through belonging and skill development, sustain enrollment with proactive advising and targeted aid, and remove last-mile barriers with flexible course access and structured graduation checks. The Student Success Task Force provides the umbrella advocacy and oversight for stronger student success practices across the institution. The Office of Retention & Student Success collaborates with appropriate partners across campus to scale these practices, expand cohort opportunities, and institutionalize registration-lift routines with holds triage and re-enrollment aid. The Registrar's office is working to standardize degree-audit checkpoints. At

the same time, Goucher College is committed to continually assessing transfer policies and processes to ensure flexibility and a seamless transfer process. Transparent credit mobility, predictable merit, and clear articulation pathways, anchored by Goucher's Transfer Guarantee, make the bachelor's degree more accessible and efficient without diluting its quality.

Goucher will continue to track a focused set of indicators: subgroup retention and persistence, gateway course success, and degree awards. These results will guide adjustments to advising, financial hold management, course availability, and transfer practices. By scaling proven strategies and strengthening transfer pipelines, the college sustains recent gains and advances Maryland's attainment goals while keeping a clear, degree-first mission.

Hood College

55% Completion Goal Annual Report

Submitted by Interim Provost Paige Eager, PhD on 10/1/25

The Maryland Guaranteed Access Grant

The Maryland Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant has been a vital resource in supporting enrollment and retention for low-income, in-state students. Through Hood’s participation in the GA Grant Match Program, eligible students have received between \$17,500 and \$22,100 annually in state funds, matched by the College. This partnership has significantly improved access to higher education for populations historically underrepresented in bachelor’s degree attainment.

Policy changes over the past decade have influenced the program’s effectiveness. The removal of the GPA requirement broadened access, expanding funding to students with lower college-going and retention rates. While this improved equity, it also introduced new budgetary challenges for the state, leading to reductions in maximum awards. For example, although the maximum award steadily increased in prior years, the 2025–2026 academic year saw a \$4,100 per-student reduction, disproportionately impacting returning students and institutions. In addition, administrative errors in award eligibility created further financial strain, with six Hood students incorrectly awarded the GA Grant, leaving the College and students responsible for covering approximately \$18,000 per student over three additional years.

While the GA Grant has been instrumental in advancing degree completion, these challenges highlight the need for greater stability and predictability in state aid programs.

<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Max GA Grant</i>
2015–2016	\$ 17,500.00
2016–2017	\$ 17,500.00
2017–2018	\$ 19,000.00
2018–2019	\$ 18,600.00
2019–2020	\$ 19,100.00
2020–2021	\$ 19,400.00
2021–2022	\$ 19,300.00
2022–2023	\$ 20,000.00
2023–2024	\$ 20,700.00
2024–2025	\$ 22,100.00
2025–2026	\$ 18,000.00

Tracking and Impact

	Cohort	one-yr retention	4-yr graduation rate	5-yr graduation rate	6-yr graduation rate
2018	239	74.5%	43.5%	54.0%	56.9%
MDGA	10	90.0%	60.0%	70.0%	80.0%
no-MDGA	229	73.8%	42.8%	53.3%	55.9%
2019	320	74.4%	42.5%	51.9%	54.1%
MDGA	19	100.0%	42.1%	63.2%	63.2%
no-MDGA	301	72.8%	42.5%	51.2%	53.5%
2020	293	72.0%	43.3%	53.6%	
MDGA	36	72.2%	36.1%	52.8%	
no-MDGA	257	72.0%	44.4%	53.7%	
2021	323	73.1%	47.1%		
MDGA	16	75.0%	75.0%		
no-MDGA	307	73.0%	45.6%		
2022	294	80.3%			
MDGA	17	88.2%			
no-MDGA	277	79.8%			
2023	303	68.0%			
MDGA	30	80.0%			
no-MDGA	273	66.7%			
2024	310	77.7%			
MDGA	45	73.3%			
no-MDGA	265	78.5%			

Retention Rates: The College tracks retention rates of students receiving the GA Grant match to determine if this financial support helps them stay enrolled from year to year. In general, the data supports the assertion that this financial support does lead to increased retention.

Graduation Rates: By analyzing graduation rates, Hood College can assess whether matching the GA Grant contributes to timely degree completion. The data shows that five and six year graduation rates are increased due to the additional financial support.

Strengthening Transfer Pathways

Over the past decade, transfer student recruitment has been a cornerstone of Hood's enrollment and degree completion strategy. Hood has articulation agreements with all Maryland community colleges, which have eased the transfer process and strengthened pathways to the bachelor's degree. Current renegotiations emphasize incentivizing associate degree completion prior to transfer and expanding agreements to include honors-to-honors pathways. In 2025, Hood also established its first out-of-state articulation agreement with Valley Forge Military College in Pennsylvania, thereby broadening transfer opportunities.

Internally, Hood has implemented a series of process improvements to better serve transfer students. These include raising baseline merit scholarships, promoting specialized scholarships (e.g., Honors and Phi Theta Kappa), and developing a transfer-specific communication flow. Enhanced visit opportunities, virtual advising sessions, and priority admission deadlines (while maintaining rolling admission) have provided transfer applicants with greater access to timely information and support. The nursing program also employs rolling admission, ensuring quicker decisions for students in this highly competitive field.

Closer collaboration with the Registrar's Office and the Student Success team has improved transcript evaluations, advising, and communication. Transfer students are connected early with faculty advisors in their major fields, strengthening academic integration and campus engagement. To further support community college pipelines, Hood has launched a transfer newsletter, expanded outreach through festivals and community events, and piloted on-site instant decision programs at Frederick Community College. These events eliminate technology barriers and provide immediate feedback and advising. The model will be extended to additional community colleges. Transfer students at Hood demonstrate strong graduation rates. For example, 74% of the transfer students who started in 2021 graduated in four years.

Academic Preparation and Support Initiatives

Hood has also introduced initiatives to prepare students academically before and after matriculation. One notable strategy is the free summer course program, which allows incoming students to enroll in a 100-level online course prior to fall entry. This initiative reduces financial burden, accelerates degree progress, and helps students adjust to the academic rigor of college coursework. Data analysis has demonstrated positive outcomes in student retention and success for participants. The summer course participation rate is about 30% and those taking the free summer courses have consistently showed higher one-year retention (average of 7%) over the past five years.

Another successful initiative is the Seminar for Academic Success (GNST 101), part of Hood's General Studies curriculum. This course equips students with essential learning strategies, time management skills, and self-directed learning approaches. Admission counselors frequently recommend GNST 101 to incoming students who may benefit from early academic scaffolding, such as first-year students with identified risk factors or transfer students who have struggled academically in previous coursework. Early engagement in GNST 101 has been linked to improved persistence and retention outcomes

GNST 101 summer and fall sessions

	Returning students*			New students			All sum/fall GNST 101		
	N	fa-fa retention		N	fa-fa retention		N	fa-fa retention	
2019-20	11	7	64%	66	39	59%	77	46	60%
2020-21	10	3	30%	87	55	63%	97	58	60%
2021-22	15	10	67%	77	55	71%	92	65	71%
2022-23	15	10	67%	74	61	82%	89	71	80%
2023-24	14	8	57%	92	66	72%	106	74	70%
2024-25	16	11	69%	74	48	65%	90	59	66%
sum/fall	81	49	60%	470	324	69%	551	373	68%

GNST 101 spring sessions

	Returning students*			New students			All spring GNST 101		
	N	sp-fa retention		N	sp-fa retention		N	sp-fa retention	
2019-20	58	42	72%	1	1	100%	59	43	73%
2020-21	52	34	65%	0			52	34	65%
2021-22	53	39	74%	4	4	100%	57	43	75%
2022-23	47	37	79%	1	1	100%	48	38	79%
2023-24	54	37	69%	4	1	25%	58	38	66%
2024-25	45	36	80%	3	0	0%	48	36	75%
spring	309	225	73%	13	7	54%	322	232	72%

Looking Ahead: Certificates and Alternative Credentials

While Hood’s primary mission remains focused on associate and bachelor’s degree attainment, the College also recognizes the increasing demand for postsecondary certificates and industry-recognized credentials. Hood has begun evaluating program areas where alternative credentialing can complement degree pathways, particularly in high-demand workforce fields. Over the next five years, Hood anticipates developing additional short-term credentials that align with industry needs while ensuring these programs articulate into degree pathways whenever possible. This dual approach will allow Hood to meet labor market demands without compromising its commitment to bachelor’s degree completion.



Johns Hopkins University submission to the Maryland Higher Education Commission 2025 report on best practices and annual progress toward the 55% completion goal

Johns Hopkins University places the utmost importance on our students' success and the achievement of both their goals and the university's expected outcomes for all those whom it admits. During the last decade the university has made significant strides in engendering and responding to a significantly changed student population. This has required new resources, initiatives, and attention to both enduring and new challenges regarding retention and completion.

Strategies the institution found most effective in supporting degree completion

To support its already high retention and completion rates the university has invested significant resources and attention to student health and well-being, financial aid, and academic advising. This has especially benefited first-time limited income (FLI) students. In fall 2024, the percentage of students from low-income backgrounds, measured by eligibility for federal Pell grants, rose to 23.8%, Hopkins' highest percentage to date. The percentage of first-generation college students rose from 19.4% to 20.3%. The percentage of students who are first-generation or low-income is 30.2%.¹

Need-blind Admission and Financial Aid

Via the university's transformative [\\$1.8 billion gift](#) from Michael R. Bloomberg, we were able to commit permanently to need-blind admissions and become a loan-free institution for our

¹ <https://hub.jhu.edu/2024/09/19/johns-hopkins-demographic-makeup-scotus-ruling>



undergraduates. We also became one of the first private research universities to end legacy admissions.

FLI supports – Hop-in summer program and PILOT program

While financial aid is a necessity for our students’ success, it does not guarantee success without complementary supports. We choose to highlight three in particular that have garnered nationwide plaudits for their success in supporting first-generation limited-income students- the [Hop-In summer program](#), the [PILOT program](#), and a newly designed success coach model in academic advising. Johns Hopkins recognizes that all students must receive support and guidance tailored to the conditions, requirements, and opportunities of their schools and programs. Concomitantly, it affirms the value of maintaining a consistency of experience that fosters students’ sense of affinity to Johns Hopkins as one university.

Growing demand for other postsecondary credentials

Non-degree and Non-credit

Responding to growing demand for other postsecondary credentials, the university is piloting a comprehensive learner record (CLR) and has developed an approved JHU micro-credentials framework. The CLR begins to orient the university to an increased focus on competencies and an understanding that learners’ mastery of competencies in curricular and co-curricular learning experiences be assessed, certified, and documented as a supplement to the standard transcript.² The microcredentials framework provides a mechanism for consistent

² <https://provost.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/JHU-CLR-Vision.pdf>



badging/microcredentialing of skills and competencies achieved in both traditional academic and non-degree and non-credit learning opportunities.

Advanced Academic Programs and Engineering for Professionals

Pre-dating and complementing efforts in this domain are the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences Advanced Academic Programs (AAP)³ and the Whiting School of Engineering's Engineering for Professionals. AAP offers more than twenty-five master's degrees to life-long learners who are upskilling to advance in their careers or change careers. The Whiting School of Engineering's Engineering for Professionals unit offers challenging part-time, online courses in more than twenty-four disciplines that address the most current engineering technologies, practices, and issues.⁴

Sustainability plan

The university's most recent strategic plan, 'Ten for One', reflects and accommodates these initiatives and objectives and the university's ordinarily applicable financial, planning, evaluation, and assessment approaches will ensure continued progress consistent with the plan's objectives.⁵

³ <https://advanced.jhu.edu>

⁴ <https://ep.jhu.edu>

⁵ <https://president.jhu.edu/ten-for-one>

Loyola University Maryland

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Toward the 55% Completion Goal

*In support of the Moore-Miller Administration 2024 State Plan Goal
“Setting up Maryland Students for Success”*

October 2025

Report Focus – Culmination of the Goal and Vision for the Future:

Maryland’s higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State’s degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies have your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor’s degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

1. Degree Attainment

Loyola University Maryland is one of only 27 Jesuit, Catholic universities in the United States. The University is committed to the educational and spiritual traditions of the Society of Jesus and to the ideals of liberal education and the development of the whole person. Loyola offers undergraduate and graduate programs that challenge students to understand the ethical dimensions of personal and professional life and to examine their own values, attitudes, and beliefs. Loyola organizes its programs in the humanities, natural and applied sciences, and the social sciences within Loyola College, programs in education and administrative leadership in the School of Education, and programs in business and accounting in the Joseph A. Sellinger, S.J., School of Business and Management.

Loyola’s graduation rate averages 80%. During the period of the State’s 2025 Completion Goal (2012-2025), Loyola awarded bachelor’s degrees to 12,462 students.¹ In the most recent five years, an average of approximately 135 degrees was awarded to first-generation college students.²

Cohorts of students who began college during the years most directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent constraints on physical presence on campus saw depressed graduation rates, and the University has been attentive to creating the supports necessary to increase student success, as measured by improved retention and graduation rates.

2. Strategies to Support Bachelor’s Degree Completion

Through a succession of strategic plans that predated and carried through the 13-year timeframe, Loyola has focused specifically on the adoption and enhancement of high-impact practices (HIPs), identified by the American Association of Colleges and Universities as teaching and learning practices that demonstrate significant educational benefits for students who participate in them.³ At Loyola, students engage in at least one of the HIPs and have several opportunities to engage in additional HIPs through the University’s

¹ Sources: Loyola University Maryland Office of Institutional Research and Maryland Higher Education Commission Degree Trend Data

² Source: Loyola University Maryland Office of Institutional Research

³ <https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/high-impact>

emphasis on experiential learning opportunities, such as capstone projects, collaborative assignments, common intellectual experiences, first-year seminars, community-engaged learning, internships, global and domestic learning tours, and undergraduate research. In Loyola's most recent administration of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in spring 2024, 88 percent of seniors self-reported that they had participated in two or more HIPs during their time at Loyola, and 46 percent of seniors identified that they had participated in four, five, or six HIPs.

Students benefit from support inside the classroom with exceptional faculty and outside the classroom through well-rounded offices and initiatives that attend to students' academic, personal, and spiritual development and care of the whole person. Loyola students transition to college life and learning in their first year through Messina, where they create lasting friendships and develop relationships with a student leader, faculty, advisors, and mentors who help them explore their passions and discover their potential by engaging in deep intellectual, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of life at Loyola and in Baltimore. Their introduction to college and personal and spiritual growth are further supported through student engagement beyond the classroom through more than 150 student-led clubs and organizations, arts and culture on and off campus, fitness and recreational sports, NCAA Division I sports, sponsored weekend events, leadership development, engagement with the community through service, religious and spiritual life through campus ministry, Catholic and ecumenical worship, interfaith events and ecumenical services, local houses of worship, retreats, and sacraments. Loyola's Center for Community, Service, and Justice engages students, faculty, alumni, and the broader Loyola community in education through service for a just and equitable world. Additional services promote the well-being of Loyola students through the Thrive Center for Student Success, the Counseling Center, the Student Health Center, The Women's Center, Residence Life & Housing, and Dining.

The Academic Advising and Support Center promotes the academic progress of Loyola's undergraduate population by working with students to understand their curricular components and their academic pathway to graduation. The Study offers undergraduate students 1:1 peer tutoring, content-based workshops, academic and organizational consulting, and drop-in tutoring for mathematics and statistics. The Writing Center, rooted in the Jesuit tradition, embraces the concept of *Eloquentia perfecta*—communication that not only achieves clarity and precision but also inspires action and personal growth—and offers undergraduate students support in brainstorming and organizing their ideas, clarifying their message, strengthening their arguments, and building their confidence in their academic writing. The Loyola/Notre Dame Library is an innovative center of engaged learning and research that advances the academic and spiritual missions of Loyola University Maryland and Notre Dame of Maryland University by supporting students' use of information and technology. Loyola's Disability and Accessibility Services provides students with disabilities the equal opportunity to participate in all Loyola courses, programs, and activities fully and independently by collaborating with campus partners to proactively remove disability-related barriers and improve accessibility and by coordinating accommodations for students with disabilities.

The Rizzo Career Center at Loyola University Maryland serves all students and alumni in discovering fulfilling career paths, preparing to present their best selves to the world, and maximizing available resources to achieve their goals. Total engagement in Academic Year 2024-25 reached 65.8 percent of undergraduate students through career center appointments or career events, including 84.8 percent of first-year students. Loyola asks our graduating class about their post-college status within six months of graduation. Each year, about 95 percent of our respondents have reported that they are working, continuing education, serving in the military or engaged in a post-college service program like the Jesuit

Volunteer Corps or Americorps. The *Wall Street Journal's 2025 Best Colleges in the U.S.* ranked Loyola 5th in the nation for Career Preparation.

3. Plans for Expansion of Initiatives for Student Success

Together We Rise: Loyola University Maryland's Strategic Plan for 2030 sets a vision for steadfast commitment to student success and transformational excellence in fulfilling its mission. Through the initiatives of the plan, Loyola aspires to be a preeminent university for student success, an institution that equips students to prosper and achieve significance by living a meaningful life for and with others.

Among the initiatives to achieve these goals, Loyola will create an integrated and comprehensive support network for students and invest in faculty development. For example, the newly launched Thrive Center for Student Success provides holistic coaching to students as they navigate the complexities of college life. Through orientation, mentoring, programming, and outreach, the Center strives to ensure that each student flourishes at Loyola and beyond. The Thrive Center employs academic enrichment and intervention services and programs, mentorship programs, and incoming first-year programs to empower students to grow intellectually, socially, recreationally, culturally, spiritually, and vocationally.

To meet the educational goals of today's students and tomorrow's leaders, Loyola will build on our liberal arts foundation to create new mission- and market-aligned programs, especially in fields of health and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). For example, in Academic Year 2025-26, Loyola launched a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program and new undergraduate academic degree programs in Environmental Science, Environmental Studies, and Forensic Science. Recent proposals are leveraging our historical strengths in the business school as well as expanding upon them with some new majors that emphasize STEM and experiential learning. University-wide, faculty have worked to define and further develop the incorporation of experiential learning in their academic programs.

4. Balancing Degree Attainment and Demand for Post-secondary Credentials

Loyola is approved to award bachelor's degrees, post-baccalaureate certificates, master's degrees, post-master's certificates, professional practice doctor's degrees, and research/scholarship doctor's degrees. As Loyola has watched the growing trend for industry-recognized credentials, a limited number of faculty members has piloted offering a certified badge through coursework that showcases important skills, such as the ability to earn a personalized analytics academic badge in partnership with SAS Institute, Inc. Another example includes Business Intelligence and Data Mining.

Loyola has recently created stackable credentials at the graduate level, through the creation of certificates within already approved degree programs. This new approach for Loyola aims to meet graduate student needs and to create new pathways for students to demonstrate their achievements to employers along the way toward earning a master's degree. Loyola promotes the attainment of advanced degrees for undergraduate students through accelerated pathways that allow students to decrease their time to completion and expenses when qualified to engage in graduate level courses and apply them toward their undergraduate degree.

Loyola will continue to monitor student needs, demand, and employers' valuing of non-degree credentials. As opportunities arise to introduce new credentials in alignment with strategic plan goals, Loyola will continue to grow and revitalize its programs, with an eye on forming future leaders dedicated to service and justice.

Throughout its history, **Maryland Institute College of Art** has made informed and strategic decisions to ensure student success and completion in its undergraduate BFA programs. Our College's Mission speaks directly to completion: EMPOWER students to forge creative, purposeful lives and careers in a diverse and changing world. THRIVE with Baltimore. MAKE the world we imagine.

As the oldest continuously degree-granting art and design college in the nation, MICA has almost 200 years of student success stories. Our statistics over the past ten years reflects our success: MICA has a first-year retention rate between 88% (Fall 2017→Fall 2018) to 83% (Fall 2023→Fall 2024) and a six-year graduation rate of 72% for its Fall 2018 cohort. Pell Recipients: 59% of the F17 Pell recipients graduated within 6 years; 66% of the F18 Pell recipients graduated within 6 years.

MICA begins planning for completion at the very beginning of our students' journey with us.

Strategy: Employ Rigorous Evaluation during Admissions Outreach

Admissions Counselors ensure that incoming cohorts meet the rigorous standards of our undergraduate programs by reviewing portfolios and high school transcripts. When students are accepted and register with the college, MICA begins the outreach process to focus on student success at the institution.

Strategy: Offer Tailored Orientations

MICA offers cohort focused orientation programs to meet the needs of first year and transfer students. Led by the Center for Student Engagement, orientations focus on MICA's mission: *EMPOWER students to forge creative, purposeful lives and careers in a diverse and changing world. THRIVE with Baltimore. MAKE the world we imagine.*

During **Orientation**, students and their families have opportunities to consider academic preparedness, MICA policies, and institutional resources. Early connections are made during orientation to campus resources, such as the Student Counseling Center, Academic Advisors, Accessibility and Disability Services, and the Writing Studio. New students participate in an engaging three-day orientation for new students in the fall and a special orientation for students who begin in the spring semester.

Strategy: Infuse the First Year Experience Curriculum with foundational skills to ensure pathways to completion.

In the past ten years, MICA has undergone two assessments and renewals of the First Year Experience Curriculum. MICA maintains a structured focus throughout its first-year programming and curriculum, acknowledging that success in the first year, particularly the first semester, is an indicator of completion. The First Year Experience curriculum balances foundational skills for creative practice with critical thinking. In Liberal Arts, students take a first-year writing course that focuses on developing research and writing particular to various genres and subjects. This strategy allows MICA to begin a student's journey with us focusing on several institutional learning outcomes: *MICA students will have expertise in their chosen discipline(s), including an understanding of the historical context of their field, the technical skills required for purposeful application, and the knowledge necessary to maintain a professional practice. MICA students will gather; evaluate critically; and effectively and responsibly use information.*

Strategy: Develop Engaged Live/Learn Communities and Accelerator Program

MICA continues to develop innovative programming for students in the first year, including the **First Year Fellows programming for Creative Entrepreneurship**. Students selected for this experience live together in a specific residence hall; are enrolled in entrepreneurial-focused First Year Experience classes, and participate in co-curricular programming specifically designed to support budding entrepreneurship. *MICA students will demonstrate understanding of the importance of creative practices and their impact on communities, society, and the world.*

Other Live Learn communities have been developed at MICA. The **Global Creatives First Year Fellows** program supports an inclusive community with international and domestic students. It promotes global connections through intercultural living, cohort-based learning, and mentorship. Enrolled students take their core first-year classes together. Additionally, dedicated programming, including international career panels, cultural exchanges, and travel funding workshops are available and designed to develop students' global outlook and exploration of opportunities for future work, study, and travel. This supports our institutional outcome: *MICA students will understand the interconnectedness of local and global issues and be able to ethically engage in a variety of cultural contexts.*

The third live-learn cohort is **Ecosystems, Sustainability, and Justice (ESJ) First Year Fellows**. This community focuses on environmental and social justice. Through coursework, studio practice, and collaborative discussions, students explore art and design work in a cohort focused on the interconnected environmental and social impact. *MICA students will take informed and responsible action when addressing issues of... social and environmental justice.*

A long-standing program that has led to real results in MICA's completion agenda is the **Art & Design College Accelerator Program (ADCAP)**, providing a fully funded pathway to high-quality art and design college education for 15 Baltimore City students in each cohort. Participating students will receive not only the advantages of MICA's educational material and curriculum, but also receive the benefits of a dedicated support network and individual mentorship beginning in high school, continuing through degree completion, and beyond.

Strategy: Develop and maintain student relationships in Professional Advising

The use of professional advisors has been a long-standing mechanism at the College to ensure appropriate connections between the students, the programs and the faculty of college. Our advisors foster thoughtful connections between the students and the curriculum to create creative pathways to degree completion. MICA's commitment to its students and their curricular decisions leading to completion reflects a pathway to achieving an institutional learning outcome: *MICA students will envision, implement, and evaluate various possibilities as part of their creative practices and critical processes.*

Degree Audit has been implemented at MICA, so students can be engaged in their own completion strategy while also exploring various options including minors, majors and co-majors.

Strategy: Engage faculty to Provide Insights on Student Course Experience

Academic Affairs has policies to ensure ongoing engagement with student success, retention and degree completion. The Faculty at MICA use the learning management system, Canvas, which allows for students 24-hour, seven day a week access to course syllabus, assignments, grades, and schedule. The Provost's Office requires mid-term grades for all students to give an accurate assessment of their standing in a course. Faculty are available for weekly office hours, and department chairs assist students with a variety of degree completion advising as they progress through the curriculum. Faculty also collaborate with the Office of Student Academic Success by providing referrals to activate student support services, including academic and wellness, described in detail below.

Strategy: Strengthen faculty Development to support ELL Student Course Experience

MICA has made an investment in English language learning faculty, who in turn have developed language supported curriculum. While no ELL student is required to take ELL supported coursework, it is available for all first-year courses in the Liberal Arts, and there are additional upper-level courses tailored to ELL students. Faculty have access to a professional development online course developed by MICA ELL faculty entitled Integrating English Language Learners into Instruction.

Strategy: Support Student Success with a Matrixed approach

MICA has made a commitment to create an interconnectedness in our internal systems to ensure student success. The college has implemented a committee structure to engage in an ongoing and thorough review of policy, and procedures across systems with membership from Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and Students Affairs. Facilitating this work in the Provost's Office is a new Assistant Provost for Engaged Teaching, Learning, and Student Success. Among the areas that this position oversees is the Office for **Student Academic Success**, which is dedicated to responsive one to one and group programming to meet the needs of students to encourage persistence and increase retention rates. Through faculty referrals, the office makes targeted outreach to students to facilitate positive results in the classroom.

The Student Academic Success Office oversees the **Writing Studio** at MICA. Since 2020, MICA has employed virtual tutoring sessions, offering sessions into the evening in response to student needs. Writing tutors work with students on writing assignments for class as well as drafting and revision of artist statements, grant proposals, cover letters, and resumes.

A new position developed out of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions supports programing and targeted engagement with first year first semester students. The **Associate Director of New Student Engagement** works with special populations of first-generation students, commuter students, and referred students from faculty observations to ensure that the crucial time of the first semester is a positive one, as it directly correlates to completion.

Strategy: Develop and resource a full-service Wellness Model

MICA's holistic approach to student success connects creative academic focus with the physical, mental and social well-being of our students, which is integral to student success, retention, and completion. All students benefit from the programming from the Wellness team at MICA which includes an onsite full service Health Center, Fitness Center, Student Counseling Center, and Accessibility and Disability Services.

In 2023, MICA moved to an in-house **Student Health Center** that is an outpatient primary health care facility providing comprehensive medical care for both acute and stable chronic illness, preventative medical care, and health education services. The Fitness Center offers various classes and intramural sports as well as an on-site gym. **Student Counseling Center** provides a broad range of high quality, relevant, and ethical services and resources to the MICA community via the PATHs model, a needs-based service delivery model that allows trained counselors and psychologists to develop individualized support plans for MICA students. **Accessibility and Disability Services** ensures equal access to MICA educational opportunities for those students with documented disabilities. MICA also has a center for **Student Outreach and Support** to advocate to faculty for students with extenuating circumstances, such as bereavement or prolonged illness.

Strategy: Empower Student Engagement to Prepare for Post-Graduate careers

MICA has developed and refined the opportunities for student curricular and co-curricular engagement to create marketable skills and envision their post graduate life. Newly embedded into the Core Curriculum for every undergraduate degree plan is the **Creative Experiential Learning (CEL)** six-credit component. This is designed to intentionally integrate professional experiences as part of a student's pathway to degree fulfillment. Through CEL-designated coursework, faculty and staff will connect students with Baltimore's rich ecosystem of arts, design, and creative industries, providing pathways for internships, global and intercultural exchanges, creative entrepreneurship, professional practice, community engagement, and social impact work. This is a purposeful approach to strengthening and expanding our offerings in experiential learning and preparation for creative and artistic fulfillment and impactful careers.

The **Center for Mission and Community Learning** supports meaningful civic engagement by building the capacity of students, faculty, and community partners to work together on real-world challenges through education, creative practice, and sustained collaboration.

The **Center for Creative Impact** leads interdisciplinary, creative, impact-driven, and funded projects that address real-world challenges and social issues — helping students to acquire the skills needed; to collaborate across various disciplines; Gain practical experience learning in the field; Establish professional and real-world connections; Explore multiple career pathways across diverse fields.

The **Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Career Development** is our campus hub for career readiness and support. Internships count for curricular credit at MICA and are built into several degree programs. Career Development offers MICA network, contacts between students and alumni, and iGrad, a financial literacy tool. MICA participates in SNAAP, Strategic National Arts Alliance Project, offering data on key indicators (e.g., graduation rates, percentage pursuing arts careers, non-arts career paths, income levels).

The **Ratcliffe Center for Creative Entrepreneurship** was made possible with a generous gift from the Phillip E. and Carole R. Ratcliffe Foundation. The Center addresses the evolving needs of artists and designers in the new creative economy. Its activities include curricular, co-curricular, and competition showcases.

All of these curricular and student engagement initiatives support the institutional learning outcome: *MICA students will synthesize ideas and experiences to generate questions and respond with inventive and imaginative thinking and making.*

MICA's Vision for Postsecondary Credentials: 2025 to 2030

MICA is balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials by intentionally collaborating across schools on an Academic Vision that embraces traditional and non-traditional students in creative experiential learning (CEL). As badges, stackable credentials, and degrees converge within the MICA ecosystem, we have the opportunity to define a new model for creative education.

Badging is an option that MICA can pursue with the development of the CEL six-credit coursework. This takes the MICA education and makes it visible from the beginning of each student's educational journey, no matter when or where they complete their degree.

MICA realizes its Academic Vision for potential cohorts of freelancers, entrepreneurs, and creatives in its **Professional Studios** courses. The inaugural courses, *Essentials of Culinary Photography* and *Generative 3D Assets for Game Design* bring MICA's 200 years of expertise in art and design education to those who want career-relevant learning in targeted, industry recognized coursework and credentials.

In the professional online and low residency programs for advanced degrees, there are courses and credentials designed to be modular: skill sharpeners for career growth, and stackable credentials potentially leading to **certificates or** advanced degrees. This approach directly addresses the demands of the creative economy—supporting Baltimore's growing innovation ecosystem, fueling regional workforce development, and contributing to national conversations about skills-based education and lifelong learning. In doing so, MICA not only sustains its reputation as a leading art and design institution, but also positions itself as a national hub for cultivating creative talent at every stage of the educational journey.

In the year preceding its bicentennial, MICA has reflected the educational opportunities for the citizens of Maryland and now the world through in person, undergraduate, graduate, degree completion, professional, online, in-person, and low-residency opportunities. Our Academic Vision for the future is bolder than ever, with greater options for empowering students to forge creative, purposeful lives and careers in a diverse and changing world; thriving with Baltimore and making the world we imagine.

McDaniel College:

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

McDaniel College has taken a focused approach to improving bachelor's degree completion rates, with an emphasis on transfer success, student support, academic engagement, and overall student well-being and development. These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to helping students stay on track and finish their degrees.

1. Supporting Transfer Students

Transfer student success has proven to be one of our most impactful strategies. Several initiatives ease the transfer process and ensure students don't lose momentum. We have:

- Established Block Transfer and Transfer Plus, which provide clear pathways for students bringing credits from other institutions, thus allowing them to retain earned credits and continue progressing toward their degrees without delays.
- Partnered with the MHEC Transfer Success Initiative to strengthen the path from an associate degree at Maryland's community colleges to graduating from our state's four-year institutions colleges and universities. This aligns our transfer policies with best practices across the region.
- Expanded use of technology and articulation tools, such as the Transfer Evaluation System (TES), which allows students and advisors to better understand how previously earned credits apply toward degree requirements.
- Developed academic maps in every major to give students a semester-by-semester guide for course selection, which improves the time-to-degree.

These efforts earned us Phi Theta Kappa's recognition as "one of the most transfer-friendly college in the nation."

2. Building Student-Centered Support

Academic planning alone doesn't guarantee student retention, so we have built a model of student support that combines academics with belonging and wellness. Some highlights of this model include:

- A centralized learning commons in the library providing STEM tutoring, writing support, and academic coaching, making it a "one stop shop" for students seeking help.
- Use of academic maps along with student planning tools helps students track their progress and plan.
- Student Success Coaches for all first-year students and peer mentors in every First-Year Seminar (FYS) course to strengthen community and encourage help-seeking.

- EAB Navigate 360 for early alerts, progress reports, and coordinated proactive advising and timely interventions.
- Expanded programs through SASS (Student Accessibility & Support Services), initiatives like Thrive, and embedded courses such as My Design, focus on students' strengths, purpose, belonging and well-being.

Data from surveys like the HEDS New Student Survey and the ACHA National College Health Assessment have informed these efforts, helping us identify and address gaps in belonging, wellness, and student engagement.

3. Investing in Faculty and Staff Student success depends on the people who guide them. We've strengthened this work through:

- A comprehensive onboarding and advisor training program.
- Ongoing professional development which prepares faculty and staff to support students' evolving academic and career goals.

Looking Ahead

Our goal now is to embed these practices into the fabric of the College. That means sustaining transfer pathways, expanding wellness and belonging efforts, and continuing to adapt to student and workforce needs.

We are also extending career preparation across programs:

- At the graduate level, many of our master's programs already integrate industry certifications and professional competencies.
- At the undergraduate level, required courses like *My Career* and other career-embedded curricula help students connect their studies with future work.

Over the past decade, McDaniel College has strengthened transfer pipelines, expanded student support, and made career readiness central to the student experience. We'll continue evolving these efforts to ensure all our students find success here and beyond graduation.



**Mount St. Mary's University
Emmitsburg, MD**

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Mount St. Mary's University (MSMU) is proud to partner with other institutions of higher education in the state to achieve the 55% completion goal and we applaud the State for making student success a priority. The mission of MSMU - to "graduate ethical leaders who are inspired by a passion for learning who lead lives of significance in service to God and others" – is closely aligned with the goal and because of our focus on student success, our six-year graduation rate since the completion goal was announced has consistently exceeded 55%. In this final report, we will highlight some of our most effective practices from the past twelve years. Then, we will describe the student success initiatives in our new strategic plan that will carry us forward for the next several years. Finally, we will provide some perspective on the anticipated growth of certificates in our academic portfolio.

Implementing High Impact Practices

MSMU has intentionally invested in evidence-based High Impact Practices (HIP) that have been shown to improve student retention and graduation rates. Service is a HIP that is also a core component of our mission. There are many ways that MSMU undergraduates can take part in community service including the 15-week Semester of Service program, week-long Immersion Trips over Spring Break, and numerous service events like the Special Olympics weekend. The RISE Leadership program is a unique leadership development program focused on serving others. The number of seniors participating in service activities has grown by 62% since 2017.

Conducting research with faculty and completing a capstone experience (both HIPs) are hallmarks of a Mount education. MSMU faculty are active scholars who excel at integrating their research with teaching and enjoy mentoring students through their own independent research projects. Over 60% of MSMU students conduct a mentored research project with a faculty member. Over 75% of students complete a capstone experience that involves synthesizing what they have learned during their four years. The annual SPARC Festival is a three-day showcase of student creativity and research where students have the opportunity to share their research, writings, artwork, and performances with the entire university community.

Internships are another high impact practice that MSMU promotes to help students explore career options and establish a network in their chosen field. The Career Center helps students locate high quality internship locations and helps prepare them for the opportunity. More than 70% of MSMU students completed an internship in each of the last three years and many of those experiences led to employment after graduation.

Enabling Greater Access to Higher Education

Student completion is inextricably tied to the student’s ability to finance their education. MSMU is keenly aware of and respects the sacrifices that many students and families make to attain a college degree. To that end, 100% of Mount St. Mary’s undergraduate students receive institutional aid that significantly lowers the cost of attendance. Students are grateful for the Sellinger Funds from the state that enhance their financial aid packages. MSMU aggressively pursues gifts and grants that can expand scholarship opportunities such as the \$498,000 C-STEM grant award from the National Science Foundation. The Financial Aid office and a team of professional advisors proactively educate students and families about college financing, where to find scholarships, and how to navigate the FAFSA. With over half of our students from Maryland, we assist students in their applications for the Maryland Guaranteed Access grant that allows many students to attend college that otherwise would not be able to.

Through one-on-one advising with faculty members, we aim to graduate students within 4 years so that they don’t have to pay for additional semesters when it is not necessary. In 2024, 95% of our graduating students completed their degree within 4 years.

Signature Student Support Services

MSMU provides a plethora of student support services that emphasize personalized service and one-on-one advising. The Mount Cares Committee is a team of representatives from multiple segments of the campus community—Academic Affairs, Residence Life, Public Safety, Campus Ministry, Athletics, and Learning Services. The Committee meets on a bi-weekly basis to discuss students who have been identified as at-risk by professors or staff members. Students are assigned a “case manager” from the Committee who reaches out and offers resources and support where needed. For the past five years, the Mount has been a member of the Move the Needle Project, a consortium of 24 institutions coordinated by Credo™ that fosters a sustainable campus culture of student success. Student demand for mental health services has grown rapidly over the last several years and the Mount has responded by expanding counseling options and staffing.

Sustaining Student Success Efforts

MSMU recently completed a new three-year Strategic Plan (2025-28) with student success as one of its four Strategic Initiatives. Goals within this Initiative include “Elevate the student experience”,

“Increase student engagement”, and “Promote student success through high-quality advising”. As part of the strategic plan, these initiatives are the priority for the institution for the near future. MSMU is committed to a process of continuous improvement in student learning and in all of its functions and services. Findings from regular assessment efforts are used to inform the goals and activities for the subsequent year.

Certificates and Credentials

Employers and students are expressing more interest in certificates and credentials. This is especially true for the adult undergraduate population that is already working. MSMU will continue to offer post-baccalaureate certificate programs that meet our workforce needs in the region. Our first undergraduate certificates were introduced this year and we anticipate adding a modest number over the next several years. MSMU is committed to meeting the changing educational needs that will advance the workforce in our state and region.



2025 Notre Dame of Maryland University Annual Report on the 55% Completion Goal

Over the past ten years, Notre Dame of Maryland's undergraduate student population has changed in important ways, and the University's approach to student success has evolved to support its students accordingly. Throughout the decade the focus has been facilitating the students' timely completion of the bachelor's degree. (Notre Dame has never offered associate's degrees.) What has remained consistent over that time period is the University's commitment to an individualized, personal approach to teaching, advising, and supporting students.

Over the past decade, the University's student success function has expanded to accommodate students whose obstacles to degree completion may be driven by myriad factors. In 2015 there was a single associate dean in the School of Arts, Sciences and Business (SASB) who served as a resource to first-year students but whose primary responsibility was support for students on academic probation. That support included resources for time management, tutoring, and study skills. Resources were offered to students primarily on a case by case basis and not widely publicized. Because SASB had oversight of the general education curriculum, the school housed the student success function as well. Support for nursing or education undergrads beyond the core curriculum was left to those schools except in the case of probationary students. Recognizing a need for a more comprehensive student success plan, the University applied for and received a five-year federal Title III grant that allowed for 2019 implementation of a multi-pronged effort. While the COVID pandemic disruption slowed implementation of the project somewhat, ultimately the student success initiatives supported by the Title III funding were a boon to students whose learning in high school and/or college had been disrupted by remote education, social isolation, and situational uncertainty.

As part of the Title III initiative, the newly created position of Director of Student Success began to report to the provost and not to the Dean of SASB. That organizational change allowed for better communication with the appropriate schools to support nursing and education students beyond their general education courses as well as SASB students. The grant funded refurbishment of existing campus space to create a Student Success Center staffed by peer coaches and offering resources including loaner laptops and textbooks, school supplies, and a comfortable place for individual or group study. Expanded subject-specific tutoring as well as a testing center for those who need accommodation for completion of timed assignments also became available. Perhaps most significantly, the grant enabled the University to adopt EAB's Navigate 360 platform to facilitate communication, record keeping, advising, and consulting about students' academic progress. Navigate allows students, faculty, and staff to share information readily so that everyone is up to date on a student's situation. More than 90% of faculty have been trained in using Navigate effectively, and last year the platform led to more than 1900 student appointment scheduled with faculty, advisors, tutors, and other staff. Since the

September 2024 end of the Title III grant period, the University has committed funds from the regular operating budget to continue to support its initiatives: a dedicated director, the Testing, Tutoring, and Student Success Centers, and use of Navigate. The University has also reimagined and revamped its required first-year course to emphasize habits of scholarship for academic success in the first semester and community engagement and service learning in the second. In response to weak student satisfaction with academic advising, the University has also increased training and provision of resources for per-major and major advisors.

Another important retention initiative of the past ten years (and more) has been support of one growing student demographic in particular: first generation students. In 2010 the University began the Trailblazers Program. Students who are the first in their families to attend college are invited to participate when they matriculate. If they do not elect to join in their first-year, they have the option of becoming Trailblazers later in their time as undergraduates. The program has a dedicated director and an annual calendar of social events as well as workshops on academic and personal success. A two-part workshop on financial literacy, first offered in 2023, has become a popular annual offering. One of its aims is to help students understand how to pay for college and how to make financially sound choices about student loans and personal finance. Trailblazers in their junior and senior year partner with students in their first and second years to provide experienced peer support. The affinity program is not only popular but successful in retaining students. For the past three years, as incoming classes have included more than 200 students each year, more than 45 students per year have joined Trailblazers, and first to second year retention in the program has been above 90% in that period. The program has had an average 4 year graduation rate hovering around 50% over the past decade. Financial precarity continues to be the most common cause of first generation attrition. NDMU will continue the program as well as its effort to support students through all available financial aid as well as knowledge of personal financial management.

As the Completion Plan implies, our retention efforts are coupled with focus on graduating students who can build careers in areas satisfying to them and in demand in the marketplace, particularly in Maryland. The strength of NDMU's program mix is in fields with value in the workplace. Initiatives around degree attainment do not have to compete for resources with programs for credentials with workplace value. NDMU focuses on post-baccalaureate certificates for those who already have a degree and want to strengthen their workforce value. The University recognizes that the Maryland Community College System is uniquely positioned to offer post-secondary certificates to Maryland learners.

Our strong undergraduate programs in nursing, biology, and health sciences attract students who want to pursue careers in healthcare. Graduate programs in education, nursing, pharmacy, integrative health, art therapy, occupational therapy, and physician assistant studies mean pathways to career development. Education, nursing, and integrative health in particular offer opportunities for working professionals to advance their careers by earning post-baccalaureate certificates or graduate degrees. With the August 2025 finalization of NDMU's acquisition of Maryland University of Integrative Health to create our new School of Integrative Health, the University has added complementary healthcare approaches to its curriculum. Faculty and administration are working across programs to create opportunities for stackable credentials in integrative health for current students and practitioners in nursing, pharmacy, and occupational therapy to begin with.

The School of Integrative Health offers 3 post-baccalaureate certificates in Integrative Health Studies, Ayurvedic Wellness Practice and Cannabis Science. These are of interest to current practitioners and also show promise for pairing with other health-focused degrees NDMU offers as above.

The School of Education (SoE) offers master's and doctoral programs as well as five different, specialized post-baccalaureate certificates. The certificates attest to advanced expertise in important areas of education including Teaching and Learning with AI, TESOL and special education. These are popular programs with in-service teachers since they are designed to meet specific needs in classrooms in Maryland and beyond. The AI certificate is the most recent curricular innovation from the SoE. Approved by MHEC in September 2025, it is already enrolling teachers from state school systems, Montgomery County in particular.

Notre Dame's efforts over the next five years will continue to focus on degree attainment *and* viable credentials to meet workforce demand. In the short term, integrative health will be key to that effort as the University continues to develop stackable credential combinations that can benefit healthcare providers. Education will continue to be a Notre Dame leader in both areas. Undergraduate enrollment increases have resulted in growth in the number of undergraduate Education majors, and our student success initiatives will support them to timely graduation. Notre Dame leads private institution of higher learning in Maryland, and is #2 in the state overall, in the number of graduates who earn teacher licensure. As the University continues to add innovative in-demand programs, as it has recently done with the AI certificate and the EdD with policy emphasis, it will continue to serve teachers and administrators who want to advance their careers well.

Other existing areas are primed for growth as well. The post-baccalaureate certificate in Risk Management is already responsive to the employment pipeline. Faculty in the program are working with the National Labs to ensure that the Risk Management curriculum responds to the need for students who can pursue Risk Management in STEM-related areas. In the current environment, of course, the program will monitor the effects of changes in federal government policy.

Maryland's Capitol Technology University and NDMU have agreements whereby NDMU students can earn majors in various Engineering fields as well as a minor in Cybersecurity through the partnership. These agreements have only existed for the past two years, and as both partners commit more resources to promoting them, they will be another source of future growth. The two universities are awaiting MHEC approval of a joint degree in Healthcare Technology Engineering, a specialized program designed specifically to meet a labor market need for specialized expertise. Thoughtfully researched projections envision enrollment of 8 students in the first cohort with a total of 40 students across 4 classes in five years.

The University is also allocating resources to develop innovative learning spaces and opportunities in growing majors that align with employment opportunities. In fall 2025 these include business and computer studies, and information from Enrollment Management suggests those majors will be popular with matriculating students for the next couple of years.

As the Maryland 2025 55% project wraps up, Notre Dame of Maryland University has positioned itself well to continue to support its growing student body to timely graduation and to offer opportunities to enable future students to graduate with a credential that sets them on a career path for professional success.

If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Dr. Martha Walker, Provost & Vice President of Academic Affairs, at (410) 532-5321 or mwalker12@ndm.edu.

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress Towards the 55% Completion Goal

As a small community with a common undergraduate program of study, retention and student support is at the heart of what happens at St. John's College. In reflecting on the last decade of retention and student support efforts, we have found that many programs had incremental effects on student completion, including programs focused on student financial aid and support for multilingual students. However, the most meaningful progress has come from improvements in the delivery of mental health services and the implementation of an overall wellness strategy that integrated the counseling center the student health center into one holistic Student Health and Wellness Center.

Over the past decade the College has transformed the delivery model of not only mental health services but also of medical services. Based on the Healthy People 2020 Framework released by the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Okanagan Charter, and within the ecological model of public health prevention strategy, the approach that St. John's College implemented over the past decade, the Holistic Wellness Model, seeks to identify and implement coordinated strategies to intervene across a variety of health determinants ranging from individual factors to institutional factors. Within this model, interventions targeted multiple variables that contribute to or detract from overall mental health and wellness both for individuals and the campus community.

Strategies were implemented across four different factors:

- *Individual Factors* include things like demographic information such as gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation; medical and mental health history and prior experiences with medical and mental health care; and attitudes, skills, and beliefs that impact how individuals view themselves. Interventions include individual mental health treatment, crisis and support hotlines, and medication.
- *Interpersonal Factors* include relationships with peers, faculty, and staff at the college; relationships with immediate and extended family; and relationships with romantic partners. Interventions include group therapy, training workshops, skills development education, and support groups.
- *Community Factors* include athletic and intramural programs, student organizations, study groups, outreach programming, and community lectures and events. Interventions include social norming campaigns, public health outreach events, and community partnerships with mental health and wellness organizations.
- *Institutional Factors* includes college policies and procedures, decisions around resource allocation, and institutional messaging around mental health and wellness. Interventions include systematic policy reviews, student surveying and data collection efforts, and broad messaging around the importance of mental health and wellness from campus leadership.

While the implementation of the overall framework was probably the single most important strategy, shifting from independently operating health and counseling centers to a fully integrated Student Health and Wellness Center was essential in operationalizing the strategy. Within this Center, medical services, mental health services, psychiatric services, and wellness services (nutritional counseling, workshops, outreach, etc) are delivered within the same physical location and utilize a single, shared, electronic health record system. All clinical staff participate in weekly clinical care meetings where complex student cases are discussed, and treatment plans finalized. While most of the services provided constitute direct patient care (Individual-level Interventions), staff within the Center also plan and implement outreach programs monthly with the goal of increasing the general public health knowledge of the campus community on topics like suicide, substance use, sleep, nutrition, and how to manage stress and anxiety (Community-level Interventions).

Some additional concrete examples of new evidence-based best practices that have been implemented include:

- All Student Health and Wellness Center mental health providers completed training in an evidence-based, suicide-specific treatment framework, the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicide (CAMS). Medical staff received training specific to identifying mental health concerns within a medical setting. This is crucial in identifying students who are presenting for medical treatment caused by mental health conditions and referring them for support.
- The college contracted with ProtoCall Crisis Response to provide 24/7 support to our students who are experiencing a mental health crisis, including and specifically those who are experiencing suicidal thoughts or thoughts of non-suicidal self-injury.
- Real-time counseling support is available to students 24/7 through a third-party telehealth provider. This allows students to receive real-time support for issues that may not represent a “mental health crisis” but for which they need immediate support.
- Through a partnership with a non-profit organization named “Minding Your Mind” Resident Advisors receive specialized training in supporting student mental health, how to engage in discussions around mental health topics, when to refer a student for mental health care, and how to support a student who may be experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Through a program called the Red Folder Project faculty and staff have the opportunity to receive training on mental health and how to identify students in crisis. This program includes QPR training. and training on how to engage students in discussions around mental health.
- Through a program called the Green Bandana Project students have the opportunity to receive training on mental health and how to identify students in crisis. This program includes QPR training. and training on how to engage students in discussions around mental health.
- Implemented a new Life Skills 101 workshop series with focus on self-care, stress management, proper nutrition, and sleep hygiene.
- Staff within the Student Health and Wellness Center engage with the campus community through student outreach events designed to change the campus culture around talking about mental health, seeking mental health support, and to further educate the community about specific mental health concerns.
- A new 75-minute session was added to new student orientation focused on mental health and wellness, how to seek resources and how to support a friend who is struggling.

New for the 2025-2026 academic year is a temporary case manager position within the Student Health and Wellness Center focused on ensuring students seeking services are connected to the most appropriate resources. As we look to the future, the hope is to secure funding to make this a permanent position. Additional opportunities include building out a series of programs to connect students with the outdoors and nature through both structured and self-guided programs and opportunities.

As a small community with under 500 undergraduate students, most multilingual students are international students attending college in the US. Efforts on addressing issues of completion with this population has focused mostly on ensuring that the English proficiency of the students is appropriate to meet the demands of the curriculum. This has included expanding the ESL requirement for admission to include additional test options beyond just the TOEFL or the IELTS such as the PTE and the DET. Additionally, all applicants are required to submit at least one essay and to participate in an admissions interview.

Two years ago, the college added a Discussion Based Application where students are provided with the opportunity to apply to the college through an interview and conversation with a much abbreviated application vs a standard written application. This has proven to be very effective in determining the level of English proficiency as it required two different interviews, participation in an online seminar, and submission of graded written work in English.

Once students are enrolled, should they find that they are struggling with English in classes they can access a writing tutor with specific training on ESL students. This tutor meets one-on-one with students to assist with writing, counsels students on acculturation to the college, assists with idiomatic speech, advises on class participation strategies, and helps with study planning.

Efforts in financial aid have been focused on both the financial aid awarding practices and strategy of the College and on individual counseling for students. Several years ago, the college started working with a third-party consulting firm to assist in providing a financial aid awarding strategy to help students access the college and ensure we were following best practices. A tuition reset in 2018 dramatically reduced the cost of undergraduate tuition making the college more affordable for students. While there have been modest increases since 2018, undergraduate tuition is still below that of other private liberal arts colleges.

Additionally, our financial aid counselors meet one-on-one with students to explain policies and loan requirements, assist in the financial aid application process, and help with financial and loan counseling so students understand the requirements for loan repayment upon graduation. In 2025 the college announced and implemented free tuition for families making less than \$75,000.

During the summer of 2020 a new summer bridge program was started with the goal of helping Pell grant recipients with the transition into the college. Since its first year this program has grown and is now open to any student who wishes to participate. Students who participate in this program highlight the importance it played in helping them get connected to campus resources, understand the academic expectations of the college, and feel more comfortable asking for help from faculty and academic supports.

While there is certainly an increased demand for other postsecondary credentials, St. John's College remains committed to our program of study and does not have any plans to offer other credentials. Students who wish to pursue other credentials are eligible to apply for summer funding to support coursework, classes, or other avenues that result in a certificate or credential of another type.

2025 Report to the Maryland Higher Education Commission — September 21, 2025

Stevenson shares the State’s goal of expanding educational access and attainment for all Marylanders and supports and contributes to Maryland’s 2025 completion goal. Stevenson’s 2024 report provided a sampling of initiatives we have put in place to support student mental health, multilingual learners, and student access to financial aid. This 2025 report summarizes the initiatives we have found most effective in supporting degree completion.

Enhanced Cross-Campus Collaboration

One of the most effective strategies we have implemented to support student success and retention has been to cultivate strong, collaborative, cross-divisional relationships with stakeholders from across campus. In 2022, the Center for Student Success established a Student Registration and Retention Operations Team (SRR Ops Team). The team meets biweekly and includes representatives from Admissions, Athletics, Faculty, Financial Aid, President’s Office, Registrar’s Office, Residence Life, Student Accounts, and Student Affairs. Priorities include policy review and revision, establishment of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), identification and removal of barriers to student retention, and centralizing/streamlining resources and retention efforts. This work has led to reimagining our Summer Orientation program, enhancing our onboarding process for new transfer students, revising our support of students on financial aid probation, and adjusting the timelines of several of our processes. Since the start of this team, we have seen increased collaboration and partnerships across campus as well as significant improvements in our overall student retention as well as a reduction in summer melt.

Other examples of enhanced collaboration are our Student-Athlete Support Team (SAST) and our Green Zone Initiative (GZI), which focuses on enhancing support for our military-connected students. The SAST includes staff from Athletics, Student Affairs, the Office of Academic Support, the Office of Academic Advising, and our NCAA Faculty Athletics Representative. The team meets biweekly to identify student-athletes who may be experiencing academic challenges and connects them with resources such as mentoring and academic coaching. Student-athletes comprise approximately 25% of Stevenson’s undergraduate student population, and since implementing this intentional support, student-athlete retention has improved significantly. The Green Zone Initiative started in the Spring of 2024 with the goal of providing ongoing support for our military-connected students as they transition into Stevenson and complete their degrees. There are four distinct goals of this initiative: Faculty and Staff Education, Policy Review and Revision, Connection to Campus Resources, and Building Community. The Green Zone Working Group includes representatives from Admissions, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs, and is another example of an intentional cross-campus partnership designed to enhance student success and degree completion.

Robust New Student Orientation and Transition Programs

Another priority for Stevenson has been to enhance support for students as they transition into the university. To achieve this goal, we implemented several new programs. First, we revised our June Summer Orientation program to include an extended day for students and added programming for family members so they could learn about resources on campus and ways to best support their student.

Second, we identified cohorts of incoming students who might benefit from specialized support and created small group programs to provide them with resources and support them through the transition. These programs include the Advantage Program for students registered with our Office of Accessibility and Disability Services as well as the Gear Up Program for our first-year football athletes. Third, we facilitate a First-Year 101 session for all new students during Welcome Week in August. This session gives them an overview of our Learning Management System, helps them build a time management plan, and ensures that they know their schedule and have their course materials. Finally, we created a new transition program for our transfer students and a January orientation for students joining us in the spring semester.

Collectively, these programs provide an opportunity for every new student at Stevenson to benefit from additional support as they transition into the university. They are supplemented by additional efforts in Student Affairs including a robust first-year residential experience and wellness groups centered around the transition to college. Like the initiatives outlined above, these programs have been part of our strategic plan to support student success, and they will continue to be a priority in the years to come.

Specialized Academic Support Programs

Over the past several years, Stevenson has focused on developing and implementing intentional programs to meet students where they are and support them in their academic and personal success. Examples of these programs include the development of the Stevenson University Writing Center as well as specialized programs such as Study Strategies Tutoring, Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL), Drop-In Group Study (DIGS), and Academic Coaching and Mentoring (ACM).

The Stevenson University Writing Center opened in 2024 and serves all students in our campus-based programs. Staffed by peer writing consultants, students can make an appointment to get help with all phases of the writing process, from understanding assignment guidelines to making final revisions. Consultants are available through appointments as well as drop-in hours, and the Writing Center also offers specialized services such as in-class workshops and write-ins, and assisting students in better understanding appropriate and ethical use of generative AI.

The Study Strategies Tutoring program was designed to supplement our content tutoring for various subjects. Study Strategies Tutors work with students to support general study skills such as note taking, time management, and study skills. This program is helpful for students who struggle with the transition to college as well as those who have challenges with executive functioning, organization, and planning. For course-specific support, we have free and unlimited individual tutoring as well as two programs that are offered in partnership with our academic departments: Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) and Drop In Group Study (DIGS). Both of these programs utilize specially trained peer tutors to provide supplemental learning and study sessions for challenging courses in math and science.

Students who need ongoing support throughout the semester can participate in the Academic Coaching and Mentoring (ACM) program which was designed to support students who are struggling academically. Paired with a staff member in our Office of Academic Support, students meet weekly to work on skills such as time management, prioritization, study skills, and getting connected to resources on campus to support their holistic success. This program is open to all students and is often required for students who are on Financial Aid probation or reinstated from suspension.

In addition to these robust programs, there are two online resources that provide students with 24/7 access to support. First, Resource Central is a SharePoint site that students can access directly through

Blackboard, our Learning Management System. Developed in 2023, Resource Central serves as a one-stop shop for student support. It includes information on study skills, time management, health and wellness, and academic integrity. In addition, it includes specialized resources for student-athletes as well as instructions for how to access campus resources. Similarly, BrainFuse is a resource available to our online students and provides 24/7 access to tutoring and writing assistance.

Policy/SOP Development and Revision

Another area of priority over the past several years has been critically examining our policies, processes, and procedures to identify and remove barriers to student retention and success. Some specific areas that have been addressed include our financial aid satisfactory academic progress (SAP) policy, a policy to provide academic adjustments to English Learners in their first two years of study, and several policies and processes to better support students with extenuating circumstances such as temporary illness and injury, active-duty military students who are called to serve, and withdrawal due to extenuating medical or personal circumstances. In addition, several Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) documents have been created to ensure consistent processing in all areas of the university.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Postsecondary Credentials

Stevenson University Online (SUO) is committed to the career-focused education mission of the university. At present the focus of SUO is degree programs. However, the university does recognize the value of shorter-format credentials and began offering credit-bearing post-baccalaureate certificates (PBCs) in 2018. These certificates offer students the opportunity to earn credit toward their degree, earning a credential in the process. Further, we award Credit for Prior Learning for a variety of industry credentials, allowing us to both recognize the value of these industry credentials while also offering students the opportunity to earn credit for their achievement.

Graduate and undergraduate degrees will remain the focus of SUO for the foreseeable future, with no plans for the development of non-credit programming. Building on the significant number of industry-recognized certifications we already recognize, we plan to systematically review our degree programs to identify opportunities to integrate content that will support students' eligibility and preparedness to earn certain credentials or sit for credentialing exams. Adaptations such as this, and the possible expansion of PBC offerings, represent SUO's most likely response to the demand for postsecondary credentials. Our focus will remain squarely in the degree-granting space.

Washington Adventist University

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal

Strategies

Strategy One

Beginning in 2016-2017, the university moved to standardize academic programs to 120 credits for degree completion. This represented a strategic step toward enhancing student success and institutional effectiveness by reducing the credits required from 128. This alignment promoted consistency across degree programs, simplified academic planning, and supported timely graduation. By reducing excess credit requirements, this strategy helped students complete their degrees more efficiently while also limiting student debt. The change also strengthened transfer pathways and aligned Washington Adventist University's (WAU) programs with national norms, making the university's offerings more competitive and transparent. While the transition required careful curriculum review to preserve academic rigor and organizational educational values, it ultimately reinforced WAU's mission to foster excellence and service through accessible, high-quality education that prepared students for meaningful careers and lifelong learning.

Strategy Two

Around 2018, the university developed degree pathways and course planning for all majors. By creating clearly defined degree pathways, WAU provided students with a structured roadmap to graduation, which helped students understand course sequencing, prerequisites, and milestones for timely degree completion. Improved course planning processes ensured that classes were offered in alignment with student needs and program requirements, which reduced scheduling conflicts and supported on-time graduation. These efforts not only enhanced academic advising and student engagement, but also promoted synergy, transparency, and accountability across departments. Ultimately, the university's focus on intentional degree pathways and thoughtful course planning strengthened its ability to deliver a coherent, accessible, and mission-centered educational experience that empowered students to achieve their academic and career goals.

Strategy Three

More recently, beginning in 2024-2025, the implementation of an academic self-service platform marked an important advancement in improving accessibility, efficiency, and student support. This initiative empowers both students and faculty by providing real-time access to academic information, degree audits, registration tools, and advising resources within a single, user-friendly system. Comprehensive training for faculty on the platform ensured they could effectively guide students through course selection, degree planning, and progress tracking, fostering a more proactive and informed advising process. The transition to self-service also enhanced transparency, reduced operational inefficiencies, thereby allowing students to take greater ownership of their academic journey. Overall, this initiative reflected the university's dedication to leveraging technology to strengthen communication, streamline academic

operations, and uphold its Vision 2030 Student Success Bold Goal specific to 4-year timely degree completion.

Strategy Four

Furthermore, close to 2013, the Academic Alert System was first implemented, which significantly enhanced the university's ability to provide early, proactive support for students. This system allowed faculty and advisors to identify students facing academic or personal challenges early in the semester, enabling timely interventions and connection to campus resources such as tutoring, counseling, and academic advising. The Academic Alert System improved communication between faculty, advisors, and student support staff, increasing the likelihood that every student's needs were being fully met. Ultimately, this initiative contributed to increasing student retention, stronger academic outcomes, and a more supportive learning environment. The first-year experience is critical to long term success. By creating a structured process for monitoring and responding to at-risk students, this alert system helped increase the retention and persistence of first-year students.

Strategy Five

Around 2020, WAU implemented a required attendance policy, which helped to ensure maximum student engagement, content mastery, and skill refinement. It played a pivotal role in strengthening academic accountability, external data reporting, and overall institutional effectiveness. By consistently tracking attendance across all courses, WAU gained valuable insights into student participation patterns that directly correlated with academic progress, enrollment stability, and DFW grades (D and F grades, Withdraw). This initiative enabled earlier identification of students who were struggling or disengaged, allowing faculty and advisors to intervene promptly with targeted support and resources. The consistent collection of attendance data also improved the accuracy of academic reporting, compliance, and financial aid eligibility verification. As a result, the university experienced improved student retention and a deeper understanding of the connection between attendance and achievement. Ultimately, the attendance requirement reinforced WAU's mission to create a learning environment which nurtures the development of competent moral leaders committed to distinctive service within a caring, relationship-rich learning environment.

Strategy Six

At WAU, moving to a standardized 30/60/90 credit-hour system for determining class standing marked an important step toward enhancing clarity, consistency, and student empowerment in the academic journey. This initiative provided students with a transparent framework to understand their progress—clearly defining what it means to be a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior based on earned credits. By standardizing these milestones, WAU helped students better track their advancement toward degree completion, plan future coursework more effectively, and take ownership of their educational goals. Advisors and faculty also benefited from this clarity, as it improved communication during advising sessions and streamlined degree audits and registration processes. Overall, the adoption of the 30/60/90 standard strengthened academic planning, reduced confusion, and supported timely graduation—reflecting WAU's

ongoing commitment to fostering student success through structure, transparency, and intentional academic support.

Sustain or Expand Efforts

Washington Adventist University plans to sustain and expand these academic initiatives by embedding them into the Provost's Strategic Plan, annual operational goals, and the University's Vision 2030 framework. These efforts—such as standardized credit structures, academic alerts, degree pathways, and the use of academic self-service tools—are not isolated projects but integral components of WAU's long-term strategy to enhance student success and institutional excellence.

Under the Provost's Strategic Plan, WAU will continue to refine data-driven systems that monitor student progress, expand faculty development and training to strengthen advising, and ensure academic policies remain student-centered and mission-driven. Operationally, the university is aligning resource allocation, technology investments, and departmental goals to maintain the effectiveness and scalability of these initiatives, as essential to meet and exceed the university's VISION 2030 Bold Goal of 4-year degree completion for its traditional students and timely degree completion for its students who are pursuing accelerated degree completion through the university's School of Graduate and Professional Studies.

Aligned with Vision 2030, WAU's commitment extends beyond maintaining these systems—it aims to foster a transformative learning environment that is innovative, inclusive, and sustainable. By continually assessing outcomes, integrating feedback, and leveraging technology, WAU will build on these foundational strategies to achieve its vision of being a vibrant faith-based learning community recognized for excellence in academic quality, student support, and holistic development through which its graduates more fully experience their life's call through professions of distinctive service.

Balancing Degree Attainment with Evolving Demands

Washington Adventist University is thoughtfully balancing traditional degree attainment with the growing demand for certificates and industry-recognized credentials by expanding flexible academic pathways that respond to workforce needs while staying true to its mission of holistic education. WAU recognizes that today's learners seek both academic depth and practical, career-ready skills. In response, WAU has launched an analysis of its degree offerings to identify opportunities for embedded credentials through which incremental earning capacity, character development, and professional competencies are attained. Furthermore, WAU partners with its sister institutions to make non-credit credentials available to its constituents through third-party professional partners, such as CoreEducation.

Over the next five years, WAU anticipates a continued refinement of in-person learning as essential for the collegiate experience of community, character development and credential attainment. In addition, in accordance with market demand, WAU anticipates further developing hybrid and online learning options which incorporate a minimum of weekly access to a "master teacher" through which deeper insights and understanding are attained. Furthermore, the

university is actively reviewing actions through which its students will understand how to harness artificial intelligence (AI) for maximum service. This evolving balance will allow WAU to remain competitive and relevant in a rapidly changing educational landscape—continuing to fulfill its mission of preparing students for a lifetime of service, leadership, and distinctive professional excellence.

2025 Report on Best Practices and Annual Progress toward the 55% Completion Goal *Washington College*

In alignment with Maryland's statewide goal for 55% of adults aged 25 to 64 to hold an associate's degree or higher, our institution has implemented intentional, evidence-based strategies to increase degree completion and support student success. This completion target aims to ensure a well-educated workforce and promote economic competitiveness across the state. Maryland has made steady progress toward this goal, and continued advancement will require institutions like ours to sustain and expand high-impact practices that remove barriers, improve outcomes, and serve a wide range of learners.

Our college embraces this mission as a shared responsibility. Over the past decade, we have developed a comprehensive, student-centered approach that supports retention, accelerates completion, and adapts to the changing educational landscape. Our strategies span academic innovation, support services, technology, and targeted interventions—all grounded in data and a deep commitment to the student experience.

Over the past decade, our institution has implemented a multi-faceted approach to increase associate and bachelor's degree completion, resulting in strong student success outcomes. Our 10-year average first-time-in-college (FTIC) first-year retention rate stands at 84%, with our current rate reaching a two-decade high of 87.9%. Four-year and six-year graduation rates average 65% and 73%, respectively, reflecting our sustained commitment to student persistence and completion.

A key driver of this success has been the work of the Retention Working Group (RWG), a cross-departmental team committed to supporting student success through data-informed, student-centered strategies. The RWG operates by leveraging established retention models and a variety of internal and external datasets to guide its work. The team balances a wide-angle view of national trends in higher education retention with a focused, localized approach to understanding the specific experiences of our student population.

While setting goals and establishing numerical benchmarks is part of the process, the heart of our retention work lies in the day-to-day commitment of faculty and staff to enhancing the student experience. Our approach is both practical and aspirational: we focus on the details while also maintaining a big-picture vision for continuous improvement. Through strong faculty-student and staff-student relationships, we work to remove administrative and emotional barriers that can impede student progress. These relationships have proven essential in improving student satisfaction and persistence.

Early in its formation, the RWG identified four core areas that, when improved, lead to higher student retention and degree completion: well-being, academics, finances, and engagement. Using a combination of withdrawal survey data, institutional data (such as the Student Satisfaction Inventory and the campus wellness survey), and student feedback, the RWG has embraced a holistic, qualitative approach to understanding student departure. One key insight is that no two withdrawals are alike—each is shaped by a unique combination of circumstances that impact a student's sense of belonging and ability to stay enrolled.

Recognizing this complexity, the RWG emphasizes incremental, process-level improvements that positively impact one or more of these four key areas. Whether improving communication systems, refining onboarding processes, or streamlining access to support services, the goal is to reduce friction points in the student experience before they lead to attrition.

The RWG has also focused significant attention on second-year retention, an area for which no national benchmarking data currently exists but which our own internal research has shown to be just as critical as first-year retention. Our analysis found that second-year persistence is often influenced by unresolved academic and social challenges from the first year. Recent data revealed a second-year retention rate of 84.5% for the Fall 2023 cohort (from 200 students in Fall 2023 to 169 in Fall 2024). In response, we have launched new initiatives to specifically enhance the sophomore experience, guided by recommendations from a specialized task force.

In examining second-year retention data, we have identified several student populations that are at elevated risk for attrition:

- Students with a first-year GPA of 3.00 or below, with a second-year retention rate of just 67.7%—and among these, students earning a GPA of 2.0 or lower in their first semester almost always withdraw.
- Students from underrepresented racial and ethnic backgrounds, with a retention rate of 77.2%.
- Students from outside Maryland and surrounding boarding states, with a retention rate of 73.7%.

These insights have further shaped our strategies, leading to targeted outreach, early academic intervention, and additional support programs designed to close these equity gaps. Through this multi-layered and adaptive approach, the Retention Working Group continues to play a vital role in helping our students persist, thrive, and graduate.

Our commitment to academic support has also been essential in advancing degree completion. In addition to core resources like the Quantitative Skills Center, Office of Academic Skills, Writing Center, and Disability Services, we have expanded these services to include comprehensive tutoring across disciplines, academic coaching, study skills workshops, and drop-in hours that accommodate varied student schedules. We also provide personalized support for students with accommodations, including assistive technology and advocacy services. The recent addition of a Dean of Advising and Academic Advocacy has strengthened our ability to offer proactive, student-centered advising that integrates academic, personal, and career planning.

Technology plays a crucial role in enhancing student success, and our in-house Office of Information Technology (OIT) allows us to respond quickly to student needs. By streamlining service delivery, improving communication platforms, and upgrading campus infrastructure, OIT has helped create a more connected and responsive learning environment.

Academic innovation remains a core strategy. In recent years, we have expanded our program offerings to reflect emerging fields and student interests, including Data Science, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and lower-level language

certificates. Our dual-degree and postgraduate partnerships—in disciplines ranging from engineering and environmental science to nursing, business, and medicine—offer students clear pathways to advanced study and high-impact careers.

We are also deeply committed to fostering strong faculty-student relationships, a hallmark of our educational experience. Our national ranking—#22 in Princeton Review’s “Professors Get High Marks”—underscores the level of personal attention and mentorship our students receive. Additionally, new athletic programs, including golf and cross-country, and robust extracurricular offerings contribute to a campus culture that promotes connection and belonging—factors shown to positively impact retention.

Looking to the future, we are investing in efforts that will sustain and expand our progress. We are leveraging advanced enrollment analytics to guide recruitment and retention strategy, ensuring that we remain responsive to shifting student demographics and expectations. Academic departments are developing new offerings that align with workforce trends and student aspirations, while also expanding instructional delivery models to include hybrid and experiential learning. We are also continuing to design lower-level certificates and stackable credentials that allow for multiple entry and exit points along the postsecondary pathway.

Special attention is being paid to first-generation students, who are already benefiting from a newly launched mentoring initiative designed to promote social capital and academic confidence. These efforts will be further supported by the strategic use of grant capital directed toward student-focused innovations, equity initiatives, and learning support systems.

At the same time, we recognize the increasing demand for certificates and industry-recognized credentials—a trend that reflects both labor market needs and student desire for flexible, outcome-oriented learning. We are responding by developing more stackable credential pathways within existing programs, offering students the ability to build toward degrees while earning credentials that hold immediate career value. Our Innovation Labs have served as incubators for this work, allowing faculty and departments to pilot new certificates and concentrations that can be quickly adapted to meet market demand.

Over the next five years, we anticipate further integrating traditional degree pathways with short-term credentials and professional certifications. Through strategic partnerships with industry, educational consortia, and funding organizations, we will ensure that our programs remain aligned with workforce trends and accessible to a broad range of learners. This evolving balance will allow us to continue advancing Maryland’s degree attainment goals while also equipping our students with the skills, knowledge, and flexibility needed to thrive in a dynamic, skills-based economy.

Maryland's higher education institutions have played a key role in advancing the State's degree attainment goals. Looking back over the past decade, what strategies has your institution found most effective in supporting associate and bachelor's degree completion? How do you plan to sustain or expand these efforts? At the same time, how is your institution balancing degree attainment with the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials—such as certificates and industry-recognized credentials—and how do you anticipate this balance evolving over the next five years?

St. Mary's Seminary and University (SMSU) is the oldest Roman Catholic seminary in the United States, having been founded in 1791. Today, most of its students are seminarians seeking ordination in the Roman Catholic Church, which typically requires an MDiv degree. Consequently, the strategies that we employ are aimed at masters-level degree completion and not associate's- or bachelor's-level degree completion.

The strategy that we have found to be the most effective support for ensuring seminarians complete their master's degrees is our faculty mentorship system which is common to Roman Catholic Seminaries in the United States. Upon entering the seminary, each student is assigned a mentor on the faculty. The student meets with this faculty member biweekly to discuss how the student is getting along both academically and socially and to address any stressors or concerns that may affect the student's well-being.

In addition to the faculty mentorship program, St. Mary's puts value on its peer-mentorship and social initiatives that are well-integrated into seminarian life. There is a House Council that helps ensure a healthy balance between academics and personal enrichment and a busy social and religious calendar that allows our students to feel connected and valued as a member of the St. Mary's community. All of these combined contribute significantly to our high retention and graduation rates. We will continue to sustain these efforts by ensuring they remain funded and supported by the administration and Board and will expand them as appropriate based on the feedback we receive from surveys of our graduates, alumni and the dioceses and religious community we support.

We do not anticipate a change in the balance between degree attainment and the growing demand for other postsecondary credentials in the next five years. Since the Roman Catholic Church does not require any education further than an MDiv for a priesthood candidate, we do not anticipate a growing need for postsecondary certificates.

Introduction

Over the past decade, WITS has worked intentionally to support Maryland's higher education degree attainment goals by expanding academic programs, strengthening student support services, implementing robust assessment practices, and engaging alumnae in mentoring initiatives. These efforts have increased the likelihood that students not only complete their associate and bachelor's degrees but also enter graduate study and the workforce prepared to thrive. At the same time, WITS has begun to balance degree attainment with the state's growing demand for certificates and industry-recognized credentials, ensuring that our students are competitive in a rapidly evolving labor market. This report reviews the strategies WITS has found most effective in supporting degree completion, describes how we intend to sustain and expand them, and outlines our approach to balancing degree attainment with alternative credential pathways in the next five years.

Expanding Academic Programs in Emerging Fields

One of the most impactful strategies WITS has implemented has been the development of new academic programs in fields with strong workforce demand. As part of the 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, WITS committed to expanding programs that lead not only to successful degree completion, but also to employment, transfer, or graduate school acceptance. In January 2021, WITS launched two new bachelor's degree programs: a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Science Disorders. Both programs were designed to align with institutional learning goals and industry standards. Their creation broadened the academic portfolio, offering students additional high-demand pathways and ensuring that the curriculum meets evolving state and national workforce needs. By investing in emerging academic fields, WITS helps ensure that students are completing degrees that lead to tangible opportunities.

In response to student interest and evolving industry standards, WITS introduced a certificate in graphic design. While the institution had long offered the full sequence of graphic design courses, the absence of a formal credential limited graduates' professional opportunities. Establishing the certificate allowed students to gain recognition for their skills and opened additional career pathways. This initiative has not only enhanced students' employability but also improved retention among those pursuing graphic design, as they can now earn a professional credential at WITS rather than transferring to another institution or online program.

Enhancing Academic Assessment and Program Review

Another core strategy has been the systematic improvement of assessment and academic program review. Beginning in 2020, WITS adopted a methodical program review process that examines course offerings, sequencing, pacing, learning objectives, and alignment with peer institutions. This process has led to meaningful program improvements, including renaming courses in the communication sciences and disorders major to more accurately reflect their content, clarifying science requirements for students, and revising the way student observations are conducted to strengthen experiential learning. In psychology, faculty recently updated the

curriculum and textbook for a foundational course, ensuring that students engage with the most current scholarship in the field. These changes are reinforced by enhanced curriculum mapping, which ensures continuity and coherence across the student experience.

At the institutional level, WITS has also expanded assessment of Institutional Learning Outcomes. Each year, faculty assess one or two outcomes, implement recommendations, and re-assess in the following cycle. This process has directly influenced teaching practice. Faculty have developed study guides to support exam preparation, increased in-class discussion to reinforce critical concepts, and provided concrete examples to clarify expectations. Year-over-year data demonstrate improvements in student proficiency and mastery, providing clear evidence that assessment is driving real gains in learning and degree persistence. By embedding assessment and program review into the culture of the institution, WITS ensures that degree pathways remain rigorous, responsive, and supportive of student success.

Strengthening Academic and Student Support Services

Recognizing that academic preparation is only one part of degree completion, WITS has expanded support services to meet students' diverse needs. When faculty observed that mental health concerns were affecting academic performance, WITS developed a referral program connecting students to outside counseling resources. In addition, tutoring services were expanded to provide individualized academic support across disciplines. These initiatives acknowledge the holistic needs of students and remove barriers that might otherwise prevent them from completing their degrees.

Achieving Regional Accreditation

Perhaps the most significant milestone in advancing student degree attainment was WITS' successful accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in April 2025. Regional accreditation elevates the value of a WITS degree by ensuring its recognition nationwide and by strengthening students' chances of acceptance to accredited graduate programs. Accreditation also positions WITS to expand academic offerings and partnerships, further supporting Maryland's statewide attainment goals.

Alumnae Mentoring and Career Support

Another highly effective strategy has been the student mentoring program that pairs current students with alumnae working in their field of interest. Mentors provide guidance on academic and professional pathways, help students clarify their goals, and, in some cases, assist them in securing internships or employment. Survey results from both mentors and mentees indicate that the program is transformative: students gain clarity about their career direction, often refining their academic focus as a result. Some even discover what they do not want to pursue, a realization that prevents wasted time and supports timely degree completion. By connecting students' academic experience to real-world opportunities, mentoring strengthens motivation, persistence, and overall attainment.

Sustaining and Expanding Degree Completion Efforts

WITS is committed to building on these successes in the coming decade. We will continue to expand academic programs in alignment with workforce needs, particularly in health sciences, education, and technology-related fields. At the same time, the integration of assessment and program review will remain central, with special attention to closing equity gaps and ensuring that underrepresented student populations receive the support they need to thrive. WITS also plans to expand its mental health partnerships, tutoring programs, and peer mentoring initiatives, further reducing barriers to student success. In addition, the institution will strengthen partnerships with graduate schools and employers to streamline students' transition to advanced study or employment. These strategies will sustain progress toward degree attainment while ensuring that students graduate well-prepared for their next step.

Balancing Degrees with Certificates and Industry-Recognized Credentials

While associate and bachelor's degree attainment remains central to WITS' mission, we recognize the growing importance of alternative credentials in Maryland's workforce ecosystem. Employers increasingly value certificates and short-term training programs that demonstrate industry-specific competencies. To meet this need, WITS is actively exploring certificate programs that complement existing degrees. For example, the certificate in graphic design is a credential that opens professional opportunities for WITS students. By embedding certificate and industry-recognized credentials into degree pathways, WITS can support students in building layered credentials that serve both immediate employment needs and long-term academic goals.

Looking Ahead: The Next Five Years

In the next five years, WITS anticipates a continued balancing of traditional degrees with flexible, credential-based learning. Collaboration with local employers will ensure that certificates and credentials remain relevant and that students are positioned for immediate employment. At the same time, bachelor's degree attainment will remain the cornerstone of WITS' mission, with alternative credentials serving as enhancements rather than replacements. This layered approach allows WITS to meet the state's educational attainment goals while preparing students for graduate school and for meaningful careers in their field.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, WITS has implemented a range of effective strategies to support Maryland's degree attainment goals: program expansion in emerging fields, robust assessment and program review, strengthened academic and student supports, alumnae mentoring, and regional accreditation. Together, these initiatives have positioned our students for success in completing associate and bachelor's degrees, transferring to graduate study, and entering the workforce. Looking forward, WITS will continue to sustain and expand these strategies while also developing certificate and industry-recognized credentials that align with state and

workforce needs. By maintaining this balance, WITS will help Maryland achieve its ambitious educational attainment goals while ensuring that students graduate with the degrees and credentials necessary for meaningful careers and lifelong success.

The Yeshiva College of the Nation's Capital (YCNC) is a small boutique college offering a single specialized degree. This unique focus fosters an intimate academic and cultural environment that is distinct from larger colleges with multiple disciplines. Because of our specialized mission, not all students enroll with the sole goal of degree completion; for many, participation in the program and immersion in advanced Talmudic study is itself a prestigious and meaningful accomplishment. It is typical and acceptable for students to decide during their studies to pursue alternate degrees. Therefore, completion rate is not necessarily an accurate assessment of students' success at YCNC, as completion of this specialized degree is often not a student's primary objective in joining YCNC. Nonetheless, over the past decade we have seen both enrollment and degree completions rise significantly, reflecting the strength of our core strategies.

This upward trajectory in our growth and success is largely due to our two fundamental principal programs as described below, *Knowing our Students* and *One-on-One Academic Resources for All*.

Our foremost initiative *Knowing our Students* is a guiding principle of our institution. Our head administrators are both teaching staff and rabbinic leaders who interact on a personal level with each student. In addition to our head administrators giving classes to every student, they also develop personal relationships and can offer guidance through frequent one-on-one meetings and interactions. The rest of our teaching staff is composed of rabbis who spend much time regularly counseling students regarding life issues, learning issues, social issues, family challenges, careers, and mental health challenges. This high-contact model has been central to student persistence and completion.

Our second key initiative, *One-on-One Academic Resources for All* ensures that every student receives individualized academic support. To ensure the success of our student body, we offer extensive one-on-one tutoring services to all students at no additional cost. As part of required course work, students study with partners during designated daily times. During those designated daily hours, we have dedicated staff, knowledgeable in their subject areas, that work with these student pairs. Every student, both those who are struggling and those who are excelling, knows who they can turn to with questions or academic guidance. "One-on-One Academic Resources for All" is a large contributory factor in our student's averaging above a 3.0 GPA across all 4 years. Academic failure is rarely an issue for students no longer wishing to pursue their degree at YCNC.

To sustain and expand these efforts, YCNC is committed to maintaining a low faculty-to-student ratio, hiring additional staff as enrollment grows, and continuing to prioritize direct mentorship and individualized instruction as hallmarks of our program.

As a specialized institution offering one degree only, YCNC does not currently provide certificate or industry-recognized credential programs, nor do we plan to in the future. We also do not discourage students from pursuing additional credentials through other institutions while enrolled with us. In this way, our role complements, rather than competes with, Maryland's broader higher education ecosystem. While demand for workforce-aligned credentials is growing, YCNC anticipates its unique niche will also continue to grow, serving students whose primary goal is Talmudic law studies. We see our role as complementary to other institutions in Maryland rather than competitive.

Looking ahead to the next five years YCNC anticipates continuing to serve its distinct student population with the same focused mission. Our contribution will be to preserve an academic pathway for students whose primary goal is advanced Talmudic study, while supporting Maryland's overall attainment agenda through consistent degree completions, strong academic performance, and graduates who bring their learning and leadership to communities nationwide.