

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

1. MISSION

St. Mary's College of Maryland is Maryland's honors college, a selective, public liberal arts college—a vibrant community of scholars and learners. We foster a rigorous and innovative curriculum; experiential learning; scholarship and creativity; close mentoring relationships; and a community dedicated to honesty, civility, and integrity. We are committed to diversity, access, and affordability. Our students, faculty and staff serve local, national, and global communities and cultivate and promote social responsibility.

2. INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

Goal 1: Ensure a high quality and rigorous academic program.

Objective 1.1: Revised metrics for this objective were introduced this year. For the past three years, SMCM has met the target of 100% of graduates completing at least two high-impact practices (HIP) and 80% completing at least three HIPs. This year, 99% of students completed at least two HIPs. The few students who completed only one HIP were on track to complete a second experience when the coronavirus pandemic forced the cancellation of their plans. We are confident that as the pandemic resolves, we will meet this goal of 100% in future years.

Peer Benchmarks: The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) releases annual benchmarks regarding the completion of HIPs among graduating seniors at institutions participating in the survey. For the Class of 2019, SMCM's rate of 100% of students completing at least two HIPs exceeds the national average of 86% of students at participating Carnegie Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institutions. Further, SMCM's rate of 87% of students completing at least three HIPs is also well above the national average of 68% of students at participating Carnegie Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institutions.

Objectives 1.2 and 1.3: SMCM is committed to offering a rigorous curriculum taught by qualified faculty. For the past four years, SMCM has met or exceeded the targeted percent of full-time faculty who have terminal degrees. Although the percentage of credit hours taught by full-time faculty (87%) just missed the target (88%) this year, full-time faculty still teach the great majority of undergraduate credit hours. Finally, the undergraduate student-faculty ratio has been between 9:1 and 10:1 for the past five years, well below (better than) the target of 12:1.

Peer Benchmarks: SMCM has by far the lowest student-faculty ratio (9:1) among the traditional four-year public institutions in Maryland, which average 15:1. The SMCM student-faculty ratio is second lowest (after New College of Florida at 8:1) among COPLAC institutions, which average 15:1; and is on par with Maryland private institutions, peer institutions, and aspirant institutions, which range from 7:1 to 14:1 (average = 10:1). (*Source: IPEDS Data Center*)

Goal 2: Recruit, support, and retain a diverse and qualified group of students, faculty and administrative staff.

Objective 2.1: In FY20, SMCM recruited a first-year class that exceeded the targets for the percentages of minority students (for the seventh consecutive year), of first generation college students (for the third consecutive year), and of Pell grant recipients (for the third time in five years). High school academic performance of the entering class remains strong; the average GPA of incoming students was again at its highest value in the past five years, and is projected to improve for the FY21 entering class. Median SAT scores appear to have stabilized around 1180, above the target of 1150 (note that only the 2018, 2019 and 2020 scores are directly comparable because of changes to the SAT). Finally, SMCM continues to face challenges in recruiting and enrolling students from outside of Maryland, but this is expected to improve with the FY21 class.

Peer Benchmarks: Based on available benchmark data which uses the mean (average) rather than the median, the average SAT score of SMCM entering students (1176) continues to exceed that of most other Maryland four-year institutions (FY20 average = 1096), and our students rank well against high school seniors both in Maryland (FY20 average = 1058) and nationwide (FY20 average = 1059). (*Source: MHEC 2020 Data Book*)

Objective 2.2: Both four-year graduation rates (Fall 2016 cohort graduating by Summer 2020) and six-year graduation rates (Fall 2014 cohort graduating by Summer 2020) were below targets for all groups. Projections show most rates rebounding over the next two years, although not to target levels and with greater fluctuations among estimated six-year rates. Some of the current year's decline may be attributable to students who did not complete due to pandemic-related complications in Spring and Summer 2020. However, this is unlikely to explain the full decline.

We continue to analyze the relationship between students' progress toward degree completion and several important early academic milestones, including enrolling in a college mathematics course in the first year, attempting at least 16 credits per semester in the first year, and earning at least 32 total credits in the first year. These milestones are historically correlated with higher retention and graduation rates, particularly among students from underrepresented groups. For the last two cohorts analyzed (Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 cohorts), students were less likely to have met these milestones, and four-year graduation rates were subsequently lower. We will continue to examine students in the Fall 2016 cohort for possible additional insights into their lower completion rates; however, it seems more productive to focus our attention forward on current and future cohorts rather than looking backward. Thus, we will devote particular attention to understanding the experiences and performance of current students, particularly those in their first and second year, with regard to the critical academic milestones we have identified. We will continue to work with faculty advisors and academic support staff to ensure they are aware of the importance of these milestones, and know how to communicate them to their first-year student advisees. We will investigate additional strategies to support students who may be behind the pace of 16 credits per semester; this December, for example, we will offer our first ever winter term classes, which will allow students to earn up to an additional 4 credits via remote learning.

Finally, about 15% of departed first-year students over the past several cohorts have transferred out to two-year institutions, according to data from the National Student Clearinghouse. We are considering how best to reach out to these students regarding the possibility of reverse transfer,

encouraging them to return and complete their baccalaureate degree at SMCM. The development of targeted, program-specific articulation agreements with many Maryland community colleges (discussed below in Objective 2.6) is expected to facilitate such reverse transfer efforts.

Peer Benchmarks: Based on the most recent comparison data available (FY16), SMCM’s overall four-year graduation rate (72% for the 2012 cohort) exceeded those of other institutions belonging to the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) and other Maryland public four-year institutions, as well as Maryland private institutions and SMCM’s peer institutions, many of which are private. The average four-year graduation rate at aspirant institutions (all private) represents a benchmark well above our target. As shown below, four-year graduation rates for African American students, Hispanic students, and all minority students combined were all well above the corresponding rates at other COPLAC and Maryland public institutions. Four-year rates for all minority students and Hispanic students were also higher at SMCM than at Maryland private institutions and peer institutions, while rates for African American students lagged behind. Benchmark four-year graduation rates for Pell recipients are not available. *(Source: IPEDS Data Center)*

Four-Year Graduation Rates, FY16 (Fall 2012 cohort)					
Institution(s)	N	Overall	Minority	Afr Amer	Hispanic
SMCM	1	72%	63%	48%	67%
COPLAC	27	38%	31%	29%	31%
MD Public	11	29%	25%	23%	28%
MD Private	9	60%	53%	53%	51%
Peer	12	67%	62%	54%	66%
Aspirant	6	86%	84%	78%	86%

For six-year graduation rates, the most recent comparison data available (FY18) reveal that SMCM’s overall rate (80%, for the 2012 cohort) exceeded that of all other comparison groups except private aspirant institutions at 89%. SMCM’s six-year rates for all minority students exceeded those at other COPLAC, Maryland public, and Maryland private institutions, but were behind those of peer and aspirant peer institutions. Notably, the six-year graduation rate for Hispanic students at SMCM was well above that from all other groups except aspirant institutions. African American students’ six-year graduation rates at SMCM exceed those at COPLAC and Maryland public institutions, but are behind other groups. Finally, SMCM’s six-year graduation rates for Pell recipients in FY18 was well above those of other COPLAC, Maryland public and private, and peer institutions, and was close to the average rates at aspirant institutions. *(Source: IPEDS Data Center)*

Six-Year Graduation Rates, FY18 (Fall 2012 cohort)							
Institution(s)	N	Overall	Minority	Afr Amer	Hispanic	Pell	Need Aid
SMCM	1	80%	72%	56%	81%	84%	81%
COPLAC	27	54%	50%	48%	47%	48%	51%
MD Public	11	49%	48%	47%	50%	47%	48%
MD Private	9	67%	60%	59%	58%	62%	65%
Peer	12	75%	73%	68%	75%	75%	74%
Aspirant	6	89%	88%	83%	89%	87%	88%

These comparisons with peers and aspirants, which are our primary programmatic and curricular competitors, underscore the need for SMCM to direct additional attention and resources toward underrepresented students. *(Source: IPEDS Data Center)*

Objective 2.3: After a low second year retention rate in FY19, the rate has rebounded to 85% for the Fall 2018 cohort returning in Fall 2019. While still not meeting the target, this retention rate still exceeds many benchmarks.

Peer Benchmarks: Based on the most recent data available (FY18), SMCM’s first-to-second year retention rate (82%) exceeded those of other public liberal arts colleges (COPLAC institutions, average = 73%), Maryland public four-year institutions (average = 75%), and Maryland private institutions (average = 79%), and approached the rate at peer institutions (average = 84%), many of which are private. Retention rates at private aspirant institutions averaged 94% in FY17, which is well above SMCM’s target but is a useful aspirational benchmark as we strive to remain competitive with those institutions. *(Source: IPEDS Data Center)*

Objective 2.4: SMCM continues to work to maintain a diverse faculty and staff. Gender parity was once again achieved for both faculty and staff in FY20, and the diversity of full-time staff (percent minority) missed the target by only one percentage point. Faculty diversity declined which indicates a need for further attention to recruitment and retention strategies.

Objective 2.5: SMCM has met or exceeded the target of an entering class that contains 20% transfer students for the past seven years. The FY21 estimate (Fall 2020 incoming class) is for a lower than usual proportion of transfer students, likely related to the challenges of recruiting transfer students during the coronavirus pandemic in Spring and Summer 2020. We will continue to focus on recruiting a strong incoming class of transfer students.

Objective 2.6: Among transfer students, the three-year graduation rate (69%, Fall 2017 entering students graduating by Summer 2020) well exceeded the target of 60%. The four-year rate (69%, Fall 2016 entering students graduating by Summer 2020) just missed the target but was also strong. Moreover, analysis of students’ degree progress for the Fall 2018 and Fall 2019 transfer cohorts suggests that these graduation rates will continue to increase strongly over the next two years. Continued development and refinement of articulation agreements with Maryland two-year institutions will facilitate transfer students’ timely progress toward the baccalaureate degree.

Goal 3: Ensure access for students with financial need through a strategic combination of federal, state, private, and institutional funds.

Objective 3.1: This objective has consistently been met or exceeded as SMCM has focused on meeting the financial needs of entering first-time students.

Objective 3.2: Both four-year and six-year graduation rates among students receiving need-based aid (Pell grant or Stafford loan) were low this year, similar to other cohort groups as discussed above for Objective 2.2, and are similarly projected to remain low. Given the particularly sensitive financial situation of students receiving need-based aid, this gap warrants increased attention. Similarly, retention to the second year (81%) was again below the target and lower than the rate for the overall population.

Peer Benchmarks: Similar to findings for graduation rates among Pell recipients, SMCM's six-year graduation rate for students receiving need-based aid in FY18 (81%, most recent comparison data available) was well above that of other COPLAC institutions (51%), Maryland public institutions (48%), and Maryland private institutions (65%). Notably, this rate also exceeded the FY18 rate at peer institutions (74%). The six-year graduation rate for recipients of need-based aid at aspirant institutions was 88%, nearly equal to their overall six-year graduation rate. (Source: IPEDS Data Center)

Goal 4: Increase student contributions to the Maryland community and to the state and national workforce.

Objectives 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4: Community service participation in FY20 did not meet the target for the first time in five years, but internship participation did meet the target at 45% of graduates. Metrics for 4.3 and 4.4 were revised to align with nationally recognized benchmarks at six months after graduation. While the six-month employment rate was below the target for the Class of 2019, the six-month continuing education rate was substantially above the target, suggesting that 2019 graduates who were not employed were choosing to continue their education instead. In support of this interpretation, the overall Career Outcomes Rate (rate of graduates with a "positive career outcome", such as employment, continuing education, fellowship, or service experience) for SMCM was 94%, compared to 91% for baccalaureate arts & sciences institutions nationally.

Peer Benchmarks: Benchmarks for the six-month employment and continuing education rate come from the nationally administered First Destination Survey, and are for Carnegie Baccalaureate Arts & Sciences institutions. For the Class of 2018, the most recent data available, SMCM's employment rate was 62% and the national rate was 68%, while SMCM's continuing education rate was 28% and the national rate was 19%. The total Career Outcome Rate for SMCM was 94% while the national rate was 91%. Again, these numbers support the interpretation that SMCM graduates are just as successful as college graduates nationwide, and are more likely than similar college graduates nationwide to choose to continue their education (rather than enter the job market) just after graduation. (Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) First Destinations for the Class of 2018 Report)