**MEETING OF THE U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY**

**BOARD OF VISITORS**

**30 June 2015**

**U.S. CAPITOL VISITOR’S CENTER**

**ATTENDEES**

BOARD OF VISITORS MEMBERS: Dr. Sharon van Wyk, Ph.D.; Captain Kirsten Martin representing Vice Admiral Charles Michel, U.S. Coast Guard, Deputy Commandant for Operations; Mr. Chris Thayer representing Rear Admiral Thomas K Shannon, U.S. Navy, Commander Military Sealift Command

CONGRESSIONAL STAFF: Staff from the Senate Commerce Committee, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS), Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI), Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE), Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-IN), Rep. Dennis Ross (R-FL), Rep. Peter King (R-NY) and Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY)

Maritime Administration/Department of Transportation (MARAD/DOT) OFFICIALS: Maritime Administrator Paul Jaenichen; Deputy Administrator Michael Rodriguez; Mr. Michael Novak, Director, MARAD Office of Congressional and Public Affairs; Rear Admiral James Helis, U.S. Maritime Service, U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Superintendent; Mr. Brian Blower, MARAD Academy Liaison and Board of Visitors Designated Federal Officer; and Ms. Angela Stroschein, MARAD Office of Congressional and Public Affairs

ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS: Mr. William Pennella, Vice Chairman of the Board and Executive Vice President, Crowley Maritime Corporation

**PURPOSE**

As required in law, the Board of Visitors (BOV) met to receive a briefing on the state of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (“USMMA” or “Academy”) and to hear the findings in the July 1, 2015 report to the Secretary by Academy’s Advisory Board.

Maritime Administrator Jaenichen commenced the meeting at 10:05 a.m. with welcoming remarks and introductions of the BOV members, MARAD and Academy representatives in attendance.

**SUPERINTENDENT’S BRIEFING**

Superintendent Helis provided briefings on the state of the Academy, statistics for the incoming USMMA Class of 2019, upcoming calendar events, and the ongoing academic re-accreditation process, including progress made on the Academy’s “self-study” report and the timeline for upcoming milestones. He then provided and overview of completed critical infrastructure projects, the status of “Zero Deck” renovations in the Midshipmen Barracks, the plans for renovations to the main academic buildings and the completion of the Academy Space Utilization Study.

Superintendent Helis then provided an update on the 2013-2014 Academic Year Biennial Survey and Report on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault noting that the final report is currently in the clearance process at MARAD and DOT Transportation. He pointed out that there are no significant changes from the interim report that was submitted to Congress in January 2015.

**ADVISORY BOARD REPORT**

After introducing the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Advisory Board (Advisory Board) members, Dr. Sharon van Wyk, Chair of the Advisory Board, provided background on the purpose of the Advisory Board, the member selection process, the Secretary of Transportation’s (Secretary) directives to the Advisory Board following the 2014 Advisory Board Annual Report and briefing to the Secretary, and the need for institutional assessment. Dr. van Wyk then briefed the findings of the 2015 Advisory Board Annual Report. She explained that observations of the Advisory Board were derived from:

* Discussions with Academy leadership, faculty, staff, Midshipmen, alumni and maritime industry commercial and Federal employers;
* Inspection of Academy facilities and grounds;
* Presentations and reports prepared by faculty and the Academy administration for the Advisory Board;
* Responses to employee and student surveys; and
* Discussions with the Academy re-accreditation steering committee and sub-committee members who are leading the self-study reaccreditation process.

Dr. van Wyk then outlined the findings of the Advisory Board in four general categories:

1. Academic Experience

2. Improved Quality of Life

3. External Relations

4. Institutional Assessment

Academic Experience

In 2014, Secretary Foxx directed the Academy to develop a comprehensive leadership program. The Commandant initiated a leadership working group which developed a leadership assessment program to be implemented beginning in Fall 2015 for all Midshipmen. A leadership course was developed and offered as an elective in the Second trimester of 2015 with the intent of becoming mandatory in 2016. These initiatives were well received by the Midshipmen, and the Academy is proceeding in a prudent manner to ensure all Midshipmen have equal access to enhanced leadership development opportunities. A more ambitious initiative to formalize and standardize the leadership development program has stalled because the members of the working group have not reached agreement on how best to incorporate a structured leadership program into the current four-year Bachelor of Science Degree curriculum and U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Credentialing training.

In 2014, the Secretary also directed the Academy to provide additional support to faculty. Over the past year, the Academy formalized a program to routinely evaluate faculty teaching methods, provide additional resources and training to support faculty professional development and encourage faculty to be more uniformly available to Midshipmen outside of the classroom. Common practices at other institutions, such as administering student surveys at the end of each semester, have been adopted and in-class observation of non-tenured faculty has increased from two to three times per academic year. The faculty mentoring program has been enhanced so each new faculty member is now assigned a junior and senior peer mentor.

Improved Quality of Life

In the 2014 Advisory Board Report to the Secretary, the Advisory Board discussed the insufficient quality and availability of food for the Midshipmen. Over the last year, the dining experience has improved significantly and the Commandant’s staff continuously monitors and reviews food services to ensure food quantity and quality remains consistent.

A Director of Student Activities has been funded and hired at the Academy, and the Regiment has initiated more extracurricular and development activities for the Midshipmen.

External Communications

A Director of External Affairs has been hired, and the Superintendent has initiated a town hall meeting each trimester to provide a forum for regular, public communication with Midshipmen, faculty, alumni and other interested parties.

Institutional Assessment

Faculty members have expressed interest to the Advisory Board for resources to strengthen the Academy’s institutional assessment capability in support of making data-driven decisions. Their interests align well with a recently formed Institutional Effectiveness Council led by the Deputy Superintendent. The Advisory Board recommends that the BOV support the allocation of resources to strengthen the institutional assessment capabilities of the Academy.

**SUMMARY**

The Advisory Board made the following recommendations to the Secretary for his consideration:

1. Stay the course and direct the USMMA Administration and Faculty to carry out the immediate and long-term directives issued by the Secretary in 2014.
2. Direct the Academy to conduct a comprehensive review of the academic and Regimental programs in light of the Academy’s mission and formalize and standardize the leadership development program at the Academy without increasing the academic load on faculty and Midshipmen.
3. Direct the Superintendent to strengthen the Academy’s capability to collect and use data in a meaningful way to support decisions and in accordance with *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Requirements of Affiliation and Standards of Accreditation.*

**QUESTIONS**

Senator Wicker’s staff asked a question about the leadership recommendations of the Advisory Board and how they would be implemented. Dr. van Wyk pointed out that the recommendations are not intended to change the curriculum, but rather to fill existing gaps. Superintendent Helis added that he has directed the Academic Dean to make room in the existing curriculum without adding to the course load. He noted that the leadership course is being offered as an elective this school year, but will become part of the curriculum beginning in 2016.

**MR. PENNELLA’S COMMENTS**

Mr. Pennella noted that USMMA is a vital source of mariners for Crowley Maritime and it must remain successful in its mission and stay relevant. He stated that he is honored to serve on the Advisory Board, but he would like to see the gap closed between the Academy and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Alumni Association and Foundation. Mr. Pennella noted the shared goals of all Academy stakeholders.

**MR. THAYER’S COMMENTS**

Mr. Thayer echoed Mr. Pennella’ s comments regarding the need for the Academy to continue to produce quality licensed mariners as the Military Sealift Command (MSC) is highly dependent on competent mariners to accomplish its mission. Administrator Jaenichen noted that MSC is the largest single employer of Academy graduates and MSC offered approximately 60 seagoing positions in 2015.

**CAPTAIN MARTIN’S COMMENTS**

Captain Martin noted that the U.S. Coast Guard Academy has an existing leadership program that they would be happy to share with USMMA and she encouraged everyone to visit the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

**DEPUTY ADMINISTRATOR’S COMMENTS**

Deputy Administrator Rodriguez pointed out that nearly100 percent of graduates go on active duty or in the Reserve component of the Armed Forces and he mentioned that the U.S. Navy Reserve’s Strategic Sealift Officer program was recently highlighted in The Navy Reservist magazine. He went on the say that as a USMMA graduate, he is appreciative of the work done by the Advisory Board and their service to MARAD, the Academy and the Nation.

**CLOSING REMARKS**

Administrator Jaenichen thanked the Advisory Board for their dedication and hard work over the last year.

There being no further questions or discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 1040.