

U.S. MERCHANT MARINE ACADEMY (USMMA)

2022 SECOND REPORT TO THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

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Preface

This report provides the U.S. Secretary of Transportation (Secretary) Pete Buttigieg with advice and counsel in accordance with the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA, or Academy) Advisory Board (Board) Charter. Pursuant to 46 U.S. Code of Regulations, Secretary Chao appointed members to the Board in June 2019.

This 2022 report is the second written by this Board. Its primary purpose is to advise the Secretary, Maritime Administration (MARAD) Administrator, and Academy Superintendent on matters that need immediate and continued attention to advance the Academy toward meeting its strategic goals and objectives.

The findings in this report are based on direct inspections and observations made during the one virtual visit by the Board to the Academy for a Board meeting, the Zoom “visits” made by the Board with the Academy, Zoom calls with Government officials, individual visits by Board members to the Academy, oral reports and written documents provided to the Board by faculty and staff, survey data, and individual and small group discussions with Midshipmen, faculty, staff, administration, alumni, members of the maritime industry, and higher education officials. Recommendations are based on the Board members’ collective knowledge of best practices and emerging trends and issues in higher education and the maritime industry, and on Board members’ expertise.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, the nation's primary source for Strategic Sealift Officers who provide the nation with secure maritime supply chain transportation in times of crisis and national emergency, faces three related and existential threats: **accreditation** requirements, **institutional governance challenges**, and **infrastructure** demands. The three threats are interrelated and are described in this report.

CONCLUSIONS

The following are the Advisory Board's conclusions:

1. The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy faces three related and existential threats: **accreditation** requirements, **institutional governance challenges**, and **infrastructure** demands. The three threats are interrelated.
2. **The Academy does not have the governance, physical or fiscal infrastructure to be accredited, an existential threat.**
3. **The inability of the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration to grant the Academy Superintendent the requisite authority in personnel hiring, financial planning and management, and procurement, is a critical failing and an accreditation concern that threatens the Academy's ability to exist as an independent and healthy institution of higher learning.**
4. **The Academy's governance structure is a patchwork quilt of authorities, responsibilities and oversight that give the appearance of oversight, but hinder effective leadership and decision making.**
5. **The Academy's infrastructure planning, execution and maintenance processes are ineffectual and have followed a painful cycle of ineffective planning and decision making.**
6. DOT's and MARAD's recent efforts to introduce project management expertise are laudable, but limited, since the efforts will not be supported by

modern project management tools or a robust technology infrastructure at the Academy. Both are required to successfully introduce and sustain project management capabilities.

7. Despite the swift and visible response to SASH events at sea and at the Academy, more action is needed to improve the culture at the Academy. These improvements are not unique to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and require industry-wide action and complementary programs at the other federal service academies and at the state maritime academies.
8. Cultural and SASH concerns persist at the Academy, limiting the effectiveness of SASH programs and improvements.
9. Further SASH enhancements are required, including legislation, additional authorities, and new Coast Guard and DoD processes for predator and incident reporting and tracking, hotlines, counseling and mariner-specific reporting avenues on multiple social media platforms in order to build trust among users in the maritime community, at the Academy and at the state academies.
10. The vulnerability and currency of the Academy's data and network architecture and systems, which are central to the Academy's ability to deliver on its educational and professional development training missions, are concerning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy is in a state of existential risk. This report is a clarion call that immediate and constructive action across several levels of the federal government are required if the Academy is to be sustained. Of immediate and critical concern are the issues of **Accreditation, Decision Rights Clarification for the Superintendent, and Infrastructure**. As explained in this report, the Academy's accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is in jeopardy. The specific recommendations of the Advisory Board include:

1. MARAD, DOT and the Academy should immediately stand up a separate Task Force, independent of the Advisory Council being constituted by the Secretary of Transportation, to address the Superintendent's decisional authority. Resolving this issue within 12 months is critical to successful accreditation and to the healthy and robust operation of the Academy that is the nation's primary source for Strategic Sealift Officers.

2. DOT/MARAD should develop an interagency design/build agreement and fund a comprehensive infrastructure and capital improvement program designed to provide the nation's primary source of Strategic Sealift Officers the educational and experiential learning experience expected of the world's maritime leaders.
3. The Academy should accelerate request a one year extension from the current Middle States AoL accreditation activities, so that, following ILO to programmatic learning outcomes mapping, (1) performance metrics for all ILOs and programmatic learning outcomes that reflect current learning conditions can be established, and (2) at least two rounds of AoL assessment, utilizing the ILO and programmatic learning outcome performance metrics, can be completed prior to the Middle States visit in 2024-2025. Partial data collection for all ILO and programmatic learning outcomes that reflect COVID student learning impacts could highlight continuous improvement and pathways to full data collection efforts.
4. DOT and MARAD should streamline the Academy oversight Boards into the two Congressionally mandated and statutorily constituted Board of Visitors and the Advisory Board, the latter responsible for oversight of the academic mission of the institution. The expertise of the METERB could be leveraged and integrated into the Advisory Board.
5. DOT, MARAD and the Academy should accelerate the planning, reporting and analysis capabilities represented in the Student Information System and immediately review the Academy's data, network and enterprise architecture choices with an eye to positioning the Academy for educational excellence, including specialization and educational programs in highly desirable skills, maritime capabilities and microcredentials, including cybersecurity, renewable energy, maritime-commercial space interfaces, distributed and enterprise systems, and autonomous systems.

Critical and expeditious action on each of these topics in the immediate term is imperative; otherwise, key milestones occurring in the next months will be

eclipsed, threatening any ability of the USMMA to maintain its status as an accredited institution.

Specifically, if the collective stakeholders do not address **Accreditation and Decision Rights Clarification for the Superintendent** immediately, discussions on other topics capturing some stakeholders' attention will become moot if the Academy loses accredited status following the Middle States review in 2024-2025.

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Advisory Board

SECOND ADVISORY BOARD REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, the nation’s primary source for Strategic Sealift Officers who provide the nation with secure maritime supply chain transportation in times of crisis and national emergency, currently faces three immediate, related existential threats: **accreditation** requirements, **institutional governance challenges**, and **infrastructure** demands. The three threats are fundamentally interrelated: Standard VII.2.b of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the Academy’s accrediting agency (‘Middle States’), requires that

...[the institution] has sufficient independence and expertise to ensure the integrity of the institution. Members must have primary responsibility to the accredited institution and not allow political, financial, or other influences to interfere with their governing responsibilities (Middle States, 2022);

Standards VI.4 and VI4.6 require that accredited institutions:

[provide] fiscal and human resources as well as the physical and technical infrastructure adequate to support its operations wherever and however programs are delivered; and

[demonstrate] comprehensive planning for facilities, infrastructure, and technology that includes consideration of sustainability and deferred maintenance and is linked to the institution’s strategic and financial planning processes (Middle States, 2022).

Thus, per Middle States, an accredited institution must have clear and sufficient **governing authority**, a robust process that demonstrates continuous improvement, and adequate physical and technical **infrastructure** in support of its mission. At the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, all three of these elements are in jeopardy: the infrastructure is crumbling and in disrepair; the fiscal and program management capabilities at the institution are inadequate and the senior leadership is shackled to a distant and murky set of fiscal, human resource and operational requirements from the U.S. Department of Transportation/Maritime Administration, and the Academy does not have sufficient time in its academic

schedule to complete the required rounds of infrastructure improvement and assurance of learning (AoL) assessments by its **next self-study year (2024-2025)**, given the lack of progress on its long range plan.

Each of these threats by itself would prove substantial. Given that these items were noted as critical insufficiencies in the 2016 Middle States review that resulted in the Academy being placed on accreditation warning (Middle States 2016a), and in light of the departure of the entire senior leadership team within the next two calendar years (between June 2022 – June 2024), they suggest that **the Academy does not have the governance, physical or fiscal infrastructure to be accredited, which poses a clear existential threat.**

This report describes the state of the Academy in the areas of governance, assurance of learning and infrastructure and provides a series of forward-looking recommendations for the Academy. This assessment and recommendations assume that the results of the work of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy Advisory Council, constituted in response to the November 2021 National Academy of Public Administration report (NAPA, 2021), will not be available in sufficient time to incorporate into these recommendations.

As per 46 U.S. Code 51313, the Advisory Board is responsible for advising the Secretary of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Transportation/Maritime Administration and the Superintendent of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy on the course of instruction and management of the Academy. This report is a required report from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy's Advisory Board to the Secretary of Transportation on the state and future status of the Academy.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation by regional bodies is the minimum essential quality standard for learning organizations in the United States. Accreditation activities demonstrate educational effectiveness and continuous process improvement, including an assurance of learning, effective governance and institutional planning, analysis and reporting.

The Academy is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE); it received re-accreditation in 2017, after being placed on warning in 2016 because of insufficient evidence that the institution was in compliance with:

Requirement of Affiliation 7 (Institutional Planning), Standard 2 (Planning, Resources, and Institutional Renewal), Standard 3 (Institutional Resources), Standard 4 (Leadership and Governance), Standard 5 (Administration), and Standard 9 (Student Support Services) (Middle States, 2016b). The Academy was removed from warning in November 2017, after demonstrating adequate progress on these items. However, the items' recurrence in 2022 suggests that the progress noted earlier was not sustained and is a basis for future accreditation scrutiny.

Assurance of Learning (AoL)

A core mission of the Academy is educating the next generation of future maritime leaders. Central to educational competence is demonstration to accrediting organizations that learning is underway and that learning outcomes are measurable and part of the institution's continuous process improvement efforts.

As part of its Assurance of Learning (AoL) activities for accreditation, the Academy has identified four Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs): Leadership, Professional Expertise, Lifelong Learning and Global Understanding. Table 3-1, Appendix G, of the November 2021 National Academy of Public Administration's *Organizational Assessment of the USMMA* (NAPA, 2021) showed that the Academy's ILO's were updated in November 2021 to reflect measurable outcomes (NAPA, 2021, Table 3-1, Appendix G). The next steps, to map the ILOs to programmatic learning outcomes within each of the Academy programs, and to create measurable performance measures for each learning outcome, were described as underway in February 2022. This progress is important in establishing the performance expectations and metrics for the assurance of learning at the Academy, a core mission objective.

Two rounds of assurance of learning (AoL) assessment are traditionally undertaken in order to demonstrate an institution's institutional and programmatic data collection, analysis and planning processes, and to demonstrate that continuous improvement efforts are underway and systematized in the institution. Because of the Academy's 11-month academic year, the Academy requires 3 years to complete two rounds of AoL assessment, rather than most institutions' two-year cycles.

Since the Academy's Middle States accreditation self-study year is 2024-2025, it is highly unlikely that the Academy will have undertaken two cycles of AoL assessment prior to the Middle States visit. This is significant, as it leaves open the

questions of whether routine, systematic AoL processes are underway at the Academy, and whether the academic and institutional leadership are able to leverage the lessons learned processes and results from the AoL activities, a hallmark of vibrant and effective educational institutions. More importantly, as is the case with all higher education institutions, the COVID learning impacts on this generation of students have not been assessed and need to be accounted and planned for in accreditation and assessment activities.

Because of the importance of accreditation to the continued and effective operation of the Academy, **the Advisory Board recommends that the Academy request a one year extension from the current Middle States AoL accreditation activities**, so that, following ILO to programmatic learning outcomes mapping, (1) performance metrics for all ILOs and programmatic learning outcomes that reflect current learning conditions can be established, and (2) at least two rounds of AoL assessment, utilizing the updated ILO and programmatic learning outcome performance metrics, can be completed prior to the Middle States visit in 2024-2025. Partial data collection for all ILO and programmatic learning outcomes that reflect COVID student learning impacts could highlight continuous improvement and pathways to full data collection efforts.

To support these efforts, the ongoing **student information system acquisition and installation processes, currently focused on transitioning Registrar data, must also be accelerated** so that an adequate AoL data repository and analytical capability can be developed to support AoL assessment, which is currently a manual process. These activities are required immediately and are essential inputs to a successful accreditation visit.

Effective Governance

The Academy's governance structure, a concern noted in the 2016 Middle States report and in the 2021 NAPA report, is a patchwork quilt of authorities, responsibilities and oversight. The Academy receives oversight and advice from three bodies, the Congressional Board of Visitors (BOV); the Academy's Advisory Board, whose statutory responsibilities include the Academy's academic mission; and the Maritime Education and Training Executive Review Board (METERB), a board of senior executive service personnel based in MARAD Headquarters in Washington, DC. All provide input and suggestions to the Academy Superintendent.

In July 2021, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General found this structure unworkable and recommended that, '*[g]iven [the] various existing oversight bodies supporting the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, the Maritime Administration should reconsider whether the Maritime Education and Training Executive Review Board is needed. Having too many oversight bodies can confuse lines of authority and can short circuit effective leadership in the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy' (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2021).*

These thoughts were also echoed in the November 2021 NAPA report, which noted that the Academy's advisory structure provides the appearance of oversight, but in actuality does not provide appropriate guidance. Part of this shortfall relates to the capabilities and experience of the Board. Members of the different groups lack domain and educational experience as well as advisory authority. Congressional BOV members are Congressional representatives and staffers with some industry participation; the Academy Advisory Board members include senior industry, educational and stakeholder representatives. METERB members provide knowledge of MARAD and DOT processes and activities, but they do not currently have any educational or industry leaders.

Because of the needs for effective oversight of and guidance for the Academy, the Advisory Board concurs with the 2021 recommendation of the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General and recommends streamlining Academy oversight Boards into the two Congressionally mandated and statutorily constituted bodies: the Board of Visitors and the Advisory Board, the latter responsible for oversight of the academic mission of the institution. The expertise of the METERB should be leveraged and integrated into the Advisory Board.

Institutional Planning, Analysis and Reporting

Planning, analysis and reporting capabilities are essential for effective education, leadership development and governance in educational institutions. Central to these capabilities are the technology and human processes required to support effective decision making with analytics and information. The 2021 NAPA report highlighted the Academy's lack of strategic vision and infrastructure for providing that vision.

To address some of these issues the Academy is in the process of installing a Student Information System (SIS), a common repository for academic and financial records, including registration, grades, financial and outcomes assessment information. The first phase of the SIS project will migrate the current student record system to the SIS. Financial and outcomes assessment data, including ILO and programmatic learning outcome reporting, analysis and report dissemination are scheduled for later phases of the SIS project. As a result, the SIS repository and institutional learning capabilities will not be available to support Middle States accreditation analysis and reporting in academic year 2023-2024, a key data gathering year in advance of the Middle States visit. This gap was identified in the 2021 NAPA report as well as in the previous Middle States visit.

The Academy is also supported by on-premise data centers that house the Academy's Blackboard Learning Management System and simulator systems. The on-premise data center is on the critical path of the Samuels Hall renovation, and its lack of compliance with appropriate fire and safety regulations has halted the Samuels Hall renovation for over 18 months. Reviewing the data center needs and architecture is the subject of an on-going technology study that will likely eclipse the useful life of the servers and data. The Samuels Hall renovation has been designed, redesigned and underway for close to 10 years, with no new bridge simulation facilities – the heart of the marine transportation students' experiential learning on campus—introduced at the Academy in over the past decade. The data center that powers the ancient shell of the simulation building is serviced by a single trunk vulnerable land-based data link that is subject to possible interruption from vehicle-light pole accidents.

To move this and other infrastructure projects forward, MARAD and DOT have recently introduced project management capabilities (Project Management Institute, 2022) to the Academy in the form of a project manager detailed from the FAA, with planned support for direct hires of 3 additional program managers. This expertise, however, will not be supported by modern project management tools or a robust technology infrastructure at the Academy, both of which are required to successfully introduce and sustain project management capabilities.

The vulnerability and currency of the Academy's data and network architecture and systems, which are central to the Academy's ability to deliver on its educational

and professional development training missions, are concerning. As a result, **the Advisory Board recommends that DOT/MARAD and the Academy accelerate the planning, reporting and analysis capabilities represented in the Student Information System and immediately review the Academy’s data, network and enterprise architecture choices** with an eye to positioning the Academy for educational excellence, including specialization and educational programs in highly desirable skills, maritime capabilities and microcredentials, including cybersecurity, renewable energy, maritime-commercial space interfaces, distributed and enterprise systems, and autonomous systems.

DECISION RIGHTS CLARIFICATION FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT

In 2016, Middle States noted that:

“The Superintendent does not currently have direct control over the institutional functions of personnel hiring, financial planning and management, and procurement. The Superintendent must have the means, authority, and responsibility, assigned or delegated from DOT and/or MARAD as appropriate, over the institutional functions of personnel hiring, financial planning and management, and procurement required to effectively and efficiently accomplish the Academy’s mission. “

The U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General’s report (2021) noted that problems persisted with respect to the Superintendent’s authority, and recommended that the Maritime Administration examine the appropriate division of decision-making and authorities of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy’s management between the Superintendent and the Maritime Administration’s headquarters. Although the Superintendent’s authority differs from those of traditional institutions of higher education, the Advisory Board notes that clear lines of authority and responsibility are articulated at the nation’s other federal services academies, as well as at the state Maritime Academies. **The inability of the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration to grant the Academy Superintendent the requisite authority in personnel hiring, financial planning and management, infrastructure planning and procurement, is a critical failing and an accreditation concern that threatens the Academy’s ability to exist as an independent and healthy institution of higher learning. The 2021-2022 Sea**

Year cancellation similarly impacts the institution’s ability to provide important Strategic Sealift Officer resources and expertise to the nation in the midst of a global pandemic and supply chain crisis.

Budget planning and execution authority, as well as adequate financial resources, are key to effective institutional leadership. As noted in the 2021 NAPA report, the Academy does not receive financial support that is similar to that provided to the other federal service academies:

“The perceived unequal footing between USMMA and the other federal service academies crosses several areas, most notably arrangements for faculty, facilities decision making, and the discretionary use of funds.” (page 189)

Limits to the Superintendent’s authority also stretch to partnerships and opportunities to enhance midshipmen learning, including leveraging industry knowledge, expertise and resources in and out of the classroom, aside from funding. The Superintendent’s ability to engage alumni, external organizations and the maritime industry is highly curtailed and limits the effectiveness of student learning opportunities.

Although MARAD reported to the U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General in 2021 (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2021) that the concern about the appropriate division of decision-making and authorities of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy’s management between the Superintendent and the Maritime Administration’s headquarters was resolved, it is clear to the Advisory Board that the issue is not resolved. The Superintendent is severely hampered in his ability to execute on the mission of the Academy, the learning experiences of the midshipmen suffer, and time and energy is and has been lost for years as a result of micromanagement, murky decisional lines of authority and ineffective and unclear lines of responsibility.

The inability of the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration, in concert with the Academy, to grant the Academy Superintendent the requisite authority in personnel hiring, financial planning and management, and procurement, is a critical failing and an accreditation concern that threatens the Academy’s ability to exist as an independent and healthy institution of higher learning.

The Advisory Board recommends that MARAD, DOT and the Academy immediately stand up a Task Force, independent of the 2-year tenure of the Advisory Council being constituted by the Secretary of Transportation, to address the Superintendent’s decisional authority. Resolving this issue within 12 months is critical to successful accreditation and to the healthy and robust operation of the Academy that is the nation’s primary source of Strategic Sealift Officers.

Culture, Including Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment (SASH)

In late September 2021, a blog released a story of “Midshipman X”, which generated a powerful response throughout the maritime industry, at the Academy, and at MARAD, and resulted in vocal demands for maritime industry-wide changes to the culture both at sea and on shore. The Academy’s Sea Year program, an essential element in midshipmen experiential learning and a critical requirement to satisfy days at sea before midshipmen sit for their licenses, was halted in October 2021. The Academy and MARAD provided a swift and visible sexual assault/sexual harassment (SASH) program response, providing financial support and new leadership in the Academy’s sexual assault and prevention (SAPR) office. A midshipmen advisory group was set up on campus, pre-shipping briefings and peer mentoring were established, and on-campus support programs were set up as additional reporting avenues for midshipmen at sea.

MARAD instituted the EMBARC (Every Mariner Brings a Respectful Culture) program in December 2021, a voluntary industry program that includes shipboard video and audio monitoring in all vessel spaces where midshipmen encounter their shipmates; in addition, a designated reporting individual for SASH concerns or reports was identified for each vessel, and midshipmen joining ships during Sea Year met with the designated person as well as shoreside and shipboard leadership prior to embarking. Increased reporting and SASH feedback mechanisms, incident tracking, and improved cautionary and protective practice information were begun as part of the EMBARC program. To date, some U.S. flag carriers who participate in MARAD’s Maritime Security Program have enrolled in EMBARC. The Maritime Administration is actively recruiting additional shipping companies as participants (in April 2022), and midshipmen returned to Sea Year berths in limited capacity in February 2022.

However, much more needs to be done. Predator tracking and notification to shipping companies and to the Academy of individuals with previous sexual offenses aboard ships with midshipmen are needed so that information and appropriate guidance can be provided. The Congress, GAO, Coast Guard and the shipping industry acknowledge that additional legislation, information and authorities are required to provide this notice and guidance (Susan Collins, 2021; General Accounting Office, 2022).

Despite the swift and visible response to SASH events at sea and at the Academy, more action is needed to improve the culture at the Academy. These improvements are not unique to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy; NAPA recently completed a Cultural Competence study of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy that noted similar concerns with culture (NAPA, 2022) and similar calls have been heard for improved SASH policies, procedures and culture at the state maritime academies (Cal Maritime News, 2021; SUNY Maritime College, 2022).

Specific cultural and SASH concerns include fears that midshipmen would be blacklisted for reporting SASH events, would suffer reputational damage, would not receive enough sea days to sit for their license, and would not be able to graduate on time. Lessons learned and best practices from similar programs at other institutions are needed, along with institutional, emotional and financial support for affinity groups such as the Kings Point Ladies Club (Kappa Pi Lambda) and LGBTQ support groups (the Open Seas Club for example).

Many of the Advisory Board recommendations concerning Sea Year and vessel operators are central elements in the EMBARC program. Further enhancements, however, are required, including hotlines, counseling and mariner-specific reporting avenues on multiple social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Meta and WeChat), in order to build trust among users in the maritime community, the Academy and at the state academies. Peer to peer counseling and reporting resources, as well as credentialed and trained midshipmen and professional mariners, are critical to healthy culture building.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Academy's infrastructure planning, execution and maintenance processes are ineffectual and have followed a painful repeated cycle over a several decade period:

- A general consensus, sometimes following a study, that the Academy needs to address deferred maintenance and capital improvement.
- A master plan for capital improvement is proposed by the Academy.
- Some activity begins related to these topics, including some congressional support.
- Painfully slow progress, or none at all, typically ending with another study that repeats this process.

As noted earlier, DOT and MARAD are taking steps to address deferred maintenance, in addition to developing the human capital required to manage programs and budgets. Beyond these short-term actions, **the Advisory Board recommends that DOT/MARAD develop an interagency design/build agreement and fund a comprehensive infrastructure and capital improvement program designed to provide the nation's primary source of Strategic Sealift Officers the educational and experiential learning facilities expected of the world's maritime leaders.** The funding requirements for the infrastructure plans have been identified, and short-term and long-term human capital investments in project and program management are being made. **Missing from these efforts are the Academy's sustainable human capital and infrastructure planning processes; clear decisional authority that would allow the Superintendent to execute the Academy's mission and provide an excellent learning environment for students; and a healthy culture that provides a safe and secure learning environment for all students.** Absent these elements, the Academy is at risk of failing its accreditation, which threatens the institution's viability and existence.

CONCLUSIONS

The following are the Advisory Board's conclusions:

1. The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy faces three related and existential threats: **accreditation** requirements, **institutional governance challenges**, and **infrastructure** demands. The three threats are interrelated.
2. **The Academy does not have the governance, physical or fiscal infrastructure to be accredited, an existential threat.**
3. **The inability of the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Maritime Administration to grant the Academy Superintendent the requisite authority in personnel hiring, financial planning and management, and procurement, is a critical failing and an accreditation concern that threatens the Academy's ability to exist as an independent and healthy institution of higher learning.**
4. **The Academy's governance structure is a patchwork quilt of authorities, responsibilities and oversight which give the appearance of oversight, but hinder effective leadership and decision making.**
5. **The Academy's infrastructure planning, execution and maintenance processes are ineffectual and have followed a painful cycle of ineffective planning and decision making.**
6. DOT's and MARAD's recent efforts to introduce project management expertise are laudable, but limited, since the efforts will not be supported by modern project management tools or a robust technology infrastructure at the Academy. Both are required to successfully introduce and sustain project management capabilities.
7. Despite the swift and visible response to SASH events at sea and at the Academy, more action is needed to improve the culture at the Academy. These improvements are not unique to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and require industry-wide action and complementary programs at the other federal service academies and at the state maritime academies.

8. Cultural and SASH concerns persist at the Academy, limiting the effectiveness of SASH programs and improvements.
9. Further SASH enhancements are required, including legislation, additional authorities, and new Coast Guard and DoD processes for predator and incident reporting and tracking, hotlines, counseling and mariner-specific reporting avenues on multiple social media platforms in order to build trust among users in the maritime community, at the Academy and at the state academies.
10. The vulnerability and currency of the Academy's data and network architecture and systems, which are central to the Academy's ability to deliver on its educational and professional development training missions, are concerning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy faces an existential threat. This report is a clarion call that immediate and constructive action across several levels of the federal government are required if the Academy is to be sustained. Of immediate and critical concern are the issues of **Accreditation, Decision Rights Clarification for the Superintendent, and Infrastructure**. As explained in this report, the Academy's accreditation with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education is in jeopardy. The specific recommendations of the Advisory Board include:

1. MARAD, DOT and the Academy should immediately stand up a separate Task Force, independent of the Advisory Council being constituted by the Secretary of Transportation, to address the Superintendent's decisional authority. Resolving this issue within 12 months is critical to successful accreditation and to the healthy and robust operation of the Academy that is the nation's primary source for Strategic Sealift Officers.
2. DOT/MARAD should develop an interagency design/build agreement and fund a comprehensive infrastructure and capital improvement program designed to provide the nation's primary source of Maritime Security officers the educational and experiential learning experience expected of the world's maritime thought leaders.
3. The Academy should **request a one year extension from the current Middle States AoL accreditation activities**, so that, following ILO to

- programmatic learning outcomes mapping, (1) performance metrics for all ILOs and programmatic learning outcomes that reflect current learning conditions can be established, and (2) at least two rounds of AoL assessment, utilizing the updated ILO and programmatic learning outcome performance metrics, can be completed prior to the Middle States visit in 2024-2025. Partial data collection for all ILO and programmatic learning outcomes that reflect COVID student learning impacts could highlight continuous improvement and pathways to full data collection efforts.
4. DOT and MARAD should streamline the Academy oversight Boards into the two Congressionally mandated and statutorily constituted Board of Visitors and the Advisory Board, the latter responsible for oversight of the academic mission of the institution. The expertise of the METERB could be leveraged and integrated into the Advisory Board.
 5. DOT, MARAD and the Academy should accelerate the planning, reporting and analysis capabilities represented in the Student Information System and immediately review the Academy's data, network and enterprise architecture choices with an eye to positioning the Academy for educational excellence, including specialization and educational programs in highly desirable skills, maritime capabilities and microcredentials, including cybersecurity, renewable energy, maritime-commercial space interfaces, distributed and enterprise systems, and autonomous systems.

Critical and expeditious action on each of these topics in the immediate term is imperative; otherwise, key milestones occurring in the next months will be eclipsed, threatening any ability of the USMMA to maintain its status as an accredited institution.

Specifically, if the collective stakeholders do not address **Accreditation and Decision Rights Clarification for the Superintendent** immediately, discussions on other topics capturing some stakeholder's attention will become moot if the Academy loses accredited status following the Middle States review in 2024-2025.

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