



THE SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20590

July 24, 2014

Rear Admiral James A. Helis, USMS
Superintendent
U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
Kings Point, NY 11026

Dear Admiral Helis:

As a follow-up to our recent meeting with the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) Advisory Board where we were briefed on the Board's findings and recommendations in their annual report, I want to provide additional guidance in your implementation of USMMA's Strategic Plan 2012-2017.

The Advisory Board's May 2014 assessment of the progress towards the goals specified in the Strategic Plan is timely and their recommendations are sound. In response to the Advisory Board's Report, it is essential that we take action immediately. The USMMA, through the Maritime Administration (MARAD), is directed to:

- Develop a comprehensive leadership development program that integrates academic and regimental student experiences and places leadership development at the forefront of the Academy experience. The Academy will draw on best practices from other institutions, including, but not limited to, the other Federal service academies. The leadership development program will enhance students' understanding of leadership and ensure that they acquire the skills necessary for effectively exercising lifelong leadership in our rapidly changing world.
- Upgrade the dining experience to address nutritional shortcomings by working with Food Services to plan and prepare high-quality meals and snacks that meet students' nutritional and dietary needs. Make healthy food alternatives available after-hours when the dining facilities are closed.
- Hire an experienced individual to assist Academy leadership with reinforcing a positive campus culture and allocate appropriate funding for student life, leadership development and cultural programs. Engage students, faculty and staff to work together to develop dynamic, engaging student life activities both on campus and in the local community as well as taking advantage of the close proximity to New York City.
- Establish a program to routinely evaluate faculty teaching methods in the classroom and to provide faculty support and training for professional development. Hold the faculty accountable to be available to Midshipmen during their published office hours.

These actions represent my priorities for implementation as discussed with you and the Acting Maritime Administrator, and are to be initiated immediately within existing budgetary and

staffing constraints. Other Advisory Board recommendations remain for prioritization and implementation at later dates, to be determined based on resource constraints and budget processes.

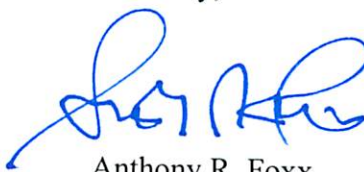
In addition to the immediate steps above, MARAD and the Academy will also lay out a plan to:

- Appoint an industry advisory entity with the specific mandate to assist the USMMA in curriculum development;
- Develop a faculty hiring strategy to ensure a diverse, skilled and adequate number of faculty hires with unique skill sets and recent industry experience;
- Improve USMMA's alumni relationships, to include strengthening and expanding communications with alumni to share more information about the accomplishments and needs of the Academy;
- Identify policy changes and resources to provide greater professional development opportunities for faculty; and
- Conduct a comprehensive review of educational equipment, including simulators and information technology infrastructure, and explore opportunities for use of private funds to develop this infrastructure.

As discussed, MARAD and the Academy will conduct a thorough review of the USMMA curriculum with the goal of better integration and balance between the academic, regimental and extra-curricular aspects of the Midshipman experience. The Academy must better leverage both time and staff, and must develop creative ways to meet the requirements for the academic degree, the U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Marine Credential, and the U.S. Armed Forces active duty or reserve commission, while meeting USMMA's mission of graduating leaders of exemplary character to serve the Nation. The Academy and MARAD will report progress on all of the above actions to me on at least a quarterly basis. The first quarterly progress report will identify the timeline with milestones for planning and implementation. Any additional resources necessary to implement these programs should be submitted for consideration in the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget. I expect MARAD and the Academy to remain actively engaged with the Advisory Board and the Board of Visitors and to keep them apprised of progress toward implementing the USMMA Strategic Plan 2012-2017.

Thank you for your continued dedication and commitment to developing our Midshipmen into future maritime professionals and leaders.

Sincerely,



Anthony R. Foxx