

**United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) Advisory Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday, August 7, 2023**  
**USMMA Crabtree Room (In-Person)**

**Purpose:**

The USMMA Advisory Council will provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation, MARAD, and USMMA on matters related to the Academy. This is the first official meeting of the UAMMA Advisory Council

**Attendees:**

- **USMMA Advisory Council Members:** Ally Ceden; Jonathan “JC” Christian; Claudia Cimini; Shannon Collins; Wayne Gersie; Margaret DeLuca Klein (Chair); David Lewis (Vicechair); Eric Page; Benjamin D. Reese Jr., Lynn Rosenthal; and Madison Schmidt.
  
- **Department of Transportation (DOT), Maritime Administration (MARAD), and U.S. Merchant Marine (USMMA) Officials:** Maritime Administrator Ann Phillips, RDML USN (Ret.); Deputy Maritime Administrator Tamekia Flack; MARAD Executive Director Jack Kammerer; Will Sheehan (Designated Federal Officer (DFO)); VADM Joanna Nunan, USMS (Superintendent); Captain Mikel Stroud, USMS (Acting Deputy Superintendent); Captain James Zatwarnicki, JR., USMS (Acting Provost); Rebecca MacPherson (Acting Director, Facilities), Anton Tripolskii (Director of SAPRO), Kristofer Schnatz (Director of Phys Ed and Athletics), Julianne Rhinebeck (Advisor to the Administrator), Aaron Meyers, Veronica Barry, Kelly Butruch, Thomas Johnson, and Mary Grice (backup DFO).
  
- **Public:** Jim Tobin, President of the USMMA Alumni Association & Foundation.

**Meeting Call to Order and Roll Call:**

The USMMA Advisory Council (Council) Chair, Dr. Klein, called the meeting to order shortly before 9:00am. Will Sheehan (DFO) conducted roll call and confirmed 11 members were present, and two were absent (Dave Curfman and Roshenda Josephs). Mr. Sheehan provided an overview of the agenda and meeting administrative items, and then introduced the Maritime Administrator, RDML Ann Phillips for opening remarks.

**Opening Remarks by the Maritime Administrator, Honorable Ann Phillips:**

Administrator Phillips kicked off her remarks with introductions of the MARAD Headquarters team present, and then briefly passed to VADM Nunan to introduce the Academy team. The Administrator then thanked the Council for devoting their time and knowledge, skills and abilities to help the Academy, especially with all of their unique backgrounds and how vital this is to the institution, and broadly to the country. The work of the Council will help to not only move USMMA forward, but the Maritime Industry as a whole, and will have lasting effects on our National and economic security. The Administrator briefly highlighted the importance of the

maritime industry, and especially the need for a fleet of commercially operating U.S.-flag vessels, as well as the Ready Reserve Force that MARAD maintains that are all a key element of DoD strategic sealift, and most importantly, is the pool of civilian mariners to man them.

The Administrator briefed on the Council's responsibilities to provide substantive recommendations to the Secretary, who has great interest in actively participating in and supporting this effort. The Maritime Administrator's remarks highlighted the MARAD's mission and responsibility. In summary, we need U.S. flagged ships, we put cargo on those ships, and we need mariners to operate those ships – this is where the Academy comes in. She also touched on the USMMA Sea Year and commissioning. She noted that 25 percent of licensed officers come from Kings Point, which is the largest source of Merchant mariners, and is what makes Kings Point unique.

The Administrator highlighted the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) November 2021 report, and noted the report is very wide ranging on longstanding and systemic challenges in the areas of education, facilities infrastructure, sexual assault and sexual harassment (SASH), institutional culture and learning environment, external stakeholder engagement and institutional level management. The Administrator then highlighted that this is where the Council's work will come in - helping to advise and provide recommendations to address the five recommendations in the NAPA Report that was shared with the Council in advance of the meeting. Specifically, the Council is tasked to examine the five recommendations pulled from the NAPA report and determine how to best interpret those recommendations, to what extent those recommendations should be implemented, and lastly, whether collectively they can come up with better solutions within each of those recommended areas. She welcomes them to address other recommendations as well.

The Administrator then summarized what actions MARAD and the Academy have been taken since the NAPA Report. The immediate focus and priority is midshipmen health and safety, and USMMA re-accreditation coming up in 2024. For infrastructure, the USMMA hired an experienced Facilities Director and built staffing capacity to better address infrastructure, but the challenge is not enough capacity, and keeping people with the right qualifications. The Administrator further highlighted other improvements, including; extending midshipmen mental healthcare hours to the weekend (and thanked Council member and former midshipmen and now Ensign Maddie Schmidt for her direct support); successfully attaining on-campus concurrent jurisdiction, an effort led by Academy counsel Ilene Kreitzer; addressing Cyber and IT challenges; implemented Every Mariner Builds a Respectful Culture (EMBARC), which was passed in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act to expand the vessels midshipmen can safely travel on while training at sea. While a lot has been accomplished, much more work remains to be done to achieve sustained positive change.

Administrator Phillips also noted that the culture of the current merchant marine industry is decades behind the U.S. military, and is not sustainable. This is an issue that needs to be solved, and the best place to lead this change is at the Academy where mariners are 'made'. The

Administrator thanked the Council again for their willingness to serve at this critical moment in time, and then introduced the Deputy Administrator Tamekia Flack to provide remarks.

**Remarks by Deputy Maritime Administrator Tamekia Flack:**

Deputy Administrator Flack highlighted the importance of the Council and noted the diverse level of experience they bring to the table that provides a great value. The Deputy shared her background, and then noted how this advisory council was so important to her predecessor, former Deputy Maritime Administrator Lucinda Lessley, who was also the primary driver in implementing the EMBARC program. The Deputy encouraged the Council to bring their expertise and best ideas (with no limitations) to the table. The Deputy noted that the work the Council will embark upon is an important factor to the economic vitality of the Nation, and that she remains available for the members when they have any questions.

**Remarks by USMMA Superintendent, Vice Admiral Joanna Nunan:**

Vice Admiral (VADM) Joanna Nunan welcomed the Council and noted that she is still building her leadership team. Admiral Nunan started off with the graduates who go active duty, and that after eight years, they are resigning their commission. She noted the importance of finding better ways to do a better job retaining these merchant mariners. At the end of the day, it is about the midshipmen, and how we can make it better for them. The progress is notable but very fragile – the Academy needs more resources – funding and staffing. Admiral Nunan indicated she is focusing on picking the best staff. She provided an overview of the Academy, including history/background, the mission, and why we are here. She reviewed the Academy values: respect, honor, and service. She emphasized respect, and that the other values will fall into place - if you have respect.

**Remarks by Acting Deputy Superintendent, Capt. Mikel Stroud:**

Capt. Stroud briefly introduced himself as the newly delegated Acting Deputy Superintendent. He provided welcoming remarks to the Council, and then passed the floor to the Acting Provost.

**Remarks by Acting Provost, Capt. James Zatwarnicki, Jr.**

Acting Provost Capt. James Zatwarnicki provided highlights of the academic curriculum, and how the Academy provides such a unique opportunity. Capt. Zatwarnicki briefed information on the trimester system, simulations, labs, STCW competencies, sea year experience, and training aboard the training vessel Kings Pointer. He provided a briefing on the four pillars – regiment, sea year, athletics, and education to reach the institutional learning outcomes. He noted that sea year is the ‘crown jewel’ for students, and that the world is their campus as they travel all over the country and world in their training. The Acting Provost noted graduates come out of the Academy with a Bachelor of Science degree, USCG licenses as Merchant Marine Officer, and Commissions in the U.S. Navy Reserve (or other Armed Forces).

**Remarks by Director, Facilities and Infrastructure Management, Rebecca MacPherson:**

Rebecca MacPherson provided an overview of the Academy infrastructure, in order to familiarize the Council of the ongoing priority projects and activities she has been overseeing in

the short time she has been with the Academy. She provided background on the Samuel Hall issues. In addition to that, the director provided information updates on ongoing projects she has spearheaded and moved forward: Crown-in-Shield Pier, Mallory Pier wave screen, Fulton-Gibbs, fiber optic Loop work, boiler replacement, Campus-wide maintenance contract, storm water management system and seawall, and the USMMA master facilities plan. She explained that the USMMA was in some cases bringing facilities systems to failure instead of administering continuous preventative maintenance. The campus-wide contract in place is a critical tool to address and manage these ongoing requirements.

**Question and Answer Period:**

Following the morning briefings, the DFO then opened up the floor for any questions.

- Administrator Phillips asked Ms. MacPherson to explain the Merchant Marine Academy Requirements for Infrastructure Needs Executive Review (MMARINER) Council and Office of the Secretary of Transportation’s Merchant Marine Academy Capital Council (OMMAC) process.

Ms. MacPherson responded that these council bodies are a way for MARAD and DOT to provide oversight and have insight into major Academy infrastructure projects. The MMARINER Council is MARAD’s oversight that includes MARAD leadership (e.g., the Administrator, Executive Director, Associate Administrator for Budget and Programs/CFO, etc.), for all projects that exceed \$1 million for approval. This oversight has been in place for a year and a half, and ensures projects are approved that align with the Department priorities. The OMMAC is the DOT oversight council that reviews all approved MMARINER Council projects and helps to ensure the appropriate resources and approvals are available to move forward on projects. This Council has been in place now for about a year. The level of ‘buy-in’ and support the Academy is getting in this process is unprecedented. The Superintendent noted that she does not have a fully formed/ functional staff yet, so this process is helpful to ensure she has the right level of ‘buy-in’ to move forward on these projects. Director MacPherson mentioned that the MMARINER Council meets every month, but there is an ability to call ‘ad hoc’ meetings to address health and safety as or if needed.

- Dr. Ben Reese wanted to hear more about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – this includes both leadership and students. He wanted to learn about DEI culture and noted the lack of discussion in this area.
- Wayne Gersie noted the importance to DEI and creating a welcoming environment to a more diverse campus. He noted that diversity is our strength and if we don’t start leveraging it soon, or we will pay a price later. He noted that students need an experience that brings those from different backgrounds. This is just as threatening as some of the other issues discussed, such as cyber security, if we do not address it quickly. Mr. Gersie noted that he is glad to be here to raise awareness on this important issue.

The Superintendent recognized his concerns, and that the Academy is working on advancing DEIB and sees this as a priority and opportunity. She highlighted that the statistics for the incoming class for minorities is 25%, up from 12%. She noted we have a long way to go, and the Academy has to work on the “belonging” piece of DEIB. The Academy has Affinity groups, and the Academy is in the process of recruiting for a DEI Officer, and the hiring process will allow the Academy to reach out to candidates with appropriate experience. The Superintendent welcomes the Council’s help on DEIB.

- Ally Cedenó wanted the Superintendent to talk about efforts to increase minorities and women at the Academy. The Superintendent noted they have hired a diversity recruiter, and suggested the Academy provide a white paper on the issue to the Council.

### **Break for Campus Tour and Lunch:**

The DFO then announced that it was time to end the morning session of the USMMA Advisory Council’s public meeting to allow the Council to complete a tour of the campus, and have lunch. The afternoon session of the Council’s meeting will be called ‘back to order’ again at 1:00 pm.

### **Continuing Public Session/Council Business:**

Vicechair Lewis made an announcement that Jim Tobin from Alumni Foundation offered to coordinate meetings with alumni and Council members where they live.

Dr. Klein wanted to start addressing the assigned problem set, and do consensus voting, and asked members to identify subcommittees that Council members want to reside on. She noted that the Council has a two-year term and a report at the end of every year. Dr. Klein noted that they are required to meet 4 times per year – November at USMMA, February will be virtual, for June’s planned meeting the location is TBD. Vicechair Lewis said the goal would be to have a draft report in June. The DFO will work with the Academy and MARAD leadership on proposed dates/deadlines for the meetings (including when the charter is due for update and the term of the Council) and get back to the Council.

### **Presentation of Problem Set:**

The DFO provided a presentation on the origin of the Problem Set. He identified the 2020 NDAA required NAPA conduct a study of the USMMA. This NAPA study rendered 67 recommendations identified in their November NAPA 2021 Report. The problem set is to address NAPA recommendations 3.4, 6.5, 8.2, 8.4, and 9.4.

### **Council Discussion:**

Dr. Klein provided a brief of the problem set recommendations. Dr. Klein suggests that Academics could be subcommittee of its own - Dr. Reese suggested they focus on faculty and culture and climate. Are we picking the right kind of faculty and students? Ally Cedenó suggested focusing on candidates and how the process gets in the way and she suggested aligning academics with industry trends. Wayne Gersie indicated the driver of all of this will be accreditation and the need to develop a DEI strategic plan. He further emphasized that the Council desires to come up with recommendations that are actionable and help move the

Academy forward. The other issue is how to improve governance and a culture of accountability. Capt. Jonathan Christian noted that the Academy has different authorities and level of resources than the other [military] service academies.

Administrator Phillips highlighted there are laws and authorities that direct certain outcomes, but this is not necessarily an impediment, as laws can be changed. The Deputy also noted this as well, and that this is something MARAD will need to work through so the Council should not let politics or law limit their recommendations.

Dr. Klein noted culture is less tangible but extraordinarily impactful, and as to whether students, faculty and staff are inclined to be inclusive. Dr. Reese indicated that DEI should be layered into each subcommittee. Wayne Gersie recommended there be some type of qualitative assessment of the environment.

Ally Cedeno noted the benefit of having a stand-alone Career Services Department that focuses on opportunities other than being at sea. This is important to retain licensed mariners. Career Development would work with women and minorities and to show there are more opportunities in the industry. She also noted there are tools and roadmaps to utilize on where we are with climate culture. Vice Admiral Nunan noted that this is timely, as an assessment of the environment will allow them to make adjustment/s in the facility as needed to address necessary changes.

The Council determined the need to formulate the following Sub-committees:

- 1) Academic
- 2) Governance
- 3) Facilities
- 4) DEIB/Culture/Climate
- 5) Health, Wellness, and Safety

Dr. Klein received unanimous consensus from the Council that these are the five subcommittees. She noted that she will now work with David Lewis and the DFO to staff the subcommittees. A report is due in one year and recommendations will be made in these five areas. The DFO shared that subcommittee groups can meet as needed and do not need to be a public meeting. The Chair requested that the Council members provide her with what subcommittees they would like to lead or participate in, and any recommendations for subject matter experts. Dr. Klein said she will pull the full list together and will share with everyone after she has an opportunity to review with Vice-chair Lewis.

### **Bylaws**

Chair Dr. Klein asked for a vote on the bylaws shared in advance of the meeting for the Council's approval. The Council provided unanimous consensus on their approval to the bylaws.

**Public Comment Period:**

The DFO acknowledged that he received no public comments in advance of the meeting and opened the floor up to Jim Tobin (USMMA Alumni Foundation), who was present as part of the public. Mr. Tobin provided a comment on behalf of the Alumni Foundation indicating the Alumni is here to support. He noted that infrastructure is one of the biggest issues at the Academy – he noted that if we do not arrive at a long-term plan for infrastructure, nothing else matters. The Alumni Foundation is working to assist with diversity, but this will not improve if we do not make it a place they want to learn at. He noted without infrastructure improvements, the Academy has no future.

**Briefing on the USMMA Academic Curriculum, Captain Paul Acquaro:**

Capt. Paul Acquaro provided an overview of the Academy’s Academic Program. This included an overview of the curriculum, and highlighted the Department of the Navy, Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), and ABET all have a say in our curriculum. In 2018, the Academy reviewed the curriculum to determine if the Academy was doing everything it was supposed to in the curriculum. The 2018 review rendered that the Academy is not doing everything it is required to do for the Department of the Navy. USMMA Midshipmen carry a high credit load. For the 2024 curriculum, Capt. Acquaro went over changes they were looking to implement in the curriculum to help better develop and retain the students. Capt. Acquaro also provided an overview of the MSCHE Self Study Timeline and status of ongoing actions to complete in preparation for the March/April 2025 MSCHE visit.

**Briefing on USMMA Athletic Program, Kristofer Schnatz:**

Kristofer Schnatz, Director of Physical Education and Athletics, briefed the Council on the Athletic Program and opportunities available to the midshipmen. The Academy is part of Division III. Mr. Schnatz went over a number of challenges the program has, including lack of capacity on the athletic fields, acclimating cadets when they come back from sea year, and the cadets having to stay fit while they are at sea, and the timing of their return and start of the sport season. He noted that recruiting early is critical, but every student athlete recruited, is often recruited by other institutions. When athletic recruits come here and see the state of the facilities, the Academy often loses athletes. The Academy was built for men and we have a problem when it comes to needing women locker rooms. This is not a good experience for women and needs to be addressed.

**Briefing on USMMA SASH Program:**

Anton Tripolskii, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO) Director, provided an overview of what his office has implemented to address the NAPA recommendations. The Director noted that the Athletics Director has done so much for equity and inclusion. The Director indicated the Academy is working to address the NAPA recommendations, and noted there is an epidemic of gender-based violence, as addressed in the NAPA report. SAPRO covers all issues that Title IX offices in other Institutions of Higher Ed would cover. The ongoing challenge is the demand on the students, especially the plebes. The SAPRO Program is being assessed by an external contract who will render recommendations in March 2024. Protecting

students while at sea is going to help recruitment. The SAPRO Director stressed we need to create an environment where we stand up to misogyny and harassment to make sure it changes. Midshipmen are trained twice a year on SAPR. Mr. Tripolskii also discussed the SAPR Ambassador Program, an advocacy program and regimental model that will help to advance cultural changes. This is currently being rolled out, with advocacy groups being named, and will help along with the faculty and staff that can advocate and report for the victims as well.

**Briefing by USMMA Acting Commandant and Regimental Commander, CDR Andrew McCarthy and MIDN Katie McGillicuddy:**

CDR Andrew McCarthy (Acting Commandant) and MIDN Katie McGillicuddy 1/C (Regimental Commander) provided an overview of the Regimental Program. This included the mission, regimental learning outcomes, and the regimental organizational staff and structure. Regimental Commander McGillicuddy is in charge of the entire regiment and provided information on initiatives and support services available to the midshipmen.

Regimental Commander McGillicuddy provided her perspective on the sailing experience and how EMBARC helped to make her feel safe while at Sea Year training. She noted that her experience at the Academy helped her be a success when she went on Sea Year.

**Closing Remarks and Adjournment:**

VADM (Ret) David Lewis gave closing remarks. The first line of business is to staff the subcommittees and get the subcommittees working. The Subcommittee chairs will drive the meeting schedules and may require a 2-3 meeting commitment before the next Council meeting expected in November 2023.

Administrator Phillips thanked everyone for their time and dedication and highlighted that all perspectives are encouraged. She also noted that any recommendations for subject matter experts, to let the DFO know.

The DFO ended with some administrative issues related to travel because many had flight cancellations. He thanked everyone for their help organizing, especially all of the Academy staff, and then adjourned the meeting at 1657 hours.

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**I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes of the USMMA Advisory Council are accurate and complete. These minutes will be archived on the USMMA Advisory Council's website.**

*Margaret Klein*  
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**Dr. Margaret Deluca Klein, Chair, USMMA Advisory Council**

5 Jan 2024  
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**Date**

Submitted by:  
Mary Grice ([mary.grice@dot.gov](mailto:mary.grice@dot.gov)), Designated Federal Officer