

ACM Leads with Optimism in 2025

A commentary by David Jones, President of Allegany College of Maryland

Next week, I will have the honor of welcoming students to Allegany College of Maryland for the start of the spring semester. Without a doubt, it's one of my favorite days on campus. No matter the year, students renew our college community. They bring a sense of hope as they connect or reconnect with one another and with us, often as their surrogate family. The first day of a semester is a chance to begin again.

That hope and optimism of our students mirrors our own. We envision a bright future for ACM in 2025, as we consider our enrollment trends, economic impacts, and partnerships. Despite the many challenges facing higher education, we can share in good faith, as I do today, what we know about ACM to be true.

Our student enrollment is positive.

Allegany College of Maryland is in a unique position. As other colleges and universities experienced declining enrollments during the fall semester, our student enrollment increased by 4.3% over the prior fall. Similarly, we appear on track for increased enrollment when the spring semester begins on January 15.

Our Center for Continuing Education and Workforce Development celebrated record enrollment in FY 24 with an increase of 10.2% in FTE or Full-Time Equivalent. (FTE is a calculation that translates our full-time and part-time headcount into a single number for comparison purposes.)

We influence the lives of our students and our regional economy.

ACM is a strong investment for students. According to a recent economic outlook study of the 2022-23 academic year, our college outperforms the stock market. Our students experience an average annual return of 19.6%, while the S&P 500 has delivered an average return of 10.1%. From this report, we know that an ACM student gains \$3.40 in lifetime earnings for every dollar invested in their education.

For many of our students, their college degree is what moves them out of the cycle of poverty. After graduation, the average ACM alumni with an associate degree annually earns \$7,500 more than a person with a high school diploma or GED. Over their working life, this amounts to \$255,000 more in higher income.

As ACM builds opportunity for students, we continue to create wealth for our region. From 2022-23, our college added \$95.8 million in income to our service area's economy — roughly 2.0% of our region's total gross regional product. If we consider \$95.8 million instead in terms of jobs, we supported 1,533 positions.

Because our graduates generate larger incomes over time and are less likely to use government services, the present value of ACM amounts to \$18.0 million in total taxpayer benefits.

Our partnerships enhance local opportunities.

As we join America's community colleges that are leading the way in reinvigorating the local and national economies, we continue to form partnerships that enhance our local opportunities. We recently partnered with agencies, funders, and community leaders on a range of projects.

ACM was selected for the **Maryland Transfer Intensive**, a cooperative project between the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Aspen Institute, which begins this spring. Through this partnership, our enrollment and transfer staff will develop skills and tactics to make the transfer process more affordable, less time-consuming and barrier-free for ACM students.

Through our **Meeting the Moment** project, our facilitators are successfully teaching stress-reduction and mind-body skills to more than 600 students of all ages in 22 public schools. The project is a partnership with Allegany County Public Schools and The Center for Mind Body Medicine and funded through an \$825,000 grant to ACM from the Maryland Consortium on Coordinated Community Supports and the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission.

We are honored to contribute land for its development and be part of the County's public-private partnership to develop the **Willowbrook Outdoor Wellness (WOW)** complex. The new county-owned public park is a place and space for everyone and every type of body, with more athletic fields and facilities yet to be constructed.

To keep our campus safe and secure, we received a \$375,000 grant through the Maryland Higher Education Commission's **Campus Safety Grant Program** to integrate and improve our video surveillance and controlled entry systems.

In the year ahead, our college will build on these present-day collaborations as we work to provide access to high-quality, affordable higher education pathways for transfer to a university, career and technical education, and workforce training.