



The US Merchant Marine Academy's At-Sea Training *Essential preparation for national security*

ABOUT SEA YEAR:

Overview

The US Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) was established by Congress prior to World War II to ensure the nation has a pool of highly qualified, service obligated, licensed mariners ready, willing, and able to serve in times of war or national emergency. It is the US Merchant Marine (primarily commercial vessels), not the Navy, that is responsible for moving troops, supplies and materiel to the warfront.

These vessels carry all types of cargo in peacetime and are manned by civilian crews. In times of conflict, the US Navy's Strategic Sealift Officer Force (SSO) is responsible for operating these vessels which are deployed by the military in wartime. The SSO is overwhelmingly comprised of USMMA graduates (over 80 percent).

Upon graduation and receiving their commission as an officer in the reserves, USMMA Midshipmen are expected to assume vital roles within the military sealift. The requisite training must be completed while at USMMA, as Midshipmen are required to obtain an unlimited tonnage Coast Guard license as a condition of graduation. On the job training is simply not an option, and this is why Congress has mandated that USMMA provide this mission-critical at-sea training, informally known as "Sea Year."

At-sea training is unrivaled and is as important for USMMA Midshipmen as flight school is for USAF pilots or Naval aviators

An unparalleled training program, Sea Year produces USMMA graduates, all with an eight-year service commitment, who are able to step on board vessels from day one and serve as officers with the experience, confidence, integrity and the trust of everyone on board.

Sea Year is an immersive program totaling 12 months, in which US Merchant Marine Academy Midshipmen are assigned to commercial maritime vessels as deck and engineering officers in training to acquire maritime skills in a real-world environment.

The knowledge and experience acquired via Sea Year is fundamental to the world-class maritime education provided by USMMA and is mandated by Congress and US Coast Guard (USCG)-certified. This intensive and diversified training takes place aboard multiple commercial vessels and is unique to

USMMA – nothing comparable is offered at any other college or university, including the four other federal service academies.

USMMA Midshipmen must complete a rigorous four-year program that requires them to obtain 143 credit hours during their three years at the Academy and undergo twelve months of unique, experiential training at sea. During their Sea Year, Midshipmen must earn at least an additional 20 academic credits while training on a diverse portfolio of vessels.

OMB recognizes the defense and security needs that at-sea training fulfills

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has noted that “USMMA exists to meet a quantifiable public need, producing merchant marine officers to an established technical standard for Defense and Security requirements.” According to OMB, the role of the state college maritime programs is to “produce Merchant Marine Officers for industry,” not for national defense.

USMMA training must reflect the multidimensional nature of the military sealift

USMMA *Deck* Midshipmen’s training takes place on a diverse array of militarily-useful cargo ships that represent the backbone of the US sealift. Oil tankers that transport and transfer jet fuel, container ships carrying military cargoes, roll-on-roll-off vessels transporting tanks, bulk carriers, and heavy-lift ships are all crucial components of a sealift. Midshipmen graduate with real-world experience on the same vessels, managing the same cargoes and fuels, and piloting and navigating the same waters they will be expected to operate in during wartime.

USMMA *Engine* Midshipmen’s training takes place on ships with a variety of propulsion plants, including slow-speed diesel engines, medium-speed diesel engines, diesel-electric drive, steam turbine engines, and gas turbine engines. They gain first-hand experience in operating and maintaining a wide range of propulsion plants and ship’s systems, conducting the same routine and emergency operations they will be expected to master during wartime.

The USMMA curriculum – and campus – were built around Sea Year

USMMA’s total enrollment is ~1000. The campus was built to house approximately 750 Midshipmen, since 25% of the Midshipmen are off-campus in at-sea training throughout the entire calendar year.

Plebe (freshman) year is spent on campus taking classes in firefighting, first aid, marine engineering, nautical science, naval science, and ocean survival, in addition to Bachelor of Science degree required classes, to prepare Midshipmen to embark on their Sea Year training.

The remaining three years are spent rotating between Sea Year training and on campus classes. Every Midshipman will spend a four-month and an eight-month tour at sea on various vessels to complete the USCG-mandated sea days (at least 300 for engineers; 330 for deck officers) as well as curriculum requirements to be eligible to sit for their week-long Unlimited Third Assistant Engineer or Unlimited Third Officer license exam.

All Deck Midshipmen must complete a comprehensive 21 academic credit “Sea Project” covering every aspect of vessel operations, including attaining a proficiency in celestial and terrestrial navigation, lifesaving drills, cargo operations, ship structure and stability, navigational rules of the road, seamanship, and more.

All Engineering Midshipmen must complete an in-depth 20-22 academic credit Sea Project by which they attain an in-depth knowledge of main propulsion plants, shipboard engineering systems, naval architecture, refrigeration systems, electrical engineering, lifesaving, and more.

“Strife-born Alma Mater”

Of the more than 9,000 merchant mariners killed in WWII, 142 were Academy students aboard merchant ships undergoing their Sea Year training. Since that time, USMMA Midshipmen have directly supported operations in the Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and most recently, in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. As a result, USMMA is the only federal service academy to have lost students in combat, and the only one to have been awarded a Battle Standard.

Senior Military Leaders Understand the Crucial Role of USMMA Graduates

As former Secretary of Defense James Mattis told USMMA graduates in 2018, “You’re going to sustain our allies and fuel our ships and ferry our warriors. It’s as simple as that and we’re going to need you as we see the storm clouds gather.... Our Merchant Marine...is absolutely essential. It’s in every war plan that I review.”

Commercial vessels are the backbone of our military sealift, without which we could not prevail in conflicts

Strategic Sealift is the ability to wield America’s power overseas through water-borne transport. During war there are two types of sealift resources: Surge Shipping of military unit equipment and pre-positioned material—the initial, high-volume, rapid movement of battle tanks, assault vehicles, artillery, helicopters, trucks, and immediate combat provisions to support troops and aircraft; and Sustainment Shipping to resupply US forces to meet daily consumption and build up reserve stocks while combat is taking place.

Throughout history, the civilian U.S.-flag maritime industry has played an indispensable role in ensuring that American military planners have an adequate and a reliable source of strategic sealift; USMMA ensures an adequate supply of fully trained and licensed merchant mariners are available to man those vessels. It’s no surprise that Franklin Roosevelt called the U.S. Merchant Marine the “fourth arm of defense.”

For more information/helpful links:

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