

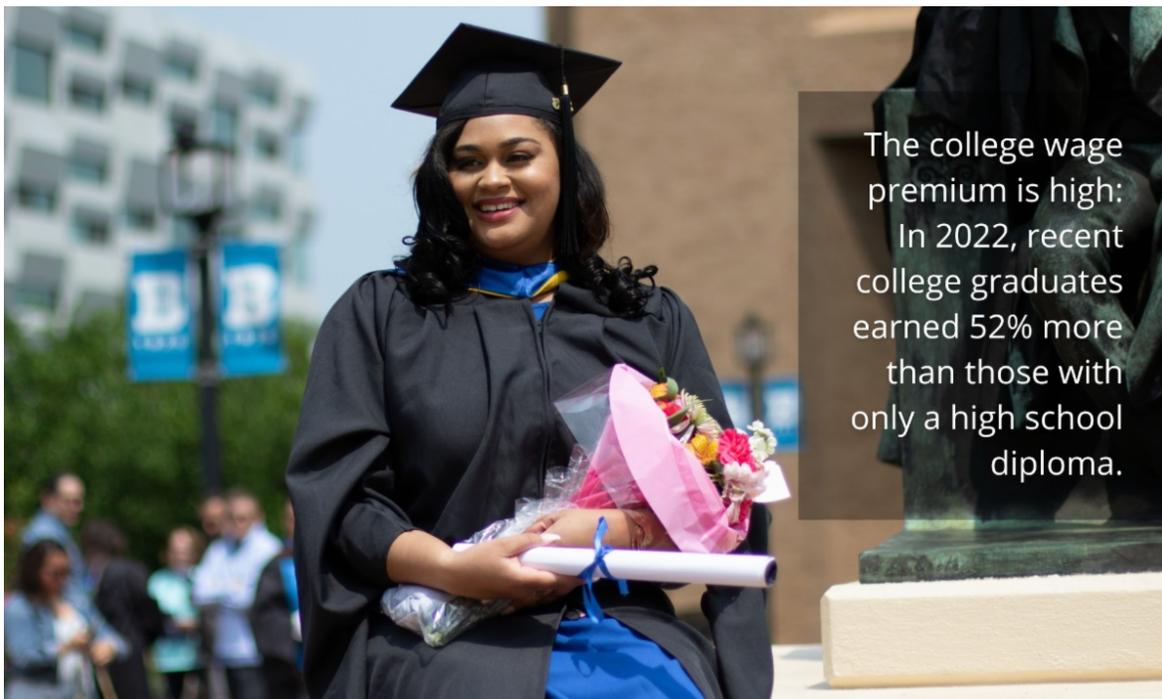
The Cost and VALUE of College

Last month, our USM universities [awarded](#) 40,000 undergraduate and graduate degrees. Each one of those degrees is a story—of persistence, of sacrifice, of joy, of a dream fulfilled, a journey continued, a community enriched, a family made tearfully proud.

As I congratulate the University System's Class of 2023—those who chose a degree despite the time and work and cost—I reflect on the growing number of Americans who say that college isn't, in fact, worth it.

The Value

Of course, the data show otherwise. The salary return on a four-year degree has remained remarkably strong over the years. A recent college graduate can expect to earn [50 percent more](#) than someone the same age who has only a high school diploma. Over a lifetime, the difference is about \$1 million. And while that number will rise and fall by [college major](#) (STEM degrees still outperform all others) and, less so, by the college itself, all evidence bears out the value of higher education.



Certainly, I don't believe that everyone needs a four-year degree. I don't believe a degree is a requirement to succeed. But I do think it makes success much easier. I do think it helps those entering the job market and the millions more moving through it every day. Because a degree isn't just for those getting their first job—but for those getting their second, their third, the job that doesn't even exist today.

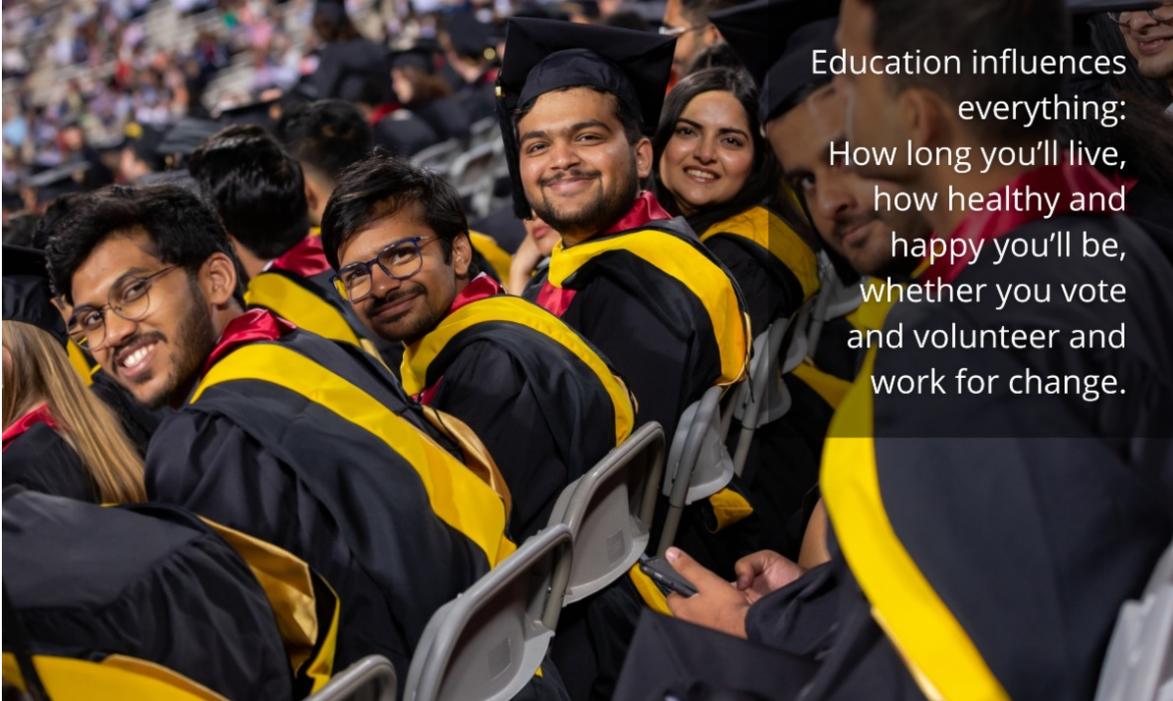
And what of the states that house those jobs? They, too, are made stronger for the education of their people. The 40,000 students we graduated this year are fueling Maryland's fastest growing industries (7,450 computer science degrees) and driving how our companies operate (8,100 business degrees). They're filling critical positions in classrooms (2,750 teaching degrees) and hospitals (1,600 nursing degrees), where staffing shortages threaten the state's ability to educate and care for its citizens.



Maryland is routinely ranked in the U.S. top 5 for the share of residents with a bachelor's degree and with a graduate or professional degree; for PhDs and engineers as part of the workforce; for tech innovation; and, not coincidentally, for [household income](#). Why is this important? Because the personal wealth a degree confers, multiplied across individual earners, translates into shared wealth, with higher salaries feeding a larger tax base that supports public programs and services.

But the education we offer isn't just about employment or earnings. Education influences everything: how long you'll live, how healthy and happy you'll be, whether you vote and volunteer and work for meaningful change, how many dollars you give to charity and how many hours to community causes.

And societal benefits aside, college builds the skills that everyone needs regardless of career aspirations: critical and creative thinking, communication, collaboration—skills that write our success as much as any disciplinary knowledge. College is where learners get comfortable working across their differences to solve the most intractable problems of our age—the problems that higher education has always been called upon to solve.



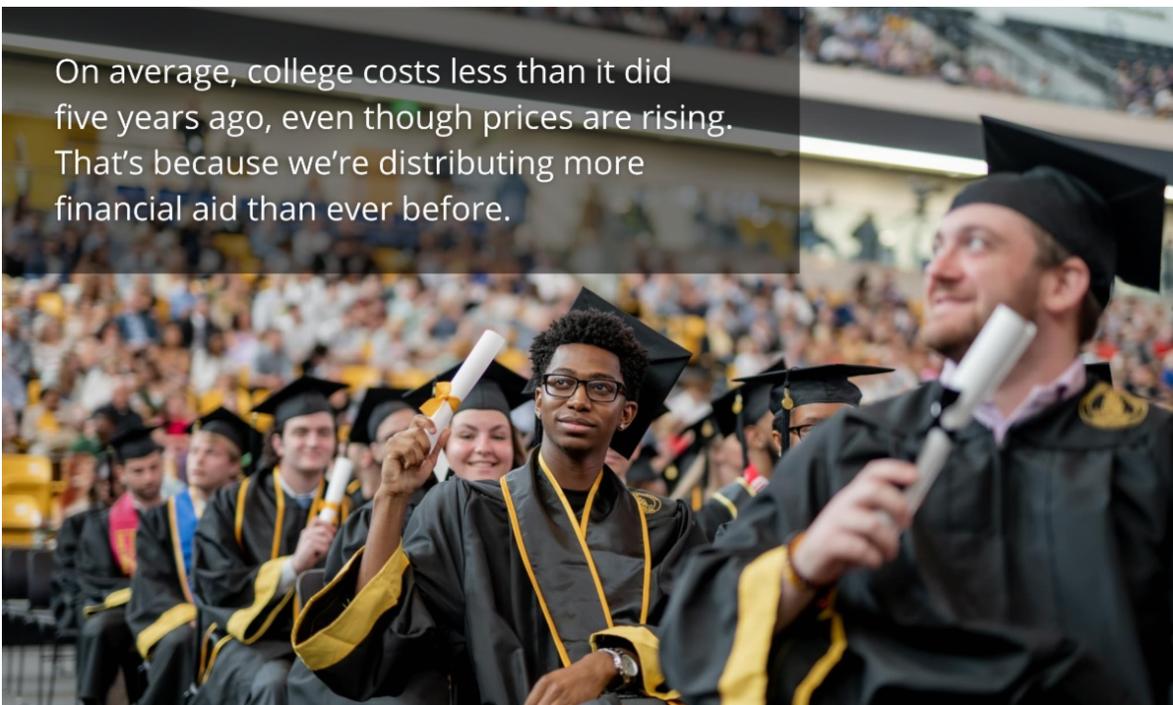
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The Cost

And so, with all this accrued value—to the individual and the state, to personal and collective prosperity, to public service and the public good—what's the problem?

The problem, for too many, is the first half of the cost-benefit analysis. The *cost*. In Maryland, the in-state sticker price for one year at a public university is about \$10,500. That lands Maryland right [in the middle](#) of all 50 states in terms of public college cost. By comparison, we're affordable.

And the fact is, few students actually *pay* the sticker price. On average, college costs less than it did five years ago, even though prices are rising. How is that possible? It's possible because we're distributing more financial aid—more than ever before.



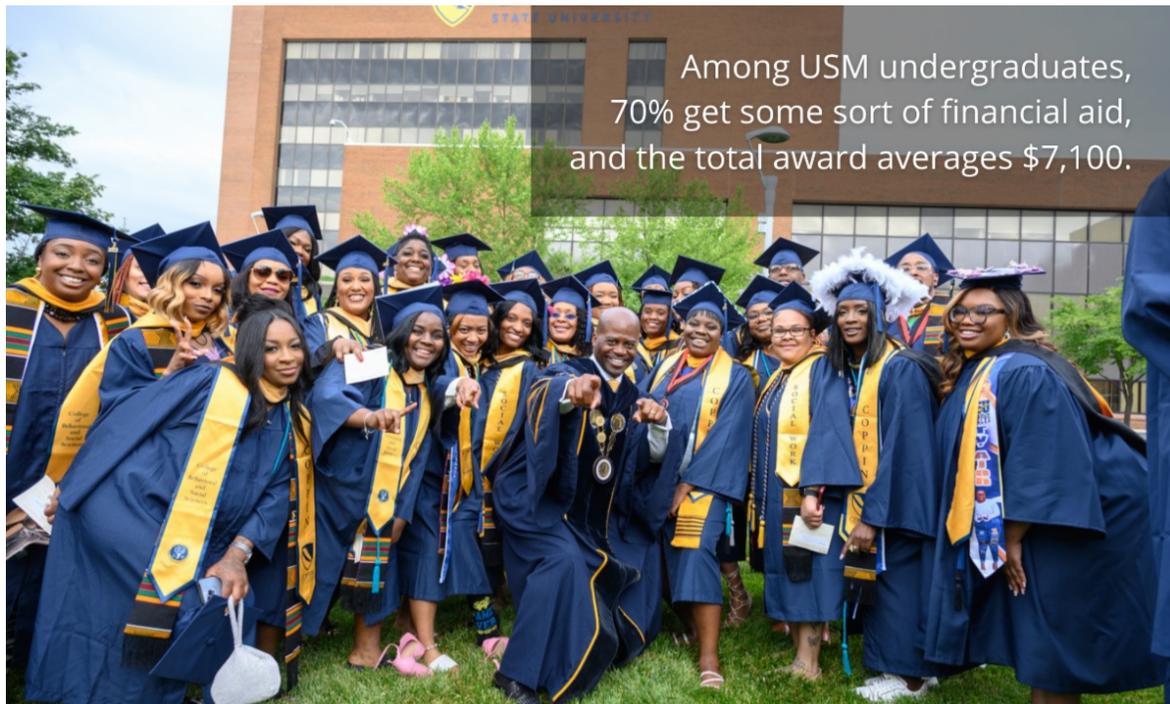
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Among the USM's 125,600 undergraduates, 87,300 (70 percent) get some sort of financial aid, and the average amount they get each year is \$7,100. A portion of this aid comes from our universities

themselves: Together, they awarded \$180 million last year to 45,000 students with financial need. In less than a decade, the amount of university money distributed annually in aid has grown by 50 percent, as has the number of students receiving it.

This is the main reason that fully half of the University System's undergraduates complete their degree without any student loan debt.

But make no mistake: What that means is that half of our undergraduates *are* burdened by debt. Nearly 50,000 in-state students have some unmet financial need. And for every additional \$1 million in aid, we could eliminate debt for 112 Maryland students.



That's why we were especially grateful for the passage of [SB 426](#) this legislative session. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Nancy J. King, authorizes the University System to establish a quasi-endowment up to \$150 million. Our universities can contribute money to this fund, and as it grows in value year over year, use the income generated for student aid.

A fund like this means three things: 1. We can open up a USM education to more students. 2. We can help those students stay in school until they have their degree in hand. 3. Those students can graduate unshackled by debt and ready to invest their wealth and their service in the communities they call home.

This is the Maryland all of us want. It's the Maryland we all deserve.

I thank Gov. Moore and the General Assembly for their abiding and generous support of the USM—our ambitious mission and our daily work.



We honor our graduates by serving those who follow them—opening our doors wide and giving all learners an education that lifts them up and lets them shine.

To the Class of 2023

Most of all, I thank our students and their families. I thank our 40,000 graduates—the Class of 2023—who entrusted us with their education and who taught us a lot about grit, grace, and resilience along the way.

A pandemic marked this leg of their journey, but it didn't define them. Their brilliance does that—their talent and drive and ambition; their dedication to improving the lives of others and the world in which we live.

And the best way that the University System of Maryland can honor these graduates is by ensuring that those who follow them get the same opportunities; that we open our doors to as many learners as possible, from all backgrounds and experiences, and provide an education that lifts them up and lets them shine. Congratulations to the extraordinary Class of 2023.



