



DATE: Jan. 16, 2024  
TO: Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
FROM: Dannel Malloy, Chancellor, University of Maine System  
RE: **Report on UMS First-Generation Student Enrollment and Success**

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P.L. 2013, Chapter 166 requires the University of Maine System (UMS) to provide the Legislature data annually about the first-generation college students we enroll and our efforts to improve their educational outcomes. While student success is lower for first-generation UMS students than their peers despite targeted supports, their rate of degree attainment from Maine's public universities is notably more than double the national average.

In Fall 2023, 40.2% of all UMS degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates were considered first-generation, meaning neither of their parents earned a four-year college degree, up slightly from 40.1% in 2022. Among incoming first-year or transfer students to UMS universities in Fall 2023, 40.4% were first-generation. This represents a small increase from 2022 amid a continued national trend of fewer first-generation student-enrollments.<sup>1</sup>

	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023
Neither parent has a bachelor's degree (all students):	41.2%	40.1%	40.2%
Neither parent has a bachelor's degree (full-time students):	37.7%	36.8%	37.3%

### ***First-Generation Student Outcomes: 2017 Cohort Graduation***

The U.S. Department of Education typically considers the six-year college graduation rate for baccalaureate degrees (or the three-year rate for associate degrees) when measuring student success. These data reflect completion at the original institution as well as any other institutions the student may have transferred to, and show that first-generation student completion rates significantly lag those of their non-first-generation peers at UMS universities. Nationally, 20% of first-generation students attained a bachelor's degree within six years.<sup>2</sup> ***As shown below, the University of Maine System's six-year first-generation degree attainment is more than double the national rate.***

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<sup>1</sup> Numerous national studies have examined this issue and have come to the same conclusion (STRADA, NACE, NASPA, College Board, Common Application, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> Center for First Generation Student Success (2019), "2016/17 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study, First Year Experience, Persistence, and Attainment of First Generation College Students."

**YEAR 6 OUTCOMES FOR FULL-TIME, FIRST-TIME  
BACHELOR'S DEGREE-SEEKING FALL 2017 ENTERING COHORT**

<b>Year 6 Outcome</b>	<b>First-Generation</b>	<b>Not First-Generation</b>
Graduated from Starting UMS Institution	42.3%	57.1%
Graduated from Other Institution	9.3%	11.0%
Enrolled at Starting UMS Institution	2.9%	2.8%
Enrolled at Other Institution	5.4%	4.5%
Not Enrolled; Did Not Complete	40.1%	24.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**YEAR 6 OUTCOMES FOR ALL FIRST-TIME & TRANSFER  
BACHELOR'S DEGREE-SEEKING FALL 2017 ENTERING COHORT**

<b>Year 6 Outcome</b>	<b>First-Generation</b>	<b>Not First-Generation</b>
Graduated from Starting UMS Institution	45.0%	57.3%
Graduated from Other Institution	9.1%	10.4%
Enrolled at Starting UMS Institution	2.9%	2.8%
Enrolled at Other Institution	4.9%	4.1%
Not Enrolled; Did Not Complete	38.0%	25.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**A Summary of Strategies Used and Activities Undertaken to Recruit, Retain, and Graduate First-Generation College Students**

As noted above, first-generation students represent more than 40% of those attending UMS universities. While these students come from all demographic groups, research indicates they are more likely to be from low-income families, and to be female, older, and with dependent children. Typically, they are academically less well-prepared, lack essential learning skills, have lower college and career aspirations, and may experience and/or perceive a lack of support from family, friends, or significant others. When considering college, they can find the application process overwhelming, and often view a bachelor's degree as too ambitious a goal given the public and political narrative on college costs and student debt.

Once they do enroll, they tend to achieve lower first semester GPAs, are more likely to drop or stop out, are more likely to commute, attend part-time and work full-time, have difficulty integrating into

the academic culture, and have lower self-esteem.<sup>3</sup> Developing and implementing a range of in-person and virtual support services for these students as they apply for college and ultimately attend is critical to enhancing their opportunities for success.

### ***Programs and Services Added or Enhanced During 2023 to Support First-Generation Students***

Below you will find examples of programs and services our System and its universities added or enhanced in 2023 to better serve first-generation students. These are in addition to the many programs available to all students, and ongoing initiatives to support first-generation students.

#### **System-wide First-Generation Initiatives**

- **New for 2024:** All UMS universities implemented their own Pathways to Careers plan to increase the number of experiential learning opportunities for their students. Viewed through an equity lens, Pathways to Careers works to remove barriers and provide experiential learning to all students, ensuring that first-generation students are optimally supported for academic and professional success.
- **Update from last year:** With leadership from the University of Maine and through the UMS TRANSFORMS initiative supported by the Harold Alfond Foundation, UMS expanded research learning experiences to all seven universities during Fall 2023, when more than 700 first-year students, of whom approximately 25% were first-generation, began college early to form active cohorts to help with their transition. Tailored research learning experiences allow students to (a) create new knowledge, and (b) make connections to faculty and peers at the start of college, both of which have been demonstrated to increase retention.
- **Update from last year:** All UMS universities implemented their own Gateways to Success programs to reduce failure rates in the courses that hold the most first- and second-year students back from advancing in their degree programs and completing college. Through UMS TRANSFORMS funding, 14 Gateway projects were launched in Fall 2023, including a significant increase in the use of Maine Learning Assistants, other peer mentor opportunities, and a suite of high-impact teaching practices. In total, these projects reached 74 individual course sections and 2,281 students across UMS.
- **Update from last year:** The University of Southern Maine, the University of Maine at Fort Kent, the University of Maine at Augusta, the University of Maine at Machias, and UMaine have worked closely with Jobs for Maine Graduates (JMG) to embed Student Success Specialists in their academic support structures to assist JMG-supported students, many of whom are first-generation. The Student Success Specialists work with other members of the universities' success teams to support the transition to higher education and help students forge paths to successful careers.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/documents/first-gen.pdf>

## University-led Initiatives

- **New for 2024:** UMaine and the University of Maine at Machias developed the Black Bear Early Alert initiative, which targets the entire first-year cohort and will directly impact first-generation students. Faculty were asked to provide feedback in the second and eighth weeks of the semester for all targeted students in their courses, and 488 students were flagged to receive academic and non-academic assistance from academic success teams.
- **New for 2024:** At the University of Maine at Augusta, TRIO workshops featuring the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), New Ventures Maine (a statewide program of UMS/UMA), and the Credit Abuse Resistance Education (CARE) program help students manage their student-loan burden and address personal economic management. The university is sensitive to the large debt load students are facing upon graduation and is taking steps to decrease the amount of loan money needed.
- **New for 2024:** To reduce historical equity gaps for their most vulnerable students, UMaine and the University of Maine at Machias developed and implemented professional and peer academic coaching in Fall 2023. First-year students with two or more opportunity factors—e.g. first-generation, federal need-based Pell Grant-eligible, rural, below 3.0 high school GPA— were provided a professional and peer academic success coach. The coaches are responsible for contacting these students throughout the semester to offer support and connect them with other institutional resources.
- **Update for 2024:** The University of Maine at Machias continues to work with Family Futures Downeast, a grant-funded, two-generation program dedicated to first-generation adult learners and their young children. This program has been recognized by the White House as one of 10 Rural IMPACT centers nationwide. The program has impacted over 227 students, with nearly 80% of them continuing to pursue their college degree. All are first-generation.
- **New for 2024:** The University of Maine at Farmington's TRIO Student Support Services program (Johnson Scholars) supports 180 first-generation and/or low-income students in accessing the resources they need to engage and succeed in higher education. Services include intensive advising, professional tutoring, skills-building workshops, financial literacy instruction, merit scholarships, leadership opportunities, and other enrichment events. All first-year students are provided access to peer mentoring to help them identify and achieve their goals. Additionally, the Johnson Scholars lounge remains a bustling place, providing free printing, snacks, tutoring, collaborative study sessions, and community building.
- **New this year:** The University of Maine at Farmington offered First-Gen Week in early November. It featured a lunch-and-learn program, a watch party for the Statewide Panel sponsored by the Maine Educational Opportunity Association, a campus celebration on the green, including first-gen button-making, popcorn, and snow cones, and an Imposter Syndrome Panel. The university has offered similar programming in previous years. When eligible, the university has applied for and received grants from NASPA/Center for First-Generation Success.
- **New this year:** Diversity is a priority for the University of Maine School of Law. Attracting and retaining first-generation college students is central to this priority. In the 2022 admissions

cycle, 20% of Maine Law's entering class comprised students who were the first in their families to complete a four-year college degree. In the 2023 cycle, that figure was 19%.

- **Updated from last year:** The University of Maine at Presque Isle has introduced several new elements to its university introductory course, including financial literacy, a career-prepared micro-credential, and peer mentors. The Extended Learning Opportunity program helps connect students with job-shadowing experiences and internships, and the university is partnering with local high schools to boost the connection between the university and early college pathways.
- **New for 2024:** The University of Southern Maine hosted a multi-campus celebration of first-generation students and alumni focused on resources for first-generation students, including a story gallery walk where students, staff, and faculty could explore the stories of university alumni who were first-generation students, and a first-generation workshop on identity, intersectionality, belonging, equity, and inclusion.
- **New for 2024:** The University of Maine at Fort Kent's TRIO Student Support Services program supports 165 first-generation, low income, and/or students with disabilities who have potential to meet the challenges of higher education by strengthening and developing their academic and self-management skills. The focus is to ensure that participants in the program have a realistic chance to persist in school and graduate. To accomplish these objectives, the university provides services to enhance students' academic success and social skills. Services in these areas advance the university's mission of preparing students for lifelong learning and success as professionals and engaged citizens.
- **Update from last year:** UMaine participated in the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) Data Literacy Institute, through which the flagship is working on data-informed projects to close equity gaps in financial aid and in high failure-rate gateway courses, and to promote participation in internships and other experiential learning opportunities and thereby increase connection, completion, and career readiness. Quantifying areas for improvement where first-generation students have higher opportunity gaps is a central objective of this work.

Because each university in the University of Maine System has a relatively large percentage of first-generation students, many programs and services provided for all students also support the first-generation cohort. For example, UMS continues to experience enrollment growth in its early college courses, with 4,724 Maine high school students earning free college credit through UMS universities in Fall 2023, an 6.3% increase from the previous fall and a 32.4% increase from Fall 2019. These opportunities raise college aspirations, high school and post-secondary degree attainment, and college and career readiness, all while reducing student debt. While early college benefits all learners, it most strongly improves outcomes for those who are traditionally underserved, including first-generation students.

Broad-based service and support across all UMS universities continue to be provided in the following areas:

- Marketing and recruitment

- Orientation and onboarding
- Programs and services provided during enrollment and beyond, including: academic advising, learning support services, counseling services/supports and referrals, career services and career preparation, veterans' services, specially designed retention and student success programs focusing extensively on first-year students, Think 30/15 to Finish/Finish in Four programs, financial literacy, and the Make the Grade (course repeat) program.

It is important to note that many of the services, programs, and supports referenced in this report are available both in-person – including at University of Maine at Augusta centers across Maine – and online.

### ***Plans or Recommendations Regarding Enrollment and Retention of First-Generation College Students***

A wide range of programs, services, and supports are in place for our students from the time of initial inquiry to enrollment and beyond, and enhanced services and supports are put in place every year as we refine our student success efforts to meet evolving needs and opportunities. A System-wide Student Success Steering Committee reviews student outcomes, strengthens extant programs, and actively examines national best practices in this sphere.

The value of a four-year college degree has never been greater, and it remains the surest path to social mobility. For example, the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the greatest employment growth in the future will be in occupations requiring a baccalaureate or graduate degree. As an illustration of that fact, working-age alumni of UMaine earn more than double the state's median income.

Given this, in addition to the investments recommended in the 10-year state economic strategy and by Gov. Mills' Economic Recovery Committee, including to expand access and affordability of housing, broadband, childcare, the University of Maine System recommends the following consistent with our recommendations provided to the Committee as required by Resolve 2021, Chapter 79, to improve the success of first-generation and all students, and thus Maine's economy and communities:

**Increase direct State appropriation for UMS:** Over the past 15 years, state appropriation for UMS has increased annually on average by 1.8%. As noted in the past, it took eight fiscal years after the Great Recession for the System's state appropriation to return to FY08 levels. Increasing investment in UMS will help us continue to maintain affordability, grow institutional aid, improve programs and facilities, and expand navigational and other support for vulnerable learners so they can enroll, persist, and earn their degree.

**Support public early college:** As noted above, early college raises aspirations and positions students—especially underserved learners, including first-generation students—for greater college and career success. As demand exceeds available state appropriation, Maine may have to limit the number of early college credits students can take, and thus the benefits they can realize. Ensuring

the appropriation keeps pace with the growth in student participation is essential to realizing the full potential of this proven program.

**Provide state funding for a "Free University" initiative:** Maine's "free college" program has sent a strong message that post-secondary education is a public good and within the reach of all Maine people. UMS recommends the legislature build on the success of this program by extending similar opportunities to Maine students who aspire to attend our state's public universities and who may also be place-bound, or wish to pursue an affordable post-secondary degree for which UMS is the only public pathway. For example, LD 512 proposes a "last-dollar" promise program to allow Maine students with demonstrated financial need to enroll in a UMS bachelor's program without paying out-of-pocket for tuition and fees. If advanced, a need-based free UMS program would increase the likelihood that students already enrolled— especially those who are first-generation and/or low-income— could persist to timely completion of their in-demand degree program without taking on more debt. This program would also expand affordable access for future Maine students.

**Expand financial literacy and consider requiring FAFSA completion:** First-generation students lack help at home in fully understanding the costs and tremendous benefits of college, and how to plan and pay for it. School counselors and other school-based resources are central to their college search and financial aid process, but are not adequately resourced, and increasingly are attending to students' complex social and emotional needs. This was especially evident during the pandemic, when there was a 5% drop in the number of 2021 filings of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) overall in Maine, and an 8.8% decline in filings by those who are Pell-eligible, in part because remote learning meant many students did not have access to school-based resources.

The State should invest more in school counselors and FAME financial aid education efforts starting in middle school to improve the financial literacy and planning of Maine students and families. Furthermore, to ensure that first-generation students and all students are accessing all financial resources available to them to pay for college, the Legislature should consider making FAFSA filing mandatory for high school graduation.

UMS looks forward to partnering with the Legislature and the Governor, PK-12 and postsecondary education partners, and organizations that advance college aspirations, access, and success to move these recommendations forward and ensure that first-generation students and all students can graduate to a better life in Maine.