

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Maine Community College System

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
323 State Street, Augusta, Maine 04330-7131
207.629.4000 • Fax: 207.629.4048
www.mccs.me.edu

December 18, 2014

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
127th Maine Legislature
Cross Office Building 202
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

The Maine Community College System is providing this letter in response to Public Law Chapter 166 (126th Maine Legislature), "An Act Regarding Enrollment and Graduation Rates of First-Generation Higher Education Students." This law requires the Maine Community College System, University of Maine System (UMS), and Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) to provide the following information about first-generation college students by January 15th of each year:

- A. Data regarding enrollment of first-generation college students and educational outcomes, including graduation rates for first-generation college students compared with other college students;
- B. A summary of strategies used and activities undertaken to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students and any available data indicating the effect of those strategies and activities; and
- C. Plans for or recommendations regarding new strategies or actions designed to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students.

To meet the requirements of the legislation, the MCCS worked with the University of Maine System (UMS) and Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) to coordinate data collection and reporting in order to promote, as possible, a common framework for determining enrollment and educational outcomes of first-generation college students. Additionally, the three institutions agreed that for the purpose of this report, we would define a first-generation student as one with neither parent having completed a college degree. Each institution determined the level of college completion appropriate to its mission. For the MCCS, a student is first-generation if neither parent has earned an associate degree. For UMS and MMA, a student is first-generation if neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree. For consistency, we are also providing data on MCCS students with neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree.

The three institutions agreed that questions on admission applications related to parents' highest level of education should provide students the opportunity to be specific about the degree completed by each parent. Since previously this information had not been consistently requested

or collected by the MCCS, our colleges revised their admission applications for new students entering in the fall of 2014.

Because no consistent information to determine first-generation status was available for students who entered a Maine community college in fall 2013, no statistics were reported last year. With admission applications having been revised, we are now able to provide the numbers and percentages of first-generation students entering our colleges in fall 2014. It is important to note, however, that applicants did not always answer questions concerning parental education. Of the 4,483 students who entered a Maine community college in fall 2014, 3,917 (87%) responded with information sufficient to determine first-generation status.

This year's report includes the numbers and percentages of first-generation students entering our colleges in fall 2014 using both the MCCS and UMS/MMA definitions (Table 1). For the MCCS system as a whole:

- 49% are first-generation college students using the definition, "neither parent has earned an associate degree."
- 67% are first-generation college students using the definition, "neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree."

Data specific to first-generation students from future reports will be helpful in identifying any unique needs for first-generation students.

Community colleges—in Maine as well as nationally—are the gateway to higher education for many first-generation college students. We provide a vital resource for Maine citizens seeking an accessible and affordable, quality education. Our colleges actively recruit students from all walks of life and all stages in their higher education journey: high school students exploring career or transfer options, adults seeking career advancement, workers in transition, and returning veterans.

The Maine Community College System continues to be engaged in a number of efforts to better understand and reduce barriers to improving student preparedness and performance at our colleges. These barriers are not unique to any one group, and any one student can have more than one barrier, such as no recent academic experience, considerable frustration associated with academic experience, heavy family responsibilities, and a challenging economic situation. Programs and services provided for all students also assist first-generation students.


- The MCCS has worked with leadership from the University of Maine System, Maine Maritime Academy, and the Maine Department of Education on the development of a five-year strategic plan to address issues of common concern. This plan includes objectives and measures designed to improve student persistence and graduation rates.
- The MCCS will be implementing a new strategic plan with student success as the focal point. Numerous student success initiatives are already underway at our colleges. Through these efforts we hope to significantly increase the number of students who achieve their academic and career goals.

- The MCCS continues to work with individual high schools to improve college readiness and persistence through such programs as Early College for ME and On Course for College, which allow high school students to experience college, explore careers, and earn college credit while still in high school. The Early College for ME program serves a higher percentage of first-generation students than the system as a whole. Using the definition, “neither parent has earned an associate degree,” 63% of the Early College for ME students who enrolled in a Maine community college this fall are first-generation college students, compared with 49% for the MCCS.

In addition to programs and services for all students, five Maine community colleges (CMCC, KVCC, NMCC, WCCC, and YCCC) have TRiO Student Support Services (SSS) programs to specifically assist eligible first-generation students. TRiO SSS is a federally funded program that provides valuable support and services to low-income students, first-generation college students, and students with disabilities. Services include academic planning, tutoring, financial aid assistance, financial literacy programming, and guidance in course selection and registration. The goal is to increase the persistence and graduation of disadvantaged students by offering comprehensive, individual support.

I would be glad to meet with you at any time to address any questions or concerns the Committee may have.

Sincerely yours,



John Fitzsimmons
President

Maine Community College System

TABLE 1: Fall 2014 Entering Degree-Seeking Students by College and by Number and Percentage of First-Generation Students¹

College	Entering Students ² #	Neither parent has a(n):			
		Associate		Bachelor's	
		#	%	#	%
CMCC	629	345	55%	460	73%
EMCC	477	198	42%	312	65%
KVCC	392	185	47%	272	69%
NMCC	190	98	52%	133	70%
SMCC	1669	831	50%	1065	64%
WCCC	106	69	65%	87	82%
YCCC	454	210	46%	311	69%
MCCS	3,917	1,936	49%	2,640	67%

¹ The source for data in the table is the MCCS Data Mart. First-time and transfer students are included in the counts. Data about parents' levels of education are self-reported by applicants on the application for admission. This analysis presumes that applicants have accurate knowledge of their parents' educational achievements.

² Students with reported parental education levels only.