

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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December 15, 2015

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
127th Maine Legislature
100 State House Station
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 2013, 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, 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 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 applications for admission 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 MCCS, our colleges revised their applications for new students entering in the fall of 2014.

This year, we are providing statistics for students who entered a Maine community college in fall 2015 (Table 1). Last year, we reported the first-generation status of students who entered a Maine community college in fall 2014 (Table 2). As the summary below indicates, MCCS has seen a slight increase in 2015 in the percent of our students who are first generation using either definition.

	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
Neither parent has an associate degree	49%	51%
Neither parent has a bachelor's degree	67%	68%

Student outcomes, including graduation rates for first-generation college students compared with other college students, will be reported at 150% time to completion (three years), consistent with National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reporting. Graduation, transfer, and still-enrolled rates for the cohort of students who entered a Maine community college in fall 2014, disaggregated by first-generation status, will be available in 2017.

For many first-generation college students, community colleges are the gateway to higher education. Although an estimated 30% of entering freshmen in the U.S. are first-generation college students, the percentage at Maine's community colleges is more than double that figure. The majority of first-generation students are also low-income, making it even more likely that they will not complete their education. Nationally, more than a quarter of low-income, first-generation students leave after their first year — four times the dropout rate of higher-income, second-generation students.¹

MCCS student success strategies are targeted to students who are at greatest risk of failing to finish their programs of study, and first-generation students tend to share a number of significant risk factors: they often work at least part-time while attending college; many must balance significant family responsibilities, often as single parents; and these factors make it more likely that they will attend part-time.

¹ http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-03-30-FirstGenDorm30_ST_N.htm

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This year, for the first time, all seven of Maine's community colleges have received funding from the U.S. Department of Education to offer TRIO Student Support Services Programs on their campuses. These programs are designed specifically to serve low-income, first-generation college students and offer comprehensive, individual support through academic planning, tutoring, financial aid assistance, financial literacy, and guidance in course selection and registration.

Other initiatives aimed at student success seek to support our most at-risk students. These include on-campus employment opportunities that allow students to build their work schedule around their classes; intensive college readiness experiences offered at no cost in the summer before students enroll in a program of study, mandatory orientation, college-readiness courses, and accelerated learning programs that mainstream remedial students using a model of instruction that combines academic support and college-level coursework.

In addition, MCCS seeks to expand the number of college navigators at all seven colleges to help ensure that students—especially those with little experience of college—have the academic and personal supports they need to persist and complete a college degree.

Finally, we remain committed to making sure our colleges are as affordable as possible. Maine's community colleges continue to offer the lowest tuition and fees in New England.

I would be glad to meet with you at any time to address questions or concerns the Committee may have regarding our students who are the first in their family to attend college.

Sincerely yours,

Derek P. Langhauser
Interim President

c: Commissioner of Education

Tables 1 and 2 appear on the following page

Maine Community College System

TABLE 1: Fall 2015 Entering Degree-Seeking Students by College and by Number and Percentage of First-Generation Students

College	Entering Students #	Neither parent has a(n):			
		Associate		Bachelor's	
	#	#	%	#	%
CMCC	775	428	55%	569	73%
EMCC	596	287	48%	396	66%
KVCC	499	266	53%	371	74%
NMCC	174	87	50%	124	71%
SMCC	1,626	786	48%	1015	62%
WCCC	148	87	59%	112	76%
YCCC	406	201	50%	285	70%
MCCS	4,224	2,142	51%	2,872	68%

Fall 2015 total entering students: 4,350

TABLE 2: Fall 2014 Entering Degree-Seeking Students by College and by Number and Percentage of First-Generation Students

College	Entering Students #	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	1,669	831	50%	1,065	64%
WCCC	106	69	65%	87	82%
YCCC	454	210	46%	311	69%
MCCS	3,917	1,936	49%	2,640	67%

Fall 2014 total entering students: 4,483

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