

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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DATE: Jan. 17, 2023  
 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**

P.L. 2013, Chapter 166 requires the University of Maine System (UMS) to annually provide the Legislature data about the first-generation college students we enroll and our efforts to improve their educational outcomes.

In Fall of 2022, 40.1% of all UMS degree/certificate-seeking students were considered to be first-generation, meaning neither of their parents earned a four-year college degree, down from 42.8% in 2020. Among incoming first-year or transfer students to UMS universities in the Fall of 2022, 39.6% were first-generation. While our percentage of first-generation students decreased from Fall 2021 as you will see below, this mirrors national trend that have increasingly seen fewer first-generation students enrolling during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
Neither parent has a bachelor's degree (all students):	40.5%	40.7%	39.6%
Neither parent has a bachelor's degree (full-time students):	38.0%	38.4%	37.8%

**First-Generation Student Outcomes: 2016 Cohort Graduation**

The U.S. Department of Education typically considers the six-year college graduation rate (or the three-year rate for community colleges) 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 that of their non-first-generation peers at UMS universities, which is entirely consistent with first-generation completion rates at two- and four-year colleges and universities across the country.

**YEAR 6 OUTCOMES FOR FULL-TIME, FIRST-TIME, BACHELOR'S DEGREE-SEEKING FALL 2016 ENTERING COHORT**

Year 6 Outcome	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
Graduated from Starting UMS Institution	41.1%	55.6%
Graduated from Other Institution	11.6%	12.9%
Enrolled at Starting UMS Institution	3.9%	2.4%
Enrolled at Other Institution	6.1%	5.2%
Not Enrolled; Did Not Complete	37.3%	23.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<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.)

**YEAR 6 OUTCOMES FOR ALL FIRST-TIME & TRANSFER  
BACHELOR'S DEGREE-SEEKING FALL 2016 ENTERING COHORT**

<b>Year 6 Outcome</b>	<b>First-Generation</b>	<b>Not First-Generation</b>
Graduated from Starting UMS Institution	43.7%	56.9%
Graduated from Other Institution	11.7%	11.4%
Enrolled at Starting UMS Institution	3.2%	2.2%
Enrolled at Other Institution	5.6%	4.8%
Not Enrolled; Did Not Complete	35.7%	24.8%
<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 one-third of those attending UMS universities. While these students come from all demographic groups, research indicates that 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 often experience and/or perceive a lack of support from their family, friends or significant others. When considering attending college, they can find the application process overwhelming and many times view a bachelor's degree as too ambitious a goal, including 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>2</sup> The impact of the pandemic, including "learning loss" in high school and college, and increased work and caregiving demands, has further impacted the success of these students and their college aspirations, though access initiatives like free community college may help. Developing and implementing a range of both in-person and virtual support services for these students both as they apply for college and ultimately attend is extremely important to enhancing their opportunities for success.

***Programs and Services Added or Enhanced During 2022 to Support First-Generation Students***

Below you will find examples of programs and services added or enhanced in 2022 by UMS and its universities to better serve first-generation students. These are in addition to the many programs available to all students.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/documents/first-gen.pdf>

- UMS, under the leadership of the University of Maine and through the “UMS TRANSFORMS” initiative supported by the Harold Alfond Foundation, **expanded research learning experiences** to six of the seven UMS universities during Fall 2022, and more than 500 first-year students (of whom approximately 25% were first-generation) began hands-on college early to form active cohorts to help with their transition to college. Research learning experiences allow students to create new knowledge and make connections to faculty and peers at the start of college, which has been demonstrated to increase retention.
- All UMS universities authored their own “**Gateways to Success**” **plan to decrease failure rates in the course that hold most first- and second-year students back** from advancing in their degree programs and completing college. Utilizing UMS TRANSFORMS funding, targeted activities will begin this year and dramatically increase the use of Maine Learning Assistants, other peer mentor opportunities and a suite of high impact teaching practices.
- UMaine participated in the Association of Public Land Grant Universities' "**Data Literacy Institute,**" through which the flagship is working on data-informed projects to close **equity gaps** in (a) financial aid, (b) high failure-rate "gateway" courses (see above), and (c) participation in internships and other experiential learning opportunities that increase connection, completion and career readiness. Quantifying areas to improve where first-generation students are currently being left behind is a central objective of this work.
- UMaine gave all first-year students who didn't meet the GPA cutoff for their **merit scholarship** (a group with over-representation from first generation students), an extra year to bring up their grades before any merit scholarship change.
- The University of Southern Maine **expanded the Promise Scholarship program**, which is designed to help disadvantaged young achievers from Maine overcome financial, academic, social and cultural barriers, remain in school, and graduate in four years with little or no debt. The program now serves up to 100 students annually (25 students in each cohort), and 72% of the students identify as first-generation. Since 2017, \$990,000 in scholarship aid has been awarded to a total of 108 recipients, and 88% of the students accumulated no student loan debt.
- The University of Maine at Farmington **enhanced their first-year seminar class to include a “success skills lab,”** which is designed to help fill the gaps left by years of intermittent online and in-person learning and other disruptions to the high-school experience. The lab is designed to integrate hands-on activities to build academic habits and skills as well as peer-to-peer structured support.
- The University of Maine at Presque Isle has introduced several new elements to its university introductory course to include **financial literacy, a resiliency micro-badge and peer mentors**. The Extended Learning Opportunity program helps connect students with job shadowing experiences and internships, and UMPI is partnering with local high schools to boost the connection between the university and Early College Pathways.
- The University of Maine at Augusta has implemented a **new shared-advising model** which provides a holistic advising approach that supports students academically as well as providing “wrap-around services.” In tandem with this new advising model, UMA is also piloting a new onboarding program for new admits which connects them to their advisors soon after being admitted and continues throughout their first semester.
- The University of Maine at Machias, in partnership with UMaine, offers the New Beginning for Wabanaki Students, a program focused on **increasing retention and completion of tribal**

**students** and includes a mentorship program in which advanced Native American graduate and undergraduate students will reach out to “first timers” from those communities and guide peers at the Machias and Orono campuses through research projects and professional development activities.

- USM, UMM, UMFK and UMA are all working with **Jobs for Maine’s Graduates** (JMG) in providing further supports for the students JMG serves (many of whom are first-generation) who are attending one of these institutions, and JMG also has college and career specialists embedded on these campuses to provide further support for these students.
- Six UMS universities have **TRIO Student Success Service programs** that predominantly serve first-generation and under-represented populations. Students have extremely good success in these programs (an example is UMPI’s program, where 100% are in good academic standing, 97% remained enrolled and 57% graduated within six years of entry).
- All UMS universities are providing **increased mental health services** for students. UMA, as an example, will be providing students with 24/7 crisis support via live call center services provided by a third-party vendor, ProtoCall, and all universities are offering expanded mental health and wellness workshops and activities.
- All UMS university accessibility services offices collaborated to purchase an electronic database software system that will facilitate the work of the accessibility services professionals, **improve the accommodations experience** of the students receiving the services, and benefit students by allowing for a more seamless provision of services for students with disabilities across the universities.

Furthermore, because each institution within UMS has a relatively large percentage of first-generation students, many programs and services that are provided for all students also assist this sub-category of students. For example, UMS continues to experience **enrollment growth in its early college courses**, with 3,924 Maine high school students receiving free college credit through UMS universities in the Fall of 22, an 8.1% increase from the fall before, and a 41.6% increase from Fall of 2018. These opportunities raise college aspirations, high school and postsecondary degree attainment, and college and career readiness – all while reducing student debt. While early college benefits all learners, it most improves outcomes for those who are traditionally underserved, including first-generation students. Additionally, in 2022 (FY23), thanks to investment from the Maine Legislature and Gov. Mills and its own commitment to student access and affordability especially for first-generation students, UMS kept tuition flat for in-state students, the eighth time it has done so since 2012.

Broad-based service and support across all universities continue to be provided in the following areas (for more detail, see the 2021 report [here](#)):

- 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 which focus extensively on first-year students, Think 30/15 to Finish/Finish in Four programs, financial literacy, “Make the Grade” program, etc.

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

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

As you can see from the many efforts already underway at our universities and the extensive additional supports provided during the pandemic, a wide range of programs, services and supports are in place for our students from the time of first inquiry to enrollment, and enhanced services and supports are put in place every year as we further refine our student success efforts and meet evolving needs and opportunities. We have implemented a Systemwide Student Success Steering Committee that is reviewing this data, discussing successful programs already in place and examining national best practice in developing additional supports and/or revising some currently in place.

The pandemic has brought many of the issues facing first-generation students into stark relief – the access to broadband and an environment conducive to learning, the availability of childcare for adult learners, issues of food and housing insecurity, concerns about finances and paying for college, and, perhaps most significantly, uncertainty about attending college and the importance of educational attainment when workers are in such demand. Yet the value of a four-year college degree has never been more important, and it remains the surest way to social mobility. For example, the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics projects the greatest employment growth in the future will be in occupations that require a baccalaureate or graduate degree and working age alumni of UMaine earn more than double the state’s average media income.

Given this, in addition to the investments recommended in the 10-year state economic strategy and by Gov. Mill’s Economic Recovery Committee including to expand access and affordability of housing, broadband, childcare, UMS 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 1.2%. It took eight fiscal years after the Great Recession for the System’s State appropriation to return to FY08 levels. Increasing investment in UMS, as proposed by Gov. Mills FY24-25 biennial budget, will help the System continue to maintain affordability, grow institutional aid, improve programs and facilities, and expand navigational and other support for vulnerable learners so they can equitably enroll, persist and earn their degree.

**Continue to grow Maine State Grant:** UMS commends Gov. Mills and the Maine Legislature for recently raising the minimum award amount of the need-based Maine State Grant from \$1,500 to \$2,500 in – further narrowing the affordability gap for 6,900 UMS student recipients, many of them the first in their families to pursue college. We urge support of the further \$500 increase proposed in Governor’s new biennial budget, and also continued investments by Congress to raise federal Pell awards.



☑ **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 a student 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.

☑ **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 at least in middle school to improve the financial literacy and planning of Maine students and families. Furthermore, to ensure that first-generation and all students are accessing all financial resources available to them to pay for college, the Legislature should consider making FAFSA filling 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 first-generation and all students can graduate to a better life in Maine.