

University of Maine System

Response to Public Law 2013, Chapter 166, 126th Maine Legislature “An Act Regarding Enrollment and Graduation Rates of First-Generation Higher Education Students”

January 15, 2015

Overview of the Legislation and Data Collection

Public law Chapter 166 requires the University of Maine System (UMS), Maine Community College System (MCCS) and Maine Maritime Academy (MMA) to provide the following information about first-generation college students by January 15th of each year:

- Data regarding enrollment of first-generation college students and educational outcomes, including graduation rates for first generation college students compared with other college students;
- 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 these strategies and activities; and
- Plans for or recommendations regarding new strategies or actions designed to increase enrollment and graduation rates of first-generation college students.

In order to meet the requirements of the legislation in a consistent way, between July and November of 2013, the University of Maine System worked with the Maine Community College System and Maine Maritime to coordinate data collection and reporting in order to ensure that our reporting of enrollment and outcomes are presented in a similar manner and format across all campuses.

We reviewed definitions of first-generation college students used by entities such as the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the Pell Institute, IPEDS, and federal agencies such as the Department of Education (for programs such as TRIO), and found that the definitions varied. Further, definitions also varied within our own systems and campuses. In addition, we discovered that our more traditional methods of gaining this information (for example, through the FAFSA or through a student’s self-report) were not as accurate as they should be.

Collectively, we agreed that our definition, for the purpose of this report, would be that for a student to be a first-generation student, neither parent would have *completed* a college degree. Each institution determined what level of degree was most appropriate to its mission; in the case of the UMS, a first-generation college student is a student neither of whose parents has earned a bachelor's degree. Further, we will report on both first time and transfer degree seeking students, beginning with the Fall 2014 cohort . Finally, when reporting graduation, we will report graduation up to the 150% standard (up to six years).

We also worked together to determine how best to collect information related to first-generation status going forward and agreed that the admissions applications were the appropriate venue for this. Our admissions applications were revised to incorporate questions that are more specific about the degree level completed by each parent but these changes did not go into effect until February 2014, for the class entering Fall 2014.

Due to this change in how we will collect this data and the late implementation of the change, we are relying on general data which exists within our student administrative computer system for this first report specific to the Fall 2014 entering class (please see Attachment A for this data). However, with the revised applications in place to collect more consistent and accurate data for future classes, we should be able to provide more comprehensive data related to first-generation status for the Fall 2015 entering class. This will be a welcome enhancement to the way in which we have been able to both collect and analyze this data in the past, and will enable us to better use data going forward in developing additional programs, services and supports that assist first-generation students.

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

First-Generation students are present at all universities within the University of Maine System, representing approximately 43% of the entering class in Fall 2014. While these students come from all demographic groups, research indicates that they are more likely to be from low income families, and may be female, older and with dependent children. Typically, they are academically less well prepared, lack essential learning skills, have lower aspirations for success and often 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. 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.¹ Clearly, developing and implementing a range of support services for these students both as they apply for college and ultimately attend is extremely important in enhancing their opportunities for success. The Universities of the University of Maine System have chosen to approach how to best identify and serve these students in a variety of ways.

Overarching Programs and Services which Benefit All Students

Because each institution within the University of Maine System 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. It is important to remember that in addition to the wide range of services and supports available on each campus, additional supports and services which complement and supplement what occurs on campus are available at the University College centers of the University of Maine System (e.g., Rockland, Ellsworth, Rumford, Bath/Brunswick, Saco, etc.) – this gives expanded access to potential and current students and their families to these important supports.

Marketing and Recruitment – Admissions staff at UMS universities work extensively with every high school in Maine to ensure that students know about the programs and services they offer. Through publications, social media and on line literature, through visits to the high schools, attendance at college fairs, presentations at workshops and at guidance events, campus visits by high schools (and a growing number of middle schools), and through open houses, discovery days and other special on-campus events, students interested in college learn about our universities. Several universities offer special summer programs for incoming students that enable them to address academic deficiencies or get a head start on their college career. One example of this is UMA’s annual YoUMA summer scholar program which includes a partnership with Lewiston High School to target first-generation, low aspiration students; UMFK and UMM both offer summer bridge programs which work with any at-risk student prior to their first semester of enrollment in addressing needs within developmental course work and skills essential to college success. All of our campuses participate in the Aspirations program, Early Study programs and Dual Enrollment programs which encourage high school students to enroll in college level coursework and get a head start on their higher education aspirations.

In addition, our admissions staff, transfer affairs staff, University College outreach staff and others work with organizations such as Maine Adult Education in general and the College

¹ <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/portals/0/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/documents/first-gen.pdf>

Transitions program specifically, Women, Work and Community, the Maine Employers' Initiative, various veterans' organizations, other employer-based organizations (such as the Maine Municipal Association Annual Conference) and other community organizations to reach out to adult students who may be interested in either attending college for the first time or returning to college after a long absence. Better addressing the needs of this population and helping them return to college is a fundamental component of our recent report and recommendations, "*Adult Baccalaureate Completion Distance Education Report*" issued in June 2013 and currently being implemented at all of our campuses.

Recognizing that many new students and most specifically first-generation students are often unfamiliar with deadlines for admissions, financial aid and course registration, all campuses have preferred but also rolling deadlines for admission and provide support throughout the cycle for students who may apply late. Several campuses have late start "mini-sessions" that can enable late applicants to initiate coursework in a timely way.

Orientation – All campuses offer a range of orientation programs during the summer and at the start of each semester whose goal is to acquaint the student with the campus, with important policies and procedures, with their program and faculty and with each other. All encourage parents and significant others to join the student at the orientation and separate programming is provided to help them prepare for and support their student's entry into higher education. Many campuses offer an overnight residential orientation in addition to the more program-oriented orientation; this affords students who will be living on campus the opportunity to learn more about residence hall living, meet the other students and staff with whom they will be living, learn more about how to get help when they need it, etc. The goal of any orientation is to begin that important process of helping a new student connect to and engage in campus life. In addition to orientations at the beginning of school, all campuses host many fairs during the first week where students can learn more about clubs, community organizations, athletic activities, and other extracurricular activities in which they can participate.

Programs and Services Provided During Enrollment and Beyond

Once a student is enrolled within any institution of the UMS, a range of programs, services and supports are in place for them including but not limited to:

- *Academic advising* – Academic advising helps a student successfully progress within the major of their choice, assists when the major is not the correct "fit", works with the student when they have other factors impacting their ability to be successful (social, emotional, academic preparedness, financial) and connects the student to the appropriate resources on campus. Many campuses have structures where new and first

year students are advised by both an academic advisor/student success specialist (who acts as the general resource for the students) and a faculty advisor (who advises and mentors specific to the academic program);

- *Learning Support Services* – these programs and services help students develop the skills and resources they need to be successful in college. Services range from tutoring support in areas like mathematics, English and writing, supplemental tutoring and instruction in courses within majors, delivery of workshops in time management and other skills needed for college, access to writing centers, learning commons and math labs, assistance from library staff. UMA is implementing several initiatives focused on online coursework and online students with the intent to facilitate early intervention, communication and improve student success;
- *Counseling Services and referrals* – these services help students cope with a range of issues related to their emotional and behavioral health, lack of support from family or significant others, difficulty orienting to college, juggling multiple demands, gaining self-confidence, etc. All campuses have intervention teams or student success teams in place for students who may be dealing with multiple difficulties ranging from academics to emotional or mental health issues;
- *Specially designed retention and student success programs which focus extensively on first year students* – Examples include one stop student success centers which help students navigate the university, identify resources, receive advising; First Year Living/Learning communities within the residence halls which have both an academic and social goal of connecting the student; cohort based learning experiences where students take similar courses together as a group; first year experience courses which further orient students to college and provide critical knowledge and resources for success; special bridge programs for students who may be academically at risk (ex. UMFK’s Bridge to Success program, and UMM’s Bridge program); co-curricular opportunities for leadership development and connections to fellow students through student life, athletics and other student service/support offices.
- *Financial Literacy* – All campuses are participating in the SALT program which is an on line tool, supplemented by campus-based programming, that encourages responsible financial management, and among other resources, provides answers and advise regarding budgeting, taking out loans or, upon graduation, loan consolidation.
- *Affordability* – The University of Maine System has frozen tuition at the same level for four years and has expanded the availability of financial aid during the same time period. Major scholarship funding for adults returning to college is available and three rounds of funding have been awarded to date.

These are just some of the many services and supports in place for students as they progress toward their higher education goal. Hundreds of organizations, activities, events, workshops and many additional opportunities for connections to faculty, staff and students on each campus create a rich menu for every student, and most especially for first-generation students who many times need the help of the larger university community to ultimately be successful.

Grant Programs which serve First-Generation Students

In addition to our current population which has significant numbers of first-generation students, six of seven universities of the University of Maine System have federally funded TRIO programs which serve, as a part of their mission, first-generation college students. The primary purpose of TRIO programs is to prepare underserved populations for entry into, persistence within and completion of postsecondary education. These programs offer a range of supports and services designed to address the needs of these students and to help increase their chance for academic success.

The range of TRIO programs is geared toward smooth transitions along the path toward higher education:

- Educational Talent Search (between the ages of 11 and 27 who have completed at least five years of elementary education – UM and UMPI have this program);
- Upward Bound (between the ages of 13 and 19 who have completed 8th grade and are planning to go to college – UMF, UMPI and USM have these programs);
- Upward Bound Math/Science (same as Upward Bound but have an interest in and aptitude for careers in math and science – UM has this program);
- Student Support Services (students who are enrolled/accepted into a sponsoring postsecondary institution and have an established need for academic assistance – UM, UMA, UMF, UMFK, UMPI and USM have this program); and
- Educational Opportunity Center (serves ages 19 and above who have expressed an interest in pursuing postsecondary options and require project services – UM has this program).

Although all TRIO programs serve first generation students, not every student who participates in EOC, ETS or UB attends a UMS campus. However, all UMS institutions that have a Student Support Service (SSS) grant are serving a wide range of first-generation students as a part of the grant (at least two-thirds tend to be low income and first-generation). The goal of SSS programs is to help students become successful by providing additional supports that supplement services already available on the campus, and by working closely with students to assist them

as they progress through their college career. Some examples of initiatives and results are as follows:

- UM's SSS has served over 300 students, two-thirds of whom are from first generation and low income backgrounds. The Program, co-administered with the UM Tutor Program, does not recruit students but works with Admissions, the Tutor Program, Disability Support Services, pre-college TRIO programs such as Upward Bound, Educational Opportunity Center and TRIO-SSS programs within the Maine Community College System. The Program provides supplementary services to existing University services in the areas of financial aid advising, financial literacy skills building, academic skills building, and workshops focusing on social and personal skills, resume development and preparation for graduate school. The Program provides financial assistance to a limited number of students each year.
- USM's SSS currently serves 121 students; 21 SSS students graduated during 2014 and many remain enrolled and are pursuing degrees in 40 different fields. During the Fall 2013 semester, the combined GPA of these students was approximately 3.0. Services provided include working with the students to develop an Academic Success Plan, learn about resources, and work in collaboration with the student's Student Success Advisor and faculty advisors. Each semester SSS students complete a 1-credit course focused on academic and career success. Additional services similar to those UM offers are a part of this program.
- UMA's SSS (Cornerstone) serves 341 students, 69% of whom are first-generation. 89% of all Cornerstone students are in good academic standing, and 84% persisted from the first to second year. Students are provided with enhanced support and service including the provision of peer mentoring, supplemental tutoring, tuition waivers for the COL 100 (Introduction to the College Experience) course, workshops on financial literacy, extended summer programs to address deficiencies within writing and mathematics and close monitoring of progress by professional staff.
- UMF's SSS Program, Liberal Studies Bridge Program, provides peer mentoring, and intrusive, proactive advising in addition to structured academic support. A major focus of the program is to help first generation students and others participating in the SSS program access the range of services they will need to be successful and to orient them to the culture of the academy.
- UMFK's SSS serves 160 students; the annual persistence rate of these students is 81%, and 94% of the students are in good academic standing. Students are provided with numerous supports designed to aid in their success; supports include intrusive advising, tutoring, personal and career counseling, workshops in time management, study skills, and financial literacy, and other supports responsive to identified needs.

In addition to these TRIO grants, several campuses have MELMAC Foundation “Supporting Student Success” grants which also are predominantly serving first-generation students through the provision of additional supports.

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, 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. Our new approach to gathering the data related to first generation students may point to additional supports or approaches but we need to see the data and analyze it from a variety of perspectives to determine this.

In addition, recommendations which came out of the Education Coordinating Committee in their report, “*Statewide Education and Workforce Development Strategic Plan*” specific to its three goals of preparing Maine K-12 students for success, providing academic programs to meet the needs of the economy and preparing Maine’s adult workforce, will also provide additional initiatives and activities which will benefit all students but first-generation students as a sub-category within this. We will have more to report as initiatives develop related to this report.

From a statewide perspective, the report recently issued by the legislative committee, Commission of Affordability and College Completion, will serve as an important underpinning to the largest issue Maine students face which is their ability to fund their college education and successfully complete it. Again, the process which will unfold over the course of the next months in exploring the various ideas being proposed will further inform us of additional initiatives, actions or the need for additional recommendations.

Attachment A: Fall 2014 – UMS First-Time and Transfer First Generation Students

Cohort - Fall 2014	Total Students Entering	First Generation Students Entering	% First Generation Students Entering
	#	#	%
First Generation Students			
UM System - Grand Total	6,203	2,669	43.0%
First-time	4,067	1,678	41.3%
Transfer	2,136	991	46.4%
UM - Total	2,533	762	30.1%
First-time	2,063	596	28.9%
Transfer	470	166	35.3%
UMA - Total	962	504	52.4%
First-time	405	219	54.1%
Transfer	557	285	51.2%
UMF - Total	497	262	52.7%
First-time	412	227	55.1%
Transfer	85	35	41.2%
UMFK - Total	335	154	46.0%
First-time	136	57	41.9%
Transfer	199	97	48.7%
UMM - Total	165	93	56.4%
First-time	118	73	61.9%
Transfer	47	20	42.6%
UMPI - Total	280	133	47.5%
First-time	197	98	49.7%
Transfer	83	35	42.2%
USM - Total	1,431	761	53.2%
First-time	736	408	55.4%
Transfer	695	353	50.8%

Notes:

1. Includes full and part-time students.
2. Includes only degree-seeking students.
3. Includes first-time and transfer students.
4. University of Maine at Farmington and University of Southern Maine use the Federal TRiO definition of first-generation, which is neither parent has a baccalaureate degree. All other campuses report students as first generation if neither parent has any college degree. Students self-report first generation status on university applications. Figures above serve as estimates for the number of first generation students in the first-time and transfer cohorts.