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## 2014 Action Plan for Retention and Graduation

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# Provost's Action Plan



## 2014 Action Plan for Retention and Graduation



**“The University of Maine is committed to providing the best academic and interpersonal experience possible as we strive to develop engaged, active and successful students who will make a real difference in Maine, the region and beyond.”**

**Jeffrey E. Hecker, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost**



## 2014 Provost's Action Plan for Retention and Graduation

### *Background*

Provost Jeffrey Hecker assembled the Advisory Group on Retention and Graduation in fall 2013 and charged it with collecting data and evaluating best practices leading to incremental improvement of retention rates, graduation rates, and student success at the University of Maine. The Advisory Group met monthly through the 2013–14 academic year.

### **Advisory Group on Retention and Graduation membership:**

- Jeffrey Hecker, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost (chair)
- Dan Capps, Assistant Professor of Science Education
- Ted Coladarci, Director of Institutional Research
- Robert Dana, Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students
- Susan Erich, Director of the School of Food and Agriculture
- Kristina Passman, Associate Professor of Classical Languages and Literature
- Kirsten Jacobson, Associate Professor of Philosophy
- Jimmy Jung, Vice President for Enrollment Management
- Jeffrey St. John, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs
- Lucille Zeph, Associate Provost and Dean for Lifelong Learning

The Advisory Group was supported by an Associate Deans' Working Group, tasked with collecting additional data and forwarding preliminary recommendations to the Provost. It convened in October 2013 and completed its work in April 2014.

### **Working Group membership:**

- Jeffrey St. John, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs (chair)
- Jim Bird, Head of Science and Engineering Center, Fogler Library
- Timothy Cole, Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences
- William Ellis, Associate Director of the School of Marine Sciences
- Ethel Hill, Director of the Explorations and Foundations Programs
- Alan Kezis, Associate Dean of Natural Sciences, Forestry and Agriculture
- Mary Beth Willett, Director of the Tutor Program

The Advisory Group received further support from the academic colleges, the Division of Lifelong Learning, the Division of Student Life, and Office of Institutional Research. In addition, Provost Hecker and Associate Provost St. John participated in a February 2014 workshop on retention and enrollment management led by higher education consulting firm Noel-Levitz.

### *Foundational assumptions*

- This report is focused on undergraduate students. Initiatives aimed at improving the educational experience of graduate students will be developed in 2014–15.
- There is no single action, investment or policy that will unilaterally solve the retention puzzle. This report identifies and prioritizes a range of actions in response to the specific needs of various University of Maine populations.
- This report defines retention primarily as the percentage of first-time, full-time students who return to the university in the





fall of their second year, and secondarily as the percentage of students who return in each succeeding year through year six (excluding transfers). Four- and six-year graduation rates reflect the percentage of first-time, full-time students who ultimately graduate (in either four or six years).

- Faculty and instructional support staff must be engaged partners in this work. Efforts to improve retention and graduation rates require the active participation of the faculty and others who serve as instructors or advisors.
- The Provost's continued leadership and support of retention, graduation and student success initiatives are essential to the success of this work.
- UMaine's first-year retention rate (79 percent)<sup>1</sup> and four- and six-year graduate rates (36 percent and 58 percent, respectively)<sup>1</sup> are on par with peer institutions. Through the Blue Sky Project, UMaine aspires to "improve annual student retention by 5 percent and improve four- and six-year graduation rates by 10 percent."

### Implementation

The Action Plan will be implemented over two academic years (2014–15 through 2015–16). Evaluation and modification will be ongoing throughout this period. There are six components to the plan: I. Oversight and Responsibility; II. Early Action; III. UMaine Connection; IV. Learning Communities; V. Academic Support; VI. Graduation and Beyond.

## I. Oversight and Responsibility

**Best Practice: Universities establish multidisciplinary committees to ensure appropriate shared leadership of student retention and success programs and initiatives.**

Provost Hecker will form the Provost's Committee on Retention and Graduation, and task it with implementing this Action Plan in partnership with faculty, deans and campus instructional support staff beginning in fall 2014.

**Membership:** The Provost's Committee on Retention and Graduation will have the following members:

- Associate Provost for Academic Affairs (chair)
- Director of Institutional Research
- Coordinator of the Student Retention System
- One representative from:
  - Division of Student Life
  - Associate Deans
  - Division of Lifelong Learning
  - Department of Athletics
  - College of Liberal Arts and Sciences faculty
  - College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture faculty
  - College of Engineering faculty
  - Maine Business School faculty
  - College of Education and Human Development faculty
  - Honors College faculty<sup>2</sup>

**Charge:** The Provost's Committee on Retention and Student Success will serve an advisory role to the Provost. This is a standing committee.

The Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Director of Institutional Research and Coordinator of the Student Retention System are permanent members of the committee. The other members are representative of their constituent groups and serve a three-year term, with the option to renew for a second consecutive term. The committee is charged with:

- Monitoring measures of retention and graduation for the university, colleges, units and meaningful subsets of students.
- Recommending pilot programs that target improved retention and/or graduation.
- Evaluating pilot programs.
- Making recommendations about organizational realignments, resource allocation, policies and procedures as they relate to retention and graduation.
- Periodically reviewing and summarizing best practices in student retention and success.

## II. Early Action

**Best Practice: Ensure strategic early action so first-year students are well positioned to succeed academically, socially and emotionally.**

### All First-Year Students

**Actions:**

1. Develop an early-alert system to identify students at risk for failure in their first semester. System will include a high-quality early-alert software program, training for staff in Student Records, college offices, and the various instructional support units to manage communications and track student progress.

**Implementation: Fall 2015**

2. Establish three points of contact for every first-year student in the first three weeks on campus; six to nine total contacts over the first

<sup>1</sup> Mean rate for 2010–14.

<sup>2</sup> Faculty representatives from each college will be selected in collaboration with the Faculty Senate.





semester; and six to nine further contacts through the end of the first year.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

3. Working with the Academic Affairs

Committee of the Faculty Senate, ensure that every student has the opportunity to participate in a high-quality first-year success course. Some units already offer courses of this type and other units will need to develop best practices, and assemble a tool kit of resources for first-year success courses. Whether a new course is developed or an existing course is continued, all first-year success courses will include elements that have been identified as best practices, including:

- Basic study skills.
- An introduction to responsible public conduct at the University of Maine, including how to interact appropriately with faculty and professional staff.
- Importance of attendance, accountability, perseverance and proactive engagement in academic planning/management for success.

- An introduction to the full spectrum of campus academic resources (e.g., Tutor Program, Writing Center, Fogler Library).

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

*Targeted Populations*

**A. First-year students who meet college standards but are:**

- Completely undecided about a major.
- Undecided among majors in the same college.
- Undecided among majors in different colleges.

**Actions:**

1. Assign completely undecided students to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences under the advisement of the CLAS Advising Center.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

2. Admit qualified students who are undecided among two or more majors in the same college into that college upon arrival.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015



3. Assign students who are undecided among two or more majors in different colleges to the Explorations Program upon arrival.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

**B. First-Year Students who are redirected**

(Note: A “redirected” student is one who is not admitted to a major due to academic standing or program capacity, and who either remains in his or her current major or gains entry to another one.)

- Redirected students eligible for entry into one of the colleges, but not the one requested.
- Redirected students not currently eligible for entry into any of the colleges.

**Action:**

1. Redirected students in the two groups above will be assigned to the Explorations Program.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

**C. Students in Transition**

Students in one college (or in Explorations)

who are not currently eligible to move into a different college.

**Actions:**

1. Assign students who are uncertain about what major (or new major) they're seeking to Liberal Arts and Sciences under the advisement of the CLAS Advising Center.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

2. Give students who know what major (or new major) they want, but are not currently eligible, the opportunity to pursue a degree through a revised version of the Bachelor of University Studies.

**Implementation:** Fall 2015

**III. UMaine Connection**

**Best Practice: Provide ongoing opportunities for intensive campus- and community-focused activities (both academic- and student life-related).**

**Actions:**

1. Establish a Student Information Office in the Memorial Union, staffed by Academic Affairs and Student Affairs personnel, to serve as a resource hub — answering questions and directing students to appropriate academic and student-life resources across the campus.

**Implementation:** Spring 2015

2. Each college will review advising resources and structures, in light of best practices, and develop improvement plans as needed.

**Implementation:** Summer 2015

3. All new faculty and adjunct instructors will receive a copy and orientation to UMaine's *Advisor's Handbook*.

**Implementation:** Fall 2014





4. Provost's Office will make funds available on a competitive basis for units to pilot intensive campus- and community-focused activities (akin to those experienced in orientation programs).

**Implementation: Fall 2015**

#### IV. Learning Communities

**Best Practice: Provide students regular opportunities to learn together in peer cohorts, especially during their first year of study.**

**Actions:**

1. Support expanded use of Maine Learning Assistants (MLAs) for supplemental instructional support in high-demand courses. Assign MLAs and Tutor Program tutors to assist students in critical undergraduate courses. Coordinate these efforts and use baseline data for comparison in evaluating the effectiveness of this support.

**Implementation: Fall 2014**

2. Provost's Office will make funds available on a competitive basis for units to support student clubs and peer-driven, peer-focused writing/study groups in majors or departments.

**Implementation: Spring 2016**

3. Each unit will evaluate activities related to academic progress, internship opportunities, undergraduate research, and advising with the goal of expanding and integrating these opportunities.

**Implementation: Summer 2016**

#### V. Academic Support

**Best Practice: Support classroom teaching with a strategic array of supplemental instructional resources and improved academic policies.**

**Actions:**

1. Charge the Associate Provost and the Associate Deans' group with reviewing and revising the withdrawal policies, the financial

appeals process and the reduced course load policy to lessen the number of dropped courses.

**Implementation: Spring 2015**

2. Participate in SAM (the national Student Achievement Measure) under the direction of the Office of Institutional Research to provide data and perspective to improve the experience for current students.

**Implementation: Fall 2014**

3. Academic Affairs will develop and deliver an annual workshop for new faculty and instructors — How Advising Works at UMaine — led by faculty and staff members from Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management (including Student Records and Financial Aid).

**Implementation: Fall 2015**

#### VI. Graduation and Beyond

**Best Practice: Develop and sustain good relationships with students through the totality of their careers and into their post-graduate lives.**

**Actions:**

1.a. Analyze four- and six-year graduation rates for students who have earned 65 credit hours and have a declared major by unit.

**Implementation: Spring 2015**

b. Those units with graduation rates in the lowest quartile will be charged with evaluating impediments to graduation and developing improvement plans.

**Implementation: Spring 2016**

2. Create a short exit survey and require its completion on MaineStreet as part of a student's application for graduation. Address degrees of satisfaction with academic experiences, progress and outcomes, and invite





suggestions for new or modified ways to foster student success.

**Implementation: Summer 2015**

3. Provost's Committee will review the report on the Flagship Internship program and make recommendations about implementation.

**Implementation: Spring 2015**

4. The Division of Lifelong Learning will develop a retention plan focused on adult learners, including distance learners and part-time students, in alignment with the work of the Provost's Committee.

**Implementation: Spring 2016**

5. Launch the Engaged Black Bear Initiative, in which students can earn e-badges for participating in a range of activities in clustered areas of the academic/student life experience (e.g. Service Learning and Community-Based Research; Leadership and Civic Engagement; Service and Volunteerism) under the direction of the Associate Dean for Community Engagement in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, in partnership with the Bodwell Center for Service and Volunteerism, and related campus resources.

**Implementation: Spring 2015**

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