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First Year Student Success Initiative

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Transcript

[background music]

Jeff Hecker: The First-Year Student Success Initiative is a campuswide effort to focus attention on the first-year student experience in how we can get more students to be successful, meaning they're better prepared to move on, a larger percentage of them can stay here at the university and continue with their college career.

If you asked me, "Why do students leave?" there's a whole bunch of answers to that. [laughs] For some students, it's financial. Some it's social. Some it's academic. What we do is take the challenge. We looked at our data, what we could tell about why students were leaving, and also what was associated with students succeeding. We broke it down and said, "Let's look at this in chunks."

We've got 10 working groups of people looking at different aspects of the challenge in a concerted effort. I've asked them, "How are we doing here? Look at our practices. Look at best practices nationally. Come back to me with some recommendations about what we should do or what we could do here to do things differently."

Those groups are in progress with that work right now. There's information about them. If you go to the provost website and search, "first-year student success" to learn more, just click there, you can learn a little bit about these 10 working groups.

It's simple to just equate first-year student success with student retention — who started and come back for a second year. I'd like to remind everyone and myself too that's just a proxy measure of all these other things that are important.

It's important for the institution at a variety of levels. One, it's our mission. [laughs] Our mission is to get people here and help them to achieve their goals. For us, it's about 24 percent don't come back for their second year. One out of four is not coming back. That's not great. That's nothing to brag about in terms of our mission.

It's very important for the students, obviously, that they build the confidence that they can manage all the challenges that are associated with being a college student and moving to success.

It's important for us as an institution. It's important for our bottom line that we bring students in. If they continue, that's good for us. It's good for our role and good for the bottom line.

It's also very good for the state of Maine. We're bringing the students from the state. The [inaudible 2:55] share of our students are from Maine. We're bringing students from other states as well. We know that those students who earn a degree here, for the in-state students, most of them stay in Maine and start their first job, and the out-of-state students as well.

A significant portion of them are going to stay in Maine to start their first job, but they're not going to do that unless they've earned their degree. It's very important for us, the students, for the institution, but largely for the state of Maine as well.



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