

First Year Student Success Initiative
Summer Preparation Working Group Report
D R A F T
MAY 3, 2019

As the result of our work in AY18-19, the Summer Preparation Working Group of the First Year Student Success Initiative has the following recommendations, in priority order:

- 1. To pilot a “Summer Preparedness Coaching” Program (*name TBD*) which will focus on individualized math placement coaching, using ALEKS software as a base, for up to 30 students in the College of NSFA. --SUMMER 2019 [*Planning underway*] [*Budget TBD*]**

College-ready students often come to campus academically prepared, with a positive mental and emotional outlook, and adequate financial resources. Contrarily, students lacking one or more of these attributes can be a retention risk. Unfortunately, the three factors mentioned are often correlated, which compounds the challenges facing less-ready college students. This pilot project will target students generally considered less college ready, who share the following characteristics:

- Have little or no family college history (i.e. first-generation students),
- Are less likely to have a solid familiarity with the college atmosphere than the more college-ready group,
- Typically have Pell grant eligibility, and
- Frequently come from small and/or rural high schools with less academic rigor and fewer AP course opportunities.

The pilot project will involve a Math instructor, a college preparatory math refresher, coaches, and access to academic student support services. The pilot will be a mix of online engagement of the students, telephone and/or email and texting conversations, and meetings during Summer Orientation, Welcome Weekend, and fall semester. The primary collaborators on this project will be the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (primarily the Department of Mathematics and Sciences), and the Division of Lifelong Learning/Summer University. The pilot will feature the following components:

- a. A randomly selected group of students with the target attributes, thus allowing for a comparison with a control group.
- b. Online Mathematics assessment, preparation, and instruction aimed at improving fall course success. This component of the pilot program is included since mathematics courses, and courses that rely heavily on mathematics, are a major barrier to first-year student success.
- c. A kick-off meeting with pilot participant at the new student orientation in June, followed by weekly communications between coaches and students to help students become

acclimated to UMaine and campus resources (e.g. student financial aid, academic programs, TRIO Student Support Services, housing, etc.)

- d. A Fall Welcome Weekend “mini bootcamp” held in partnership with the First-Year and Transfer Center to discuss study habits, early engagement with academic support services, time management, add/drop deadlines, etc.
- e. Periodic one-on-one check-ins during the fall semester to support participants and to encourage them to take advantage of student support services on campus, and develop academic success skills (e.g. attending classes; participating in study groups).
- f. Tracking participants’ academic performance (grades) and retention during the fall and spring semesters. Data from this group will be compared to that of a control group.

NSFA, CLAS, and DLL will assess the impacts of the pilot project in spring 2020, and make recommendations for continuation, modifications and changes to the program for summer 2020.

A working group to develop this pilot and plan the implementation will be convened shortly after commencement.

2. To create a committee, appointed by the Provost and Dean of Students, in AY19-20 to consider issues of social/emotional health and create strategies for addressing.

Contrary to popular belief, social and emotional adjustment difficulties for young adults are better predictors of student drop out than academic difficulties (American Council of Education, APA & NASPA, 2014). Emerging adults, when compared to older adults, have more tumultuous relationships, less stable living conditions, a poorly defined sense of life purpose and, commonly strained finances. This volatility is compounded by the demands of collegiate coursework and a time when college students report decreases in their self-perceived mastery during their first year of college. We know that the first year of college is a distinct period for young adults where the majority of identity development occurs during emerging adulthood. It is a time in their lives associated with finding a deeper sense of meaning, exploring possibilities and potential, developing wisdom while also balancing the growth of a professional identity. Society and college campuses recognize that mental health is a spectrum; it therefore calls for a diverse approach in terms of promoting wellness, supporting students, and meeting their needs.

With the goal of promoting social/emotional intelligence, we suggest that UMaine expand and promote more training of faculty, staff and student mentors in order to build a bridge between mental & emotional health and collegiate commitments. We recommend that an appointed committee (see above) consider the following strategies:

- That an ongoing training be offered specifically for faculty, staff and student mentors related to (1) the myths of mental health, (2) the value of engagement with students in a manner that promotes connection and empathy, and, (3) working with students in distress and how to determine if a situation calls for mental health intervention. This

would include education about the existing resources on campus and how to access these resources for consultation and/or for their students.

- That the existing UM badging program be leveraged, including a module for summer orientation, to train a vast variety of people in the UMaine community.
- That an ongoing monthly Lunch and Learn Series on social and emotional be offered throughout the academic year.

3. To develop two to three pre-college “kick-start” programs at UM, working with each of the academic colleges to support student retention. --SUMMER 2020

There is a considerable body of research that suggests a direct correlation between student retention and pre-college programming the summer prior to the first semester of matriculation. These programs are often called “Bridge-Year,” “Kick-Start,” or “Early College” (distinct from the early college initiative in Maine and the UMS). These programs often offer three to six credit hours in addition to extracurricular programming to support students’ acculturation and connectedness to the university.

Developing high quality pre-college programs will be an important effort towards improving the retention rate of students going from their first year to their second year. In addition to getting a head start on earning college credit, which supports the Think 30 initiative (graduating in 4 years and reducing college debt), students will also learn about the resources on campus that are available to assist them in their college journey, and will have opportunities to interact with university staff that are all available and eager to support their success.

There are a number of challenges to developing robust pre-college programs on the UMaine campus in the summer. The infrastructure and the resources needed to support such programs are not yet in place. For example, such on-campus programming will rely on either existing UM residential life staff, who are currently unavailable during the month of August (arguably the best time for such programming) or will need to hire and train new personnel during the relevant months of implementation. Similarly, we anticipate some challenges securing adequate facilities (e.g. residence and dining halls) as well as adequate and appropriate staffing to provide extracurricular programming (e.g. field excursions, cohort-building activities).

During the summer 2019, DLL/Summer University will work with Associate Deans and/or department chairs in each of the colleges to determine which academic units would like to pilot a pre-college program for students in their department beginning in summer 2020. During the fall and spring of AY19-20, meetings will be convened to determine curricula, extra-curricular programming, social and emotional support strategies, and the logistics of programming.

4. To expand current summer outdoor orientation programs, in particular to first-generation, low income students, with the goal of increasing sense of community and social and emotional preparedness.

Much like recommendation #3, we seek to offer non-credit (and thus less costly) pre-college programming opportunities in the summer, which can help support students' feelings of belonging and connectedness to the university community. We have data to suggest that programs such as UMaine's Outdoor Programs To Introduce Opportunities to New Students (OPTIONS) can be effective in supporting students' sense of community and engagement.

We are particularly interested in expanding opportunities for non-credit programming for First Generation, Low Income students.

We have identified two approaches to developing further research to the effectiveness of non-credit pre-college programming.

- First we plan to work with the Office of Institutional Research to gather data over the last 3-5 years about students who have participated in OPTIONS programs, compare them to a similar profile of student who has not, and determine some baseline data.
- Second we want to pilot an OPTIONS program for FGLI, and begin tracking whether participation in such a program has a positive effect on retention. An appropriate comparison group will need to be determined and the pilot program will need to run over the course of 2 to 3 semesters.

Like recommendation #3 above, the OPTIONS program for FGLI students would include activities to support student engagement and connection to the college campus. For example, we would include a day of orientation with faculty and a day of orientation to campus resources and student life. In addition, the program would seek to reduce costs (by leveraging existing resource when possible and seeking in-kind contributions from campus stakeholders) and would provide tuition scholarships for low income students.

5. To develop a strategy for seeking scholarships for First Generation/Low Income students to support their participation in Pre-College Programming.

We recognize that first generation, low income students are often less likely to have the financial resources to attend pre-college program opportunities, especially given that the summer prior to matriculation is a time to earn wages to help pay for tuition. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that FGLI students have the most to gain from participating in these programs. In order for FGLI students to be able to take advantage of pre-college programs (both credit and non-credit), it is important to reduce costs and provide tuition/cost assistance to those who have financial limitations. We believe that there are donors in Maine, and perhaps beyond, that would invest in supporting students in their pursuit of college education. With this in mind, we seek a dedicated strategy to work with UMaine's Development Office to create a scholarship fund to assist our FGLI students.

