

First Year Student Success Initiative  
Summer Preparation Working Group Report  
Final Report  
MAY 30, 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:

- 1. To pilot a “Summer Preparedness Coaching” Program (*name TBD*) which will focus on individualized math placement coaching, using ALEKS software as a base. This program will create a multiple-measures mathematics placement process that encourages students to engage with the process much earlier, in order to assess the students’ needs and better prepare students during the summer prior to their initial fall math course. (Summer 2020)**

College-ready students often come to campus academically prepared and with a positive mental and emotional outlook. Students lacking these traits can be a retention risk. In order to attempt to address this situation, earlier interactions and interventions with students are necessary. The challenge is identifying these students before they arrive on campus, preferably even before they attend orientation, in order to maximize the amount of time over the summer months in which the university can work with them.

Coupled with the forthcoming adoption of ALEKS, we propose to also create a self-assessment questionnaire that students would initially take prior to the diagnostic test in the late spring / early summer. This recommendation is based on the directed self-placement process used in English departments and research on multiple-measures math placement processes at other universities. This survey would contain a series of statements like “I think of myself as a math person”, “I have difficulty taking math tests”, and “I always complete my math homework”. Based on how students agree or disagree with those statements, a “coach” would provide an initial recommendation of which math course(s) the student would be prepared to take. Students would then be invited to take the math placement test to demonstrate their knowledge.

While the ALEKS score would govern the recommended math placement, the combination of their self-assessment and the ALEKS score would help determine a proposed course of action, supported by a coach, for each student during the summer. Regardless of their test score, students would be encouraged to complete the recommended ALEKS module before re-testing, preferably prior to orientation when course registration decisions are typically made. Coaching would also address those students who may need additional math support for high-risk courses such as Chemistry. Below is a non-comprehensive list of possible results, paired with the accompanying actions:

- ❑ If a student “over-performs” on the placement test (meaning they are less self-confident about their abilities than what the test bore out), a potential course of action might include the following: a coach congratulating the student on their test performance,

advising them to complete the appropriate ALEKS module to reinforce skills and to see if they can improve their scores upon re-testing, and contacting them to discuss their feelings about mathematics that were revealed through the survey (such as test anxiety, work ethic, self-determination, interest in math, etc.).

- ❑ If a student's ALEKS score matched the course level recommended by the questionnaire, but was lower than the entry-level course required by their major, a potential course of action might include: a coach advising the student to complete an ALEKS module to reinforce their mathematical knowledge and potentially improve their test score before fall semester, but also to recommend summer math course opportunities offered both on campus and online, so that the student is ready to take the entry-level course in the fall.
- ❑ If a student under-performed on the placement test (meaning they were more self-confident about their abilities than what the test bore out), a potential course of action might include: a coach advising the student to complete the appropriate ALEKS module before a recommended re-test prior to orientation, as well as working with them during the summer to help them determine why they underperformed on the placement test and to stick to a schedule of completing the ALEKS module prior to re-testing
- ❑ If a student was a first-year STEM major that needed to take chemistry in their first-year, and this student under-performed on the placement test suggesting they were high risk to be successful in chemistry, a coach might encourage this student to take pertinent math modules in a chemistry summer prep course offered by ALEKS.

**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 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 to better identify students at risk of needing additional support for their social/emotional well-being.
- That an ongoing monthly Lunch and Learn Series on social and emotional wellness be offered throughout the academic year to faculty, staff and UM community members.

### **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 (FGLI) 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 find scholarships to support them 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.

