

# Educators Partnering for Successful Student Transitions: Collaborating to Enhance College Readiness

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*In the summer of 2021, librarians, professional tutors, and instructors at the University of New Hampshire at Manchester (UNHM) offered a free, online professional development (PD) opportunity for high school English Language Arts (ELA) educators, English learner (EL) teachers, and school library media specialists across the state. The UNHM team aimed to encourage secondary and higher-education teachers to collaborate on teaching strategies for preparing first-generation and EL students to successfully transition to college. Specific workshop topics included strategies related to college-level reading expectations, college composition curricula and practices, writing in the disciplines, information literacy and academic research, and supporting English learners in the classroom. This chapter describes how members of the*

*UNHM team partnered to create the online modules, engage with participants, and assess the workshop outcomes. The chapter concludes by identifying potential best practices for engaging in collaborative, cross-institutional PD based on the authors' experiences.*

## **INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND**

The University of New Hampshire at Manchester (UNH Manchester) is the urban campus of the University of New Hampshire (UNH). The college serves a diverse, largely commuter undergraduate student body with an average age of 23 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The majority of UNH Manchester students live within a 30-mile radius of campus and many reside in the state's Merrimack Valley region. As a result, UNH Manchester's feeder high schools are primarily located in the state's urban corridor, which includes the cities of Manchester, Nashua, and Concord.

UNH Manchester's student population reflects the diversity of these surrounding communities, representing various academic, socioeconomic, cultural, sexual orientation, backgrounds, and abilities (UNH Manchester, 2022, *Student Experience*). Ninety percent of UNH Manchester students receive some form of financial aid (UNH Manchester, 2022, *About*), and 39% of the college's undergraduate students identify as first-generation (FG), meaning they are the first in their families to pursue a degree beyond secondary school (UNH Institutional Research and Assessment, 2021).

New Hampshire's urban population centers also have significant numbers of residents who speak languages other than English in the home. More specifically, 21.1% of households in Manchester (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b), 22.5% of households in Nashua (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020c), and 9.9% of households in Concord are multilingual (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). These percentages are higher than the state average of 8.3% households where a language other than English is spoken (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020d). Schools in these districts have a considerable proportion of students who qualify for English Language (EL) support. In 2021, approximately 17% of students were Limited English Proficiency (LEP) eligible. The Office of Civil Rights (2020) defines LEP/EL as "[a] national-origin-minority student who is limited-English-proficient." Approximately 13% of students in the Nashua School District are LEP eligible and approximately 7% of students are LEP eligible in the Concord School District (New Hampshire Department of Education, 2021). These numbers do not include LEP-eligible students who have transitioned to monitored status for two years after they have attained proficiency in English.

Recognizing the unique educational needs of UNH Manchester's students, faculty and staff have long collaborated to support student transitions, success, and retention. These projects have included college transitional programs focused on the academic needs of underrepresented student populations (UNH, 2012); multidisciplinary educational campus partnerships to provide first-year college students with critical thinking, writing, and information literacy (IL) skills essential for academic success (Donahue et al., 2017; Gamtso et al., 2021; Paterson & Gamtso, 2012); STEM-based English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs for middle and high school students (UNH Manchester, 2019); and, intensive English language instruction programming for adult multilingual learners (Taylor, 2018).

### **Setting the Stage**

The inspiration for a professional development workshop about students' college transitions arose from the UNH Manchester Library Director's attendance at the New Hampshire School Library Media As-

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