

# Forestry<sup>The</sup>Source

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## Maine Forest Resources Camp Keeps Students Connected and Engaged

Regardless of their intended major, college can be a strange and overwhelming place full of unfamiliar faces and unanticipated situations for many incoming students. To ease this transition, several schools, including the University of Maine–Orono (UMaine), have instituted pre-semester programs designed to help students in a specific major bond with their classmates and get a taste of their intended career path before the school year begins.

This year, the UMaine Forest Resources Program held its inaugural forest resources camp August 27–31 at the Tanglewood 4-H Camp and Learning Center, a statewide program of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

According to Bill Livingston, UMaine associate professor of forest resources and secretary-treasurer of the Maine Division of the New England SAF, the forest resources camp was created to help incoming students establish a sense of community that will keep them connected with their school and engaged in their major.

“We want to keep students coming to college and keep them in forest resources,” he said. “At the end of the first year there can be quite a high dropout rate. The earlier we can make a connection and help students feel engaged with what’s taking place on campus, the better they do.”

Livingston said that when classes start up, students are confronted with so many new situations that they feel overwhelmed. Because the camp takes place before the semester begins, the new students have a chance to get to know the other students and the faculty without these other distractions.

Beyond fostering that sense of belonging, said Livingston, the camp also helps direct student’s career paths by giving them a glimpse of what a career in the forestry profession might entail.

“Most of the students come in saying, ‘I don’t want an office job. I want to work outdoors,’ but they aren’t certain as to what these professions are,” he said. “So the camp helps put the various disciplines within forest resources into some context so that the students can better understand what the program is really about.”



**The UMaine forest resources camp was created to help incoming students like these establish a sense of community that will keep them connected with their school and engaged in their major.**

To help them gain that insight, the 19 students who participated in this year’s camp engaged in such activities as using a compass, locating property boundaries, producing maps of forest types, completing an ecological inventory, and assisting with trail maintenance. In the process, they encountered several forestry and natural resources professionals, many of whom were SAF members, who explained how management plans are developed, harvesting operations are conducted, forestlands are regenerated, and mills produce materials from raw logs.

According to Livingston, the variety of exercises and learning experiences in the program reflects a conscious effort among the program’s creators to introduce students to the wide range of jobs within the forestry profession.

Among those who assisted Livingston in developing the program were members of the UMaine SAF student chapter, two of whom—Wilfred Mercier and Molly Simpson—worked with the students for the duration of the camp.

Although it may be too early to assess the success of the program in regard to the student’s academic success,

Livingston said that it's already apparent that the camp has helped the students acclimate themselves to the university environment.

"It's clear that they know what they're getting into, and they're working well as a group," he said. "They're a year ahead of where students typically are at this point in the year in terms of binding together as a class and being engaged in the major. This will be helpful in keeping them on campus and keeping them in forest resources."

As for next year, Livingston said that he intends to make the camp an annual event maybe even open it to high school students.

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