

THOR INSTITUTE

*‘Explore THOR’
Newsletter*

Warm winter's end greetings to our THOR community.

The THOR (Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor Recreation) Institute represents a collaborative effort among the University of Maine System schools and was founded to promote the vital industries of tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation that help drive Maine's economy.

So far, some of our proudest accomplishments include: creating a student fellowship program, developing a Vacationland series of experiential learning courses across the seasons and the state, implementing a new THOR minor - now offered at every UMS institution, providing scholarships to over 110 students, hosting a series of conferences for educational and industry partners, and executing a regional marketing campaign.

In the past few months, we have been able to secure some additional funding to support our work, such as the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation's CORA grant, which will support the Maine Bound's Adventure Center gear library, and UMS Transforms, which will support future cohorts of our THOR Student Fellowships.

This newsletter will provide additional insight regarding the work we do. As always, we are grateful for the support of our UMS, community, and industry partners to help make it all happen.

Best,

Emily Zider, THOR Institute Program Manager
Michael Curran, THOR Institute Executive Committee Chair

Feel free to reach out with inquiries and ideas!

Email Emily at emily.zider@maine.edu

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VACATIONLAND CONFERENCE 2025

The THOR Institute will host its second Vacationland conference at the University of Maine at Orono on June 4, 2025. We are thrilled to invite students, educators, and industry partners to join us as we explore possibilities for collaboration and develop a shared vision for the future!

Our most recent conference, which was held in Summer 2023, brought together over 100 education and industry partners from around the state including: 55 high school counselors and college admission representatives, 24 faculty, staff, and students from across the University of Maine System, and 27 industry and community partners. Three community partners from Greenland were also in attendance.

For more, click [here](#). Stay tuned for updates about our next Vacationland Conference! We hope to see you there!



2024 MAINE OUTDOOR ECONOMY SUMMIT

In November, Dr. Jacobs from the University of Maine (Orono) traveled with four University of Maine Outdoor Leadership students to the 2024 Maine Outdoor Economy Summit at Sunday River in Newry, where faculty and students from the Maine Business School were also in attendance.

Dr. Jacobs and the students had an opportunity to connect with many others in the Maine outdoor industry and listen to panel discussions on topics such as PFAS in equipment manufacturing and industry resilience in the face of climate change. They also created important connections between the outdoor industry and higher education. It was a great networking and learning experience for all!

Launching the THOR Minor!

THOR has recently established a multi-campus minor across all seven institutions that compose the University of Maine System. The 18-credit THOR minor is composed of courses from across all UMS campuses and allows students to establish a general foundation of the THOR industries no matter their major. The ability for students of all academic areas to add a THOR lens to their education is an exciting and meaningful endeavor considering the importance of these industries to the state, and greater access to courses across the UMS will allow students to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity of locational opportunities and challenges within these fields. The first 25 students who declare the THOR minor will receive a \$1,000 scholarship!



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VACATIONLAND: COURSES

The THOR Institute has been thrilled to launch Vacationland courses, our latest initiative with immersive placed-based educational opportunities for students from across the University of Maine System to come together and dive into these valuable learning experiences! For more details, visit maine.edu/thor/vacationland-courses.

BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT: MAINE & GREENLAND

USM - June 2024

Students from across the University of Maine System came together to dive more deeply into the working waterfront in Portland, Maine, alongside our visiting Greenlandic students from a tourism college in Greenland. Students conducted tourist site assessments and interviews with local stakeholders and site managers in order to understand the perspectives of locals and visitors and make recommendations for future sustainable tourism development initiatives.



NATURE-BASED TOURISM & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: MAINE KAYAKING & CONSERVATION

UMM - August 2024

Students from across the University of Maine System headed Down East to learn about conservation strategies, initiatives, and projects along coastal areas and islands in Maine with sea kayaking activities, an overnight camping trip, visits to conserved lands, and interactions with local land trusts. Students also learned to minimize impacts while engaging in outdoor recreational activities along Maine's coastline.



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VACATIONLAND: COURSES

WINTER IMMERSION IN NORTHERN MAINE

UMPI - January 2025

Students from across the University of Maine System recently came together in Northern Maine to immerse themselves in winter adventures with ice fishing, ice skating, snowmobiling, wildlife observing, fire-making, and first aid for cold weather injuries, as well as water and ice safety exercises! This experiential, place-based course provided students with the opportunity to immerse themselves in their natural surroundings in and around Presque Isle while learning about the dynamics of the local tourism industry.



"It was eye opening to see that the recreation and tourism industry doesn't end north of Katahdin and that there is a market in more rural areas," said one participant.

Students were able to connect with local community members, including business owners and game wardens, to learn more about outdoor recreation behind the scenes in and around Presque Isle. They visited a snowmobile outfitter and learned about snowmobile operations and safety, and also had a chance to hit the trails! Students also participated in cross-country skiing, ice skating, and more!

"It was a privilege to spend the week with so many intelligent people with so much to offer. It was awesome to meet people with similar interests and bond with everyone in nature. I think we can all agree that we made some unforgettable connections that we will carry with us through life," stated one participant.

BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT: MAINE

USM - June 2025

Students will join us from across the University of Maine System for the second iteration of this Vacationland course with a few changes - from urban to rural! We will be spending some of our time in Portland to learn about sustainable tourism development in the working waterfront, and, from there, we'll head north to Millinocket and the Katahdin ("The Greatest Mountain" in Penobscot) region to collaborate with our partners at Wabanaki Public Health & Wellness and New England Outdoor Center. Discover the best of both worlds!

**COMING
SOON**

Student Testimonials

"This course was amazingly captivating! I am so grateful for the experiences that this course offered. Being introduced to the industry in this way made it seem possible to work in recreation and tourism with real world examples. . .I would take this course again and would encourage anyone else to do so!"

"Being in Presque Isle was really special. The instructor was incredibly welcoming and made us all feel like we were part of the community. I learned that small towns in Northern Maine are special and have a really strong sense of community where everyone truly does know each other."

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STATEWIDE SNAPSHOTS: ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT MACHIAS **ADVENTURE PATAGONIA**

Students from across the University of Maine System ventured to Patagonia for a once-in-a-lifetime experience in January! Backpacking, glacier hiking, backcountry trekking, sea kayaking - they truly immersed themselves in their surroundings in every possible way while diving into nature-based tourism and sustainable development.

"Our adventures in Patagonia were absolutely phenomenal. I stepped into 2025 walking on the path of my wildest dreams. .. I would go back in a heartbeat!"

"I am inspired by all of the people we met and their ties to nature, their respect for the land, and their view of the world around us as a conversation, rather than emptiness waiting to be conquered."

"Every day held some new adventure that pushed me to think and process the world in a different way."

"I was nearly brought to tears by the beauty of the land."

"It was truly a life changing trip that I will cherish."



THOR STUDENT FELLOWS

SUMMER 2024



MOLLY BOGNER

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Teens to Trails

- Expanded a statewide outdoor marketing plan for Maine schools
- Community outreach & engagement with youth participation in the outdoors



ERIN CIAMPA

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Visitor Experiences in Acadia National Park

- Data collection on visitors' experiences at the summits of Sargent & Cadillac Mountains
- Save Our Summits - soil vegetation restoration project



AMANDA ROCK

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Teens to Trails

- Created a guide for teachers to access training to develop their outdoor leadership skills
- Assisted in creating a best practices manual by researching & compiling information & resources



SUMMER
& FALL
FELLOW!

LAINI FRAIGER

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Maine Coast Fishermen's Association

- Researched current strategies & developed a survey to engage tourists with working waterfronts
- Report with recommendations to inform future sustainable tourism development

THOR STUDENT FELLOWS

FALL 2024



SUMMER
& FALL
FELLOW!

JORDAN POTTER

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Outdoor Recreation Mapping

- Data collection on outdoor recreation access points in the UMaine community & surrounding areas
- Developed an interactive [map](#) to increase public access to the outdoors



ABBY LAVOIE

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Backcountry Squatters

- Collaborated with Backcountry Squatters to promote outreach efforts & increase outdoor access
- Developed & led a DEI training workshop for outdoor leaders & educators



MCKENNA CHAPPEL

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Arts Programming & National Parks

- Conducted research on arts programming & partnerships with national parks across the U.S.
- Compiled and curated data as a [website](#) for public reference

ATTENTION: POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Do you have a community-based project that would benefit from the support of a THOR Student Fellow and provide a positive learning experience for students?

We are always looking for potential community partners to broaden and diversify our offerings for our THOR Student Fellows, so please keep us in mind for the future!

THOR Student Fellows work 5-10 hours per week during the Spring, Summer & Fall semesters

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BEHIND THE SCENES: STAFF & FACULTY

The THOR Institute is composed of staff and an Executive Committee of faculty from across the UMS. For a behind-the-scenes look at who's involved, please click [here](#).



STAY IN THE LOOP

We're building our mailing list and we want you (and your friends!) on it! Please forward this newsletter to colleagues who may be interested. If you received this newsletter from a colleague, please join our mailing list for the latest updates.

Email Emily at emily.zider@maine.edu