

THOR INSTITUTE

DISPATCH

Reflecting and looking ahead — a warm hello from the THOR Institute.

As we begin a new semester, the THOR Institute is building on strong momentum to expand workforce-focused learning opportunities that connect students with Maine's tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation industries. With increased support from the UMS Board of Trustees and UMS, we have been able to increase our capacity for programming. Along with continued collaboration among campuses, faculty, and external partners, THOR is strengthening educational pathways and creating new opportunities that prepare students with the skills, experiences, and industry connections needed to support these vital sectors of Maine's economy.

In this issue, we highlight system-wide efforts that center experiential learning into academic experiences, foster cross-campus collaboration, and deepen partnerships with employers across the state, such as our most recent Vacationland courses and dynamic student fellowship projects, as well as our second Vacationland Conference. Together, these initiatives reflect our shared commitment to aligning academic innovation with workforce needs and to preparing students for meaningful careers that sustain Maine's communities and landscapes.

In the 'Field Notes' section, you'll find highlights of our work over the past year, whereas 'On the Horizon' highlights some exciting upcoming initiatives, including a summer Vacationland course and a new fellowship opportunity.

We invite you to take a look at what we've been up to!
-The THOR Institute Team

Feel free to reach out with inquiries and ideas!

Email Emily at emily.zider@maine.edu

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THOR Minor Info
Session - February 6

2026 Fellowship
Applications Open Now

How to Join a Kayak
Trip Down East!



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THOR INSTITUTE: ON THE HORIZON

UPCOMING STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

VACATIONLAND COURSE

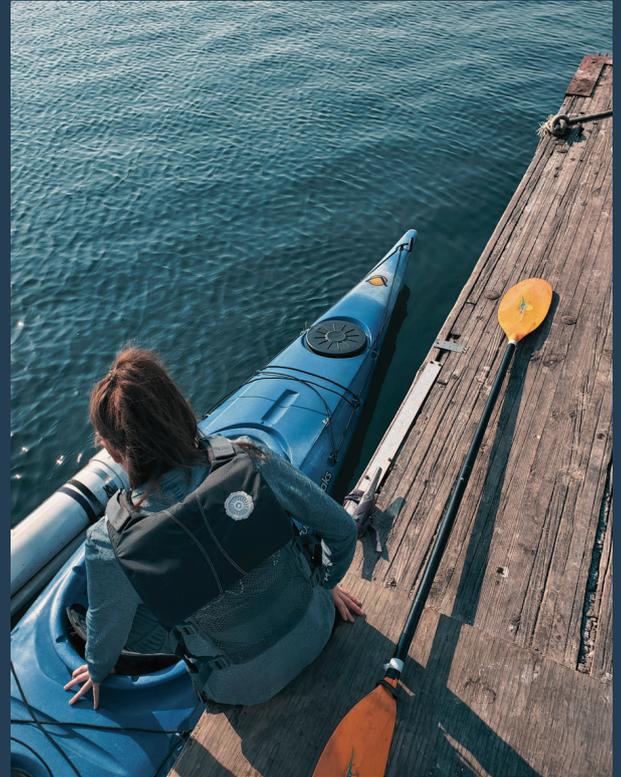
NATURE-BASED TOURISM & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: MAINE KAYAKING & CONSERVATION

University of Maine at Machias - August 2026

Our upcoming Vacationland course will take students to the heart of Down East Maine for an immersive look at coastal conservation. The curriculum will feature a blend of field-based learning and adventure, including interactions with local land trusts and visits to protected habitats.

Throughout the journey, students will develop a deep understanding of regional initiatives and learn best practices for sustainable recreation in sensitive coastal ecosystems. Don't hesitate to embark on a new adventure - with an overnight sea kayaking experience like no other!

For more information, click [here](#).



NORTH ATLANTIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FELLOWSHIP

NORTH ATLANTIC SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FELLOWSHIP

Spring/Summer 2026

We are thrilled to announce an exciting new fellowship opportunity for undergraduate and graduate students in THOR-related programs from across the University of Maine System! Students are invited to apply for this fellowship, which will focus on sustainable tourism in the North Atlantic (Maine, Greenland, Iceland) and will include a 2-week travel course to Greenland and Iceland in July 2026.

For more details, please click [here](#).

Deadline to apply: February 6, 2026

new!



THOR INSTITUTE: ON THE HORIZON

UPCOMING STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

THOR Minor Updates

Info Session - Friday, February 6, 2:00 pm on Zoom
 (click the link below for more info)

We are excited to announce that we now have students enrolled in the THOR minor from across 6 UMS institutions! We still have a few \$1000 scholarships available for students who are one of the first 25 to declare! To learn more, take a look at [the program page found here.](#)



THOR INSTITUTE: FIELD NOTES

VACATIONLAND CONFERENCE 2025

The THOR Institute hosted its second Vacationland Conference at the University of Maine at Orono on June 4, 2025. We were thrilled to be joined by students, educators, emerging leaders, and industry partners as we learned more about the amazing work being done in and around Maine.

With nearly 100 participants from around the state, this event was a fantastic opportunity to come together to explore the future of Maine-based career paths in tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation (THOR). With representation from the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation, Maine Outdoor Brands, New England Outdoor Center, and so many more, there was no shortage of knowledge and experience flowing during this event!

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



2026 MAINE OUTDOOR ECONOMY SUMMIT

In January, THOR faculty members Dr. John Daigle and Dr. Lauren Jacobs from the University of Maine (Orono) traveled with several University of Maine System students to the 2026 Maine Outdoor Economy Summit at The Holiday Inn by the Bay in Portland, where they were joined by a record number of attendees (400+).

The University of Maine System was well represented by four students who participated in a panel - "Emerging Voices: Student Visions for Outdoor Industry Careers in Maine" - as well as by Dr. Daigle, who spoke on a panel called "Land and Access Returned by Penobscot Nation Across Two Important Projects."

For more information, click [here](#).



THOR INSTITUTE: FIELD NOTES

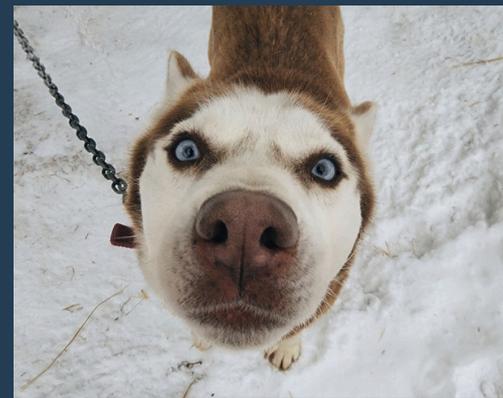
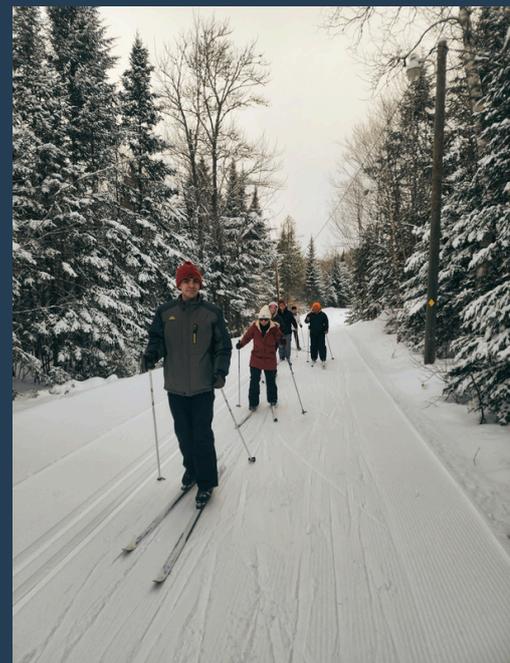
VACATIONLAND COURSES

Our Vacationland series continues to take the classroom into the field. These immersive courses offer students a front-row seat to Maine’s tourism and hospitality sectors, providing place-based learning in the very landscapes that define our state. For more details, visit maine.edu/thor/vacationland-courses.

WINTER RECREATION & HOSPITALITY BUSINESS - UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT FORT KENT

UMFK - January 2026

Students from across the University of Maine System came together to delve more deeply into the unique character of the tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation industries of Northern Maine. Students immersed themselves in experiential, place-based learning activities, including skiing, ice fishing, sled dog riding, moose stew, and so much more!



THOR INSTITUTE: STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

THOR STUDENT FELLOWS: FALL 2025

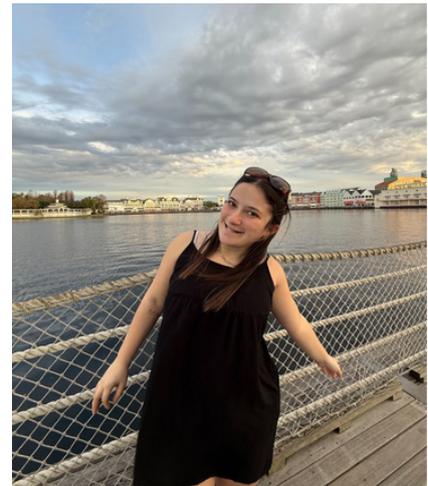


BRAYDEN VANCE

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: The World Affairs Council

- Destination research and itinerary planning for international delegations
- Scheduling and operations support for visitors of The World Affairs Council



ILANA BERKOVITZ

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Maine Bound Gear Library

- Operations support for updated gear library and new inventory
- Branding, marketing, and promotion of newly available equipment



DILLON METCALF

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Maine Huts & Trails

- Organizational research to support their benchmark project
- Marketing, brand storytelling, community engagement



ANDREW CLIFFORD

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Climbing Manual for Educators

- Conduct and compile research and resources to increase accessibility of climbing for outdoor educators leading trips
- Create a programmatic climbing manual for outdoor educators in New England

THOR INSTITUTE: STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

THOR STUDENT FELLOWS: FALL 2025



KATHRYN GATEWOOD UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Wabanaki Public Health & Wellness Campground Development

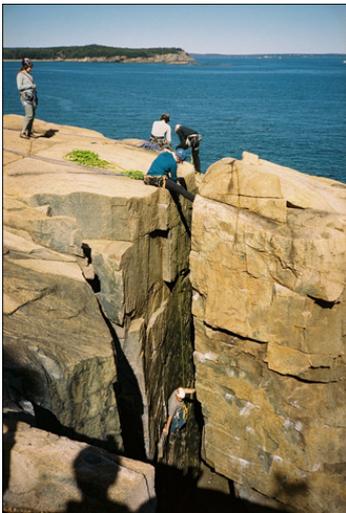
- Research to support the development of a Wabanaki-led campground in Millinocket
- Wabanaki cultural tourism initiatives in Maine



MIA FORCINE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Wabanaki Public Health & Wellness Campground Development

- Research to support the development of a Wabanaki-led campground in Millinocket
- Wabanaki cultural tourism initiatives in Maine



BENCE ROSENBERG UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

Project: Maine Bound Gear Library

- Operations support for gear library and new inventory
- Branding, marketing, and promotion of newly available equipment

THE THOR INSTITUTE & MAINE BOUND GEAR LIBRARY

The THOR Institute was recently awarded a grant to provide new outdoor gear at the Maine Bound Adventure Center (MBAC) at the University of Maine. Grant funding enabled a significant upgrade of the MBAC’s rental fleet, including new canoes, kayaks, skis, snowshoes, sleeping bags, backpacks, camping gear, new wetsuits and cold-water paddling equipment. Funding also supported the hiring of additional student and temporary staff to manage gear organization and inventory, ensuring smoother operations and improved service for all users.

**With support from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation Grant Program and in collaboration with the THOR Institute, this initiative is supported by the CORA (Community Outdoor Recreation Assistance) Grant in partnership with Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation, funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.*

THOR INSTITUTE

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