

## **The Program That Changed the University of Maine System's Fate**

*By Johanna Alonso*

Undergraduate enrollment in the University of Maine System had been declining for decades, a trend worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one campus, the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI), reversed the tide. From 2020 to 2024, UMPI nearly doubled its enrollment, largely due to the success of its innovative *YourPace* program—a flexible, competency-based online education model launched in 2017.

### **YourPace's Impact**

YourPace allows students to progress at their own speed, completing as many classes as desired during each eight-week session. Enrollment grew from 100 students at inception to about 1,300 today, with most students coming from outside Maine, including international locations like China. This program's success has fueled growth for the broader system, which is now projecting overall enrollment increases for the first time in decades.

### **Appealing to Nontraditional Students**

Programs like YourPace cater to adult learners juggling jobs and families, providing a flexible alternative to traditional classroom-based education. Critics argue that such programs may lack interaction and quality, but advocates highlight their accessibility and effectiveness for learners with unconventional needs.

### **A Model for Recovery**

YourPace is part of a broader effort to re-engage nontraditional students, including the state's 280,000 residents with some college credits but no degree. System-wide initiatives, such as Finish Strong scholarships and new fully online programs, have also bolstered enrollment.

With projections to reach 2,500 students by spring and a plan to expand faculty involvement, YourPace is setting a precedent for small universities adapting to changing educational demands. As UMPI president Raymond Rice puts it, "We must meet the market, not wait for the market to meet us."

*(This article was updated to correct the description of the Competency-Based Education Network.)*

## **Course-Building for Competency-Based Education (CBE)**

The Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) provides a comprehensive guide for creating Competency-Based Education (CBE) courses within the YourPace program using the Brightspace LMS. The guide emphasizes consistent design to streamline navigation for students, align with Academic Commitments, and meet Quality Matters standards. Below is a breakdown of the course-building process:

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### **Preparation for Course Development**

- **Checklist for Development:** Consistency is key to minimizing navigation barriers and aligning with institutional goals.
- **Focus on Learning Outcomes:** Strong Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and General Learning Outcomes (GLOs) are integrated into the course to ensure alignment with rubrics and assessments.

### **Key Steps:**

1. Add the syllabus and final assessment to course files.
  2. Include learning outcomes in the competency structure.
  3. Update course resources and disable unused tools.
  4. Add rubrics for milestone and final assessments, aligning them with learning outcomes.
  5. Publish rubrics to ensure visibility.
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### **Building Assessments and Learning Activities**

- **Milestone and Final Assessments:**
  - Create assignments using templates for consistency.
  - Use Turnitin for plagiarism detection.
  - Attach rubrics and set submission rules.
  - Avoid grade items for milestones; include them only for the final assessment.

- **Quizzes:**
    - Build quizzes using templates to maintain consistency in settings.
    - Attach learning outcomes as needed.
    - Avoid grade items for adaptive or formative quizzes.
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## **Module Structure and Learning Activities**

- **Organizing Modules:**
    - Create one top-level module for each learning outcome.
    - Use module descriptions to link learning outcomes and explain connections.
    - Add submodules for concepts/topics and include a "Knowledge Check" for milestones or quizzes.
  - **Adding Content:**
    - Include resources from Google Drive, OneDrive, or Kaltura via the "Existing Activities" option.
    - Ensure content meets digital accessibility standards.
    - Use accessible HTML templates for text-based content.
    - Import OER content as needed.
  - **Final Assessment Module:**
    - Include a pre-final draft (for undergraduates) and link to the final assessment guide.
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## **Finishing Up and Reviewing the Course**

Ensure all elements are properly aligned and functioning before finalizing the course. Use the YourPace Certified Instructor Training and other CTL resources for additional support.

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This structured approach simplifies course development while ensuring high-quality, student-centered design in the YourPace program.

The YourPace program at the University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI) and the MyPath program at UMass Global both offer competency-based education (CBE), but they have some key differences in their approach and structure. Here is a comparison of the two programs:

#### Key Differences Between YourPace and MyPath

<b>Feature</b>	<b>YourPace (UMPI)</b>	<b>MyPath (UMass Global)</b>
<b>Flexibility</b>	Self-paced with multiple start dates per year	Completely self-paced, allowing students to set their own schedules
<b>Tuition Model</b>	Flat-rate tuition per 8-week session	Flat annual tuition billed every six months, with all learning materials included
<b>Program Focus</b>	Offers a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs, including business administration	Offers degrees primarily in business and IT fields
<b>Learning Management System</b>	Utilizes Brightspace LMS for course delivery, emphasizing consistency in design	Incorporates advanced learning technologies like simulations and game-based learning
<b>Support System</b>	Provides academic success coaches and faculty support throughout the program	Offers robust student support with enrollment coaches and academic advisors
<b>Assessment Methodology</b>	Students progress by demonstrating mastery of competencies through assignments and assessments	Competency is assessed through authentic work-related projects graded by faculty
<b>Target Audience</b>	Appeals to adult learners, particularly those with prior college credits or work experience	Designed for self-motivated individuals who prefer independent study without deadlines

Both programs aim to provide flexible, affordable education tailored to the needs of adult learners. However, YourPace is more structured with its session-based tuition model, while MyPath offers greater flexibility in pacing and scheduling.

### Comparison of Program Costs: YourPace vs. MyPath

Program	Cost per Term	Term Duration	Cost per Week
<b>UMPI YourPace</b>	\$1,400 - \$2,000	8 weeks	\$175 - \$250
<b>UMass Global MyPath</b>	\$3,200	24 weeks	\$133

#### **UMPI YourPace:**

- Cost: \$1,400 to \$2,000 per 8-week term, equating to a weekly cost of \$175 to \$250.
- Distinct Features: Designed for affordability and flexibility, enabling students to take multiple classes within a term.

#### **UMass Global MyPath:**

- Cost: \$3,200 per 24-week term, translating to approximately \$133 per week.
- Distinct Features: A competency-based model that allows students to progress as they demonstrate knowledge, offering potential for quicker degree completion.

#### **Summary:**

- **UMPI YourPace:** Higher weekly cost but shorter term durations, appealing to students aiming for faster progress.
- **UMass Global MyPath:** Lower weekly cost over extended terms, better suited for students needing a more gradual pace.

