

# THOR INSTITUTE

*'Explore THOR'  
Newsletter*

## It's been an exciting academic year for the Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor Recreation (THOR) Institute.

In August we hosted our inaugural Vacationland Conference which brought over 100+ high school counselors and workforce development partners together to explore the variety of pathways within the University of Maine System (UMS) that guide students towards successful careers in the tourism, hospitality, and outdoor recreation industries.

Fall semester brought student group visits, the opportunity to attend and speak at conferences, and the kick off to our first Vacationland course, which was hosted in January at the University of Maine at Fort Kent, where students from across the UMS had a chance to explore the winter recreation opportunities that exist in Northern Maine. Spring semester brought our first cohort of THOR Student Fellows, all of whom did an impressive job deepening their academic experience connecting with community projects of interest

This summer we will host additional fellows, two Vacationland courses, continue crafting a workforce development microcredential, and work on operationalizing the THOR minor, which is in the final stages of approval at six of the seven UMS universities!

Opportunities abound in this exciting and important field, and it has been thrilling to collaborate with colleagues across the UMS and around the state to enhance programming and partnerships. This newsletter will highlight these achievements and more. We are so grateful for Maine's robust THOR community and look forward to continued and future collaboration. We're just getting started!

Best,

Emily Zider, THOR Institute Program Manager  
Tracy Michaud, THOR Institute Executive Committee Chair

**Feel free to reach out with inquiries and ideas!**

Email Emily at [emily.zider@maine.edu](mailto:emily.zider@maine.edu)

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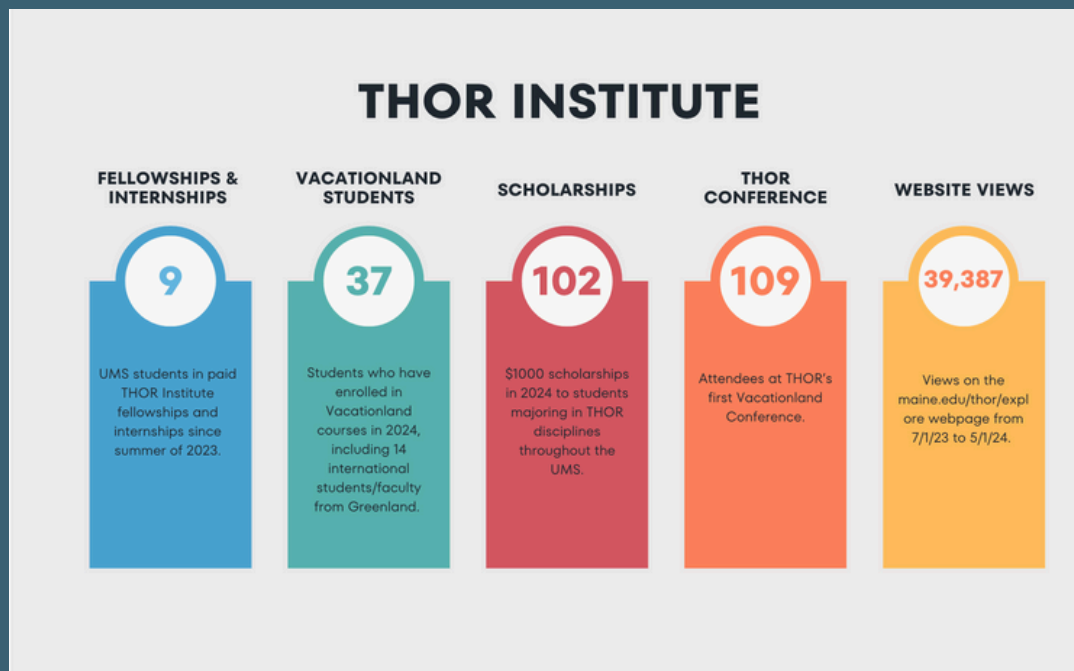
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## THOR Institute: A Collaborative Initiative at the University of Maine System

The THOR Institute is a partnership between the campuses of the University of Maine System (UMS) designed to bolster Maine's largest industry: Tourism, Hospitality, and Outdoor Recreation (THOR). THOR is working to address needs highlighted by this industry in terms of education access and workforce development ensuring students access the knowledge, skills and experiences to have successful and fulfilling careers in THOR in Maine and beyond. For more information, click [here](#).

## Approval of THOR Minor

THOR is in the final approval stages of establishing a multi-campus minor across six of the UMS universities, with efforts underway at all seven universities. 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. Additionally, 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 the THOR fields.



\*7/1/23 - 5/1/24

*THOR programming this year has been made possible in part by funding from the [Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan](#) put forth by Gov. Janet Mills and supported by the 130th Maine Legislature to invest the State's share of federal American Rescue Plan relief funds, including in University of Maine System workforce development.*

## VACATIONLAND CONFERENCE 2023

The THOR Institute hosted its inaugural conference at the University of Southern Maine from July 31 to August 1, 2023. The event 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.

Throughout the event, the energy and commitment to serving students, the industries, and the state was palpable and the THOR Institute is so grateful for all those who participated and helped make this first conference a success.

For more, click [here](#). Stay tuned for updates about our next Vacationland Conference, likely in Summer 2025!

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## VACATIONLAND: COURSES



### VACATIONLAND: ON THE HORIZON

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](https://maine.edu/thor/vacationland-courses).

### BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT: MAINE & GREENLAND

*USM - June 2024*

Join us in Portland this June to study sustainable tourism practices and collaborate with our visiting cohort of hospitality students from Greenland!

### NATURE-BASED TOURISM & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, MAINE KAYAKING & CONSERVATION

*UMM - August 2024*

Learn about conservation strategies, initiatives, and projects along coastal areas and islands in Maine with sea kayaking activities and much more!



### VACATIONLAND LAUNCH: WINTER IN FORT KENT

We are excited to share the success of our first multi-campus collaborative course - *Winter Recreation & Hospitality Business in Northern Maine* at University of Maine Fort Kent.

Students from across the University of Maine system traveled north to immerse themselves in place-based learning and the essence of winter while developing a deeper understanding of this unique region with skiing, ice fishing, dog sledding, moose stew, and much more! For more, click [here](#).

#### Student Testimonials

"This total immersion in Northern Maine allowed me to fully experience the culture. We really got to experience all aspects of Northern Maine recreation."

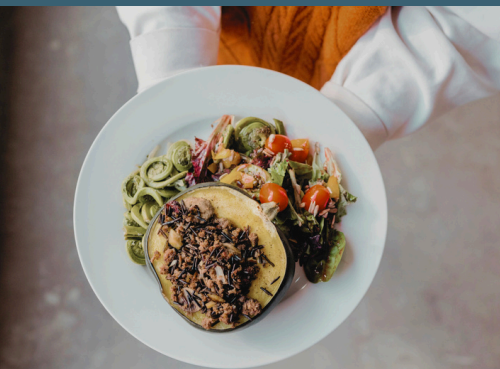
"My career goals include community outreach and sharing outdoor opportunities and experiences with people who are new to these communities. This was a great way for me to gain new connections, perspectives and ideas in community outreach."

"By participating in activities like dog-sledding, I now have a deeper understanding and appreciation of winter recreation,"

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## STATEWIDE SNAPSHOTS: ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM



### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

In a notable celebration of culinary heritage and cultural exchange, the recently published cookbook "A Taste of Two Worlds: Stories + Recipes from Greenland and Maine" has achieved global recognition at the Gourmand Awards.

Click [here](#) to learn more from one of our Tourism & Hospitality students.



### UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

The UMaine Outdoor Leadership program recently hosted a "Student Day" from the Northern Maine Outdoor Education cohort, a group of outdoor educators in rural Maine K-12 schools organized through the Rural Aspirations Project. This student day was led by our THOR fellow and Outdoor Leadership major, Emily Kidd. It was a great day, and a wonderful chance for students to make connections with each other and with the opportunities that higher education can provide!



### UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT PRESQUE ISLE

Local students have been able to take part in the experiential learning opportunity of a lifetime at Hurricane Island Center for Science and Leadership on an island off the coast of Maine to gain first-hand experience with the scientific process. These learning opportunities focused on sustainability, climate change, and environmental justice.

For more, click [here](#).

## UNIVERSITY OF MAINE AT FARMINGTON

As part of UMF's Global Seminar project, students had the opportunity to immerse themselves in French culture while collaborating with Le Mans University students to research sustainable tourism in Le Mans, the Loire Valley, Mont St. Michel, and Paris. Follow their adventures on [Instagram!](#)



# THOR STUDENT FELLOWS



## THOR Student Fellowship Project: Outdoor Recreation Programming for LGBTQ Youth in Washington County

- Building community with outdoor recreation programming to support LGBTQ youth in safe spaces. Core values in social justice, environmental stewardship, and wilderness therapy.
- Development and implementation of an overnight camping trip for LGBTQ youth.
- Click [here](#) for more from Jessica.



Photo: Jessica Williams

### JESSICA WILLIAMS

OUTDOOR RECREATION & LEADERSHIP  
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - MACHIAS

“It was extremely beneficial to have a fellowship with the THOR Institute while coinciding with this project. . . Truly an invaluable experience.”



### ASHLEY MEGGETT

EARTH & CLIMATE SCIENCES,  
OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP  
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

“This project has been an amazing opportunity to expand my knowledge of public relations, community outreach, graphic design, event planning, and outdoor skills.”

## THOR Student Fellowship Project: Teens to Trails

- Community outreach, communications and public relations, nonprofit operations, event planning and relationship-building within and beyond Teens to Trails.
- Outdoor recreation events, wilderness and outdoor skills, and networking in Maine’s outdoor industry.
- Click [here](#) for more from Ashley.



Photo: Teens to Trails

# THOR STUDENT FELLOWS



## THOR Student Fellowship Project: Northern Maine Outdoor Education Cohort Student Day

- Community programming focused on student engagement while exploring career pathways in outdoor industries at a career fair with industry partners.
- Community outreach, public engagement, event-planning, coordination & development for students, faculty, and industry partners.
- Click [here](#) for more from Emily.

### EMILY KIDD

KINESIOLOGY & PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

“I have learned so much about what it takes to plan events and bring together a group of people. Being able to put together such an event helped me gain so many skills regarding planning events and facilitation that will be crucial in my future career as an outdoor educator.”



Photo: Adventure Bound



## THOR Student Fellowship Project: The NENA Conference

- Public engagement, event-planning, coordination & development for tourism educators, students, and industry partners at the NENA Conference in Portland, Maine.
- Designed and displayed Maine-themed posters featuring different tourism regions to educate and engage audiences.
- Click [here](#) for more from Amanda.

**AMANDA ROCK**  
KINESIOLOGY & PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
UNIVERSITY OF MAINE - ORONO

“Looking forward, I hope to return as a student fellow in the summer and create and execute a brand new project relating the outdoors and tourism together within my community.”



Photo: NENA Conference

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NENA Spring Conference 2024: Students & Faculty at The Regency Hotel in Portland

## Spring 2024: Out & About

The THOR Institute has been out and about this spring at statewide conferences building relationships while developing ideas for future programming. It's been so great to connect with our local and regional communities and we look forward to more of these opportunities! We have been thrilled to participate in the NENA 2024 Spring Conference (Northeast North American Chapter of the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education) and The Governor's Conference on Tourism in April 2024.

We love seeing all of the great work being done across the state (and beyond) to steward the land, water, and communities that we know and love into the future. We look forward to exploring the possibility of collaborating with current and future community partners, near and far. We hope to see you at the next event!

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

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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](mailto:emily.zider@maine.edu)