

NEAT Institution: University of Maine Alumni Association

Project Title: Black Bears for Life: Strengthening Student Engagement and Lifelong Alumni Connections

Project Dates: July 1, 2025-June 30, 2026

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Executive Summary:

Purpose:

The University of Maine Alumni Association sought NEAT Grant funding to strengthen relationships with current students and help them begin to see themselves as lifelong members of the Black Bear community. Through increased student programming, partnerships with campus organizations, and expanded outreach to graduating seniors, the project introduced more students to the Alumni Association and Buchanan Alumni House while reinforcing the message that they are "Black Bears for Life."

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The grant enabled the Alumni Association to significantly expand student engagement throughout the 2025–2026 academic year. More than 80 student leaders participated in a networking reception at Buchanan Alumni House, partnerships with student organizations increased the Association's visibility across campus, and enhanced Grad Fair and Commencement programming introduced graduating seniors to the Alumni Association as a lifelong resource. The project demonstrated that students respond positively to intentional engagement opportunities and that Buchanan Alumni House serves as an effective gathering space for building community and lifelong connections.

Description of Institution: Founded in 1875, the UMaine Alumni Association is an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing the best interests of UMaine and its former, current, and future students. We do so by encouraging relationships and mobilizing resources in ways that enhance the value of a UMaine degree. Our efforts focus on:

- providing information, programs, and events that serve our members' personal and career interests; and
- advocating for policies and assets that strengthen UMaine's quality, reputation, and appeal.

The Alumni Association has more than 100,000 UMaine alumni living in all 50 states and over 100 countries.

MISSION STATEMENT

To strengthen the University of Maine by inspiring lifelong connection, passion, and engagement among our alumni community.

VISION

An Alumni Association that is recognized for its impact, relevance, and ability to connect, inspire, and empower generations of alumni.

Overview:

Scope of the Project

This project focused on increasing meaningful engagement between current University of Maine students and the Alumni Association. Grant funding supported programming for student leaders, sponsorship of student organizations, outreach to graduating seniors, and the development of "Black Bears for Life" promotional materials.

A primary focus of the project was introducing students to Buchanan Alumni House, the Alumni Association's headquarters and a welcoming gathering place for alumni, students, and friends of the University. The Alumni House serves as the front door to campus and represents the lifelong relationship between the University of Maine and its alumni. Hosting student events in this space reinforced the message that today's students are tomorrow's alumni, Black Bears for Life.

Process, Methodology, and Timeline

The project was implemented between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026.

Planning began with conversations between Alumni Association staff and student leaders, including the Student Government President and Dean of Students, to identify opportunities for greater student engagement. These discussions informed programming throughout the year.

Major project activities included:

- Development of "Black Bears for Life" branding materials, including banners and student giveaways.
- A January student leadership reception at Buchanan Alumni House attended by approximately 80 student organization leaders. The event featured networking, tours of the Alumni House, refreshments, and a Student Senate meeting.

- Sponsorship of student-focused events including the Student Government Inauguration and the Senior Skulls and All Maine Women induction ceremonies.
- Expanded outreach to graduating seniors through Grad Fair and a Commencement Weekend farewell reception featuring refreshments, alumni gifts, and opportunities for students and families to connect with the Alumni Association.

Together, these activities created multiple opportunities for students to engage with the Alumni Association throughout the academic year.

Findings and Conclusions (Results, Impact, and Recommendations)

The project demonstrated that students are eager to engage with the Alumni Association when opportunities are intentional, welcoming, and integrated into the student experience.

One of the project's greatest successes was introducing students to Buchanan Alumni House. Approximately 80 student leaders attended the January reception, many visiting the Alumni House for the first time. The event demonstrated that the facility can serve as a valuable gathering place for student organizations and future alumni.

Partnerships with Student Government, Senior Skulls, and All Maine Women also proved highly effective, expanding the Alumni Association's visibility among engaged student leaders while strengthening campus relationships.

Enhanced outreach to graduating seniors reinforced the Alumni Association's message that graduation marks the beginning—not the end—of a lifelong relationship with UMaine. The "Black Bears for Life" campaign successfully introduced students to the resources and opportunities available as alumni.

Overall, the project increased awareness of the Alumni Association, expanded student use of Buchanan Alumni House, strengthened partnerships with student organizations, and helped students begin viewing themselves as lifelong members of the University community.

Based on these outcomes, the Alumni Association recommends continuing student-focused programming, expanding partnerships with student organizations, and maintaining an enhanced presence during Grad Fair and Commencement. These efforts provide meaningful opportunities to build relationships before students become alumni and support lifelong engagement with the University.

See Appendix on following pages:

Appendix A: Budget

Project Expenditures

Expense Category	Description	Amount
Alumni Association Branded Student Giveaways	Black Bears for Life stickers (\$240.00) and alumni-branded champagne flutes for graduating seniors (\$1,850.00)	\$2,090.00
Student Engagement Event Catering & Supplies	January Student Leadership Reception (\$588.88) and Graduating Seniors Farewell Reception (\$2,411.71), along with related event supplies and hospitality expenses	\$4,612.30
Student Organization Sponsorships	Student Government Inauguration facility rental (\$300.00) and Senior Skulls/All Maine Women Induction Ceremony facility rental (\$300.00)	\$600.00
Black Bears for Life Promotional Materials	Tabletop banner (\$30.64) and pull-up banner (\$126.59)	\$157.23
Total Project Expenditures		\$7,459.53

Funding Sources

Funding Source	Amount
NEAT Grant Award	\$5,000.00

University of Maine Alumni Association Contribution*	\$2,459.53
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Total Project Funding	\$7,459.53
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*The original project proposal anticipated a \$1,000 Alumni Association contribution. Due to the success and expansion of project activities, the Alumni Association ultimately contributed additional funds to fully support project programming and student engagement efforts.

Survey Instrument

A formal survey instrument was not utilized as part of this project. Project outcomes were evaluated through participation levels, attendance at events, engagement with student organizations, direct feedback from student participants and student leaders, and observations by Alumni Association staff. Informal feedback was gathered through conversations with attendees, student organization leaders, and University of Maine Student Government representatives throughout the project period.

Collateral and Photos:

Full photo album of the Hearty Maine Farwell Event Found here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/umainealumni/albums/72177720334382022/>

Full photo album of the Student Engagement Reception Found here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/umainealumni/albums/72177720331860154/>

Full photo album of our Commencement involvement Found here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/umainealumni/albums/72177720333624960/>

More than 80 student leaders attended a networking reception at Buchanan Alumni House, including a Student Senate meeting, tours of the Alumni House, and opportunities to connect with Alumni Association staff.

Below is the email invite we used to target student leaders to attend.



Tuesday, January 27, 2026 | 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

You're Invited!

The Alumni Association is pleased to welcome you and other student group leaders to an exclusive evening reception at Buchanan Alumni House. Join us for appetizers, pizza, and beverages. We would love to get to know you and tell you more about the Alumni Association. We are interested in becoming more involved with current students and staying in touch when you become alumni! Enjoy a social hour with us as we all get to know each other! Be a part of this special evening!

This is an invite-only, casual event.

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**Senate meeting to follow immediately from 6 - 8:30 p.m. in the McIntire Room.*

We are excited to host you and share our mission: **“Black Bears For Life”**.

At the UMaine Alumni Association, we want every student to know that once you become a Black Bear, you are *always* welcome home with us.

We look forward to celebrating with you!

Please fill out the RSVP form by clicking the [Register Here](#) button below.

**Each student group leader may select one person from their student group to bring as a guest.*

[**Register Here**](#)

Or contact chelsea.mcallian@maine.edu with any questions.



ALUMNI
A S S O C I A T I O N
THE COLLEGE OF OUR HEARTS ALWAYS!

Below are the Black Bears for Life Branded Stickers that we created and purchased:



Student Leaders pose with the Black Bears for Life Banner at the Student Engagement Reception



Students mingle at the Student Reception in January, and Student Government hosts their meeting at Buchanan Alumni House





Photos and Collateral below from our Farewell Reception for graduating seniors and families can be seen on the following pages:







