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The mismatch between existing and future jobs in Maine, and the workers willing and able to do them, applies across many fields, from hospitality to advanced manufacturing.

A new statewide initiative will target one skills gap in particular: the shortage of 977 computer and information technology professionals Maine is expected to face by 2018, according to a report released last year by Southern Maine Community College.

Project Login, spearheaded by the University of Maine System and Educate Maine, aims to double the number of computer science and information technology graduates from the university system, from 80 in 2011 to 160 in 2016.

“The University of Maine System has the capacity and the training, the courses, but we don’t have enough students entering and staying in these degree programs,” said Andrea Maker, program director of Project Login.

Educate Maine is a business-led nonprofit organization that promotes increased educational attainment, and dozens of companies are stakeholders in the initiative. Major employers such as IDEXX Laboratories, WEX, Maine Medical Center, Unum and TD Bank are financially supporting Project Login, and some have pledged to offer paid internships.

“What we hear is that these companies that have options to put their data centers elsewhere often have to consider doing that, because we don’t have the workforce in Maine to support data centers of these large organizations,” Maker said. “And many

medium and small organizations also need this type of support, because businesses

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Maker said they will start in the spring semester by hosting campus receptions with business leaders in attendance so students can learn more about the demand for computer professionals and make connections.

The university system distributed a survey to computer science and information technology students earlier in December to gauge interest in summer internships, and Project Login leaders plan to talk more with students about the obstacles that lead some to leave those degree programs.

To increase enrollment, Project Login will launch a website with video testimonials and social media outreach to target three populations: middle school and high school students, military veterans and the more than 200,000 people in Maine who have college credits but no degree, Maker said.

Kokoska said UMA is trying to interest high school students in computer science by offering free introductory programming courses through the High School Aspirations program.

UMA is also trying to make it easier to transfer credits from other institutions and schedule classes around work and family commitments. Kokoska said they've seen increasing interest in their post-baccalaureate program, which waives general education requirements for students who already have a bachelor's degree.

Kokoska said one challenge to retention may be the difficulty of the program, especially the math classes.

"Some students love the idea of coming in and say, 'I want to be in computers, I want to be a web developer, I want to be in networking,'" Kokoska said. "But then they realize the number of classes they need to take in the math field."

That matches up with the experience of Kevin White, a 25-year-old UMA student

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“The school district said that when they were looking for people, techs, to run network lines or do anything with IT, they had trouble finding people in the field,” White said.

Marcia Moore had a different experience since graduating from UMA's post-baccalaureate program in May of 2011.

The Monmouth resident uses the skills she learned to run her website selling lawn gnomes and to do database work that makes her more productive in her job at Maine Revenue Services, where she's worked for 20 years.

But she wants to move away from accounting, and her degree hasn't yet helped her get a job in the computer sector. The jobs she's seen available pay far less than she makes.

Moore said several of her classmates from UMA have moved out of state for work, and she thinks that may be contributing to Maine's shortage of computer professionals.

“It's not a well-paid field for Maine, at least not for entry-level,” Moore said. “For \$12 an hour it's not worth going to school for four years. The deficit in Maine is not really due to lack of qualified people; they can't keep them because they can't pay enough.”

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