News release  
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**Take the first step to a college degree at UMaine's Hutchinson Center in Belfast**

*Flexible class schedules, on-site advising, scholarships and a convenient location*

Belfast, Maine — When Amy Smith of Lincolnville started thinking about going back to college 10 years ago, she was scared. She was 36 years old and had not been in a classroom since 1989.

“I struggled hard just to finish high school,” Smith says, “and I thought college was a huge step from high school. Everything felt intimidating and I just did not think I could do it.”

After high school, Smith dedicated herself to her growing family. It wasn’t until her eldest child began looking into college that she starting toying with the idea herself. She had always quietly harbored the hope of getting her college degree, but lacked the confidence and resources to give it a try.

Smith says she might never have taken the leap if it had not been for the University of Maine’s outreach center in Belfast, the Hutchinson Center.

“It was local and a lot smaller than a typical college, so it didn’t feel intimidating,” she says. “And the people were so kind and so friendly. They really walked me through the process in a way that allowed me to believe that this was actually doable.”

Smith encourages others to consider it giving the Hutchinson Center a try, particularly now when the center is enrolling for fall classes in Belfast and has scholarship money available.

“I understand that sometimes the most challenging thing is to pick up the phone or send an email to set up an appointment to get started, but know that once you take this first step, you have a dedicated and caring staff to support you,” says Smith, who is now one of those staff members.

Classes ranging from chemistry, creative writing, pathophysiology and world politics to social psychology, social work classes and the fundamentals of acting start Aug. 28. The schedule is specifically designed for flexibility, including late afternoon, evening, online and weekend
classes. This works better for part-time students who are also juggling other big obligations, like full-time jobs and a busy family.

The center also is eager to work with students to access generous scholarships.

“If time and money are the reasons that you haven’t started or finished your college degree, then the Hutchinson Center is the perfect fit for you,” says Smith.

These were the ingredients for Smith's success. Soon after enrolling, she earned her first grade: A in psychology. (She couldn’t believe it!) Then she took one more class, and earned another A. Step-by-step, she continued on her educational journey at the Hutchinson Center, gaining confidence along the way.

Smith took most of her classes in Belfast and graduated as valedictorian at the University of Maine with a bachelor’s degree in history. But her story doesn’t end here. She then earned her master’s degree and, now, has almost completed her doctorate in history at UMaine — all while working as the academic advisor and assistant director at the Hutchinson Center.

“My educational journey has brought me back to the place where I began,” Smith says. "I am now the first point-of-contact for people who want to start or finish their degree and I totally understand how challenging taking this step can be.”

She says she is eager for people to reach out to discuss their hopes — and, if necessary, their understandable fears.

“I know it’s scary, but take it in small steps,” Smith advises. "Make the call, send the email, or stop in — one action has the potential to change your life, as it did mine."

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About the University of Maine: The University of Maine, founded in Orono in 1865, is the state's land grant university, with research and community engagement classifications awarded by the Carnegie Foundation. UMaine is among the most comprehensive higher education institutions in the Northeast and attracts students from Maine and 49 other states, and 63 countries. It currently enrolls 11,219 total undergraduate and graduate students who can directly participate in groundbreaking research working with world-class scholars. The University of Maine offers 35 doctoral degrees, 85 master's degrees, and more than 90 undergraduate majors and academic programs; and one of the oldest and most prestigious honors programs in the U.S. The university promotes environmental stewardship, with substantial efforts campuswide aimed at conserving energy, recycling and adhering to green building standards. For more information about UMaine, visit umaine.edu.