

NH Families Should Look at Our Community Colleges

New Hampshire families facing sticker shock over rising college tuition should look at their local community college. At NH's community colleges – seven in all, located throughout the state -- higher education is still affordable. The curriculum and programs are linked to skills and jobs in today's economy and also provide a well-rounded learning experience. Students at NH's community colleges earn credits which they can transfer to a four-year college to continue their education (at considerably less cost than going directly to the four-year institution) or earn an associate degree or certificate which prepares them for skilled employment.

The community colleges are a good bargain and an exceptional value for NH students. This is the case even with last month's tuition increase, which was a result of budget cuts at the state level. The value comes from the community colleges' priorities of meeting students' needs and remaining in tune with the economy. The colleges are focused on quality, so students find an academic setting that offers challenges, rigor, and the tools for future success. Because the primary mission of these institutions is teaching, students receive individual attention, support, and guidance from instructors connected to their chosen field.

I am a businessman who, for the last two decades, has also been deeply involved in higher education because I know the value of education to individual well-being as well as to the economy. New Hampshire's community colleges have grown dramatically in recent years, precisely because they are good at what they do: providing a quality education that focuses on jobs and on helping individuals of all ages, backgrounds and aspirations develop as learners. There is no "typical" community college student – they include high school graduates filling in the blanks of an unknown future, adult students and family breadwinners creating new career paths, honor students seeking academic challenges in a small college setting, and uncertain learners who may need extra help to move forward.

New Hampshire's community colleges offer small classes, and they are always taught by credentialed, professional instructors. The Community College System of New Hampshire is also one of the state's largest providers of online courses, an exciting and flexible way to learn that transcends the boundaries of geography.

Students also find vibrant campuses with student clubs and organizations, leadership opportunities, places to network, socialize and pursue their interests.

Tuition, which remains the lowest college tuition in the state, can also be offset with financial aid through federal programs and from the Community Colleges of NH Foundation, which raises funds from private and corporate sources to award grants based on need or, in some cases, within particular fields of study.

Businesses both large and small in NH understand the importance of their local community college, and that is why strong partnerships exist between businesses and the colleges. Businesses help ensure the colleges have appropriate equipment and curriculum for instruction, they advise the colleges about industry trends, and they frequently provide employment pathways for students and graduates. The importance of these local connections is what puts the “community” in “community college,” as is the fact that many instructors are drawn from the business community and bring the knowledge and perspective of today’s skilled workplace.

As your family determines how to make ends meet, get ahead, and find the best educational value available, take a look at NH’s community colleges. You’ll find vibrant, high-quality and active institutions committed to helping their students succeed.

Paul Holloway of Rye, NH is chairman of the board of trustees of the Community College System of NH. He is owner of the Holloway Automotive Group. The Community College System of NH includes Great Bay Community College in Portsmouth, Lakes Region Community College in Laconia, Manchester Community College, Nashua Community College, NHTI-Concord’s Community College, River Valley Community College in Claremont and Keene, and White Mountains Community College in Berlin.