



# News Release

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## **NMCC strengthens the bridge between high school and college**

**Aroostook County** - It comes as no surprise that those holding a college degree will earn more in their lifetime than those without one. While Aroostook County has very respectable high school graduation rates, the number of those students who then choose to continue on to college needs improvement. One avenue in which Northern Maine Community College is striving to do just that is by offering early college opportunities for students that allow them to earn college credit while still in high school.

“Going to college is never easy, but these opportunities help ease the challenges of transition and in many cases, reaffirm that college, and sometimes even a particular major, is the correct path for a student,” said Elizabeth Crawford, coordinator of the On Course for College efforts at NMCC. “Students who take advantage of early college opportunities are more likely to persist in their college experience to graduation, generally have a higher GPA than their peers, and seem better able to adjust to the college environment.”

According to Crawford, while offering this type of opportunity to students isn't a new concept, NMCC's approach has expanded. “AP (Advanced Placement) has been around for years, but how we're approaching it now is a lot broader. We're concentrating on making the transition easier for students.”

Through dual enrollment, high school students may complete college-level coursework while in high school, typically through a course taught in their own school by an instructor affiliated with the College, using the College's course syllabus. Students may earn both high school and college credit for their work.

As an example of dual enrollment at work, Crawford points out that there are currently five NMCC courses being offered at Presque Isle Regional Career and Technical Center (PIRCTC) under this program: Introduction to Business, Entrepreneurship, Personal Finance, Accounting, and Introduction to Computer Applications.

“Our partnership with the Community College opens opportunities for our students to continue their education more easily,” said Amy White of PIRCTC, who teaches courses for the College. According to White, while the most popular classes may vary from year to year, there is a high level of interest in all of them. Entrepreneurship, which is being offered for the first time at PIRCTC this year, was in such demand that she is teaching two sections.

Often, students may take these business classes, which are considered electives toward high school graduation, because they have an interest in earning a business degree—a concept that White can understand, since she herself is a 1999 graduate of one of Northern Maine Community College’s business programs. Others may take a class, such as Personal Finance, simply because they know it may help them in the future.

“The cost savings to our students is obviously a huge benefit, but being able to take the class spread out over the full academic year, rather than compressed into one semester, is also a great benefit. Students aren’t so rushed, and oftentimes they are able to take part in additional projects that they otherwise wouldn’t have been able to,” said White.

Courtney Ruest, a 2009 Presque Isle High School graduate who earned NMCC credit for an accounting course she took at PIRCTC, agrees. “It really made a big difference to me to be able to take accounting spread out over the whole year. It was at a slower pace and with people I know.”

Other schools taking part in dual enrollment with NMCC are: St. John Valley Technology Center in Frenchville, Van Buren District Secondary School, Caribou Regional Technology Center, Region Two School of Applied Technology in Houlton, Northern Penobscot Tech Region Three in Lincoln, United Technology Center in Bangor, and Westbrook Regional Vocational Center.

In addition to taking a class at their own school, qualifying high school juniors and seniors can have tuition waived for up to six credits a semester under the High School Aspirations program. They can take classes at NMCC’s main campus in Presque Isle, or at its outreach centers in Houlton or the St. John Valley. Students from any high school in the State, as well as home-schooled students, may be eligible to take part in the High School Aspirations program.

“Whether a student has exhausted a school’s options in a given subject, is looking for a different classroom environment, or wants just wants to test the college waters, Aspirations meets those needs,” said Crawford.

“Taking a class at NMCC helped me meet new people, learn how college instructors teach the class, and discover if I needed to change my study habits for college,” said Ruest, who also took two night classes at NMCC before she graduated from PIHS.

The early steps Ruest took through NMCC helped to firmly put her on the path to continuing her education. With 10 college credits already in hand, she entered NMCC's Liberal Studies program this fall. After earning her associate degree, she plans to transfer on to a four year college.

With more schools entering into dual enrollment agreements with NMCC each year and more local high school students taking advantage of the Aspirations program, College officials are hoping to see a growing number of students like Ruest successfully bridge the step from high school to college. Interested students and parents can talk to their local guidance department to determine which opportunities would best suit them. Crawford can also be contacted for more information at Northern Maine Community College.

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*Amy White (standing) teaches Northern Maine Community College's Introduction to Computers course to students at the Presque Isle Regional Career and Technology Center. PIRCTC students can take this and four other NMCC classes on-site in their regular classrooms while earning both high school and college credit for the course under a dual enrollment agreement between NMCC and PIRCTC.*



*Courtney Ruest, a 2009 graduate of Presque Isle High School, entered NMCC's liberal studies program as a full-time student this fall. Taking advantage of both Dual Enrollment and High School Aspirations opportunities, Ruest had already completed ten credits toward graduation—providing both a significant cost savings for her as well as the added benefit of being able to have a lighter class schedule than some of her peers.*