



News Release

Contact:
Jason Parent
Development and
College Relations Office
33 Edgemont Drive
Presque Isle, ME 04769
Phone: (207) 768-2808
Fax: (207) 760-1101
jparent@nmcc.edu

January 19, 2010
NR10008

NMCC spring semester enrollment up 15 percent over last January; campus officials voice concern over impact

Aroostook County - The start of new semester at Northern Maine Community College has again brought a surge of new students with enrollment jumping 15 percent over opening day last January. While the continued growth on campus is a clear indication that demand for the programs offered County-wide is high, College officials are raising some concerns about the resulting impact on the institution, surrounding region and students – who will soon be graduates.

When spring semester classes began January 11, the campus welcomed what official census numbers will likely show to be the institution's largest student body in the second half of an academic year, rivaling numbers last seen in the mid 1990's.

Much like that turbulent economic time for the County, NMCC President Timothy Crowley, who was then vice president and academic dean of the institution, sees the College as a crucial resource to the area's economy in these challenging times. Simultaneously, Crowley is concerned about how the College will sustain its efforts of serving more individuals with dwindling resources, as well as the local opportunities for the trained and skilled workers the institution will soon see ready to go to work.

"We have really stretched this campus community thin in terms of the numbers of students we are serving. There are several administrative and staff positions that we have not filled, many faculty are teaching classes where the capacity level has been increased and in some cases multiple sections of courses have been added to accommodate the demand for what we are doing," said Crowley. "There is unquestionable pressure on faculty and staff to meet the demand."

The growth in student numbers has been across the board. In recent years, NMCC has attracted one of every eight Aroostook County high school graduating seniors, many who see the College as a high-quality, affordable resource to earn their degree in two years and quickly enter the workforce. However, enrollment statistics also show a significant increase in the number of students who begin their journey in higher education at NMCC and then transfer on to a baccalaureate degree granting institution.

Conversely, the College has also seen a significant increase in the number of non-traditional students – many displaced workers – who turn to the institution to train for a new career. In March of 2009, after a large number of area residents were laid off from area lumber mills, NMCC – in an unprecedented move – started a special semester to accommodate those impacted by the economic downturn.

“The more than 40 students who took advantage of this special semester continue to persist in their goal of earning a degree, and are nearly halfway through their academic studies. These individuals, many of whom have young families, are critical to the future of Aroostook. We, as a County community, cannot afford to let them become an unfortunate outmigration statistic. These workers, along with our other non-traditional students, represent an entirely different demographic than a student right out of high school who might choose to leave the area, at least for a while, to discover the world,” said Crowley. “These non-traditional students will be well prepared to enter the workforce, and we want to be certain that the economic opportunity is here for them to enter the local labor market.”

Surveys of NMCC alumni taken within six months of commencement over several years show that the number of graduates who stay in Maine to work or continue their education typically stands around 95 percent. The percentage that remains in The County has ranged between 55 and 65 percent in the annual questionnaire.

The College is working collaboratively and extensively with other area educational institutions and County organizations to provide opportunity for its students to stay in the area after graduation.

Another challenge NMCC is already experiencing and that Crowley sees as exacerbated on the near horizon is the ability to meet prospective student demand in certain programs as state funding for higher education decreases. The College’s nursing program has long had a waiting list, and nearly all of the trade and technical occupations offerings are currently at or near capacity.

Applications for fall 2010 enrollment are well ahead of similar numbers last year at this time. Meanwhile, the College has already had to make difficult decisions including reducing the number of students it would accept in next fall’s incoming class for its popular wind power technology program from 36 to 18. The first of its kind program in New England has attracted qualified applicants from all over the state and out of state.

#####