



News Release

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NMCC realizes gain in number of students entering College direct from high school

Aroostook County - As education officials in Aroostook County and throughout the state continue to direct their energy toward increasing the number of high school graduates who go on to college, evidence that such efforts are making a difference locally are found in the make-up of this year's student body at Northern Maine Community College.

Preliminary Fall 2006 enrollment figures released Wednesday by the Maine Community College System show the Presque Isle campus has seen a 7.5 percent increase in the number of students entering the College directly from high school compared to last year. Although overall enrollment at NMCC remained relatively steady compared to last year (a total headcount of 914 students, compared to 921 students last fall), the increase in students making the transition directly from high schools across the state is significant as it reflects one of the intended goals identified when the community colleges were established four years ago.

"Overall Maine and Aroostook County graduate a high percentage of high school students, but those figures don't hold true when you look at the number who go on to higher education. Since our official transition to a community college in 2003, NMCC and the other six system campuses have engaged at all levels to ensure students who want to come to college get there, and further, through our outreach and partnership with area high schools, we have focused on student aspirations to encourage more students to pursue higher education," said NMCC President Timothy Crowley.

Crowley, along with his system counterparts, joined MCCS President John Fitzsimmons and Governor John Baldacci at a press conference Wednesday at Central Maine Community College in Auburn to announce the latest system enrollment gains. Baldacci, who led efforts to create the community college system in Maine had high praise for the efforts of all those who have directed the seven campuses through and beyond the transition.

"Our community colleges have more than lived up to their potential. They are one of Maine's real success stories, and our goal is to continue to build on that success," said Baldacci. "Their programs represent the heart of the Maine economy and the best hope for the future of Maine people."

Underscoring the governor's remarks, Fitzsimmons announced that system-wide the number of students entering directly from high school has jumped 75 percent in the four-year window since the transition, which has been among the greatest contributing factors to an overall 48 percent enrollment increase- to 11,153 students- since the legislature changed the name and mission of the former technical colleges. Over the same four-year period, Aroostook's Community College has seen their overall number of students coming directly from high school jump ten percent.

System-wide the increase in direct from high school students is also being credited to the Early College for ME program, which targets students who have traditionally not gone to college yet who have the academic potential to succeed in college. Begun in 2003, the program offers college transition services starting in the junior year, including early college courses, support with the college admissions process, scholarships, and guidance before and during college. The Early College for ME program for Northern Maine and Washington County is housed on the NMCC campus.

Another noteworthy transformation in the composition of the student body at NMCC is evidenced in the data that shows where students attending the college come from. In addition to a gain in the number of students transitioning from Aroostook County high schools, the Presque Isle campus is attracting larger numbers of students from other parts of the state, the northeast and Canada. Currently NMCC students represent all of Maine's 16 counties and five states – Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Vermont.

“It is extremely encouraging for us to see students from throughout Maine and beyond enrolling,” said William Egeler, NMCC dean of students. “Not only does that translate into a stronger, more diverse student population that in effect enhances the educational and social experience for all attending NMCC, but it also has impact on the region as these individuals are more likely to seek employment or further education in Aroostook County.”

According to Egeler, the College has seen a recent surge by both local students and those from outside Aroostook County interested in the liberal arts program and the various trades programs. The liberal arts program has been particularly attractive to Aroostook County students looking to begin their college experience and earn credits toward a four year degree.

NMCC offers the most affordable per credit higher education cost in Maine, and with recent agreements such as “Advantage U”, which guarantees junior-level status at any University of Maine System campus to any Maine Community College liberal arts associate degree graduate, students are attracted by the quality, convenience and cost. A similar recently established partnership between NMCC and Husson College, which included moving Husson's Aroostook County operations on to the Presque Isle campus, is expected to have further positive impact on NMCC enrollment. Over the years, NMCC has established numerous transfer agreements with institutions throughout Maine and elsewhere.

Despite the continued growth of the Maine Community College System, President Fitzsimmons noted at Wednesday's press conference that financial constraints have begun to slow enrollment increases. He noted that some programs have been forced to establish lengthy waiting lists for admission. At NMCC, the associate degree nursing program and trades programs are filled to capacity and with additional resources could enroll larger numbers.

“I am enormously proud of our faculty and staff. The success of the System rests on their shoulders. We are concerned that without additional state investment, we will be forced to cap enrollment next fall,” said Fitzsimmons. “Adding faculty and staff, as well as updating and expanding college facilities, are the major challenges before the System.”

At the MCCS Board of Trustees meeting held prior to Wednesday’s press conference, the Board approved submission of the System’s FY08/FY09 biennial funding request of \$50.4 million in FY08 and \$53.4 million in FY09. The requests represent a six percent increase for each of the two years.

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