



# News Release

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## NMCC spring semester enrollment up 13 percent over same time last year

**Aroostook County** - Enrollment at Northern Maine Community College is up 13 percent over the same time last year. According to College officials the number of students signed up for classes two weeks into the spring semester stands at 983, up from 870 last January.

NMCC and Maine Community College System leaders attribute the increase, in part, to the weak economy and rising unemployment. During past economic downturns, the state's community colleges, including NMCC, have experienced an increase in both applications and enrollment as individuals have sought to upgrade their job skills or prepare for a new career. Applications for admission heading into the spring semester at NMCC were up more than 14 percent.

The preliminary numbers at NMCC are expected to grow even more in the coming months with new rounds of lay-offs announced in recent weeks and temporary lay-offs in the forest products industry that have been extended for an indefinite period of time. College officials are meeting regularly with representatives from the Maine Career Center offices in Aroostook County to discuss ways the College can assist.

Discussions with the Career Center are now focused on the possibility of NMCC, in partnership with the SAD 1 Adult and Community Education Center, offering a March start-up of developmental college courses to serve displaced workers who were unable to begin classes at the start NMCC's semester on January 12.

"We are seeing the direct impact of recent mill closures and other company downsizings in our area," said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. "We have had numerous displaced workers turn to the College in recent weeks and months looking to make a new start. These are very difficult economic times and we intend to work closely with our local communities, individuals and businesses to help ensure we do our part to help retool the workforce and bolster the County's economy."

According to Crowley, that work is becoming increasingly challenging given the growing demand for NMCC's programs and services coupled with the impact of the economic downturn on the state's budget and the increasing difficulty faced by students paying for higher education as a result of the tough economic times.

In recent months, NMCC has grappled with making difficult budget cuts to trim nearly \$400,000 from its current fiscal year that ends in June. The sum represents the northernmost community college's share of the \$2.9 million curtailment order for MCCS.

Several programs and courses at NMCC have seen significant growth in demand over the past year. One area that has seen a bounce is the College's liberal studies program, which allows students to build a solid academic foundation that mirrors the first two years of general education in most baccalaureate studies at four-year colleges and universities. The number of students enrolled in that program has grown 22 percent from 161 in January of 2008 to 197 this year.

"The growth in liberal studies can largely be attributed to two different groups of students. On the one hand, we have students, including displaced workers, who are enrolling in the program to get started on their college experience while they decide on a new career path. On the other, we have many students, including a significant number of recent high school graduates and college transfers, who are recognizing the value – economically, socially and academically – of starting their work toward a four-year degree at a community college," said William Egeler, NMCC dean of students. "The ability of these students to transition seamlessly to one of the County's two University of Maine campuses or Husson University, right here on the NMCC campus, is quite a draw."

Other draws in recent months have included the early childhood education program, which has seen a 33 percent increase in students enrolled this year (44) over last (33). The one-year certificate program in medical coding, which was first introduced at NMCC in the fall of 2007, has twice as many students enrolled this academic year (30) as it had last year (14).

The enrollment growth is also attributed to NMCC's new program in wind power technology. To date, the college has received 33 applications for admission to the program. An initial course offering in wind power theories this semester had to be expanded to include two additional divisions because 42 students signed up for the class.

Demand for NMCC classes and programs extends to the non-credit offerings coordinated by the College's continuing education division. According to Leah Buck, assistant dean of continuing education, there are currently 18 people enrolled for the eight-week commercial driving academy session slated to begin on January 26. In recent years classes have typically numbered closer to eight students.

The difficult economic times and related stressors may have even contributed to a spike in participants for a regular Yoga class offered by the NMCC continuing education division. Twenty students are participating in a weekly Tuesday evening beginner level yoga class at the College. Regular attendance for the offering typically averages between eight and ten participants.

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