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**Over 55,000 Students Enrolled at Connecticut Community Colleges**

*Demand rises while funding declines: the CCCs work diligently to help all students succeed.*

Already the largest public higher education system in the state, the Connecticut Community Colleges (CCCs) have enrolled over 55,000 students this fall, setting yet another enrollment record for the seventh year in a row. Connecticut Community College students account for approximately 50% of all undergraduates enrolled in Connecticut's public colleges and universities. There are 55,112 students enrolled in the 12 Connecticut Community Colleges in fall 2009, representing 7.8% more than the previous fall, when student enrollment broke the 50,000 mark for the first time in the System's history. Eight of the 12 colleges saw headcount increases either in the double-digits or nearing 10%. Since 1998, overall headcount enrollment has climbed approximately 30%. During that period, full-time enrollments have grown approximately 104%, and the majority of students (approximately 62% in fall 2009) continue to be students who study part-time while also working to support themselves and their families. An additional approximately 32,000 students are enrolled in non-credit classes, the majority of which are related to workforce development.

"The CCCs are filled to capacity with students seeking affordable high-quality education," said Marc S. Herzog, Chancellor of the CCCs. The swelling enrollment stems in part from increases in the young adult population, which has also led to an upswing of full-time students. "But due to the economic downturn and the job losses," Chancellor Herzog continued, "more people of all ages are looking to change careers or to become more employable by learning new skills and technologies."

"Meeting the needs of students and helping those students to succeed in college is our focus," said Mary Anne Cox, Assistant Chancellor. "The student support services we provide, financial aid services, and academic and career counseling, all help students achieve their educational and career goals, and prepare them for the jobs that fuel our economy."

The importance of community colleges in boosting the nation back to a leadership position in a global economy has gained recent recognition. "Community Colleges will play a big role in getting America back on its feet again," said U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan last March. President Barack Obama in his unveiling of the "American Graduation Initiative: Stronger American Skills Through Community Colleges" on July 14 said investment in community colleges is crucial because "jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience" in years ahead. "We will not fill those jobs, or keep those jobs on our shores, without the training offered by community colleges," he said.

The CCCs' large enrollment will help meet the American Graduation Initiative's goal of five million additional community college graduates by the year 2020. Approximately 5,000 CCC students graduate each year. "The Connecticut Community Colleges provide the state with a supply of talented students with the educational foundation and adaptable skills needed for both the labor market and for more advanced levels of education," said Cox. "Investment in today's community college students yields large returns to our economy," she said. "It provides Connecticut with the strong foundation it needs for economic recovery and growth, and helps attract new businesses and new jobs to our state."

According to Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI) in its 2008 economic impact study, taxpayers see an annual increase of nine percent on their investments in the Connecticut Community Colleges. "Connecticut's Community Colleges add more money to the state treasury than they take out," the study reports. "The Connecticut economy receives roughly \$5 billion in income each year due to the colleges and their students." Nearly all the approximately 100,000 credit and non-credit students remain in Connecticut to live and work.

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The increased enrollments come at the same time that reductions in state funding have reduced college budgets by 10%. In response to state budget reductions, the System has initiated cost-cutting measures through cutbacks and reduction of purchasing, hiring and salary freezes, and streamlining of operations, in order to accommodate the increases in enrollment. "The approximate 10% increase in students this year comes with a budget at least 10% below what is needed to serve those students," said Chancellor Herzog. While Connecticut higher education will be funded at the same levels as 2008, in accordance with regulations for the federal stimulus, that funding will be stretched to accommodate the additional students who are flocking to community colleges and to cover the additional costs.

Addressing the budget challenges in his fall 2009 "Back to Campus" message to faculty and staff, Chancellor Herzog wrote "I am encouraged by my belief that we are well positioned to achieve the goals of the President's plan in Connecticut," citing the CCCs' work with "Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count." A multi-year national student success initiative funded by the Lumina Foundation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and other funders, Achieving the Dream aims to help more community college students succeed, particularly those who have faced significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color. The CCCs' strategic priorities include emphasis on improving student success through the use of data on student needs and performance, curriculum alignments across K-16, transfer agreements, academic interventions, strengthened support services and financial aid policies that promote persistence.

In a related grant, the Connecticut Community College System was awarded funds by MDC, Inc., the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Lumina Foundation to "expand groundbreaking remedial education programs." Connecticut was one of only five states awarded this grant. The developmental education programs "pioneered by these colleges represent some of the most promising work in the country for boosting college completion rates among struggling students," declared the funders' June news release. This work "along with the latest U.S. Department of Labor grant in renewable energy education, which follows three other US DOL Grants in allied health, nursing and manufacturing technology programs, are clear evidence and an endorsement of our effectiveness in helping students to succeed by helping them to gain the college-level skills demanded by 21st century employers," said Chancellor Herzog.

The \$12 billion over 10 years to community colleges across the nation that the American Graduation Initiative offers could help alleviate the current and increasing needs at the CCCs which are not sufficiently supported by state or federal funding. "But it will not solve the budget shortfall," said Chancellor Herzog. Terry W. Hartle, Senior Vice President, American Council on Education, writes in an article in The New England Journal of Higher Education, Summer 2009, that "state governments need to meet their responsibilities...state support for higher education has been falling for the past 25 years...The National Conference of State Legislatures chastised its own members for treating higher education as the 'balance wheel' of state budgets, receiving whatever is left after other priorities..."

"More students understand that education is the pathway to success in our global economy," said Chancellor Herzog. "The economic vitality of our state depends in large part on the critical role higher education plays in preparing students with 21<sup>st</sup> century education and skills," he said. "We must continue to make sure the resources and student services are available to ensure that all students can succeed."

For more information on the Connecticut Community Colleges, visit [www.commnet.edu](http://www.commnet.edu).

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