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Connecticut Community Colleges Strengthen the State's Economy
CCCs break the 50,000 student enrollment mark

The state's economy is significantly strengthened through investment in the Connecticut Community Colleges, reports Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI) in its 2008 economic impact study. "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. This figure amounts to roughly 2.3% of the State's total annual income."

State government receives returns from its Community College support "in the form of increased tax revenue and savings associated with avoided social costs." Every \$1.00 in taxes invested today in the Connecticut Community Colleges returns a cumulative \$16.40 over the course of the students' working careers. Social benefits that result from support of the Community Colleges include reductions in unemployment, welfare costs, health care costs, incarceration rates, and criminal justice costs.

The economic downturn has meant that more students are looking for affordable ways to gain a competitive edge in today's economy. "Investing in the Community Colleges is investing in improved skills, career opportunities, and a strong workforce for Connecticut," said Mary Anne Cox, Assistant Chancellor. "It's a way to increase earnings potential, help students create a better life for themselves and their families, attract new businesses and new jobs to our State, and expand our tax base."

Enrollments are at an all-time high at the 12 Connecticut Community Colleges (CCCs) in fall 2008, surpassing 50,000 students for the first time in the System's history, and making this the sixth-year of record-breaking Community College enrollments in both headcount and Full Time Equivalency (FTE) numbers. The CCCs have 51,105 students enrolled in credit programs at the 12 Colleges, a 5.5 percent increase in headcount since last year. Increases were seen in both full time and part time enrollments, with full time headcount increasing 8.3 percent over the prior year. Full time enrollments have increased 90% since 2000, reflecting the increase in younger, full time students attending community college to acquire marketable skills and the educational credentials to qualify for job opportunities in the knowledge economy.

Over 4,000 students graduate each year from the CCCs, many moving into jobs in high-demand fields throughout the state. Approximately 94% of students who attend the CCCs remain in the State and contribute to economic growth.

Associate degree graduates see their annual income increase on average by \$231 annually for every credit completed at Connecticut's Community Colleges. Their annual salary is approximately 39% more than someone with no more than a high school diploma, reports EMSI. Average lifetime earnings of the CCC graduate will increase by \$8.10 for every dollar they invest in their college education, an average 23% rate of return on their educational investment. Over a lifetime, CCC graduates can earn approximately \$600,000 or more in additional income as compared to high school graduates.

The 12 Connecticut Community Colleges offer a wide array of programs that help students succeed in the knowledge economy, from specialized programs such as nursing, allied health and manufacturing technology, in which students develop highly-marketable skills, to general studies and liberal arts and sciences, which foster critical thinking skills sought by today's employers.

Many non-traditional-aged students come to the CCCs to re-tool for career changes or advancements. Approximately 50,000 additional students of all ages are enrolled in non-credit and workforce development courses at the Colleges.

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The CCCs make higher education accessible through low annual tuition and fees, which at \$2,984 is the lowest among public and private institutions in the state, as well as by ensuring that need-based financial aid is available. Savings can total \$30,000 or more per year compared with private colleges.

Across the System, students are enjoying new CCC campuses, such as at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, and Tunxis Community College in Farmington, where new buildings have greatly enhanced the campus environments and services for students. Double-digit enrollment increases were recorded in fall 2008 at both Housatonic CC and Tunxis CC, with headcount increasing 13.5% and 12.8% respectively over the prior fall.

Also attracting students are the improved transfer articulation and guaranteed admissions agreements with the Connecticut State Universities and the University of Connecticut. Students admitted to UConn can select from more than 50 majors offered by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"Many factors play a role in enrollment increases, but clearly Connecticut's students are seeing the value of a community college education," said Cox. "Students have the advantage of getting a high-quality education affordably," she said, "and then moving to higher levels of education or improving the skills they need to move ahead in the workplace."

The record-breaking enrollments at the Community Colleges come at a time when the colleges are dealing with budget reductions of 3.5 percent, and an increased demand for services, particularly for the educational support services needed to help students overcome the achievement gaps and skills deficits that many underserved or disadvantaged students face when entering college-level courses.

Connecticut's working-age population will decline due to retirements and outmigration, but the minority component of the population will continue to increase, according to a 2006 report by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, New England 2020, and new entrants to the workforce must have the skills and education needed to compete for jobs in a changing economy.

"If Connecticut is to maintain its competitive edge in technology, bioscience, and precision manufacturing, and to have a well-prepared workforce in critical areas such as health care and emergency services, the achievement gaps faced by students must be addressed," said Cox. "Investment in student success means a stronger workforce and higher quality of life for our state."

Investment in the CCCs "actually returns more to government budgets than it costs," EMSI reports. "State taxpayers earn 8.6% rate of return on their investments in the Connecticut Community Colleges." Absent the Connecticut Community Colleges, "state government would have to raise taxes to make up for lost revenues and added costs."

For more information on the Connecticut Community Colleges, visit www.commnet.edu.