

LUMINA FOUNDATION

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COLLEGE, REWIRED

Innovative approaches
help higher education
connect to productivity

INSIDE



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On the cover: Jamison Guilford (center) of Raymore, Mo., is one of 23 students set to begin classes this fall at Summit Tech in nearby Lee's Summit, Mo. The Summit Tech curriculum is designed to prepare 11th- and 12th-graders for entry into a cutting-edge, cost-effective new program at the University of Central Missouri dubbed the Innovation Campus.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In many cases and more and more places, college just isn't what it used to be — and that's a very good thing. The fact is, the American system of higher education is changing, and we at Lumina Foundation believe strongly that significant change is needed.

True, the current system has served the nation well for decades — and in many ways set the global standard for much of the last half-century. But it's becoming increasingly clear that the current system just isn't enough to ensure success in *this* century.

These days, the higher education enterprise faces an unprecedented array of challenges: steeply rising costs, deep cuts in government funding, growing concern about the quality and relevance of college programs and credentials. And all of these challenges naturally affect the greatest challenge of all: society's very real need for an ever-increasing number of citizens with college-level learning.

Lumina and others have crystallized this national need into a clear and compelling national goal, what we call Goal 2025. We want to ensure that, by 2025, 60 percent of Americans have high-quality postsecondary credentials, up from the current level of about 38 percent.

Increasing numbers of economists, labor experts and employers agree that, for the nation to be economically secure and socially stable in coming decades, our higher education system must be a more efficient engine for human capital development. We must find ways to make college-level learning the norm for all Americans, particularly the growing numbers of 21st century students who constitute our future as a nation: students of color, working adults, first-generation students and low-income students. In short, we must make higher education more productive, so that it can provide many more students with rigorous, relevant, high-quality learning — but without increasing costs.

This issue of *Lumina Foundation Focus* takes you to a few places that have made that connection — institutions that are making real strides in the effort to improve college productivity by creating innovative new models for serving their students.

In this issue, you'll get a first-hand look at innovations unfolding at three diverse sites:

- Manhattan, where the City University of New York is set to open New Community College, the first two-year campus that CUNY has launched in 42 years. New College, which will use New York City itself as a one-of-a-kind classroom, takes its inspiration from an accelerated program that, since 2009, has been increasing success rates among at-risk students.
- New England, where officials at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), a private, four-year institution, are taking a number of steps to improve productivity. Some of these steps include: making an intensive effort to seek out transfer students and ensure their success, ramping up the university's online offerings, developing several three-year bachelor's degree programs, and launching a cutting-edge program called College Unbound that combines classroom work with real-time job training.
- Western Missouri, where a collaborative effort among business, K-12, government and higher-education leaders in suburban Kansas City led to the Summit Tech/Innovation Campus project. This effort, spearheaded by a local businessman and the president of the University of Central Missouri, looks to link academic rigor to workplace relevance in exciting new ways.

The examples from these three locations showcase the ingenuity and the commitment that will increasingly be required to reach Goal 2025. But they certainly don't tell the whole story. I also urge you to visit our website, www.luminafoundation.org, where *Focus* offers more on these innovative new models in higher education, including a compelling photo essay and a short video focusing on a student in SNHU's College Unbound program.

We believe this material — on the Web and on the following pages — can spark other innovative ideas that can help reshape American higher education to meet the demands of the 21st century. Clearly, it is that spirit of innovation that must fuel the drive to reach Goal 2025.

My Lumina colleagues and I encourage you to embrace that spirit, and to join us in the effort to reach that vital goal.

Jamie P. Merisotis
President and CEO
Lumina Foundation



CUNY's newest college is forming ASAP

By Steve Giegerich

In a three-decade career as an educator — a career that began at the front of a sixth-grade class and has since reached the administrative offices of the City University of New York — John Mogulescu has seen dozens of educational reforms come and go. It matters, then, when he singles out one effort as “the best thing we’ve ever done.”

Mogulescu, CUNY’s senior university dean for academic affairs and the dean of its School of Professional Studies, is talking about Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), an initiative that has helped boost the graduation rates of at-risk students and is now serving as the template for an entirely new college in the CUNY system.



(From left) Kenny Ayala, a student at Queensboro Community College; Nicolina Dapilma, a graduate of Kingsborough Community College now enrolled at Queens College; and Bronx Community College student Joel Cabrera all benefited from a CUNY effort called Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP).

The aptly named New Community College at CUNY (New College) won't adopt every aspect of the 5-year-old ASAP program when it opens its doors to students this June just east of Times Square. Still, ASAP is the foundation for what officials hope to accomplish on the first two-year campus CUNY has launched in 42 years.

The idea behind ASAP — and New College — is to provide an intrusive and intensive college experience, one that essentially refuses to allow students to fail. The program features a structured, full-time schedule; financial supports; and frequent, regular interaction with counselors and advisers. Mogulescu and other administrators are sold on the ASAP concept and eager for New College to open in its temporary home, a former secretarial school on West 40th Street, across from Bryant Park.

Admittedly, many members of the CUNY faculty don't share that eagerness. In fact, Sandi Cooper, chair of the University Faculty Senate, calls New College's proposed curricula a "low-level junior high affair" and describes ASAP as "a joke" that values graduation rates over learning.

CUNY officials beg to differ, pointing to data showing that ASAP students made impressive gains in comprehension of the core curriculum almost from the beginning of their involvement in the program. Also, officials say, students in the program are four times more likely than non-ASAP participants to graduate in two years and more than twice as likely (54.1 percent to 24.1 percent) to receive a diploma within three years. The 1,132 students who inaugurated the program on six CUNY community college campuses in 2007-08 also transferred to four-year institutions at a higher rate (48 percent, compared to 35 percent for non-ASAP students).

Cooper scoffs and says the gains from the accelerated program are artificial. "The pressure to graduate people under any circumstances is crazy," she says. "The worst of it is what it does to students who need more and not less time."

Still, CUNY officials insist the success of ASAP students is credible, citing several factors they say contribute to that success. Academically, they say, the program works because it commits students to a full-time schedule during the first year of study and because ASAP features a consolidated curriculum, instructional and counseling staffs dedicated solely to student success, and mandatory progress meetings to keep students on track.

Beyond the classroom, administrators applaud the steps taken to address the socioeconomic issues that can stymie many students. In addition to waiving tuition for the

financially strapped, ASAP provides free textbooks and a monthly New York City Transit MetroCard that students use to travel to and from campus via subway or bus.

As popular as the financial components of the program have proven to be, however, CUNY officials believe the biggest single reason for ASAP's success is its rejection of what Mogulescu calls "the morass of developmental education" or remedial coursework.

The first ASAP cohort had yet to complete its first year on the CUNY community college campuses when Mogulescu met with Chancellor Matthew Goldstein to discuss possible improvements to the program. The chancellor had no desire for simple tweaks, Mogulescu recalls. Goldstein, who had championed ASAP initially because of his frustration with CUNY's stubbornly low graduation rates, already had a grander plan in mind. "The chancellor wasn't interested in a pilot," remembers Mogulescu. "He was interested in a new college."

Goldstein had shown similar audacity early on, when he challenged the staff to graduate 50 percent of the first ASAP cohort in three years.

Nationally, only 16 percent of students in urban community colleges earn an associate degree within 36 months, according to figures from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). "I don't want to say he plucked (the number) out of thin air," says Mogulescu, "but it was a bold move."

Not half as bold, perhaps, as Goldstein's commitment to develop New College, the "different and imaginative" institution that this summer will become CUNY's seventh community college campus. The man Goldstein and Mogulescu chose to head New College is Scott Evenbeck, an unassuming, naturally

friendly psychology professor who cut his administrative teeth as dean of University College at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI).

Evenbeck may be a newcomer to the hurried pace of Manhattan, but he's no novice on the subject of data-driven outcomes. And he has no fear of taking innovative approaches to educational reform — particularly those that reject traditional remedial, non-credit coursework for at-risk students. "If students are engaged in real material that can move them toward a degree, then they don't feel like they are doing some calisthenics to nowhere," he says. Reinventing the first-year experience thus became Evenbeck's top priority in planning the New College program.

"The most important thing is that we articulate high expectations for the students," he says. "When they are told they need remedial work, they almost always work

"The most important thing is that we articulate high expectations for the students."

*Scott Evenbeck,
president of
New Community College at CUNY*



John Mogulescu, CUNY's senior university dean for academic affairs and dean of the system's School of Professional Studies. Mogulescu, an educator for more than three decades, is a huge supporter of the ASAP program that helped inspire New College, calling it "the best thing we've ever done."

down to that expectation. We want to move them in a different direction." For that reason, New College's development team chose to steer incoming freshmen into an intensive, full-time curriculum (minimum 12 credit hours) that puts "systematic thinking" at the core. New College, quite simply, will turn New York City into a classroom.

It's not that New College freshmen will dodge all of the minefields that imperil first-year students. They will still navigate classes meant to hone their reading and writing skills, and no one will get a free pass on the math requirement. But it's all about context. At New College, reading and writing skills will be taught through the lens of New York's rich literary culture. And the laboratory for math instruction (under the rubric of "statistics") might well be the city's financial district.

It will be "a curriculum very much in and of the city," Evenbeck promises, and New College is wasting no time in introducing this city-as-classroom concept. The summer bridge program in August will set the tone by offering E.B. White's noted 1948 essay "Here is New York" as a reading assignment. The piece will inspire "interpretive captions" of iconic venues in 21st century New York; a comparison of current Census data with the statistics cited by White and, finally, reflection on "How have I shaped this place, and how am I shaped by this place?"

Another assignment asks students to compare how the city is portrayed in two memorable tunes: *Empire State of Mind Part II* by Alicia Keys and Frank Sinatra's *New York, New York*. Working as a group, the students will then compose final stanzas to each song, based on their own experiences as city residents.





Scott Evenbeck, president of New Community College at CUNY, brings an innovative spirit to his new job, along with years of experience in data-driven decision making. One of his goals is to use New York City itself as a classroom; he promises "a curriculum very much in and of the city."

‘Is this some sort of scam?’

Nicolina Dapilma got a phone call from a Kingsborough Community College official before she ever set foot as a freshman on the Brooklyn campus in 2009. The official had a question: Would Dapilma be interested in a program offering free books, tuition and a MetroCard in exchange for a commitment to a full-time schedule of intensive instruction and counseling? A skeptical Dapilma first responded to the ASAP pitch with a question of her own: “Is this some sort of scam?” But it didn’t take her long to sign on.

A native of Togo in west Africa, Dapilma arrived at Kingsborough lagging in math skills but conversant in three languages. (She says she now speaks “4½” — her native tongue of Ewe, English, Italian, Spanish and a smattering of French.) Because remedial courses don’t fit the ASAP model, Dapilma was advised to address the math deficiency prior to the start of the fall semester in 2009. The summer before beginning ASAP, she took a developmental math course, becoming one of thousands of CUNY students who enroll in remedial courses despite growing doubts about their effectiveness.

CUNY spends \$39 million annually on remedial courses — a significant outlay when one considers that, according to figures from the National Center for Education Statistics, only 20 percent of students who take such courses eventually earn bachelor’s degrees.

In addition to the broader questions about their return on investment, remedial classes simply do not fit in the consolidated block schedule that is a non-negotiable element of ASAP. Donna Linderman, the program’s executive director, calls the block scheduling a “structured pathway ... a firm hand in a velvet glove” that compels students to balance their studies with the demands of family and work. Should a student slip behind anyway (as Dapilma did once the school year began), he or she can turn to academic advisers who are assigned specifically to the program. In fact, students are required to consult with an adviser at least twice a month — a “requirement” that still strikes Dapilma as humorous.

“It seemed like I was in her office on a daily basis,” she says of adviser Martha Greasley. “Whenever I had some kind of problem or something of interest to share, I’d go see her.” Greasley didn’t mind. In fact, she welcomes and encourages frequent visits. “It’s a different kind of academic advising,” Greasley insists, “much more in-depth. The students aren’t just seeing a counselor once a semester to see what classes they need to take the next semester. It’s invasive — not in a bad way, but in a good way.”

A recent study showed that, from 2007-2009, the ratio of advisers to non-ASAP students on the system’s community college campuses was 300:1. For ASAP students, the ratio was 62:1. And according to study author Anthony L. Rini, CUNY’s executive director of academic financial affairs and planning, that difference is telling.

“An ongoing assigned advisor appears to be a key component in increasing persistence and graduation rates,” Rini wrote in a dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Another key component in the success of ASAP students? Money. Seventy-percent of the ASAP students Rini surveyed cited “financial resources as the most important component contributing to their academic success.” In fact, the free MetroCard topped the list, just ahead of personal advisers. “Not having to worry about a \$104 MetroCard was the biggest thing for all of us,” says Dapilma. “The biggest factor by far.”

Dapilma is flourishing now on the four-year CUNY/Queens College campus that counts comedian Jerry Seinfeld and singer Paul Simon among its alumni. She plans to begin graduate studies soon and hopes one day to be an instructor in a program that teaches English to non-native speakers. Yet she looks back fondly — in at least one way, longingly — on her days in the ASAP program at Kingsborough. “I really do miss those MetroCards,” she says.

Lower cost, better results

Dapilma’s success appears to mirror that of the ASAP program as a whole. As the program enters its sixth year, data show that ASAP students continue to meet or exceed the benchmarks set out by CUNY in 2006. Just as important: the program also meets CUNY’s financial expectations.

Rini combined an array of metrics into a formula that compares the cost of educating ASAP students with fund allocations for students not enrolled in the program. The formula revealed the overall cost to graduate an ASAP student was slightly less on four of CUNY’s six two-year campuses — a savings Rini attributed to the shorter time it took ASAP participants to earn their degrees. Even better news: CUNY foresees even greater efficiencies as the program expands. In 2012, the approximate annual cost to provide ASAP is \$6,000 per student; by 2014,



Nicolina Dapilma, a native of Togo in west Africa, is doing well in her four-year program on CUNY’s Queens College campus, but she retains a soft spot for at least one thing from her ASAP experience at Kingsborough: university-provided transit cards. “I really do miss those MetroCards,” she admits.

when enrollment is expected to reach 4,000, per-pupil cost is projected at \$3,700 annually.

This demonstrable increase in productivity, coupled with the success stories of students like Nicolina Dapilma, is what drew Scott Evenbeck to the challenge of building New Community College at CUNY. The New College concept fits perfectly with his belief that higher education must meet the needs of the whole student — at home, at work and in the classroom.

"We've acted for too long like financial aid is one world and academic support another world and the two don't have anything to do with one another," he says. "If you have a scholarship program that adds academic expectations to money, then you have an incredible multiplier of student success."

Evenbeck rails at the misplaced priorities that too often guide institutions and systems that serve students who aren't among the academically elite. "There are plenty of incentives to get these students in the door to maximize access, but few incentives to get them out the back door with degrees," he says. "We need to count the students who are there the *last* day of class, not the first."

Again, Evenbeck plans to maximize the number of "last-day" students in New College classes, in part by making sure none of those classes is a remedial course. Instead, the first students to enter New College this summer will be placed in a full-time core curriculum that includes statistics and features seminars designed to promote systematic reading and writing about issues of historic, socioeconomic and cultural significance to New York City.

Bolstered by the enthusiasm generated by ASAP, Mogulescu, Evenbeck and the CUNY team are confident that students will embrace the new learning model at New College. However, as Sandi Cooper's comments indicate, it has so far proven far more difficult to persuade faculty. Evenbeck and Mogulescu hoped to staff New College classrooms with faculty members drafted from other CUNY community colleges. Mogulescu says the positions posted on the system's website made clear that New College wants instructors who are "not hung up on traditional governance and willing to look at different ways to think about a college."

The CUNY Faculty Senate reacted negatively, saying the New College model violates contractual requirements on tenure and fails to meet other work-related guidelines. Complaints soon followed that New College officials were failing to adequately inform faculty about curriculum decisions. Subsequently, the Professional Staff Congress representing CUNY faculty filed three grievances on behalf of New College instructors.

Through all of this, Evenbeck managed to recruit seven full-time faculty members from the CUNY community college system. Of those, five either resigned or were fired months before the first New College students walked through the door. Evenbeck, undaunted, has turned to adjuncts to welcome the inaugural class, and Mogulescu promises that the



Donna Linderman, executive director of ASAP, says one of the program's strongest features is its requirement that students follow a consolidated block schedule. She calls it a "structured pathway ... a firm hand in a velvet glove" that helps keep students organized and on track.

progress of these first students will be meticulously monitored, just as are their ASAP counterparts.

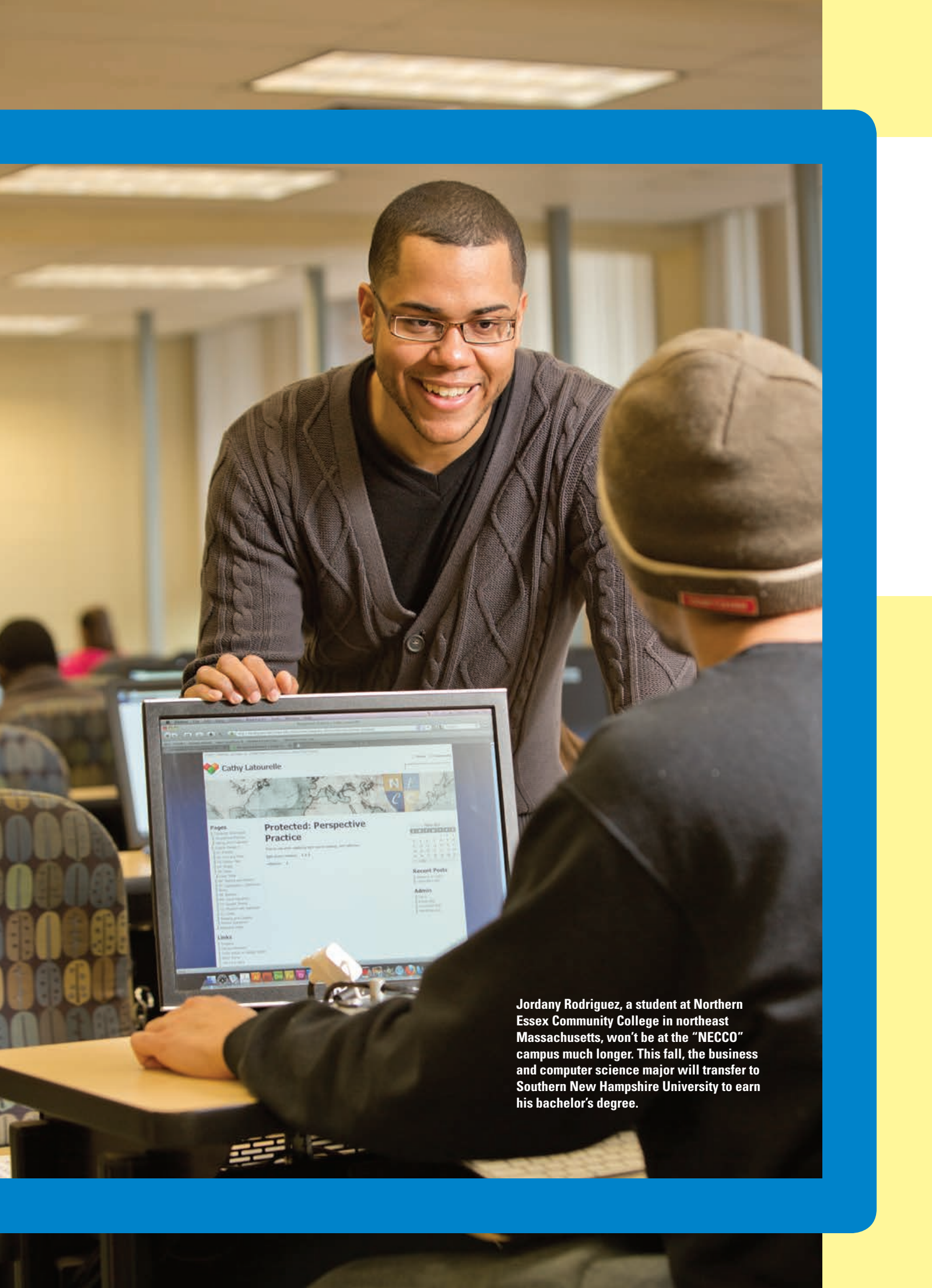
"Our model is going to work," Mogulescu predicts, "but we need to do the research to tell people *why* it's going to work."

With the deadline for the first day of New College classes inching closer, Evenbeck fretted over unresolved details, including one he saw as critical: finding the money that will allow him to offer students the free MetroCards that are so cherished by Nicolina Dapilma and ASAP enrollees.

The New College president has no illusions that everything will unfold in coming years exactly as he and CUNY originally envisioned. Flexibility, he emphasizes, is key. "We'll keep what works and discard or improve on that which doesn't," says Evenbeck. Still, whatever direction he takes, he knows it must be a new one. "The default can't be: 'If this doesn't work, then we'll go back to the way everybody else does it.' The default needs to be: 'How can the data improve what we're doing?'"

New Hampshire campus thrives on ‘nimbleness’

Jordany Rodriguez follows a registration routine familiar to anyone who's ever enrolled in a college course: He signs up for the required classes, selects the electives he'd like to take, then crosses his fingers, hoping for the best. Here, though, the routine departs from the norm. Before submitting his schedule to the Northern Essex Community College registrar's office, Rodriguez first makes sure it passes muster with a third party — a transfer specialist at his next academic destination: Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU). "It's especially important when you're trying not to pay for courses you don't need," explains Rodriguez.



Jordany Rodriguez, a student at Northern Essex Community College in northeast Massachusetts, won't be at the "NECCO" campus much longer. This fall, the business and computer science major will transfer to Southern New Hampshire University to earn his bachelor's degree.

This fall, Rodriguez, a business and computer science major, will shift his studies a half-hour north of Northern Essex ("NECCO" in the common parlance at the Haverhill, Mass., campus) to SNHU, a private, four-year institution nestled along a bend in the Merrimack River just north of Manchester.

The aggressive pursuit of transfer students represents just one aspect of SNHU's bid to enlarge its footprint in college-rich New England. Over the past 15 years, the university has also pioneered several three-year bachelor's degree programs, established a satellite campus to address the needs of academically at-risk students, launched a cutting-edge program that melds classroom seminars with real-time job training, and dramatically broadened the reach of its online programs, which now serve 12,000 students off-campus.

SNHU officials are totally transparent about their goal in taking all of these steps: It's all about increasing productivity, educating more students without increasing costs. Especially, they want to serve students who might not otherwise have the academic or financial resources to earn degrees in a timely fashion.

Paul J. LeBlanc, SNHU's president since 2003, says the school's growing reputation for innovation is rooted in

its status as an independent institution, unencumbered by legislative oversight or other restraints that can hamper publicly funded colleges and universities. "We can move faster here," he says. "There's an agility and a nimbleness that doesn't make you feel like you're running in quicksand."

SNHU, formerly New Hampshire College, first broke from the pack in 1997, introducing an integrated Business Honors program that enabled students to graduate in three years. The program's core curriculum includes lessons in subjects that are generally taught as separate courses: public speaking, for example.

"We eliminate the redundancies," says Robert Seidman, a professor of computer information technology and the co-author of a book on the three-year bachelor's program. In doing so, the program graduates 77 percent of its enrollees within 36 months. By comparison, the four-year graduation and retention rate for business schools at private institutions is 50 percent.

"I think a lot of people are under the impression that we do schoolwork all the time," says Tim Thyne, a second-year student majoring in specialized accounting and finance. "But the workload is the same as everyone else's. You just need to be more organized with your time."



Brianna Stockley (left) is an enthusiastic participant in SNHU's three-year bachelor's degree program in business. Assistant Dean Ashley A. Liadis (right), who directs the accelerated program, calls it a boon to students who are focused and financially conscious. "A year of not paying tuition is about the only thing they miss," she insists.



Derek Berndt, who recently graduated from SNHU's three-year undergraduate program, essentially had a job waiting for him when he got his degree in business administration. An internship that he'd landed with help from an alumnus grew into a full-time position.



Louisiana-born Ryan Terrell (right) came to SNHU as part of the College Unbound program, which uses “applied education” techniques to better connect the curriculum to students’ individual interests. Here, Terrell spends some down time with other College Unbound students (clockwise, from left) Galen Riordan, Brian Follansbee and Solange Abreu.

‘A complete 180’

Brianna Stockley was waiting tables and vaguely considering the possibility of attending college full time when she struck up a conversation with a customer, an SNHU financial adviser. Within a week, college went from “something I thought I’d have to do eventually” to enrollment in the three-year program. “A complete 180,” Stockley recalls. She was attracted by a faculty devoted solely to students’ success and by the business school’s reputation for fostering a “sense of camaraderie” among small groups of classmates. SNHU did not disappoint.

“We’re in the same classes; we’re involved in one another’s lives on and off campus. It’s like a big family,” says Stockley. Still, it’s not as if students in the three-year program are segregated from the rest of the campus. “We still have social lives like everyone else,” says Kyle Coumas, a second-year student majoring in small business management.

Assistant Dean and Program Director Ashley A. Liadis does point to one notable gap in the three-year experience. “A year of not paying tuition is about the only thing they miss,” she says. Also, the 37 percent of the three-year grads who return to the business school in year four to earn a master’s degree come out ahead

financially by gaining an early foothold in the job market for MBAs. And, of course, a huge financial windfall goes to three-year grads who earn a good living during what could have been their senior year of college. Many from SNHU attain those jobs through a pipeline of three-year alums.

Case in point: recent graduate Derek Berndt. The internship Berndt landed through an alumni connection turned into a full-time job this May, right after he earned his degree in business administration. “They know what you’re learning, and they know where you’re coming from,” Berndt says of his supervisors at Axis Communications. “They can relate to you. During the interview, they asked me about certain skills, and I could refer them to things I learned in the program. And they remembered it the same way, which is great,” Berndt says.

Berndt’s easy transition from college to career bodes well for new students in the three-year program, including Ryan Terrell, a Louisiana native who enrolled at SNHU as part of another effort to enhance productivity at SNHU: the College Unbound program.

College Unbound takes its cue from Big Picture Learning, the highly acclaimed K-12 initiative that provides “applied education” to students in 49 schools in 14 U.S. states and even more schools in four other nations. Each

Big Picture student designs a specialized curriculum tailored to his or her own interests. For instance, Big Picture instructors might use choreographic structure to teach geometry to a young person who's passionate about dance.

Big Picture, founded in Providence, R.I., in 1995, entered the higher-education arena three years ago with a pilot program involving seven Roger Williams University students. The introduction of College Unbound to SNHU last fall marked the first time College Unbound students attended classes and lived on a campus.

For Terrell, SNHU's College Unbound program is a do-over, a second stop on the campus circuit. His first stop, at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette, didn't pan out. "You had to fit yourself into pre-designated majors, and I didn't like that," Terrell recalls. "I'm interested in one day opening up my own style store, and instead I was sitting there listening to a lecture about Abraham Lincoln. (College Unbound) basically lets your education and interests (dictate) where you want to go. I don't have to compete with 50 other people. Before, I didn't want to raise my hand because I didn't want to look dumb."

Terrell typically spends mornings on academics and

two to three afternoons serving as an intern at the campus art gallery, the McIninch, where last spring he helped curators prepare an exhibit set to open later this year. He and other College Unbound participants say most students are unaware of the program, but that those who are acquainted with it typically sound a common theme. "The main thing we hear is that we don't have class," Terrell says.

Technically, that's true. College Unbound seminars revolve around the individual course of study each student draws up after arriving on campus. Consistent with the Big Picture model, the seminars address mainstream college subjects in nontraditional ways, with students and facilitators taking equal responsibility for the teaching. Questions are answered promptly. And it is incumbent on the entire seminar to assist students who fall behind.

"If someone is struggling, we go back to make sure they're where everyone else is," says student Solange Abreau. Another twist: College Unbound students aren't graded. Rather, they receive "narrative assessments" that measure their progress from one fixed point in the learning to the next.



Sean Moyon (left) and Michael Miller both had checkered high school careers, but they've turned themselves around, thanks to SNHU's Advantage Program. Advantage, a low-cost, no-frills approach that eliminates extracurricular activities, is designed to keep students organized and focused on classwork.

The no-frills approach

A little over 20 miles from the campus where Abreau, Terrell and their College Unbound classmates are learning together, another group of SNHU students work toward their degrees along a different path: the Advantage Program.

SNHU launched Advantage — a no-frills environment dedicated solely to learning — with students like Kali Lombardi and Cassandra Sullivan in mind. These two young women aren't in the market for the extracurricular activities that attract many SNHU students. They have more pressing concerns. Lombardi's primary responsibility is the care and support of her daughter, 3-year-old Arianna Merrill. For Sullivan, it's the shared, 'round-the-clock care of her father, Stephen, who is bedridden with a rare, degenerative autoimmune disease.

Without Advantage, college would've been next to impossible for both of these 21st century students.

The program, which SNHU launched in 2008 in an office building off an interstate exit ramp in Salem, is purposefully devoid of pretension and perks. The students, who enter straight out of or shortly after high school, know they're enrolled for one reason: an education. In exchange, SNHU provides the first two years of schooling at an annual cost of \$10,620, far below the \$28,000 price tag on the main campus.

"Double the credits for less than half the price," notes student Mike Miller, a self-described high school "goofball" who hopes his turnaround in the Advantage Program will help him gain admission to the Coast Guard Academy.

In addition to the savings on tuition, Lombardi and Sullivan were drawn to Advantage by its consolidated



Kali Lombardi, a liberal arts major in the Advantage Program, says the program's low cost is just one benefit. Just as important is the consistent, consolidated course schedule, which allows Lombardi to arrange daycare for her daughter, Arianna Merrill, and work in the evenings.



Bethany Perkins (left), here advising SNHU student Elizabeth Lanaville, heads recruitment and articulation in the university's transfer program. This year, SNHU had more than 6,000 transfer students, nearly double that from 2008-2009.

course schedule — 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The regimen allows Lombardi, a liberal arts major, to drop Arianna off at daycare at the same time four times a week, report to her after-school job at a nearby mall, and pick up Arianna at daycare at 5 p.m. each day. Block scheduling allows Sullivan, a communications and journalism major, to coordinate the demands of care-giving, with a vital, added bonus: The Advantage satellite campus puts Sullivan within a 20-minute drive of her father's sickbed should an emergency arise.

Sullivan isn't much concerned that her first two years of higher education won't fit the definition of the college experience — whatever that now entails. "All of my freshman friends (on traditional campuses) are going through so much drama now, so I'm perfectly content here," she says. "The less stress I can get, I'll take it."

Program coordinator Laura Corddry fears Sullivan would have been at "the mercy of the registrar's office" had she sought a similarly accommodating schedule at a larger school or even a community college.

Sean Moyon, meanwhile, has no idea where he'd have spent the last year if SNHU hadn't developed Advantage. But he's fairly certain of one thing: "I had no intentions of going to college until I heard about this program." Referring to a couple of minor brushes with authority and the 1.6 grade-point average he carried into his senior year, Moyon admits his high school days were "not the smoothest."

It didn't take long after arriving at SNHU for both Miller and Moyon to, as Miller puts it, "find out we're pretty smart." Their days as a goofball and a slacker

behind them, the classmates now wage a friendly competition to see who can achieve the higher grade-point average. Miller, who hopes to major in naval architecture and marine engineering at the Coast Guard Academy, is ahead ... by a whisker.

"In the past, these were kids who were told to go to work or into the military," says Corddry. "They didn't have any other options. They may have gone down the junior college road, but without the supports in place, they wouldn't have survived." In Advantage, class sizes never exceed 20, a workable number that opens the door for personal mentoring when students falter academically.

"It's small, and it's a real community, so students get everything they need right here," says Corddry. "We know every single student, and we know everything about them. Some didn't do well in high school, and this is the perfect opportunity to shine — and we can see that from these two 'goofballs' who are both on the president's list. They have ability but may not have been in the right environment before."

A mother herself, Corddry is especially proud of what the program makes possible for Lombardi. Corddry calls Lombardi "a mentor for her daughter," a devoted parent who, in a pinch, shows up for class with the 3-year-old in tow. Corddry predicts Lombardi will eventually sit Arianna down for a heart-to-heart to explain how, even as a single, teen mother, she was able to move directly from high school to SNHU. And then she'll explain why: "I wanted to make a great life for you, and so I went off to college to get my degree."



President Paul J. LeBlanc says SNHU's status as an independent institution enhances its ability to innovate. "We can move faster here," he says. "There's an agility and a nimbleness that doesn't make you feel like you're running in quicksand."

A focus on transfer students

In April, as the academic year wound down at Northern Essex Community College, another single parent expressed a similar sentiment about the example he hoped to set for his son. Jordany Rodriguez, the first in his family to attend college, held as many as four part-time jobs simultaneously to cover rent, tuition and child support while working toward his degree. The payoff was a 3.0 grade-point average and the chance to

finish on the SNHU campus what he started at NECCO nearly five years earlier.

SNHU makes sense for Rodriguez — on several levels. The university bent over backward to make it affordable and, as a first-generation student, Rodriguez feels more comfortable in a small-class environment. Proximity also matters. Manchester is only 42 miles from Haverhill, an easy commute for a father whose top priority is 3-year-old Jayvien.

Also, SNHU wanted Rodriguez as a student. *Really* wanted him. The policy that put Rodriguez on the path to Manchester traces back to a trend the admissions office spotted in 2009, at the height of the recession. Discretionary spending was down, the economic outlook was uncertain, and SNHU — along with colleges and universities across the country — was grappling with a steep decline in applications from high school seniors. Yet SNHU noticed no similar decline in the number of transfer applications.

"SNHU jumped on it and it jumped on it fast by quickly implementing a community college recruitment program," recalls Bethany Perkins. Perkins, then the university's lone transfer recruiter, now heads recruitment and articulation for SNHU and supervises a staff of four, including Brendan Stamm, the specialist who steered Rodriguez to the university.

The dividend from the work of Perkins' team is undeniable. Since 2008-09, SNHU has nearly doubled the number of transfers (3,107 to 6,104 so far in 2011-12) it teaches online and on campus. The decision to actively encourage transfers came directly from the president's office. "We want those students because they're proven," LeBlanc says. "They have a track record, and they've shown that they can do college work."

Meanwhile, Perkins and her staff have managed to inject some fun into the transfer process — a routine that can often seem arduous. Among the most visible examples of fun are the occasions when the team visits community college campuses for "On-the-Spot Decision Days."

Transcripts in hand, applicants huddle individually with SNHU counselors, who review their credentials. At the end of the consultation, advisers answer the three questions that weigh most on the minds of community college students: How many credits will transfer? How long will it take to earn a baccalaureate degree? How much will it cost? For students who meet SNHU's standards, counselors follow through with an immediate offer of admission, and those who accept get a celebratory bonus — a confetti shower. "We're not as boring as we used to be," quips Perkins.

Rosalie Catalano pays less attention to the high-energy recruitment effort than to its results. And from her perspective on the *other* side of the transfer process — as an adviser at NECCO — no university delivers like SNHU. "I deal with plenty of four-year institutions," says Catalano. "Nobody is as helpful as they are."

She points out that SNHU specialists take an early and very active role with potential transfer students, and



Rosalie Catalano (center), an adviser at Northern Essex Community College, talks with NECCO students Victoria Czaia and Jorge Aracena. She gives SNHU high marks for its work in facilitating student transfers. "I deal with plenty of four-year institutions," Catalano says. "Nobody is as helpful as they are."

she cites the individualized plan that Stamm built with Rodriguez as a perfect example.

Catalano also praises SNHU's "highly unusual" practice of accepting a full 90 credits from NECCO transfers. Other schools, Catalano says, can be "finicky" and "picky" when it comes to matching their courses with the classes offered by Northern Essex. Perkins says the effort to match the SNHU curricula with lesson plans at Northern Essex and other community colleges is not a coincidence. "Articulation agreements are trendy and sexy, but they don't work unless everyone lives up to the agreement," she explains. "We want to see how (students) did in college, and we hope (they) appreciate that."

Catalano says SNHU's liberal acceptance of NECCO credits helps transfer students come out ahead financially, even at a private, four-year institution. "If a school only takes 60 credits, which by the way is the norm, then (students) have to pay big bucks for the next two years," she points out. "In this case, they only have to cover 30 credits, which they should be able to do without incurring any debt at all."

While other institutions struggle financially, SNHU has managed to stay in the black through the recession

and its aftermath. And it's no coincidence that SNHU introduced College Unbound and the Advantage Program as other colleges and universities have slashed programs and courses. Much of the credit, LeBlanc says, goes to the rapid growth of the university's online programs. In 2007, some 4,400 students benefited from 1,045 online SNHU courses. Five years later, the school serves 9,800 students in nearly 2,200 classes.

LeBlanc is blunt. "Distance learning underwrites the financial incentives that enable the less affluent to pursue their degrees," he says. And with online student enrollment spanning the globe, the program essentially brings in money 24 hours a day. "Someone is clicking on one of our sites at this very moment," LeBlanc says delightedly.

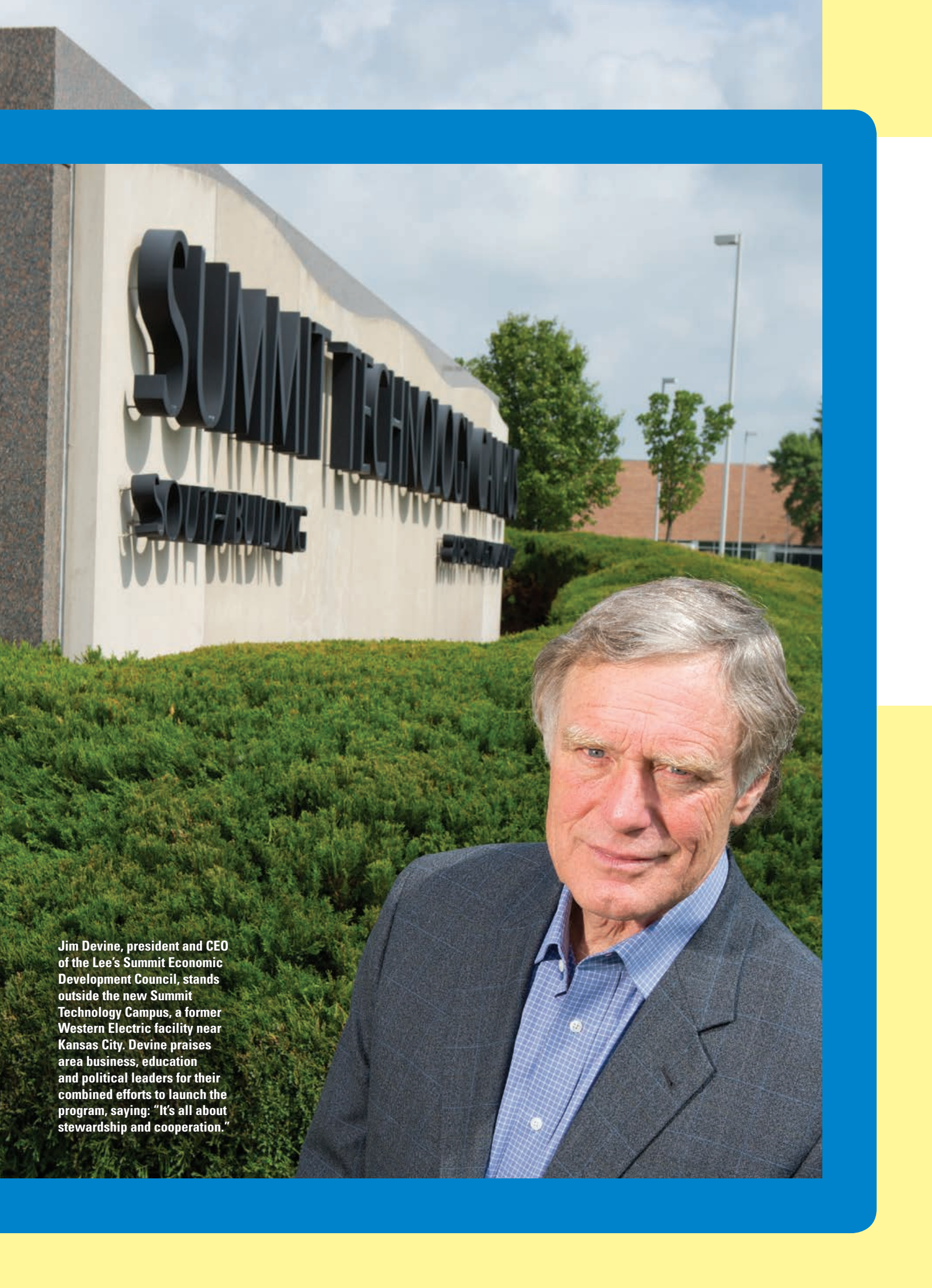
He's happy because he knows those mouse clicks help other things click as well — including the relationships between counselors like Brendan Stamm and would-be transfer students like Jordany Rodriguez. For Rodriguez, the connection to SNHU was tightened even further when he received an unexpected inducement: a personal invitation in the form of a letter from President LeBlanc. That clinched the deal. Rodriguez will begin classes on the Manchester campus at summer's end.

Missouri college tightens the corporate connection

The short version: A fellow goes to dinner, chats up a new acquaintance and leaves a couple of hours later with an idea for a new type of higher education — one linked purposely and directly with local, high-tech employers. This new twist on college would

actually take students still in high school and, with direct input from business, shape them specifically for cutting-edge careers.

The more nuanced version of the story begins with what the diners, Chuck Ambrose and Don Nissanka, brought to the table that evening.



Jim Devine, president and CEO of the Lee's Summit Economic Development Council, stands outside the new Summit Technology Campus, a former Western Electric facility near Kansas City. Devine praises area business, education and political leaders for their combined efforts to launch the program, saying: "It's all about stewardship and cooperation."

A college president at the age of 36, Ambrose had already thought long and hard about college cost and productivity by the time he arrived at the University of Central Missouri (UCM) in 2010. In fact, his thinking goes back to his first job in higher education, as an executive assistant at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) in the late 1980s. It also dominated his 12-year tenure at his most recent job, as president of Pfeiffer University in North Carolina. “The whole college cost piece has really been with me all the way through,” Ambrose says.

As it happened, Don Nissanka had also spent considerable time pondering the same issue, though from a business perspective. After earning undergraduate ('90) and graduate degrees ('92) from the UCM, Nissanka quickly earned a name for himself as an engineer and the founder of two international corporations in the growing fields of energy management and battery storage systems.

As president and CEO of Exergonix Inc., Nissanka often travels the world. But a big part of him never leaves Lee's Summit, Mo., home to his company and a town he adopted in part because of its proximity to his beloved alma mater in nearby Warrensburg. As a Lee's Summit resident, Nissanka believes the suburb southeast of Kansas City wants for little. But as a businessman, he's concerned about what the region's employment pool can provide corporations like Exergonix in terms of educated, highly skilled employees. Nissanka doesn't *want* to go elsewhere to recruit Exergonix employees, particularly not overseas. “(But) if I can't get students and future employees to accept the technology, then what's the use?” he asks.

A fateful dinner

The stage, then, was set for the dinner, an event honoring distinguished Central Missouri alumni. Seated next to Ambrose, whom Nissanka considered a kindred spirit because of earlier encounters with the UCM president, the business leader decided to act. The concept he outlined for Ambrose called for uniting three institutions — the Lee's Summit R-7 School District, the Longview campus of the Metropolitan (Kansas City) Community College system, and UCM — in a comprehensive, cost-conscious effort to educate and prepare the region's young people for jobs at Exergonix, Honeywell and other cutting-edge corporations.

From Ambrose's perspective, Nissanka's proposal was perfectly timed. Even before assuming the presidency, Ambrose sensed from interviews with UCM officials that this university seemed primed to make the moves toward productivity that Ambrose had been mulling since his AASCU days. By the end of the evening, Ambrose knew his gut feeling was accurate.

And today, barely two years after that dinnertime conversation, the concept he and Nissanka mapped out is about to be realized. Dubbed the Innovation Campus, it will be launched late this summer when its first crop of students — high school juniors now enrolled in the Lee's Summit Technological Academy — return for classes.



The blueprint for the actual Innovation Campus at Lee's Summit is still on the drawing board, projected to open in 2014. It will open its doors with the enthusiastic endorsement of key Missouri legislators and agencies, as well as the state's governor, Jay Nixon, who hailed the concept in his 2012 State of the State address. “In this whole process, no one has stepped up and said, ‘this won't work,’” says Ambrose.

The first step in determining whether Innovation will succeed was taken in mid-April, when a small group of Lee's Summit-area high school students and their parents met with district officials to talk about becoming the first group to enter the program. For applicant Jamison Guilford, a sophomore at Raymore-Peculiar High School, a spot in the first Innovation class represents the “opportunity of a lifetime.”

Chuck Ambrose (center), president of the University of Central Missouri, made it a point to meet personally with students accepted into the new Summit Tech program, including Lee's Summit West High School student Michael Brummett and his mother, Shirley.



Guilford got word in May that she's been accepted, and this August she'll transfer to Summit Tech, a highly acclaimed 11th-12th-grade program that sends 87 percent of its graduates on to college. Many Summit Tech students already choose to combine high school studies with community college classes offered in the Longview catalog. The Innovation Campus program is meant to accelerate that learning curve; think dual enrollment on steroids. The program is fashioned to steer students toward gaining the skills that a corporation such as Exergonix might need — for example, those that are helpful in the development and production of modular battery storage systems.

"This really marries the concept of early college and college/career readiness," explains Elaine Metcalf, the

director of Summit Tech. Students in the Innovation program will leave Summit Tech with an academic transcript that shows two years of college-level studies. And here's the cost-effective kicker: The coursework is largely subsidized by state and local public grants and the business community.

"We're talking about students going to school and the cost of their tuition will go down, not up," says Nissanka. Or, as Ambrose puts it, "Can you imagine a college degree that actually costs less?"

When they leave Summit Tech and arrive at UCM's Innovation Campus in 2014, students will take courses designed to meet the requirements of potential employers. If all goes according to plan, Innovation students will be on the job and earning a full-time living by the time they



Elaine Metcalf, director of Summit Tech, says the program “really marries the concept of early college and college/career readiness.” Upon graduation from Summit Tech in 2014, students will enter the UCM Innovation Campus program with two years of college-level studies, and then take courses tailored to meet the requirements of potential employers.

hit their early 20s. Stan Elliott, assistant superintendent of secondary instruction for the Lee's Summit R-7 District, calls it "education at the speed of business."

Guilford acknowledges that "money is part" of what attracted her and her parents to the Innovation Campus. Equally appealing, though, was the prospect of "getting out of the gate" by landing a job in the highly competitive field of technology while others her age are still in school.

Innovation students will learn in ways that barely registered as a blip in cyberspace when Nissanka left UCM in 1992. "Education no longer comes from textbooks or from being written down the way it was years ago," he says. "Education today comes from interaction and hands-on learning. Activities are now computer-based, and we have to shift the paradigm. Yes, the basic principles still apply. But we have to let students get their hands on what they need to know and get them to understand what it takes to get them involved in business." Ambrose adds: "We're going to take advantage of the fact that the next generation of learners can obtain knowledge at a pace we once couldn't imagine."

Jim Devine, head of the Lee's Summit Economic Development Council, cites reasons both positive and negative to explain why the Innovation Campus is a good fit for his city. As residents of a community that is highly educated (43 percent of the town's 91,000 residents hold at least a bachelor's degree, according to 2010 U.S. Census data) and affluent (median household income tops \$73,000), Devine says the inhabitants of Lee's Summit are generally amenable to a bold and innovative approach to learning. Stability is another key factor. The mayor has been in office 15 years, and the community tends to return incumbents to seats on the City Council and school board "They allow things to happen without it turning political," says Devine. "It's all about stewardship and cooperation."

The downside, though, is that Lee's Summit, like most other communities, has fallen behind in developing the highly skilled workers that are needed in global markets. "Everybody does good (work) here," Devine says, "but they haven't done it around next-generation jobs. We have retail, and we have lawyers and banks. But we also have people who make things here that are sold worldwide. And those are the people who are hurting."

Open-minded though Lee's Summit might be, residents can't be blamed for doubting the audacious proposition hatched by Ambrose and Nissanka. After all, the city sits at the western edge of a state that, since

2000, has slashed public funding of higher education three consecutive years and, as of this writing, was poised to cut an additional 12 percent in 2012. UCM alone has lost 20 percent of its state funding, some \$20 million, in the two years Ambrose has been president. Nissanka credits Ambrose for showing the Missouri bean counters the benefits of innovation and productivity.

Ambrose accomplished the feat by cobbling together a financial plan that benefits students and the institution alike. His financial blueprint takes advantage of existing programs, including one that provides state scholarships to dual-enrollment high school students and participating community colleges. (Longview already participates in the program.)

Also, once students enroll on the Innovation Campus,

a year-'round academic calendar will help students shorten the time it takes to earn their degrees. And the Innovation program will also take full advantage of its relationship with the business community. For example, private-sector partners will offer shared lab equipment, software and project managers who will serve as instructors in applied-learning courses.

On the other side of the financial coin, the campus is asking each student to apply for maximum amounts of scholarships and need-based aid. Paid student internships, with a portion of salaries diverted to tuition and fees, represent another possible funding source. In addition, Ambrose says talks are under way to provide tax credits to offset the outlays from participating businesses. "If we can accelerate and enhance what we're already doing, it will be a win-win for everyone," says Ambrose.

Come fall, Ambrose, Nissanka and Lee's Summit will take the first tentative steps to determine if the vision can be realized. And if this idea for hybridized education fails, it won't be due to a lack of hands-on effort on Nissanka's part. He's been the point man every step of the way, encouraging involvement among his peers in the business world, consulting repeatedly with instructors at all three institutions, and cajoling state and local officials.

If the Innovation Campus prevails — and Devine says there's absolutely no reason to believe it won't — it will be through the sheer will of one distinguished alum of the University of Central Missouri. "But for Don, we wouldn't be having this conversation," Devine says.

Steve Giegerich, a former education writer for the Associated Press and a onetime journalism instructor at Columbia University, is a staff writer for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.



Exergonix President and CEO Don Nissanka is a driving force behind the Summit Tech/Innovation Campus program. "Education no longer comes from textbooks," he says. "Education today comes from interaction and hands-on learning."



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