



opinion

By Dr. Martin Cantor, Ed.D.

Long Island's Community Colleges are Essential to Our Economic Growth

The fact that Long Island's young people are leaving the region, taking with them the skills that the Long Island workforce needs to sustain the regional economy places more importance on the good work by Long Island's two community colleges - Nassau Community College and Suffolk Community College.

These colleges are critical to Long Island's future because they provide the pathway for Long Island's future workforce between high school and senior colleges. Long Island needs these institutions now more than ever.

It is for this reason that Dr. Shaun McKay, president of SCC should be congratulated for his hard work that resulted in the Middle States Commission on Higher Education recent notification that Suffolk County Community College remains fully accredited.

To receive full accreditation by Middle States, SCC produced evidence documenting full compliance with all the Commission's 14 accreditation standards, including addressing Middle States outstanding questions regarding SCC meeting the Standard for Institutional Assessment and the Standard for Assessment of Student Learning, as well as providing more information about two other standards involving budgeting and resource allocation.

The College submitted a monitoring report and was visited by a small team of reviewers from the Commission in October 2013. The Commission team was satisfied with the information provided concerning budgeting. After reviewing all evidence and meeting with faculty, administration, and the College's Board of Trustees, the Commission team found the College in full compliance with all 14 Middle States standards.

Another factor making community colleges important and worth considering for high school graduates is the affordability of community colleges.

In order to meet the continued expectations of Middle States, SCC will continue to document the College's assessment processes, the advancement of student learning and the effectiveness of SCC's Comprehensive Assessment Plan for Institutional Effectiveness including performing assessment activities in every academic program and in the administrative and educational support units at the College.

Accreditation is important because Long Island's community colleges contribute significantly to the region's ability to recover the economic activity lost during the Great Recession. They provide current skill learning opportunities which lead to

higher paying jobs, since the quality of jobs in the Long Island economy has been in lower paying industry sectors with many being part-time or temporary jobs. The ability to learn skills for the higher paying jobs is a lure for Long Island high school graduates not immediately going to four year senior colleges.

Clearly the Great Recession has impacted learning since more students in lower income earning households have to obtain skills that will allow them to help keeping family budgets afloat. This need makes time spent on academics that much more important. There is a need for this since so many young people complain that they are unable to find jobs that align with their skills or salary expectations. Community colleges can meet this need by providing educated workers for companies that Long Island needs to attract and where our young people wish to work.

Another factor making community colleges important and worth considering for high school graduates is the affordability of community colleges. The rising costs of higher education and resulting financially suffocating student loans to pay for that education often render a four year college education financially out of reach for many Long Island high school graduates.

Lastly it is those students attending community colleges may not be academically prepared for the rigor of college studies. Community colleges help these students with remedial classes so they are able to succeed with college courses. Causation for the need for remedial classes and the ability to learn and graduate from a community college or transfer to a four year college is in part the socio-economic environment that a struggling student lived in during his or her early years. Research has shown that poverty or low household income has been found to impact learning. Community colleges help students overcome this challenge to learning.

With more young people expressing their unhappiness with Long Island, it is critical that those attending community colleges succeed in learning, graduate or transfer to four year colleges, complete their higher education, and become part of the regional workforce.

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The reality is that Long Island's only true asset is its people, its human capital; and our educated young people, our human capital, have shown by their departure that they are very mobile. They have shown how mobile they are by leaving the region in the thousands, taking with them the education that Long Island taxpayers have paid for, and having this education benefitting other regions of the country.

Suffolk Community College and Nassau Community College are essential in making Long Island's human capital more valuable and in keeping that human capital here. ■

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