



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education
News Clippings

Week of January 18, 2009

January 23, 2009

New report shows more WV grads finding work in state

By Aran Jenkins

A new report says that more college graduates are staying and working in West Virginia.

The study measured how many people who graduated from the state's colleges and universities were still working in the state in 2007.

That year, about 47 percent had employment in West Virginia. That's one percent higher than the year before.

Those graduates are making more money, too. Their salaries rose by more than four percent between 2006 and 2007, to an average of almost \$40,000.

Recent graduates and those with associate degrees were most likely to still work in West Virginia. Those with the doctoral degrees were the least likely to stay in state.

The study was a joint project of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the WVU College of Business and Economics. This is the second year it's been completed.

George Hammond of West Virginia University school of business says he expects the number of college graduates staying in state to continue to improve.

"My estimate would be that West Virginia's work participation rate will rise," Hammond said.

"And that's because I think West Virginia will do a bit better than the national economy as we go through the recession. I think West Virginia will experience a recession, but I don't think it will be as severe as what we see nationally."

January 23, 2009

Most Higher Education Graduates Working In Other States

Staff Charleston

Less than half of college and university graduates in West Virginia over the past 10 years are currently working in the Mountain State. The state Higher Education Policy Commission released its second Worker Participation Report Friday.

While the report shows a better rate, 47.1 percent, of graduates working here than last year's report, it still falls way below another state that does a similar study. WVU professor, Dr. George Hammond, says nearly 60 percent of graduates of the Tennessee higher education system stay and work in that state.

Hammond, who conducted the study for the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, says the numbers are tied directly to the state's economy. "The growth of the overall West Virginia economy and the types of jobs we generate has a big impact on whether or not we retain graduates and what types of graduates find opportunities in the state," he said.

Those state higher education graduates working here have an average wage of just more than \$39,000 a year.

"We are pleased to see that we are doing a fairly good job at keeping our graduates in fields like the legal, health and education professions," said Dr. Brian Noland, HEPC chancellor in a prepared release, "but we would like to improve our work participation rate in high-tech fields like engineering and the sciences."

Dr. Hammond says the state will have more tools to use during next year's study. They will be able to track West Virginia graduates in a selection of surrounding states, finding out what their jobs are and how much they are earning.

January 24, 2009

85% of nursing students pass '08 licensure exams **Only 81% succeeded in 2007 -- worst rate in U.S.**

By Alison Knezevich, Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- More nursing students in West Virginia passed their licensure exams last year than in 2007, when the state ranked worst in the country.

Members of the state Higher Education Policy Commission heard an update Friday on how nursing programs have tried to increase pass rates since then.

"We have improved considerably," said Pamela Alderman, president of the West Virginia Board of Examiners for Registered Professional Nurses. "Everyone's working very, very hard, because it was a tough year for us."

Preliminary data show that about 85 percent of nursing students in West Virginia passed their exams in 2008, Alderman said. The national average is about 87 percent.

For 2008, the state ranks 36th out of 55 states, islands and territories, said Alderman, who also is dean for career and technical programs at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College.

In 2007, West Virginia ranked 50th - last among the states. In that year, about 81 percent of students passed their exams.

Over the past year, administrators have examined weakness in their curriculum, said Duane Napier, executive director of the West Virginia Center for Nursing. Also, nursing students took practice exams throughout the year.

Last year, enrollment at Blue Ridge Community and Technical College and WVU Institute of Technology were limited because of low passing rates there. That's given administrators a chance to step back and reassess their programs, Alderman said.

"We think that things are going to be much better for those two schools in the future," Alderman said.

HEPC Chairman David Tyson and Vice Chairman David Hendrickson both called for more standardization among the state's public nursing programs, saying the difficulty of transferring credits between schools might be a barrier for students trying to finish their degree.

"I know it can't be absolutely seamless," Hendrickson said, "but we sure can break down some of these barriers."

In 2007, pass rates among the state's nursing program varied widely.

"Somebody has a curriculum that is more successful than somebody else," commissioner Tom Jones said. "I think, if you standardize, that you would find that your pass rate goes up."

There are many similarities in nursing programs, but completely standardizing the whole system would be very difficult, Napier said after the meeting.

"Every school has developed their own curriculum based on their community and the students that they have," he said.

January 20, 2009

WVU Narrows Presidential Search

Shawn Falkenstein, Morgantown, W.Va.

West Virginia University's presidential search committee will interview 14 candidates in off campus interviews.

The search committee met on Saturday via conference call to select the 14 finalists. The dates and locations of the interviews as well as the names of the candidates will not be announced. Search committee chairman Gene Budig says when the committee convenes to interview a candidate, it will not hold discussions, make decisions or vote as a committee.

WVU's Board of Governors hopes to hire a new president by April. The search committee will whittle down the 14 remaining candidates to three finalists which it will present to the Board of Governors. Those three will undergo on campus interviews with the BOG, faculty, staff and students.

Current interim president C. Peter Magrath will remain on the job until the end of June to ensure a smooth transition for the next president.

Marshall awarded \$50K for 'Bucks for Brains'

HUNTINGTON -- CSX Corp. gave \$50,000 to Marshall University Thursday as part of West Virginia's "Bucks for Brains" initiative.

Ron Area, chief executive officer of the Marshall University Foundation, accepted the gift during a presentation at the Nick J. Rahall II Appalachian Transportation Institute. The contribution will further transportation research conducted by the RTI through Rail-SORCE (Railroad Safety and Operations Research Center of Excellence).

"This contribution recognizes the outstanding work of the Rahall Institute and Marshall University," said Michael Ward, chairman and chief executive officer of CSX Corp. "The institute's research is playing an important role in helping railroads advance technology that will be needed in 21st century railroading. CSX is proud of its long and cooperative relationships with the institute, the university and the greater Huntington community."

The university has raised \$3 million so far and further gifts are expected to be announced according to Marshall University Chief of Staff Bill Bissett.

Dr. Richard Begley, director of research for RTI, said it is significant that CSX gave the money through the "Bucks for Brains" initiative because the investment potentially will be matched by the state.

"It's an excellent way to double the money and leverages the federal railroad research funds that Senator Robert Byrd has obtained, and continues to obtain, for RTI," Begley said. "This gift will help jumpstart the transportation engineering research component of 'Bucks for Brains' and complement the other investments in engineering that our President and his administration have secured for Marshall in the last few years."

The "Bucks for Brains" initiative, also known as the Research Trust Fund, was passed by the West Virginia Legislature last year. It allocates \$15 million to Marshall University and \$35 million to West Virginia University as a research endowment trust fund to be matched by contributions from each institution's foundation.

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

January 23, 2009

Anticipating Stimulus Money for Campus Projects, Colleges Get 'Shovel Ready'

By SCOTT CARLSON

In almost the same breath in his inauguration speech this week, President Obama touted green technology and his desire for higher education to make changes to meet America's evolving needs.

"We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil to fuel our cars and run our factories," he said. "And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age."

Mr. Obama was probably referring to a curricular transformation, in getting colleges to teach about new technologies, including green ones, to prepare students for emerging industries. But he might as well have been talking about the campuses themselves—their buildings and energy systems, which at many colleges are outdated, inefficient, even crumbling.

Help for those colleges may be on the way in the \$825-billion stimulus package being pressed by Congressional leaders. The bill that House Democrats introduced this month includes \$7-billion for higher-education modernization, renovation, and repair that could kick-start projects like upgrading heating and cooling systems, fixing roofs, and doing asbestos abatement.

On many campuses, especially among state colleges, renovation projects like those are stalled as government officials and higher-education administrators have been spooked by the unsteady economy and have had to absorb budget cuts.

Preferences Specified

The billions of dollars in the bill before Congress would be distributed through the Department of Energy and through state higher-education agencies, in the form of grants and loans. Of the \$7-billion, at least \$2.5-billion would go toward energy-efficiency projects certified by programs like Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED. (The legislation also includes \$500-million for training in green jobs.)

In awarding the money to institutions, the bill's language specifies, state higher-education agencies should give preference to colleges that serve large numbers of minority students, have been hit by a natural disaster, or are planning energy-efficiency projects. The money should not go to new construction, sports facilities, or facilities used for religious worship or divinity schools.

The language or the amounts in the bill could change as Congress debates the stimulus measure, which legislators are expected to make final within a few weeks. For now, colleges are preparing lists of projects that are "shovel ready," should the money roll down from Washington. The bill includes "use it or lose it" requirements: At least half of

the money would have to be spent within a year of the measure's being enacted, and the rest within two years.

All signals are that the measure, including the money for college renovations, will be pushed through and passed, says James L. Elder, director of the Campaign for Environmental Literacy, who lobbied for the inclusion of funds for college-sustainability programs.

At one point, he and other advocates of sustainability asked for much more. In mid-December, Michael M. Crow, president of Arizona State University, sent a letter to Mr. Obama's transition team on behalf of the signatories of the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment.

The group asked for \$12-billion in loans and \$12-billion in grants for renovation projects at schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions. Through surveys of college-renovation projects, supporters of the climate commitment had found some \$40-billion in energy-efficiency projects in higher education that could begin within six months, the letter said.

No Shortage of Projects

Even though scores of potential renovation projects are out there, spending several billion dollars takes a lot of planning and preparation, Mr. Elder says, and colleges should start now. "They could easily have a proposal deadline 60 days from now. They should be getting ready."

W. Richard Merriman Jr., president of Southwestern College, in Kansas, says his facilities-management team has identified an array of projects the college could take on with enough money. They range from building wind turbines to replacing drafty windows.

Mr. Merriman believes that he has some advantages in vying for the money. The college is small, and a provision in the bill says some of the funds should go to less-wealthy colleges. Southwestern has also been trying to establish programs in green energy, and some of the money in the bill has to go to innovative energy programs that can be used for education.

Jane Oates, executive director of New Jersey's Commission on Higher Education, the state's coordinating board, recently asked each college in the state to provide details of its two most important shovel-ready projects.

"We just want a list ready so that we have an idea of what hurdles the schools have going in," she said, adding that the projects on the list were "all over the map." State officials might use information about the colleges' priorities, she said, to try to make sure that as many of the projects as possible would qualify for aid from the federal stimulus bill.

The need in New Jersey is great, she said. "I don't think we'll have any problem spending it."