

# CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL  
OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Connection: New England's Journal of Higher Education and Economic Development* is published quarterly by the New England Board of Higher Education, 45 Temple Place, Boston, Mass. 02111.

Phone: (617) 357-9620

FAX: (617) 338-1577

Vol. VI, No. 2 Summer 1991

ISSN 0071-3643

Copyright © 1991 by the New England Board of Higher Education.

**Publisher:** John C. Hoy

**Editor:** John O. Harney

**Managing Editor:** Charlotte Stratton

**Associate Editor:** Wendy Lindsay

**Staff Writer:** Jennifer McCauley

**Staff Contributors:**

Judith A. Beachler, Sue Klemer,  
Madeleine Mc Garrity, Suzanne McGrail

**Art Direction, Typesetting, Production:**

Inga Soderberg, Janet Grover;  
The Pressroom, Gloucester, Mass.

**Coordinator, Advertising Sales:** Douglas Shank

**Subscription Information:** \$16 per year (4 issues); WI, SP, SU issues \$2.50 each, Fall/Facts issue \$12. Printed by Wellesley Press, Framingham, Mass. Advertising rates available upon request.

The New England Board of Higher Education was established as a nonprofit agency by the New England Higher Education Compact, a 1955 agreement among the six states that was ratified by the U.S. Congress. It is the purpose of the Board to advance and develop programs that encourage higher-education opportunities and improve efficiency in the use of resources among New England's public and independent colleges and universities.

**Chairman:** Robert L. Woodbury, chancellor, University of Maine System

**President:** John C. Hoy

**Connection Editorial Advisory Board**

**Chairman:**

**Kenneth Hooker**

Former Editor

*New England Business Magazine*

**Richard Barringer**

Director

Edmund S. Muskie Institute of Public Affairs

**Kevin E. Booth, Esq.**

Booth, Mattern and Clarke

**David Buchdahl**

Regional Director

Community College of Vermont

**Laura Freid**

Publisher

*Harvard Magazine*

**Peter A. Gilbert**

Former Editor

*The Andover Bulletin*

**Betsy Keady**

Boston, Mass.

**Arnold Koch**

Arnold Koch and Associates

**Senator Victoria Lederberg**

Providence, R.I.

**Thomas L. McFarland**

Director

University Press of New England

**Ian Menzies**

Senior Fellow

John W. McCormack Institute of Public Affairs

**Representative Neil Rolde**

Sewall's Hill, Maine

## EDITOR'S MEMO

This issue of CONNECTION focuses on the financial pressures closing in on higher education as well as the debate over political correctness. An odd mix? Hardly. As Keene State College President Judith Sturnick notes in her commentary on the latter, "catchphrases about racial and gender *quotas*, *freedom of speech* to protect racial and ethnic slurs and the inviolability of the *Western canons* ... are now intertwined with allegations of *bloated campus budgets* and the goal of *defunding, downsizing* and *privatizing* higher education."

Higher-education funding and "p.c." are directly related, because some anti-p.c. champions such as author Dinesh D'Souza — while railing against the alleged squashing of dissent on campuses — apparently see nothing ironic about urging states, foundations and alumni to close their wallets on colleges and universities with whom they disagree. "The illiberal revolution can be reversed only if the people who foot the bills stop being passive observers," D'Souza wrote earlier this year in *Forbes* magazine.

The two issues are indirectly related, because when the complex matter of how some campuses commit excesses in their drive toward "multiculturalism" — the p.c. issue — was cut into bite-size pieces for general consumption, the result was phrases like "Thought Police" and "New McCarthyism." The image of campuses being overrun by p.c. tyrants became one more reason for people to be suspicious of academia and indifferent, at best, to higher education's deteriorating fiscal condition.

Not that another reason was needed. The public had already been assured that academics occupy an "Ivory Tower," where they get fat on high tuitions and arrogantly pursue research instead of teaching. Both perceptions have been reinforced in recent months. Just as public opinion reached the boiling point on rising college costs, the federal government dusted off its interest in anti-trust violations and launched a high-profile investigation of a 40-year-old arrangement in which prestigious colleges and universities have routinely shared information on tuitions and financial aid. *The Wall Street Journal* gushed that Ivy League schools were "part of a price-fixing system that OPEC might envy." Meanwhile, members of Congress and the Bush administration charged that some research universities were bilking taxpayers for indirect costs incurred doing federally sponsored research.

It is true, of course, that money is short in the United States and particularly in New England. That may explain why the region's state appropriations to higher education are declining, but not why they are shrinking as a share of all state spending. The reason for that lies partly in increasing demands on the state dollar from programs like Medicaid and corrections, and partly in the fact that stepped-up higher-education bashing — playing on issues ranging from p.c. to university salaries — has created the costly illusion in some corners that colleges and universities are part of the problem facing the fiscally strapped states, instead of part of the solution. As Paul Tsongas, former chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Regents, recently summarized the situation in his state: "The people of the commonwealth are not demanding the preservation of education at any level."

Such anti-intellectualism doesn't bode well for a region that has no resources of any real value, save one: intellect.

\* \* \* \* \*

You may recall that in the Winter 1991 issue of CONNECTION, several essayists cited the choice of Florida State University over the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for the site of a \$60 million National High Magnetic Field Laboratory as an example of how New England's research edge was slipping away. At the time, the National Science Foundation (NSF) called for phasing out the existing Francis Bitter National Magnet Laboratory at MIT, starting this fall. But in August, MIT and the region got a bit of a reprieve as the NSF announced it would provide up to \$23 million for work at the Bitter lab through September 1995. □

*John O. Harney is the editor of CONNECTION.*