

CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL
OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CONNECTION: NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT is published four times a year by the New England Board of Higher Education, 45 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111. Phone: 617.357.9620 Fax: 617.338.1577

Vol. XI, No. 3 Fall 1996
ISSN 0895-6405

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Publisher: John C. Hoy

Editor: John O. Harney

Assistant Editor: Susan W. Martin

Publications Manager: Charlotte Stratton

Production and Printing:

The Media Shop, Inc., Boston, MA

Subscriptions and Advertising Sales Coordinator:

Christine Quinlan

Subscription Information: \$16 per year (4 issues); regular issues \$2.50 each; annual FACTS issue \$12.

Advertising rates are available upon request.

CONNECTION is printed in New England and distributed by Bernhard DeBoer Inc. CONNECTION is indexed by PAIS International (Public Affairs Information Service). CONNECTION is available in microform, paper and electronically from University Microfilms, 800 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. A cumulative index of CONNECTION articles and abstracts of recent articles are accessible on the World Wide Web at <http://www.nebhe.org>.

The New England Board of Higher Education is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized, interstate agency whose mission is to foster cooperation and the efficient use of resources among New England's approximately 260 colleges and universities. NEBHE was established by the New England Higher Education Compact, a 1955 agreement among the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

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CONNECTION has devoted a fair amount of ink during its 11 years of publication to two subjects that may at first seem scarcely related: New England's economic competitiveness in world markets and the region's magnetic appeal to foreign students. This issue looks at both, along with international programs for New England students, as part of a single, larger phenomenon: the globalization of New England's knowledge-intensive economy.

What is the relationship between New England's attractiveness to foreign students and the region's international economic position, particularly, its export trade?

For starters, when a foreign student pays tuition and fees at one of the region's colleges or universities — and last year, nearly 39,000 did — a New England service is being exported. But foreign enrollment also has a broader, less quantifiable effect on trade. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, the nations whose students travel to New England in the largest numbers — and make contacts here — are the same ones with which New England conducts most of its trade.

Moreover, the scientific talent upon which much of New England's export-dependent economy is based has a distinctly international flavor. Nearly one in four U.S. scientists and engineers with doctorates is foreign-born. Massachusetts Institute of Technology faculty who have won Nobel prizes hail from Japan, India, Italy and Mexico. And many of the central characters in the story of New England's modern economy have been foreign-born, high-tech entrepreneurs.

Our linking of foreign enrollment, international education and world trade, however, begs for some qualifications. Most importantly, the need for international awareness is too often presented solely as an imperative of economic competitiveness. It's true that we need to understand other cultures in order to sell them things. It's a borderless world, and many New England jobs depend on exports. But as Connecticut College President Claire L. Gaudiani notes, "In the multipolar world, international education must be reconceived not only to ensure New England's prosperity, but also to achieve global stability and improve the lives of the poor."

As trade becomes freer, child labor and other human rights abuses become New England's business — literally. The data provide few clues about the working conditions condoned or encouraged by some of our new trading partners nor about the extent to which New England-taught American business practices are applied to Asian or Latin American sweatshops. No wonder an Amherst, Mass., nonprofit organization called Verité and similar groups have found a niche helping U.S. companies ensure that their overseas suppliers meet human rights and fair labor standards.

In addition, more than ever before, international education has applications here at home. Sixty or more languages are spoken in the Providence, R.I., schools, and ethnic minorities will account for large proportions of new workforce entrants. Exposure to foreign cultures can play a vital role in improving intercultural relations here in New England and is a prerequisite for success even in the domestic economy.

Finally, the internationalization of New England's higher education and economy, though it has been talked about for many years, is not a done deal. Talk of restrictions on immigration, opposition to U.S. involvement in relief efforts in Africa and an array of "America First" feelings argue otherwise. The economic *and* humanist rationales for international education should be continually advanced to keep international awareness on the front burner.

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We are pleased to note that CONNECTION's Spring/Summer 1992 issue on regionalism remains timely. In September, the New England Board of Higher Education granted permission to Temple University to reprint the issue's "Cover Stories" on regionalism and interstate cooperation in their entirety in an edited volume entitled, *American Confederal Experiences, Past and Present*, to be copublished by Temple's Center for the Study of Federalism and the University Press of America.

John O. Harney is the editor of CONNECTION.