

CONNECTION

NEW ENGLAND'S JOURNAL
OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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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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With this issue, CONNECTION launches three new editorial projects, each of which we expect to fine-tune with the help of readers.

First, our Cover Stories on the economic condition of New England higher education mark an initial step in developing a reliable set of *indicators* to periodically measure the vitality of this crucial New England industry.

The central role of higher education in New England is confirmed by a spate of recent reports on the economic impact of this or that state's public *or* private colleges and universities (usually as if the other sector and the other states didn't exist.) But the relative economic health of the New England higher education enterprise itself is often difficult to discern.

If the region's policymakers, academic leaders, business people, philanthropists and others are to allocate resources wisely, they need a sound way to check New England higher education's vital signs. They need a sense of where the enterprise is headed financially and where it has been.

This first time around, we chose to look at six broad areas: college enrollment, state support of higher education, private support of higher education including endowment growth, student financial aid, academic research and development (R&D) and library holdings.

To be sure, the ideal *index* of higher education economic indicators might include other variables as well, ranging from total campus employment to the value of physical plants. That's where reader feedback will be so important.

We did not attempt to look at the academic or cultural condition of higher education. And though some of our indicators such as R&D expenditures and library holdings offer a glimpse into the current shape of academia, we understand that the economic condition of higher education which we are trying to assess here may have little to do with what students learn, how they get along and how they fare upon graduation. Indeed, a separate index of academic indicators may be needed as well.

The second work in progress is CONNECTION's mini-directory of World Wide Web sites. As more and more New England higher education and economic development organizations step into cyberspace, we will attempt to offer readers the addresses of interesting and useful Web sites on a regular basis.

In this issue, we are particularly pleased to provide Web addresses for some of the more than 200 public policy research centers and institutes that the New England Board of Higher Education has surveyed as part of its New England Public Policy Collaborative. The Collaborative — which itself has roots in CONNECTION (see the Summer 1996 issue on "Think Tanks") — aims to provide a framework for coordinating the region's policy research expertise both on the Web and in the flesh.

Finally, in this issue, we inaugurate a new "Books" section, in which we intend to review books and other publications related to trends in higher education as well as New England's economy.

The ultimate success of all three projects will depend upon input from CONNECTION readers. As always, we look forward to hearing from you.

John O. Harney is executive editor of CONNECTION.