

# THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

*THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION*  
(formerly *CONNECTION*) is published five times a year  
by the New England Board of Higher Education,  
45 Temple Place, Boston, MA 02111-1325  
Phone: 617.357.9620 Fax: 617.338.1577  
Email: nejhe@nebhe.org

Vol. XXIV, No. 2 Fall 2009

ISSN: 1938-5978

Copyright © 2009 by the New England Board  
of Higher Education.

**Publisher:** Michael K. Thomas  
**Executive Editor:** John O. Harney  
**Managing Editor:** Charlotte Stratton

**Design and Production:** HM Studios, Boston, Mass.

**Back Issues:** Back issues are accessible on the  
World Wide Web at [www.nebhe.org/nejhe/archives](http://www.nebhe.org/nejhe/archives).  
Hard copies of regular issues may be purchased from  
NEBHE for \$3.95 each; annual directory issue, \$20.

For advertising information, contact Charlotte Stratton  
at [cstratton@nebhe.org](mailto:cstratton@nebhe.org).

*THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION* is  
printed in New England.

*THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION* is  
indexed and abstracted in EBSCOhost's Academic  
Search Elite, Academic Search Premier and  
Professional Development Collection, and indexed  
in the MLA International Bibliography and ERIC's  
Current Index to Journals in Education.

**The New England Board of Higher Education**  
is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized, interstate  
agency whose mission  
is to promote greater  
educational opportunities  
and services for the  
residents of New England.  
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.



**Chair:** Sen. Joan Menard, Commonwealth  
of Massachusetts

**President:** Michael K. Thomas

## *THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION*

### Editorial Advisory Board

**Cathryn Addy**  
President, Tunxis Community College

**John Brady**  
Newburyport, Mass.

**Katherine Sloan**  
President, Massachusetts College of Art and Design

**Robert Whitcomb**  
Vice President and Editorial Pages Editor,  
*Providence Journal*

**Ralph Whitehead Jr.**  
Professor of Journalism,  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

## EDITOR'S MEMO

# Campus Visiting

It's amazing how little a career of reading and writing about higher education has equipped me to offer meaningful help on my 17-year-old son's college search. Recently, my family and I went visiting colleges, and my main observation was how, when you're rushing to see as many campuses as possible, even my beloved New England can look like a jumble of impersonal highways laced with chain hotels and chain restaurants.

Another observation is how proud New England colleges are of their Division I athletic teams. Despite all the griping about high schools being out of sync with colleges, the sports fantasy is an area where they align well. My son's school offers four "academic days" when students can be excused to go visit colleges. One parent asked, "What if they play a sport? Will they be excused from practice that day?" The guidance director answered sheepishly: "Most of the coaches are OK with that, but it varies." (*An afternoon of sprints may be worth more to some students, especially if they're scholarship material, than finding the perfect college match.*)

We diverted from the New England tour with a ferry ride to Long Island from Bridgeport, Conn. The American Institute for Economic Research recently identified Bridgeport as America's second best "small metro" in which to attend college—above such known powerhouses as Ann Arbor, Mich., Madison, Wis., Durham, N.C., and New Haven, Conn. Gritty Bridgeport is home to a university dogged by controversy since it was rescued from the financial brink in the early '90s by an affiliate of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, but the honored small metro also includes ritzier Fairfield County towns, where high college degree attainment and high per-capita income pump up overall rankings.

At one university, a tour guide aimed at anxious parental hearts by gloating about the campus's new escort service and security measures. During a quiet moment, I asked the guide if the security steps followed a wave of campus crime. "No," she conceded, "I'm a petite woman and I've never had to use an escort during my time on campus." We also saw lots of dorms, not the fancy type hyped up by the media, but the stale kind I remember from college days ... enhanced with wireless, of course.

Also every school wants to outdo the next with its commitment to the environment. The new public enemy No. 1 is the plastic lunch tray. The trays are nonrecyclable and thus destined to clog landfills. Trays also encourage overuse of water for dishwashing, and tempt students with more space for cafeteria junk food, destined to clog arteries. Some colleges boast about going trayless. But not bottomless: One vowed to keep the trays for protection during winter sledding.

To be sure, competition for college has colored my view lately. On an afternoon train out of Boston, one woman signs off her cell phone call with a child, saying, "OK, study your butt off." Another says, "Alright, now you just have your project to do." You'd think we were racing to the moon again.

But the college search also reminded us of the advantages we enjoy. At the time, the Connecticut Better Business Bureau was warning that "consumers looking to get ahead are being taken-in by so-called diploma mills" ... paying up to \$1,400 to earn a diploma by taking an online test or through "life experience" only to learn that college admissions departments and employers didn't fall for the credential. And my son is downright privileged, compared with the dozens of migrant workers we saw waiting for busses along the farmy end of Long Island. The question for him, like so many others, will be less about *access* to college and more about *success* in college.

\*\*\*\*

Our college search began with solid advice from friend Bob Woodbury, whom I wrote about in this space in the Summer 2009 *NEJHE*. In September, Bob lost his battle with cancer. Anne Woodbury, Bob's wife of 50 years, emailed friends assuring us, "He was his usual upbeat positive self who was educating right to the end. He taught us how to live fully and to die peacefully with dignity."

---

**John O. Harney** is executive editor of *THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION*. Email: [jharney@nebhe.org](mailto:jharney@nebhe.org).