

New England Fast Facts

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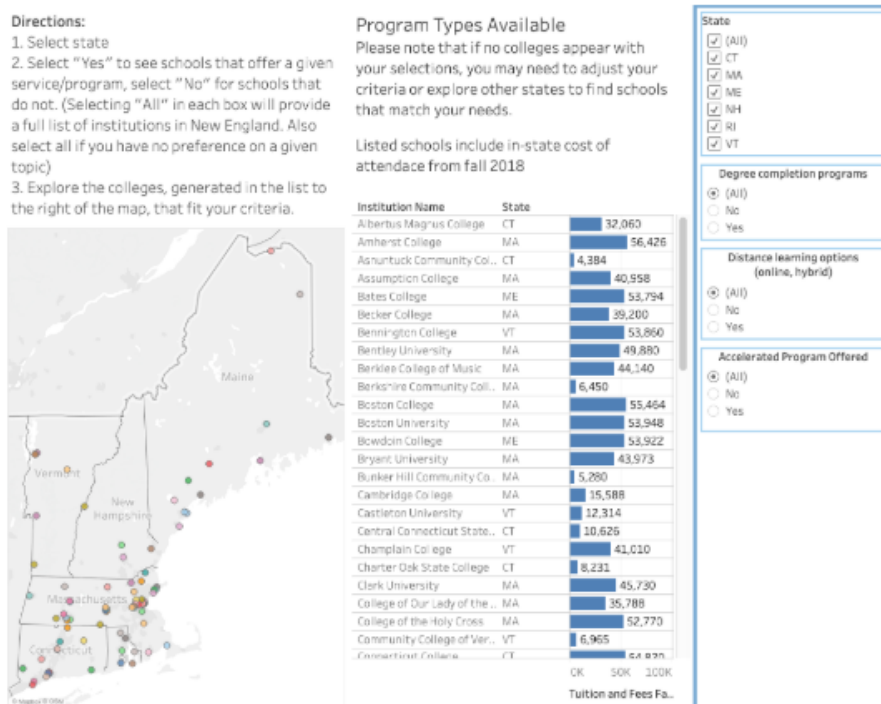
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New England Guide to Adult-Serving Colleges and Universities: Results from Survey, Fall 2019

Introduction

According to Lumina Foundation, 37% of undergraduate students in America are aged 25 years or older. Among these students, 49% are financially independent, 24% support their children or other dependents and 40% work full-time while enrolled in a credential program. In New England, 32.6% of the postsecondary population is aged 25 years or older. As a result, the traditional two- or four-year, full-time residential experience is no longer feasible for much of today's student population. Institutions in New England must respond to the needs of this growing population by providing adequate academic and non-academic services, comprehensive and accessible financial aid options and flexible programming that allows for adult students to tend to personal and professional obligations while working toward a postsecondary credential. To determine which institutions in the region offer such services and locate gaps in support for adult learners, NEBHE recently administered its annual Guide to New England Colleges and Universities Survey with an added section dedicated to available resources for adult learners. From the compiled survey responses, NEBHE has produced an interactive data display that allows users to select various supports and offerings (i.e., available financial aid, credit for prior learning, flexible scheduling options) and, in turn, generate a list of institutions that match the indicated criteria.



Screenshot of NEBHE's Guide to Adult-Serving Institutions Portal, which launched early 2020 on the [NEBHE website](http://www.nebhe.org)

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With this tool, NEBHE hopes to assist prospective adult students in their decisions regarding whether and where to enroll in college, to display exemplar institutions and demonstrate the gaps that still need to be filled to best serve this population. This tool is intended to benefit prospective students, policymakers, institutional representatives, employers and other stakeholders for the purpose of better navigating the higher education landscape, as it relates to adults, in New England.

Regional Context

In New England, there are 1,063,105 adults aged 25-64 who have some college but no degree. In each state, this represents between 12% and 18% of adults in this age bracket (Lumina Stronger Nation). Furthermore, there are an additional 927,560 adults aged 25-64 in the region with no college experience at all (Lumina Stronger Nation). With such a significant population of adults with some or no college experience, New England's institutions must rise to the challenge of better accommodating these prospective students to not only increase the regional attainment rate, but also to serve members of this population who, with additional education, can increase their wages and better provide for themselves and their families. Furthermore, a more educated workforce makes for more robust local and regional economies that contribute to the nation's overall economic health.

BEST ADULT-SERVING FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS IN NEW ENGLAND:

Granite State College,
Southern New Hampshire University,
Curry College,
UMass Amherst,
Framingham State University

BEST ADULT-SERVING TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS IN NEW ENGLAND:

Vermont Technical College,
North Shore Community College,
Mount Wachusett Community College,
Mass Bay Community College,
Capital Community College,
Quincy College,
Bunker Hill Community College,
Community College of Rhode Island

Source: Washington Monthly annual college rankings

According to the Washington Monthly annual college rankings, New England is home to five of the top 50 best adult-serving four-year institutions and eight of the top 50 best adult-serving two-year institutions. Outside of these rankings, NEBHE's Guide Survey reveals that there are myriad institutions in New England that understand the changing demographics of college-goers and offer support to adult learners. That said, the Guide Survey also points toward the remaining work to be done to ensure that college is a viable option for all adults interested in pursuing a degree.

Insights from the Guide Survey

According to the 2019 Guide Survey, nearly all respondents (n=94, 38% of the region's institutions of higher education) offer the same financial aid options to traditional students as to non-traditional adult students. However, most responding institutions (71%) do not offer financial aid options that are exclusive to adult students. In other words, for the most part, there are minimal special financial incentives for adults to apply to institutions in New England outside of traditional financial aid channels. According to a Massachusetts survey conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Education in partnership with Maguire Associates, 42% of surveyed adults with explicit interest in enrolling in higher education report lack of affordability as a barrier. Furthermore, according to a [Public Agenda survey](#), 67% of adults worry about taking on too much debt when enrolling in a degree program and 75% noted that they would pay for college by applying for grants or scholarships. Through observing these perspectives, one may infer that targeted scholarship opportunities for adults would be a significant encouraging factor in adults' decision to enroll in postsecondary education.

Source: Maguire Associates, "Massachusetts Dept. of Higher Education Adult Learner Quantitative Research: Initial Results," October 2017. Survey of MA residents age 25+ who possess high school diplomas but no bachelor's degrees.

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

The University of Maine System offers eligible adults a "Adult Degree Completion Scholarship." This program is targeted toward eligible adults with some college and no degree who left higher education at least three years prior to application.

The survey also illuminates the fact that institutions in New England offer significant academic resources for non-traditional students. To accommodate adult learners, 30% of respondents indicate that they offer extended office hours, 75% offer online or in-person tutoring resources, 41% offer flexible scheduling in some form and 62% provide application assistance for those who need it.

Other highlights from the Guide Survey include:

- 30% of institutions offer weekend courses
- 46% offer hybrid program options (partially online, partially in-person)
- 66% offer fully online programs
- 42% have an on-campus food pantry
- 48% have an emergency fund available to students in need
- 56% do not have time limits on credits eligible for transfer
- 42% offer adult degree completion programs

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The Guide Survey also sheds light on areas for improvement at the institutional level:

- Only 20% of institutions offer food and/or housing services to students outside the academic year
- Only 16% of institutions provide childcare services
- Central Connecticut State University is launching a childcare services program in spring 2020
- Only 17% of institutions offer competency-based education programs
- Only 30% offer credit-bearing work experience with partner employers

There is a great deal more New England's institutions can do to better cater to today's students. Through initiatives such as flexible programming (competency-based courses, hybrid options, credit-bearing workplace experience), adult-specific scholarships or grant opportunities or academic and non-academic supports for enrolled adults (offering childcare, providing support outside of the academic year), institutions become more attractive to prospective students who have non-academic responsibilities such as families or full-time jobs.

The Guide Survey highlights a number of exemplary institutions, some of which did not rank in Washington Monthly's top 50, but nonetheless provide noteworthy resources for adult learners. Examples include (but are not limited to):

- Curry College's continuing education program offers adults accelerated degree programs, on-campus childcare and tuition discounts for eligible students. Curry also offers prospective students the opportunity to speak with an advisor prior to application so that individuals may make informed decisions and plans for their college pathway.
- The University of Vermont offers scholarships to adults who have returned to higher education after an interruption of their studies of at least five years.
- Assunpink Community College partners with manufacturing technology companies in the area to provide credit-bearing on-the-job experience.

NEBHE will continue to build out its platform for adult learners to provide the most comprehensive information for adult learners and stakeholders in the region. For more information or to participate in the survey, please contact Charlotte Peyser, Policy & Research Analyst, cpeyser@nebhe.org.