
New Jersey Commission on Higher Education

♦ Highlights ♦

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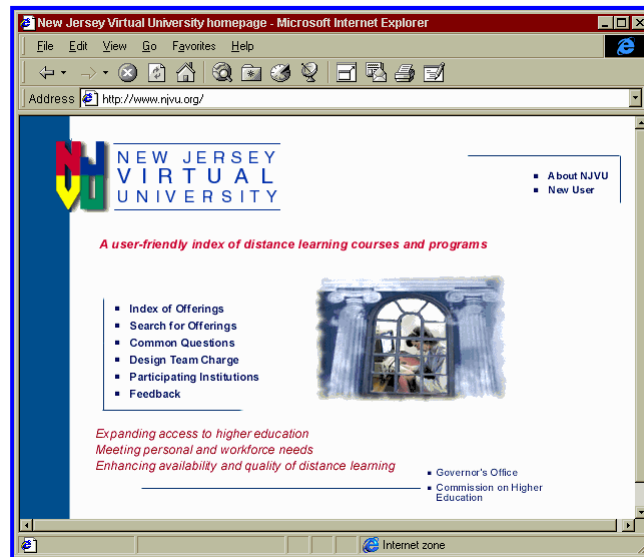
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New Jersey Virtual University is Online

During her January State of the State Address, Governor Christine Todd Whitman announced the opening of the New Jersey Virtual University, an initiative that will enhance the availability and quality of postsecondary distance learning opportunities in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Virtual University is now online at <http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/njvu.htm>. Through this website, the virtual university provides a user-friendly, online index of more than 800 distance learning courses and programs offered by 42 participating public and independent colleges and universities throughout New Jersey.

Governor Whitman proposed \$500,000 for faculty development activities that will enhance instructional design and maximize technology's potential to enrich the academic experience.



The NJVU homepage includes a searchable index of distance learning offerings.

“Distance learning will never replace the traditional classroom, but it can bring that classroom to those who are constrained by time, location, or circumstance,” Governor Whitman said in her State of the State Address. “By helping our institutions reach well beyond our borders, the virtual university will put New Jersey at the forefront of distance education.”

The NJVU website provides a central source of information on courses and programs offered over the Internet or through other technologies. The virtual university does not award credit or grant degrees. Each course or program included in the online index is offered by an individual institution that is responsible for all aspects of its distance learning offerings, including granting of credits, certificates, or degrees.

The NJVU website makes it easy for users to search for courses and programs by institution, subject area, and other criteria. They can then link directly to an institution's home page or online catalogue for specific information.

The NJVU website is already proving popular. Since it was launched in mid-January, over 16,000 “hits” have been recorded, and that number is expected to grow as more individuals and businesses become aware of the virtual university site.

“The New Jersey Virtual University builds on New Jersey’s wealth of high-tech academic and corporate resources,” said Alfred J. Cade, chair of the Commission on Higher Education. “It provides flexibility and increased opportunity to meet diverse workforce training and education needs, as well as the needs of a growing number of high school graduates and adults seeking lifelong learning opportunities.”

The online index is the first phase of the virtual university initiative. In the coming months, the Virtual University Design Team will further refine the index and continue its efforts to enhance distance education.

Led by Wendy Rayner, the state’s chief information officer, the design team includes college and university representatives, private sector representatives, and staff from the Commission on Higher Education. The team has established committees involving additional institutional representatives to address faculty development and course conversion, policy issues, technical issues, marketing, budget, and evaluation.

“The virtual university enables citizens and businesses to access education and training opportunities any time, any place. It is a key part of New Jersey’s vision to be the online state, using technology to deliver services, eliminate waste, and improve communication,” Ms. Rayner said.

For more information on the New Jersey Virtual University and to access the online index of offerings, direct your web browser to www.njvu.org. The website can also be reached through a link from the State of New Jersey homepage at www.state.nj.us.

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Technology Links Rider Education Students With High School Teacher Mentors

Building on its established relationship with Hunterdon Central Regional High School, Rider University began last fall to use desktop videoconferencing technology to enable secondary education students to see, hear, and share documents with mentor teachers in the high school.

With technology as the bridge that links their Lawrenceville campus to the Raritan Township high school, secondary education students at Rider are able to work individually with veteran subject-area teachers to review lesson plans developed as part of their coursework.

“As people learn to be teachers, they need thoughtful, reflective feedback on the planning they do from people in the field,” said Carol Brown, associate dean of Rider University’s College of Arts and Sciences. Establishing online relationships with veteran teachers enables her students to benefit from their experience and perspective even before they go into the field as practice teachers.

According to Dr. Brown, the 22 students involved during the fall semester became so engrossed in the online interactions that each video conference lasted one to two hours. And, their mentors at Hunterdon Central had such a positive experience that they asked for additional opportunities to confer with the Rider students.

The videoconferencing system used by Hunterdon Central and Rider enables participants to see and hear each other via a small image window, while two-thirds of the desktop is devoted to the document on which they are collaborating. As either participant revises the document, the other party immediately sees the changes.

Seeing a live image makes the student-teacher conversation much more personal and makes both participants much more attentive, said Spud Grammar, Rider’s Director of Media and Instructional Technology Services. He noted that as the university students quickly became comfortable with the new mode of communication, the computer became almost irrelevant to the conversation.

A secondary benefit is that the experience increases the future teachers’ appreciation of the value technology has in the classroom. “They need to be aware of all the technology that is out there,” Dr. Brown said.

Hunterdon Central Regional High School, a rural/suburban high school with 1,900 students in grades 9-12, has earned national recognition for its success in incorporating technology into all aspects of its educational program. Assistant Superintendent Judy Gray called the regional school district’s relationship with Rider “a mutually beneficial partnership.” In addition to the program with preservice teachers, the university and school district have collaborated on a writing mentors program that links English majors with high school writers, a science program, an online partnership in Chinese language, a series of teacher professional development videos, and several other joint endeavors.

Dr. Gray noted that all levels of the education system benefit when higher education institutions and school districts find new and better ways to use available technology to enhance teaching and learning. As the potential of technology continues to expand, "we can't exclude that from education," she said.

According to Rider's Dr. Brown, the next step is to link her education students with mentors from a very different type of school district — Asbury Park High School, an urban high school with about 750 students. Asbury Park already has the technology as well as extensive partnerships with Hunterdon Central, and enabling preservice teachers to learn from urban educators will enrich their perspective, she said.

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Conference Examines Higher Education Restructuring

As part of the required five-year assessment of higher education restructuring, over 150 representatives of New Jersey's higher education community convened in January to focus on the new governance structure and consider the significant challenges that lie ahead.

Governor Christine Todd Whitman opened the daylong conference, highlighting improved collaboration and increased autonomy accompanied by accountability as some of the key benefits of the new governance structure she envisioned in 1994.

While participants in the January 22 conference generally agreed with the Governor that the governance structure established by the [Higher Education Restructuring Act](#) is sound, they did discuss the need to build upon the early successes of restructuring and strengthen New Jersey's higher education system.

The recommendations made by institutional leaders, trustees, faculty and union leaders, students, legislators, Commission members and other participants will inform the joint Commission on Higher Education and Presidents' Council assessment of higher education restructuring. The report will also include the findings of a survey on higher education restructuring. The 1994 law requires a comprehensive assessment to be submitted to the Governor and Legislature by July 1, 1999.

The daylong event at Rider University included a panel discussion involving the four legislative sponsors of the Higher Education Restructuring Act as well as two individuals instrumental in drafting the law — Presidents' Council Chairman Peter Burnham and Commissioner of Education-designee David Hespe. A second panel of higher education policy experts from across the country put New Jersey's experience into a national context.

In addition, former Commission Executive Director Martine Hammond-Paludan presented an overview of key accomplishments since the new governance structure was put in place. Examples include: development of the first long-range plan for higher education since 1981 and the implementation of many of its policy recommendations, and increased accountability through institutional and state reports as well as the implementation of a performance funding initiative.

Some of the key themes addressed by conference participants during the panel presentations and break-out sessions that followed were: the importance of collaboration within the higher education community, the role of college and university trustees, coordinated systemwide advocacy for higher education, academic program review, and the budget development process. Another prevalent theme was the need for colleges and universities to respond to the public agenda, helping to address critical state needs and social issues.

An overview of the presentations and the discussions by the break-out groups will be incorporated into the comprehensive assessment of restructuring. To ensure that the final report reflects broad input from the higher education community, the committee plans to disseminate a draft of the report this spring and provide

opportunities for individuals and organizations to comment.

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Committee Releases Draft Long-Range Plan Update Seeking Feedback From Higher Education Community

The Commission and Presidents' Council joint Long-Range Plan Review Committee is seeking feedback on its draft long-range plan update.

The document reaffirms the state's commitment to the vision articulated in the 1996 long-range plan for higher education and builds on the original principles and policy recommendations by proposing a strategic course toward excellence.

New recommendations in the draft update of the long-range plan focus on mission differentiation and advocacy for higher education, two essential conditions for achieving New Jersey's aspirations for excellence.

The draft is being disseminated to college and university presidents, governing board chairs, faculty representatives, student government leaders, and other representatives of the higher education community. Printed copies are available on request by calling the Commission's office at 609-292-4310. The Long-Range Plan Review Committee invites discussion about the document, as well as suggestions for additional issues that should be addressed. Individuals and organizations are invited to provide written comments to the committee by the end of April. The Commission and Presidents' Council will also hear testimony on the draft long-range plan update at public meetings in late March and April.

To Submit Written Comments:

Mail: P.O. Box 542, Trenton, NJ 08625-0542

Fax: 609-292-7225

E-mail: nj_che@che.state.nj.us

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Coming Next Time:

As the Educational Opportunity Fund celebrates 30 years of success, *Highlights* will take an in-depth look at the EOF program — past, present, and future.



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