

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 02111-1325 Phone: 617.357.9620 Fax: 617.338.1577 Email: connection@nebhe.org

Vol. XV, No. 3 Winter 2001
ISSN 0895-6405
Copyright © 2001 by the New England Board of Higher Education.

Publisher: John C. Hoy
Executive Editor: John O. Harney
Assistant Editor: Susan W. Martin
Editorial Intern: N. Sean Bowditch
Director of Publications: Charlotte Stratton
Design and Production: The Publication Group

**Advertising Sales and
Marketing Coordinator:** Christine Quinlan

Subscription Information: \$20 per year (4 issues); regular issues \$3.95 each; annual FACTS issue \$14.95.

Advertising rates are available upon request.

CONNECTION is printed in New England. CONNECTION is indexed in PAIS International and in ERIC's *Current Index to Journals in Education*. CONNECTION is available in microform 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 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 280 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. NEBHE operates a variety of programs for New England students, including the tuition-saving Regional Student Program, and advances regional discussion of critical issues through a conference series and the quarterly journal, CONNECTION.

Chair: Nancy I. Chard, Chair, Senate Education Committee, Vermont Legislature

President: John C. Hoy

CONNECTION Editorial Advisory Board

Kenneth Hooker
Columnist, *Boston Globe*

Richard Barringer
Professor, University of Southern Maine

Laura Freid
Executive Vice President for Public Affairs and University Relations, Brown University

Betsy Keady
Market Director, The Forum Corp.

Arnold Koch
Arnold Koch and Associates

Thomas L. McFarland
Former Director, University Press of New England

Ian Menzies
Hingham, Mass.

Neil Rolde
Sewall's Hill, Maine

EDITORIAL MEMO

University of Hartford President Walter Harrison has written a wonderfully thought-provoking short piece in the winter issue of the university's *Observer* about the bygone era when a group of Hartford corporate CEOs known as "the bishops" would meet at the Hartford Club to decide the city's civic priorities and find ways to fund them. Over the more torpid recent history of Hartford, their companies merged, folded or fled, but not before the bishops managed to nurture such critical Hartford institutions as the Wadsworth Atheneum, the University of Hartford, Hartford Hospital and Trinity College.

In this way, big corporations—though highly paternalistic and often oblivious to urban ethnic concerns—served as the bedrock of economic and civic life in communities like Hartford through the 1970s. But no longer. "The new bedrocks of our communities," Harrison concludes, "will be the large, nonprofit organizations, the hospitals and universities located there. We are not moving. We are, by our very nature, anchored in and devoted to our communities; and as our economy shifts, we are increasingly the stable economic support our communities need."

But engage academics in a discussion of what shape this support might take, and the conversation will invariably circle back to "core mission." Above all, one will say earnestly, colleges contribute to their communities by preparing students for work and life. Problem is, while a lot of institutions were pursuing that noble goal behind their ivy walls, adjacent neighborhoods were becoming blighted and, in some cases, deadly. When those conditions began to scare off prospective students, modern-day bishops at Trinity College in Hartford and Clark University in Worcester, to name two famous examples, launched multimillion-dollar neighborhood revitalization projects.

Other New England colleges and universities are more quietly mobilizing their intellectual resources and public service-minded students to help their host communities improve K-12 education, untangle health-care issues and bolster economic development. Their contributions to the community run the gamut from progressive experiments, like the recent joint initiative by Springfield Technical Community College and Springfield College to train students in physical and occupational therapy while providing rehab services to Greater Springfield residents whose insurance benefits have run out, to no-brainers like Harvard's recent announcement that it will now afford Cambridge residents free admission to its world-class art museums. Campuses also face a host of more mundane but vexing town-gown challenges such as how to responsibly house students in the community—one focus of this issue of CONNECTION.

To be sure, one barrier to becoming good neighbors is the system of rewards in higher education. Professors need to do research and outreach to earn promotion and tenure. But work in the local community tends not to count for much. One Yale administrator recently conceded that most faculty would rather focus their outreach on New York City, or Sri Lanka for that matter, than on the mean streets of New Haven's Hill neighborhood.

Other challenges loom. How, for example, will the burgeoning field of distance learning alter the relationship between town and gown? Bristol Community College, for one, has capitalized on technology to reach underserved local audiences with a Web-based, one-credit course on the history of Southern New England, particularly Fall River. But newer, totally virtual colleges are not anchored anywhere, and some have worked hard to elude regulatory oversight, let alone community obligations.

At the barest level, failure to live up to Harrison's vision will cost institutions goodwill and perhaps their cherished tax exemptions. Aloof colleges will be put in their places as it were. May this issue help them out.

John O. Harney is executive editor of CONNECTION.