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# WESTERN NEW YORK'S Higher Education

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**W**estern New York is a region rich with nationally and internationally recognized assets like its incredible architectural treasures, expansive and diverse cultural institutions, natural resources, eco-tourism, and sports teams. What Western New Yorkers should be equally proud of is the incredible network of high-quality, diverse, and impactful colleges and universities. With twenty-one public, private, and proprietary schools; four-year and two-year; and large and small institutions, there is a high quality educational experience awaiting anyone who dares to achieve their dream. According to *Newsweek*, Buffalo is the number four college town in the nation for mid-sized cities and boasts over 110,500 students, adding to the culture and economy of this great region.

As President Obama highlighted during his recent visit, higher education is poised to play the strategic role it was always intended to play, driving this country forward by educating the next generation of workers and responsible citizens as well as ensuring that the American Dream is attainable for all citizens. However, this role comes with tremendous responsibility and challenge, and while it benefits from the competitive environment that has made the United States a world leader, Western New York college presidents have taken extraordinary measures to ensure

that Western New Yorkers benefit from an innovative and unprecedented collaboration between the twenty-one competing Western New York colleges and universities. This is what the Western New York Consortium of Higher Education (Consortium) is all about. When the premier national higher education newsletter *Inside Higher Ed* wrote an article on the Consortium entitled, "Competing and Collaborating," it stated, "On a \$200,000 annual budget, the consortium has gone from barely existent to vibrant." The transition to "vibrant" was supported by The John R. Oishei

Foundation and is demonstrated by extraordinary growth. Starting in 2009, with four inter-institutional collaborations, about eighty volunteers and zero sector-level collaborations, the Consortium has grown to twenty-four-plus inter-institutional collaborations, over 700-plus volunteers, and over twenty sector-level regional collaborations between the Consortium and the community working together to enhance students' experiences and advance the economic interests of the region. How this is accomplished is as impressive as what is being accomplished.

## WNY Consortium of Higher Education

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In 2009, the twenty-one Western New York college and university presidents made the pivotal decision to become a proactive and driving force behind, among other things, the economic growth of the region. This would occur on a number of fronts that included conducting internal assessments and setting priorities to establish strategic partnerships with some of the region's economic leaders including but not limited to the Regional Economic Development Council, WNY Consortium of Human Resources Executives, Empire State Development, county leadership, and other regional stakeholders. However, before any initiative moved forward, and taking an unusual yet critical step toward becoming a national higher education consortia leader, the members examined their impact and the preparation of graduates. Clearly the economic impact of the higher education community is enormous and is why the Consortium has earned the title, "Economic Powerhouse." Put simply, Western New York colleges and universities have perhaps the greatest influence over economic growth and sustainability in the region. The following statistics highlight this fact.

- \$3,200,000,000 economic impact on the Western New York economy with \$2,000,000,000 of direct institutional spending and an economic impact double that of the Buffalo

Medical Campus and twenty times larger than the not-for-profit arts and cultural institutions;

- 32,000 full- and part-time jobs with \$122,000,000 in local and state taxes;
- 22,469 degrees conferred annually, with seven in 100 residents being college students, a number greater than Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Denver, Cleveland, Baltimore, and Austin, Texas; and
- Thousands of newly created jobs, hundreds of companies launched, and the foundation of Western New York entrepreneurial ecosystem through robust student entrepreneurship competitions.

To continue and even expand this impact, the Consortium has had to think differently about its role. In many ways, it has implemented disruptive innovations that have challenged long-standing assumptions and systems while pushing the boundaries of traditional partnerships. This has clearly positioned the Consortium and Western New York as a leader in the nation as it expands strategic higher education collaborations between the business sector, K through twelve education sector, and regional and statewide economic development stakeholders. The following highlights demonstrate that commitment and the reason why Western New Yorkers should be proud of their friends, neighbors, and family members who work at local colleges and universities and who have in most

cases taken on a tremendous amount of additional work beyond the traditional forty- to fifty-hour work week. That being said, the Consortium also acknowledges that its partners have made the exact same level of sacrifice and demonstrate the same level of commitment that makes Western New Yorkers one of the smartest and hardest workforces in the world. Finally, and probably best said by President Obama during his address at UB, "Just tinkering around the edges won't be enough ... We've got to shake up the current system." This imperative is exactly the disruptive innovation that the Consortium has implemented and which is detailed below.



### P-16 Consortium:

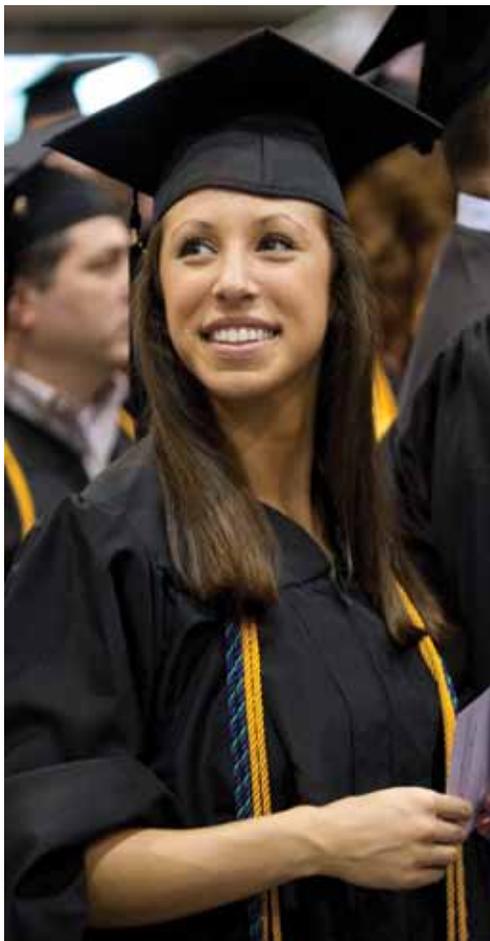
The US Department of Education has strongly encouraged partnerships between higher education and the K through twelve sector. The New York State Education Department in its plan for higher education clearly charged colleges and universities with the task of developing meaningful partnerships



with the K through twelve sector in order to better prepare students for career and college success. Fortunately for Western New York, neither the Consortium nor K through twelve educators waited for this directive and launched the P-16 Consortium in 2011. This collaboration is one of the most extensive partnerships in the

nation and includes K through twelve superintendents, curriculum developers, exemplary teachers, college and university presidents, chief academic officers, deans of schools of education, English and writing professors, business leaders, community leaders, foundations, and community-based organizations representing birth to

school age. To date, the Consortium completed a website that will track P through sixteen partnerships including themes of the partnership; higher education, K through twelve, business, and community-based partners; as well as research outcomes of the initiative. In addition, members have worked extensively to promote a strong academic



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connection between high school and college and for the first time in the history of Western New York and perhaps the state, created a council of K through twelve teachers and college and university professors to explore what it means to be prepared for college level writing. This effort will continue for the next three years and is expected to create long-term strategies for improving the college and career readiness of students across the educational spectrum.

## Economic Development Portal:

Whether large or small, perhaps the greatest opportunity for businesses across Western New York is their ability to access the vast resources of the Consortium. However, the key word in that sentence is “access,” and one cannot access what he or she doesn’t know is there. This barrier to assisting business owners, entrepreneurs, inventors, human resource professionals, and those who aspire to corporate leadership among others was addressed by creating the Consortium’s Economic Development Portal (<http://www.wnycollegeconnection.com/edp-home>). This website provides direct links to economic development departments; incubators; certification programs; centers for leadership and business development; entrepreneurship; organizational, workforce, leadership and professional development; and community liaisons. Over 200 links connect businesses to campus resources to help just about every business professional in Western New York.

## WNY Association of College Career Centers (WNYACCC) and Faculty Development (FD) Initiative:

A recent article on Career Builder highlighted the global challenge of finding high-quality, capable workers in the ten largest economies on the planet. While the United States was among those in that list, it was identified as the nation in the best position to overcome that challenge, largely because of its higher education system. The Consortium and individual campuses recognize their role in meeting the needs of employers by preparing the best workforce in the world. However, this cannot be accomplished by higher education alone. “Meeting the needs of local students at individual campuses does not prevent us from enhancing the work that we already do by engaging employers and exploring what exactly are the skill sets of the future and how can we all better prepare students,” says Steven J. Harvey, Ph.D., executive director of the Consortium. The initiative will extend across multiple years and work to enhance the learning experience within and outside the classroom. In addition to identifying these skill sets, WNYACCC has also launched for the first time in Western New York a centralized internship database (<http://www.wnycollegeconnection.com/wnyaccc-internships>). Here employers can find high quality students, assist in their professional development, and be part of the combined effort to advance the economic interests of the region through the preparation of a workforce ready for the knowledge economy. To the credit of Western New York employers, they have stepped up to the plate, engaging in various Consortium initiatives, providing increased internship opportunities for students, and blending the barrier that has historically separated colleges and universities from the communities they call home and which they play an instrumental role in growing.

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# WNY STUDENT 2 BIZ challenge

## WNY Student 2 Biz Challenge:

Without question, one of the national strategies to advance and grow the economy is through innovation and entrepreneurship. As the late Peter Drucker put it, "Innovation is the specific instrument of entrepreneurship. The act of that endows resources with a new capacity to create wealth." With that vision in mind, the Consortium set out to expand the emphasis on entrepreneurship and innovation by launching its first ever, WNY Student 2 Biz Challenge, an entrepreneurial pitch competition that pits team against team and school against school in what has turned into an amazing demonstration of talent,



vision, passion, and hard work. The competition brought thirty teams together to compete against each other and be judged by Western New Yorkers in the venture capital, angel investor, and entrepreneurship arenas. The teams spent a day presenting to judges and answering difficult questions on sustainability, profitability, patent

law, competition, and passion. From this regional competition we sent eight teams to the New York State competition where one team won \$5,000. The goal of this initiative is twofold: first, provide students with an experience that will assist them with developing the very same skills that employers are seeking in the new knowledge economy and second, encourage students to think big, be bold, and reach for the American Dream either by launching their own company or becoming an innovative leader in another company. While many of the various team members will go on to successful careers in existing businesses, the potential of a number of proposals to evolve into "homegrown" Western New York companies is quite impressive. "The next WNY Student 2 Biz Challenge will be Friday, April 11, 2014, at the University at Buffalo Student Union, where we expect to double the number of teams and institutions represented," Harvey says. "We are encouraged by other regional entrepreneurship initiatives and look forward to showcasing the amazing work of local students."

## Say Yes to Education Buffalo:

For anyone who is facing paying for college, it is understood that the task is daunting. The Consortium recognizes this and has begun to innovate along a number of fronts including programs that increase the number of students graduating in four years, cross-registration between all twenty-one colleges and universities, evening and weekend classes, and improved articulation agreements between two-year

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and four-year colleges. However, there are those in the community who have historically been underrepresented on campuses and even with the above mentioned innovations, will not be able to attend college without extraordinary measures being taken by the Consortium and community. That's where Say Yes comes into play. Say Yes represents a tremendous opportunity for Buffalo Public School graduates to secure tuition for college while being offered a wide array of health, education, social, and financial supports. The Consortium has participated at all levels of Say Yes and members are contributing millions of dollars in scholarships. This region-wide initiative is critical to raising the level of academic achievement and financial success for those who have traditionally struggled to break from their historical levels of poverty and thus contributing to the overall economic development of the region.

### Veterans Group:

Just like the rest of the community, the Consortium is extremely proud of veterans and is equally proud of the work that its Veterans Group does on

behalf of veterans, their families, and current military personnel. The Veterans Group provides programming, education on federal resources, and on-campus resources specific to veteran needs. In addition, it shares among members specific expertise on how to assist veterans with achieving academic and professional success. Providing these services to veterans offers them a pathway to become reinvested in the community and contributes to the overall economic vitality of this region.

### Workforce Development:

What may be surprising to many Western New Yorkers is that the region has a robust advanced manufacturing sector that is poised for growth and expansion but which suffers from the same barriers as other employers when recruiting qualified employees. Given this barrier, the Consortium has moved forward to increase the number of students aware of the opportunities and prepared to take advantage of the 10,000-plus job openings over the next seven to eight years. It hosted a panel

discussion with individuals from various advanced manufacturing facilities that focused on the opportunities that are available and the educational pathways a student can take to enter those fields. Individuals in attendance were superintendents, high school counselors, academic leadership from higher education, and college career counselors. In addition to hosting events like this, the Consortium has engaged or been engaged by a number of entities like Empire State Development, the Regional Economic Development Council, Workforce Investment Board, Workforce Investment Consortium, Niagara Frontier Industry Education Council, and the Buffalo Niagara Advanced Manufacturing Alliance. The Consortium is committed to ensuring that all sectors and individuals best suited for the diverse array of opportunities found in Western New York find their match and that students are appropriately prepared with the corresponding skill sets necessary for success. This value added approach benefits from the diverse degrees and certifications available through the Consortium and which can be found on the Economic Development Portal.

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## Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) & Academic Leadership Institute (ALI):

It's not enough to simply provide opportunities for advancement for students when there are also opportunities to provide individuals within the Consortium with pathways to develop and grow. This type of collaboration increases innovation and leadership abilities, leads to cost savings and efficiencies, and contributes to the entire community. Two of these initiatives are the Women's Leadership Institute and the Academic Leadership Institute. The Women's Leadership Institute provides the Western New York higher education community with a pool of qualified women who are effective professionals prepared to ascend to senior executive level leadership. As a result of their participation, these women will be highly networked and have a senior executive perspective of important higher education issues including strategic planning, shared governance, community engagement, senior executive level team-building, data-driven decision-making skills, and the importance of benchmarking and best practices. Through the efforts of the Women's Leadership Institute network, the Western New York region will have an equitable distribution of men and women in similar executive level positions. The Academic Leadership Institute is a year-long professional development program that prepares participants to understand and successfully challenge the critical issues facing higher education. It allows academic leaders to better understand how to manage educational institutes, academic units, and departments from a variety of levels and perspectives. Both of these institutes provide an opportunity for college and university leadership to expand their understanding of the issues currently facing higher education and work on innovative and bold programs to expand and address these issues.

## Selling WNY Higher Education:

The WNY Consortium of Higher Education originally started its initiative with the name Campus Buffalo. In 2010, the Consortium changed the name of its public initiative to WNY College Connection ([www.wnycollegeconnection.com](http://www.wnycollegeconnection.com)). Shortly after the renaming, a robust website was developed, which is used to maintain communication between institutional collaborations; serve as a portal for students, parents, and school counselors; and assist businesses with accessing the extensive number of resources available to companies of all shapes and sizes. In the beginning, the

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WNY College Connection reached about ten countries, 6,000 unique users and about 500,000 hits. Today, there are more than 30,000 unique visitors a year from over ninety-three nations, hitting the website over 6,000,000 times or 16,000 hits daily. This site expands the visibility of all twenty-one institutions and assists with marketing the region to individuals who are considering one of the Consortium's twenty-one colleges and universities. In addition, it is a valuable tool for employers and entrepreneurs to learn about the Western New York region, its educated population which claims more college educated residents than the national average, and all of the assets it has for residents. The Consortium will continue to promote the site and collaborate with any regional entity that sees the potential of this valuable tool for the region.

Through all of this progress, there are three things that remain constants, not just for the Consortium but for Western New York as a whole. First, it has some of the most passionate people in the nation who absolutely refuse to take "no" for an answer or to let challenges or barriers get in the way. Second, the Consortium has a sense of purpose that drives its work and commitment to becoming national leaders in preparing the next generation workforce and improving the economic vitality of Western New York. Third, the Consortium is patient but persistent. "We know that systemic change takes time but we work tirelessly to ensure that the impact we are working toward is realized swiftly and that the students, businesses, and residents of Western New York benefit from that effort," Harvey says. Whether as individual institutions or as a Consortium

of twenty-one, the higher education sector is poised to play a critical role in advancing economic interests across the region.

Yes, Western New York has a lot to be proud of and among those things are its twenty-one colleges and universities and the WNY Consortium of Higher Education that brings collaborating competitors together to drive the local economy forward. Much credit belongs to the business community which has stepped up and played a crucial role in providing feedback, engaging students on campuses and through experiences like internships, and by participating in every economic development initiative the Consortium has launched since 2009. "Western New Yorkers can stand tall knowing that we have earned the rank of the number four college town in the country and that our friends, neighbors, and relatives working in the Consortium are in this for the long haul and doing right by you and I," Harvey says. "I am proud to be a part of such an honorable and cutting edge group lead by twenty-one visionary presidents that lead amazing institutions but come together for the greater good. Finally, I am proud to call Western New York my home for everything stated above but most of all because of the incredible people who call Western New York home. We are all in this together and as we succeed, we all succeed as one great region working for a better future for generations to come."

### Contact Information:

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