

EDUCATION

Area colleges form biotech partnership

HCC students offered pathway to Westfield State

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Westfield State University and Holyoke Community College have partnered to create an affordable pathway for students to transfer credits and pursue a bachelor's degree in biotechnology from Westfield State University.

Students would first earn an associate's degree in the field from HCC, where they would take high-level science courses that can be applied at Westfield State. This is designed to create a smooth transfer process between the two schools.

"Westfield State University is honored to continue our long relationship with Holyoke Community College, this time providing a bridge between an associate degree in biotechnology and the career that community college students want to pursue," said Roy H. Saigo, interim president of Westfield State University.

"This partnership also underscores the Westfield State's commitment to facilitating accessible and affordable degree options for everyone, regardless of background."

Partnerships between two-year community colleges and four-year institutions are not new, but they are becoming increasingly popular. They allow students to enter community college with a clear pathway to what will await them after two years.

It also allows students to make longer term plans on finance and destination. It also creates more affordability in many cases.

The four-year university gains a pipeline of prepared students. The community college offers clarity to those students who know which path they want to

pursue as they leave high school. Students will receive credit from Westfield State for program-related courses completed at HCC. They can apply those credits toward the requirements for a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, with a concentration in biotechnology at Westfield State.

"We are proud of our partnership with Westfield State University that allows students to earn their associate's degree at Holyoke Community College and transfer seamlessly to Westfield State to earn their bachelor's degree and beyond," HCC president Christina Royal said.

"Programs like these offer affordable pathways for students to begin their careers with less debt and enter the next phase of their lives as leaders in the medical and science fields."

Continued growth in biotechnology and medical research is expected to increase demand for these workers, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. MassBioEd reports that nearly 12,000 jobs are forecast to be created through May 2023.

"Massachusetts has one of the highest concentrations of biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies in the world and a degree in biotech typically translates to careers with competitive salaries and opportunities for advancement," said Emily Rabinsky, HCC biotechnology program coordinator and professor of biology.

"Furthermore, it provides students with career opportunities in which they can play a role in positively impacting others' lives."

HCC offers an associate degree in arts and science, with a concentration in biotechnology. In 2018, the college opened a 13,000-square-foot Center for Life Sciences that features a dedicated biotechnology lab and instructional cleanroom, similar to those used in the biotechnology industry.