

HOLYOKE

HCC offers an express path to higher education

Effort aims to ease the process

By **DAVE CANTON**
dcanton@repub.com

Think of Holyoke Community College's Registration Express as the fast food of education: Admission, placement, course schedule and financial aid all in one day. OK, so you can't do it at a drive-up window, but it beats the old days of writing application letters, waiting weeks for acceptance, then standing in long lines to sign up for courses. And, under the state's new MassReconnect program, qualified older students can register and attend classes for free.

Yesterday was the first day of Registration Express at the Holyoke school. Monday, from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. will be the second and last full Express day before classes start Tuesday. However, after that, the admissions office will remain open for expanded hours until 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday. And, if one cannot make it to the campus, virtual registration is available via Zoom at the Holyoke Community College website at hcc.edu/regexpress.

"We hold Registration Express twice a year, at the beginning of each semester," Anne Morales Medina said. She is the associate director of recruitment and enrollment management. "We created

one-stop shopping for students that maybe haven't applied or registered for classes."

The special Saturday registration is significant because it allows working people the opportunity to sign up at a convenient time.

"If we are open only Monday through Friday and we have an adult learner that's working a 9-to-5 job, sometimes it is difficult with family responsibilities. It is hard to get here," Medina said. "This just gives us an opportunity to have an extra touch point with students."

Tricia Goodreau said that's why she came to the school. She works all week and breaking away to sign up for school just was not happening. Retired after 20 years in the Air Force, Goodreau now works as an HR specialist at the 104th Fighter Wing at Barnes. She works for the Department of Defense as a civilian employee for the Massachusetts Air National Guard. She wants to go on and get her bachelor's degree in human resources management to enhance her second career.

"It would help me to move up the scale," she said. "Education is one way they rank you and I can do it online and still work full-time."

While her associate degree was awarded from the Community College of the Air Force, most of her general education credits came from HCC and she was back for more. She

showed up yesterday with a list of courses she wanted to take, including sociology, a prerequisite course, computer applications and HR management.

While Goodreau qualifies as an adult learner, she has an associate's degree and her costs are covered by the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. She is not applying under the state MassReconnect program. But Juliana Martinez may.

Martinez was making her way through the process on Saturday. She graduated high school, is over 25 years old and has never been to college. Currently working as a certified nursing assistant, she decided she wanted to become a registered nurse. Renee Tastad said Martinez may be the ideal candidate for MassReconnect.

"Massachusetts launched MassReconnect in August," said Tastad, the assistant vice president for student affairs and dean of enrollment management for HCC said. "It offers free community college for individuals aged 25 and older, and who have not previously earned a college degree. We have seen a lot of interest from that population group."

Tastad said the state has identified as many as 172,000 people in Hampden and Hampshire counties alone who have high school diplomas but no college degrees.

"Maybe they have earned some college credits, but

they haven't finished a college degree, and we think that now is a really good time for them," Tastad said. "The state has placed a lot of emphasis on the MassReconnect program, and I know Gov. (Maura T.) Healey has said her administration decided in the range of 700,000 qualified individuals in Massachusetts have not earned a college degree."

Tastad said HCC expanded its hours to allow those people who want to register to do so conveniently.

"It puts out in the air that it's not too late. If you are considering going to college, now is the time," she said. "You can come in and we are going to help you get through all of the steps and we are going to get you on the right path to beginning classes in January."



Andrea Baker helps Tricia Goodreau, of Westfield, to apply for classes during Holyoke Community College's Registration Express yesterday morning. (HOANG 'LEON' NGUYEN / THE REPUBLICAN)

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