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FEATURED COLUMN



Getting promoted is more than just keeping your nose clean

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NHBR

The 'reasonable comp' balance of power

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Lawmakers back state-supported fund for startups

■ **BUSINESS FINANCING**

BY BOB SANDERS

In this time of budget cuts and repudiation of anything that remotely smacks of government intervention in the private sector, how

is it possible for the New Hampshire Legislature to pass a law creating a new government program that will pump \$2 million to \$6 million into risky, high-tech startups?

The goal is for the New Hampshire Innovation Business Job Growth Program to help create at least one new venture capital

fund that would pick which New Hampshire startups are most likely to succeed and benefit the public good. And the fund not only hopes to leverage millions of dollars of private capital, but also would be able to draw millions of dollars from state retirement funds — at the same time the state is cutting

retirement benefits for future state and local workers.

Yet the both the House and Senate passed House Bill 605 to the governor without a peep of debate, partly because all of the money for the program comes from the federal govern-

STARTUPS, PAGE 13

MIND
The gap

Another study finds 'disconnect' between colleges and businesses in how to prepare a skilled workforce

■ **WORKFORCE TRAINING**

BY CINDY KIBBE

How big is the "skills gap" and what will it take to close it?

A national study has been released that explores the state of America's higher education and what is needed for the country to be competitive in today's challenging global economy. Several years ago, a New Hampshire-based survey discussed some of the same issues.

Both studies found a "skills gap" along the entire learning-career continuum – colleges, businesses and the students themselves all had differing expectations of what was needed to prepare a workforce for today's and tomorrow's jobs.

"Across the Great Divide," released March 29 by Corporate Voices for Working Families

SKILLS GAP, PAGE 16

Study: N.H. is a great place for medical manufacturing

■ **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Site selection firm says southern N.H. has the advantage in New England

BY CINDY KIBBE

A New Jersey site selection firm is giving southern New Hampshire high marks, particularly when it comes to medical manufacturing companies.

Princeton-based The Boyd Company Inc. recently examined key business costs in over 55 metropolitan areas across the country as well as several foreign cities for a hypothetical 175,000-square-foot manufacturing plant employing 325 workers and shipping to a U.S. market. The result: The Manchester/Nashua/Salem area was the least costly place to do business in the five New England areas it reviewed.

MANUFACTURING, PAGE 14

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A conversation with the new dean of UNH Law School **PAGE 3**

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Early '11 investment real estate activity percolates **PAGE 30**

N.H. EXPORTS SURGE IN FEBRUARY

Shipments abroad rise 13.6% in February **PAGE 12**



Skills gap

FROM PAGE 1

and Civic Enterprises, in association with several other Washington, D.C., policy organizations, surveyed 450 businesses and 751 post-secondary educational institutions and found distinct – and concerning – disparities between the goals of higher education and what businesses sought in workers.

According to the report, employers indicated they believed the most important goal of a four-year degree was to prepare individuals for “success in the workplace” (56 percent). On the other hand, educational leaders saw higher education as a way of providing individuals with “core academic knowledge and skills” (64 percent).

“The Great Divide” also found that only 15 percent of the businesses believed hiring those with an associate degree was a good return on investment for their companies.

The 55% connection

In 2007, the University System of New Hampshire sought to explore why so many

college graduates and young professionals were fleeing the state. One of the issues that came up repeatedly through surveys and research conducted as part of the groundbreaking 55 Percent Initiative was a disconnect between how prepared graduates were and what skills employers were actually looking for in new hires.

Some say little has changed in the four years since the study was completed.

“Unfortunately, the disconnect between colleges, students and employers still exists,” said Kate Luczko, executive director of Stay Work Play, the organization developed as a result of the 55 Percent Initiative. “We’ve been talking about this for forever, but companies are still saying they can’t find qualified workers and students are still saying they can’t find jobs.”

Stay Work Play seeks to inform graduates and young professionals about the incentives New Hampshire has for careers and lifestyles.

Bill Schick, principal of the Nashua-based marketing firm Mesh Interactive Agency, also noted a disconnect between higher education and businesses in preparing a workforce,

but said he felt that it was largely a philosophical one.

“For example, education is turning out a glut of graphic designers who know the technical side – they know the nuts and bolts of Photoshop, say – but there has been very little emphasis on the design side,” said Schick.

Schick said Mesh finds hiring the right candidates difficult at times, but even more disturbing is the lack of team experience exhibited by young job candidates.

“I’ve had new graduates tell me they’ve never worked on a team before. The focus on interacting with the team is super-critical for us,” he said.

Mary Anne Cioffi, health-care careers education services coordinator at Concord Hospital, found exactly the same deficiencies among the many new interns with whom she works.

“Technology is important, but the need for good communication skills is just as important,” she said. “You still need to be able to communicate with the team.”

While there may be room for colleges to reach out to businesses, there also may be equal opportunity for businesses to reach out

to higher education.

“The Great Divide” researchers found that 13 percent of businesses surveyed specifically worked with higher-ed institutions to develop “relevant certificate or degree programs for current employees.”

The STAR program

A close dialogue between a business and a school has proven extremely beneficial for precision machining firm Hypertherm in Hanover.

“We needed machine operators, and we couldn’t find them,” said Matt Birch, manager of the Hypertherm Technical Training Institute. “We knew we either had to move production or do something ourselves.”

Consequently, in 2007 Hypertherm developed its own curriculum and opened the Hypertherm Technical Training Institute.

In 2010, the company partnered with River Valley Community College in Claremont and the Vermont Healthcare and Information Technology Education Center in the Skills Through Apprenticeship and Retraining program for CNC machinists. The intensive >

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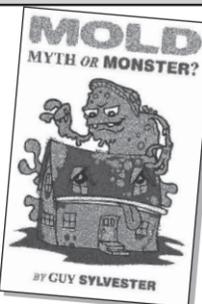
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FROM PAGE 16

nine-week program includes such courses as shop math, computer-controlled lathes and other fundamentals.

Those in the Skills Through Apprenticeship and Retraining, or STAR, program also are enrolled into a two-year apprenticeship program by the U.S. Department of Labor and are hired by Hypertherm, with benefits, prior to class.

The program has been highly successful, with more than 300 students involved and 148 currently enrolled, said Birch, who said the Claremont community college is "very forward thinking and we have a lot of communication."

Student experiences

Certainly, the stagnant economy has changed workforce expectations across the continuum and is one of the many reasons behind the lack of entry-level jobs.

Haley Lydstone, a junior at Keene State College, acknowledged the difficult job market, and has heard grim anecdotes from her friends who were graduating seniors.

"They're basically working blind," said Lydstone. "Most of them have been unsuccessful at finding any job at all. Nobody's found a job in their major. My good friend who graduated as an architect major with a 4.0 GPA is working as a bank teller. They are desperate."

She also said that college support to prepare for the workforce could be better.

"There's no classes or seminars on how to prepare a resume or how to interview or anything like that," said Lydstone, 21. "They don't even give you anything on how to research the background of a company you might be interested in."

As a nutrition sciences major, she said will be participating in internships at area hospitals next year, and she hopes she'll get a better feel for the job market then.

Christopher Larochelle of Bedford, a senior graduating in May from the University of New Hampshire Manchester, said that the internship program and faculty have been "very helpful" in assisting him in taking the next step after graduation, but formal career outreach from either the college system or employers has been virtually nonexistent in his experience.

"Academic advisers just talk about the next set of classes or whether I'm going on to graduate school, but not job stuff," said Larochelle, an English major pursuing a career in journalism. "I was really left on my own."

All of New Hampshire's higher learning institutions have career advising services, but student awareness still may be as much a problem today as it was four years ago when the same issue was identified with the 55 Percent Initiative. For instance, neither Lydstone nor Larochelle specifically asked on their own for career assistance from their schools.

Stay Work Play's Luczko also has found — after talking with students at the many college events she attends — that they are unaware that organizations such as hers and the state's many young professionals groups were open to them as resources for networking and learning about potential employers.

"I don't know why there's that sentiment out there," she said.

Working together

Continuing contact between schools and businesses is critical to developing a prepared workforce, said Jennifer Landon, director of Southern New Hampshire University's career development center.

One of the ways SNHU keeps the lines of communication open is through alumni, she said. "We often have alumni come back and give a discussion on their careers or businesses," said Landon.

She also said SNHU invites employers to campus for events, including free resume reviews and mock interviews.

Another program at SNHU is its Career and Internship Expo, with some events geared specifically toward underclassmen.

"We call it an expo because calling it a 'job fair' gives some students the perception that it's only for seniors graduating and looking for jobs," said Landon.

At Plymouth State University, the senior job fair has been successful, and novel — it is organized by the students themselves.

"This is our third year," said Peter Laufenberg, Plymouth State's business liaison officer and manager of field experience. "The students go through the index of businesses and decide which ones to invite. They create all the banners and marketing."

Like SNHU, career development at Plymouth State also begins in the freshman year.

"We offer a career services program and development courses, which are always very

popular. In the junior year, we promote the importance of internships," said Ruth DeCotis, the associate director of the university's career advising center and careers manager.

Internships and service-learning programs are becoming increasingly popular ways of bringing education and business closer together.

According to "The Great Divide" report, 86 percent of businesses said they had some kind of program integrating work and learning.

"When we go and ask businesses if they will take our interns, they are very welcoming," said Plymouth State's Laufenberg. "That says to me they understand the importance of training."

DeCotis said that Plymouth State's internship framework is so well received by local

businesses, it is often used with students interning from other colleges.

Still, SNHU's Landon concedes there is always room for more communication between college campuses and businesses.

"We're having to train for careers that don't even exist yet," she said. "That's why dialogue between higher education and business is so important, with everything evolving so quickly."

Plymouth State's DeCotis agreed: "It does have to be continuous relationship building. The giving has to occur both ways."

A copy of "Across the Great Divide" is available at corporatevoices.org and civicenterprises.net. **NBR**

Cindy Kibbe can be reached at ckibbe@nhbr.com.



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