

The View from T-Hall: Supporting the Greater Good

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Every time a New Hampshire student earns a UNH degree, the positive impact on that young person's life, on the Granite State and on the world, is nearly impossible to overstate. When you begin to tally up these benefits, it is equally hard to believe that some view public higher education as a luxury item—a nice-enough, although not entirely necessary, expense that is worthy of state support only when there is “extra” money at hand.

Yet that is exactly how public higher education is regarded in our national dialogue these days. The skepticism is especially strong here in New Hampshire, where state support for four-year public higher education hovers at less than 10 percent of UNH's annual operating budget.

New Hampshire is dead last in the country compared with the national average of 51 percent.

For the 80 percent of UNH students who qualify for need-based financial aid, and for the one-third who are the first in their families to attend college, it is critical to keep UNH affordable. In fact, everything our faculty and staff accomplish—from running one of the most cost-efficient universities in New England to inspiring record-breaking private philanthropy— helps keep tuition as low as possible. The partnership of UNH and the state is critical to students and their families. And it is critical to everyone else in the Granite State.

I know how important affordability is, because I was a first-generation student who could attend college only because of the low in-state tuition offered by New York state's public university system. I am forever grateful that citizens and leaders acted on their core belief in the common good of public higher education in those days. They invested wisely in higher education to create tremendous opportunities for their students and decades of robust economic growth for the state.

Now, more than 40 years later, I still cherish that ideal. In fact, I am inspired every day, knowing what today's bright, hard-working students can accomplish when we keep UNH accessible to them, regardless of their family income.

We know, for instance, that four-year college graduates will earn, on average, nearly a million dollars more during their careers than those with only a high school diploma. In addition to providing talent and skills that New Hampshire industries need to succeed, college graduates are also far more likely to contribute positively to society. They vote, volunteer and contribute in their communities. They adopt healthier lifestyles that return financial benefits to all of us. Simply put: We are all better off when higher education is affordable and accessible.

Here at UNH, the talented students we teach and the research we conduct contribute more than \$1.4 billion to the state's economy each year. That is a remarkable return on the state's modest investment. And we can do even more for New Hampshire when we can do more for our students and their families.

Experience bears this out. When the legislature and the governor enabled UNH to freeze in-state tuition two years ago, our enrollments jumped. Last fall, we saw our largest incoming class ever, including a 7 percent increase in New Hampshire students. I still hear frequently from UNH students and their parents just how much the tuition freeze means to them.

I also hear about the importance of college affordability when I travel around the state to high schools, meeting with students, teachers and guidance counselors. Whether I am at Fall Mountain, Nashua North, Spaulding or Manchester West, the number one question is always the same: "How can my family ever afford to pay for college?"

That is a question that keeps me awake at night. While I always answer that we are working as hard as possible to keep tuition low, I wish I could promise them that the state will partner with us to continue the in-state tuition freeze for two more years. Ultimately, that decision lies with our state's elected leaders, who are debating our funding levels even as this magazine goes to press. It is my hope that they, too, see the value of investing in UNH students and families for the greater good of New Hampshire and all of her citizens. ~

See Mark Huddleston's State of the University Address [here](#).

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