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NJ Commission on Higher Education Reviews New Employer Satisfaction Survey

The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education called upon the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University to survey employers regarding their satisfaction with graduates of colleges and universities in New Jersey. Dr. Carl Van Horn, Director and Professor of Public Policy at the Center, provided a preview of survey results at the Commission's meeting on December 17, 2004.

"Meeting workforce needs is an important component of *A Blueprint for Excellence*, New Jersey's Long-Range Plan for Higher Education," said Jeanne Oswald, Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education. "Staying in tune with the needs of employers and preparing graduates to meet workforce demands are important objectives of the plan."

In order to develop baseline data for the Commission regarding employer satisfaction, the Heldrich Center conducted a telephone survey of 402 employers in New Jersey. During the past three years, these employers had hired a graduate of a two-year or four-year college or university in the state. The survey focused on the following two areas:

- Employer views on how well the higher education system in New Jersey is preparing students for careers and the workplace
- Employer views on options to address workforce preparation

"We seek to significantly improve employer satisfaction with the preparedness of college graduates," stated Francis Mertz, Chairman of the Commission. "That will require ongoing communication and collaboration with both public and private sector employers."

Highlights of Results

- One in three employers believes that graduates with associate degrees and graduates with bachelor's degrees from New Jersey colleges and universities are very prepared for employment (31% and 36%, respectively). One in two thinks that they are somewhat prepared (55% and 53%, respectively).
- The majority of employers (83% for two-year colleges and 86% for four-year colleges and universities) believe that the quality of job applicants from New Jersey's colleges and universities has remained steady or improved over the past three years.

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- However, more than half of employers say it is very or somewhat difficult to find well-prepared graduates from two- and four-year colleges, in general (51% and 57%, respectively). This result may suggest that a mismatch exists between the demand for and supply of recent graduates in particular occupations.
- Employers were asked to rate the level of preparedness of graduates in 16 skill areas. Most employers believe that recent associate and bachelor's degree graduates are well prepared in reading, teamwork, knowing how to learn and speaking. Smaller percentages of employers believe that graduates are well prepared in the areas of time management and resource management.
- One in two (52%) employers that had hired a graduate of a four-year college or university believes that the most important function of a four-year college or university is to prepare students for specific careers. Only 25% say it is to provide students with general knowledge and learning skills.
- More than one-third (36%) of employers that hired two-year college graduates say that preparing students for specific careers is the most important function of two-year colleges.
- Finally, employers believe that higher education can be improved by making it more relevant to what happens in the workplace. The majority (69%) of employers say that more experienced-based learning, such as internships, would improve higher education. They also offer support for implementing ideas from business into college curriculums and establishing a faculty loan program so that schools can become more familiar with their companies' skill needs.

The full report of the recent survey will be completed and presented to the Commission in January.

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