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Promoting Excellence for All

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Commission Adopts Update 2005 of Higher Education Plan

The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education today adopted the 2005 update of *A Blueprint for Excellence*, New Jersey's long-range plan for higher education. Update 2005 is the first in a series of annual reports on progress in achieving the objectives of the plan.

"Regular updates of this long-range plan are vital to the state," said Commission Chairman Frank Mertz. "As the rapidly changing knowledge-based environment transforms the economic landscape, the *Blueprint* assumes added importance. There is a compelling need to focus on the pivotal role of higher education in New Jersey's competitiveness and well-being."

The future of the state's economy is tied to workforce quality, employment opportunities in knowledge-based industries, and complex research and technology. Higher education is challenged to prepare people of all backgrounds with increasingly sophisticated skills and to deliver enhanced research to fuel knowledge-based industries. The plan provides a blueprint for bringing together state, private sector, and higher education leaders to strategically address those needs and ensure New Jersey's ongoing economic prosperity.

Fulfilling the promise of this plan for New Jersey involves a new compact between the state and higher education, which calls for both a significant state investment and a measurable return on that investment by institutions. This compact will require increased state support for faculty and facilities, efficient and strategic use of resources, enhanced coordination and collaboration, and targeted initiatives – central elements of the state's *Blueprint* for higher education.

Although accomplishing the *Blueprint's* desired results will require investment, collaboration, and time, progress has already been made in implementing the plan since it was adopted two years ago. Following are key examples of initial points of progress.

- Enrollment in New Jersey's colleges and universities grew by 18,675 between 2002 and 2004, exceeding projections.
- Growth in the number of degrees in some high-demand areas has occurred since 2003, such as nursing (associate level), computer and information sciences (bachelor's level), counseling psychology (master's level), and medical scientists (doctoral level).

- New Jersey institutions increased their federal research funding by 14 percent in 2003 and by 16 percent in 2004.
- Support has increased for the state’s two major student assistance programs, Tuition Aid Grants (TAG) and the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF), and two new programs – NJ STARS and the Social Services Student Loan Redemption Program – have been established.

There are areas of the plan in which progress has not yet been made. For example:

- Capital funding for higher education to enhance quality and increase access by expanding and preserving campuses has not yet been provided. A task force of state, business, and institutional leaders is developing long-term state policy recommendations for capital needs.
- A state policy and methodology for operating support of the public research universities and state colleges and universities has not yet been established. Another task force is working to develop a policy recommendation for support of these 12 institutions.

“Update 2005 emphasizes that state policy and planning, adequate and predictable state funding, and institutional accountability are essential for an excellent and efficient system of higher education,” said Jeanne Oswald, executive director of the Commission. “In states that fortify the intellectual power of their colleges and universities, higher education serves as a catalyst for economic development and the cornerstone of a thriving society.”

Annual updates of the *Blueprint* will (1) monitor progress in achieving the plan’s seven principal objectives and key outcome measures, (2) inform future state investments linked to the objectives, and (3) develop new components to enhance progress toward achieving the overall vision.

Update 2005 is available on the Commission’s website at www.state.nj.us/highereducation.

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