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"As a student government president my main goal was to help students in all their college endeavors. The biggest challenge I have encountered in my interactions with many students at North Shore, a challenge which prevents many Massachusetts residents from pursuing higher education, is the problem of affordability. So in an effort to help these students and many others, I joined PHENOM (Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts).

Working with college students from all over the state on many different issues, PHENOM members spoke with state legislators, held rallies and had marches. PHENOM has helped obtain millions of dollars for Massachusetts higher education. PHENOM is a phenomenal organization and is essential to ensuring a prosperous future for all of us, and our state."

Nick Medico, student
North Shore Community College

Spring/Summer 2009

PHENOMenal NEWS!

Vol. 1 Issue 1

PHENOM: Defying the Conventional Wisdom

Conventional Wisdom tells us:

- * Students care about the short-term cost of attending college and not about the long-term welfare of faculty, staff, or the institution.
- * Faculty and staff care about salaries, benefits, and job security, but only marginally about affordability and access.
- * Students and workers at the flagship campus look down on community colleges.
- * State colleges feel slighted by greater attention paid to UMass.
- * Different groups don't share enough common interests to work together effectively.

And until now, there had never been a higher education advocacy organization that unites all the stakeholders despite the fact that Massachusetts has one of the most poorly funded systems of public higher education in the country. It ranks 46th in the country in per capita spending, provides less and less financial aid each year, and charges students more to attend than most states.

PHENOM, launched in late 2006 in the wake of optimism surrounding Deval Patrick's election as governor, set out to disprove the conventional wisdom. Frustrated by years of divided and ineffective advocacy, a small number of UMass Amherst faculty and student called a "Higher Education Summit", wrote a paper outlining problems and suggesting solutions for Massachusetts public higher education, and invited the Governor-elect.

When he agreed to attend, the presumptuously-named Summit lived up to its name. It was attended by over 600 people, including key legislators and leaders from the higher education system. The commitment and foundation for an ongoing statewide organization was laid in breakout sessions after the Governor's speech.

PHENOM began with several postulates:

- Each sector of the system will do better only to the extent that the entire system does better.

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Fighting for Need-Based Financial Aid

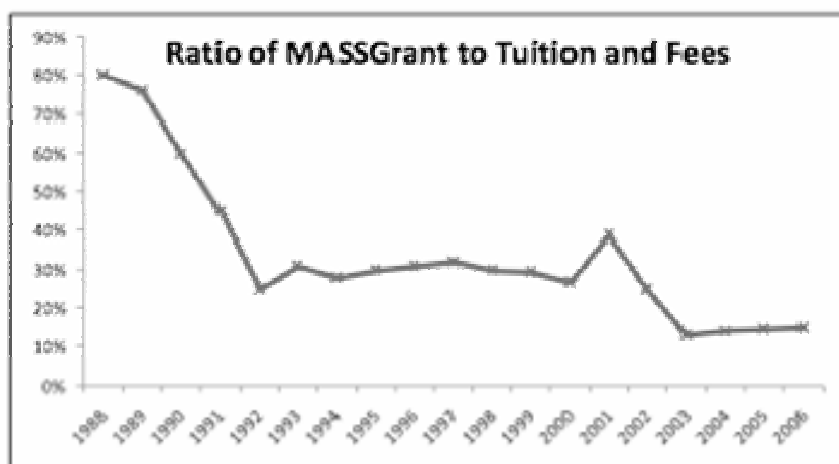
In 2008, PHENOM led a very successful campaign that took a small step toward reversing the historic decline in funding for MASSGrant. The Legislature voted to add \$3 million to MASSGrant's funding, allowing an additional 3,000 student to access the program.

MASSGrant has been our state's main program of need-based financial aid. It provides assistance to undergraduate students with a low Expected Family Contributions (EFC) who are enrolled full-time at public or private colleges.

Building off last year's success, PHENOM worked with State Representative **Sean Garballey** of Arlington to file an amendment to increase funding for MASSGrant by \$14.1 million over last year, as recommended by the Department of Higher Education.

PHENOM thanks him and co-sponsors **Humason, Walsh, Bowles, Lantigua, Keenan, Richardson, Fennell, Grant and Speliotis.**

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(Conventional Wisdom from front page)

- The issues of affordability, funding, staffing, access, and democracy are intertwined, and a movement that focuses on one at the expense of the others is needlessly weak.
- Only by mobilizing a large grassroots movement will we be able to get politicians to change the decades-long pattern of under-funding. The numbers of people who attend, work at, or have graduated from public colleges, together with their immediate families, is an enormous potential political force.
- While it is important to fight for incremental improvements each year, we also need much more dramatic and fundamental changes. To inspire people and to win the kind of public higher education system our state needs, day-to-day advocacy work has to be blended with education and an exciting ever-present long-term vision.

In 2 ½ short years, PHENOM has become a respected and effective voice in the statewide debates and fights surrounding public higher education in Massachusetts. We owe our success to the hundreds of students, staff, faculty, and community members who have defied the conventional wisdom, worked and organized together, and created a unique coalition for public higher education.

* * *

(Financial Aid from front page)

Mobilizing our constituents by phone and email, we had a partial victory when the House restored \$10 million of the \$14 million cut by the House Ways and Means Committee. As we go to press, we are working with Senators **Galluccio** and **O'Leary** and other allies in the Senate to protect this critical program's funding with an earmark.

We expanded our advocacy this year to include part-time students, including single mothers and full-time wage earners who need aid in order to attend college. Working with the Crittenton Women's Union, we have been advocating for funding for the Educational Rewards Program in addition to MASSGrant.

Welcome to the first issue of **PHENOMenal News**. We plan to publish this newsletter three times a year -- Spring/Summer, Fall, and Winter -- to coincide with the school calendar year.

We welcome your thoughts, suggestions, articles or ideas for articles.

Contributors to this issue include:

Michael Curtis
Ravi Khanna
Ruthie Liberman
Nick Medico
Cristy Casado Tondeur
Ferd Wulkan

We are extremely grateful to the Massachusetts Teachers Association for printing this issue of PHENOMenal News.

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PHENOM Organizing Statewide Access Conference

Cristy Casado Tondeur

PHENOM's Access Committee is currently planning a statewide conference dedicated to addressing barriers to education. We will bring together students, faculty, access program staff and community members to address how racism, classism and privilege are institutionalized within higher education, in order to determine how PHENOM can best organize for greater accessibility for all students.

We intend to make sure the conference format is reflective of the expressed needs of participants. We encourage participants to bring a variety of discussion formats and creative projects to the conference including, but not limited to, workshops, roundtables, audio-visual media and documentaries. We are in the process of contacting statewide access programs and organizations in order to compile goals and future agendas for PHENOM to be discussed during the conference. Please contact us with your ideas!

We are actively looking for others interested in helping to organize this first-ever PHENOM Access Conference. For further information and inquiries please email Cristy Tondeur and Vanessa Martinez at phenomaccesscommittee@gmail.com.

(Economic Independence from page 6)

selves and their families. CWU provides housing, education and training, and mobility mentoring to low income women in the Boston area, and is actively engaged in research and advocacy at the state level to break down barriers to self-sufficiency.

The steady erosion of funding for public higher education and financial aid has made it increasingly unaffordable for low-skilled working adults to obtain the education and training needed to support their families. In fact, workers in the lowest 20% income level need to spend 65% of their income to pay for community college costs in Massachusetts. This is one of the reasons our state has received an "F" in affordability from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

(See report card at http://measuringup2008.highereducation.org/print/state_reports/short/MA.pdf).

CWU values PHENOM's leadership in organizing a movement for the reinvestment required to create the trained and educated workforce needed for economic growth. Together we are working to maintain and expand the Educational Rewards Grant, the state's only financial aid program available to low-income students enrolled in college less than half time or participating in a non-degree program. Eligible students receive up to \$3,000 per academic year, of which 30% may be used for childcare or other living expenses.

Please Support PHENOM

All of the phenomenal things highlighted in this first issue of PHENOMenal News were accomplished with very limited resources. PHENOM's half-time Organizing Director and student interns are paid by the Massachusetts Society of Professors (MSP), for which we are extremely grateful. Other unions and student organizations, together with membership dues, have provided the other financial resources allowing PHENOM to function. PHENOM is appreciated and valued by higher education advocates all across the state and is poised to have a much deeper impact in the coming years. But, we need to grow our organizing and organizational capacity. We urgently need your support. Please consider making a generous donation. You can sign up for membership or make a donation on-line by visiting www.phenomonline.org and clicking on the *Become a Member* or *Donate* buttons.

If you would like to learn more about PHENOM, or how you can join this growing movement in support of public higher education, please visit www.phenomonline.org or contact Ferd Wulkan, Organizing Director, or Ravi Khanna, Administrative Director, by email at massphenomonline@gmail.com or by phone at 413-577-4121.

Your support allows PHENOM to advocate for affordable, accessible, high quality and well-funded institutions of public higher education. Become a supporting donor of PHENOM or a member on-line by visiting www.phenomonline.org and clicking on the "Become a Member" or "Donate" button.

Enclosed is my supporting contribution of: ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ \$250 ___ \$500 ___ Other

Enclosed are my Student Membership dues: ___ \$1 ___ \$5 ___ \$10 ___ \$25 ___ Other
(you set your own dues level)

Enclosed are my Membership dues: ___ \$10 ___ \$25 ___ \$50 ___ \$100 ___ Other
(you set your own dues level)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (H) _____ Phone (Cell) _____ Email _____

Affiliation _____

PHENOM is a 501c(3) non-profit organization. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law. Please cut this form out and mail it with your contribution to:

PHENOM, 121 Hampshire House, Amherst, MA 01003

Free Community College

Michael Curtis

Free public higher education is a long-term goal of PHENOM's. The reason: higher education is no longer a luxury — it is a necessity. The Massachusetts Department of Higher Education estimates that over 60% of new jobs in the Commonwealth require at least an associate's degree. What a high school diploma was in decades past is an associate's degree today. PHENOM has thus since its inception embraced the idea of adopting a system of free community college to address the problems of college accessibility and affordability immediately, and to take a major step towards a system of free higher education.

The political climate for free community college became more favorable in June 2008 when Governor Patrick released his "Education Action Agenda." It states: "*Our long-term goal is to establish a public education system that guarantees access to free community college or the equivalent postsecondary or vocational education.*" The Governor intended to recommend making community college free for current and aspiring early education and care educators, as well as for parents or guardians of K-12 children who were eligible for reduced lunch. But he included no funding for this in his FY2010 budget proposal.

PHENOM recognized that grassroots action was needed to pressure politicians to take concrete steps towards this vision. Thus in September a free community college working group was formed. Its first step was to collectively research and write a public policy report to be publicly disseminated, much like PHENOM's October 2007 publication *The Affordability Crisis in Massachusetts Public Higher Education*. Both can be found at www.phenomonline.org.

By February, the group had completed ***Making Free Community College a Reality***, a working paper which discusses the importance of community colleges, the effects of high college costs, the specifics of the Massachusetts community college system, the cost of implementing free community college (roughly \$150 million), and partial models that have been tried elsewhere. The report concludes by suggesting a rollout plan, whereby three community colleges would initially be made free. Using a pilot program such as this allows a controlled experiment and phases in the costs. The effects of making the three colleges no-cost could be observed: How many more students enroll? What other support structures are needed? If such a rollout experienced problems, they could be diagnosed and addressed before making the program universal. Such a rollout would hopefully increase political support for making the other 12 community colleges free.

The working paper is meant to be discussed, critiqued, modified and used to stimulate debate about free community college. In March, UMass students **Ethan Plofsky** and **Mike Curtis**, and PHENOM Executive Committee member **Max Page** presented the paper to the Massachusetts Community College Council (MCCC is the union for faculty and professional staff at the 15 community colleges). The MCCC offered useful feedback, especially concerning the numerous practical implications that must be considered if community college were to become free.

On April 29, the working paper was presented at Holyoke Community College. Three of the authors discussed the ideas with 35

people, the majority of whom were students. Many were enthusiastic and some were skeptical. Some said they viewed higher education as a right and believed that community college should enjoy the



College presidents **Ira Rubenzahl** (STCC) and **Evan Dobelle** (Westfield State) join PHENOM researchers **Mike Curtis** and **Dan Clawson** discussing Free Community College at the Higher Ed Summit

same protections as the public K-12 system. Some concerns revolved around the impact that free community college would have on financial aid, federal funding, space, faculty, and advising.

PHENOM is eager to make presentations and have discussions elsewhere — on campuses and in the community. Invite us by calling 413-577-4121 or emailing massphenom@gmail.com

"In a global economy, where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity. It is a prerequisite. Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma, and yet just over half of our citizens have that level of education. This is a prescription for economic decline, because we know the countries that out-teach us today will out-compete us tomorrow."

President Obama

Where Have We Been This Year?

PHENOM gets around! Here are just a few of the places we've been this year:

- ♦ At the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education's Student Leadership Conference -- leading a successful workshop on Coalition Building
- ♦ At Mt. Wachusett Community College -- running an entertaining and informative game show about public higher education.
- ♦ At the Massachusetts School Counselors Association -- discussing possible collaboration around issues of access to public higher education.
- ♦ At Higher Education Commissioner Freeland's inauguration -- urging appropriate use of federal stimulus funds.
- ♦ At the State House -- hosting a reception for legislators and hoping to organize a legislative Higher Education Caucus.
- ♦ At the ballot box -- registering and organizing students to defeat Question 1, the elimination of the state income tax, which would have had a devastating effect, especially on poor and working class families.
- ♦ At the Democratic Party's state convention -- urging delegates to make public higher education a long-term priority for Massachusetts.
- ♦ On the phone -- over a 1,000 people made calls to their legislators and the Governor in February with a few simple messages: Higher education must get its fair share of the federal stimulus funds and they should be used to minimize the need for layoffs and fee increases! Help is urgently needed for our campus operating budgets and for need-based financial aid!
- ♦ In the streets -- *Now More than Ever — Invest in Public Higher Education!* This call echoed around the State House April 8 when PHENOM organized the largest and most energetic rally for public higher education seen in years. Following a march, hundreds of PHENOM members visited the offices of every Senator and Representative to pick up questionnaires, to advocate for increased funding for higher education, and to urge them to raise the revenues that would make this possible.
- ♦ On TV -- The April 8 *Now More than Ever* rally got great coverage on several TV stations, and Greenfield Cable TV did a full half-hour show about PHENOM.
- ♦ At a different campus each month -- PHENOM held statewide meetings this year at Bristol Community College, Mt. Wachusett Community College, Quinsigamond Community College, UMass Boston, UMass Lowell, Worcester State, Framingham State, and Westfield State. Invite us to your campus!



Stacy Williams, Bunker Hill Community College student and **Beth Babcock**, Crittenton Women's Union President at April 8 rally

Economic Independence through Higher Education

Ruthie Liberman

The majority of jobs that pay family-sustaining wages in Massachusetts require some form of education or training beyond a high school diploma. Yet there are still 1.4 million people aged 25-54, *nearly half the state's workforce*, without at least an associate degree.

Crittenton Women's Union (CWU) is proud of our strong partnership with PHENOM to advocate for increased support for access to public higher education in Massachusetts. CWU works to transform the course of low-income women's lives so that they can attain economic independence and create better futures for them-

(continued on page 7)



People came from all over the state to rally on the Boston Common



Noah Berger from the Massachusetts Policy Center helping PHENOMonline with the Massachusetts budget crisis



Why should students pay for a history of tax cuts in our state?

PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION RALLY AND DAY OF ACTION
 Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
 UMass Amherst
 Worcester College
 Bristol College
 North Shore Community College
 Framingham State College
 Quinsigamond CC
 UMass Dartmouth
 Massachusetts Maritime Academy
 STCC
 Mass Bay CC
 Berkshire CC
 Greenfield CC

INCREASE CAMPUS BUDGETS!

PRO PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Wed April 8th/10am

PHENOMonline



Economic recovery requires investment in our colleges!



Has the PHENOMobile v



We're angry about the steady privatization of "public" higher ed



Students, faculty, staff and community — united!



Students from **Salem State College** at one of PHENOM's earlier advocacy days at the State House