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NM Higher Education Department Approves Higher Learning Center Proposal

Santa Fe, NM, Dec. 18, 2009 — A proposal by Santa Fe Community College to create expanded partnerships between the community college and the state’s universities to enable local students to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees has won approval from the New Mexico Higher Education Department.

With the approval from the New Mexico Higher Education Department, SFCC can continue to present its idea of creating a facility for the purpose of fostering connections between the state’s four-year schools and the community college. The facility, called a Higher Learning Center, would allow local students to attend two years of lower-division classes through SFCC, before transferring, on site, to a university-run bachelor’s completion program.

“I’m pleased to see the idea of a Higher Learning Center gaining momentum,” said SFCC President Sheila Ortego. “I appreciate the thoroughness with which the Higher Education Department and its review committee examined our proposal, and look forward to further work and collaboration with partners around the state.”

Higher Education Department Cabinet Secretary Dr. Viola Florez expressed support for the partnership initiative. “The opportunity to offer higher education access to students in Santa Fe and regional communities is exciting and visionary, and enhances the economic future of the state of New Mexico,” she said.

University of New Mexico Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Suzanne Ortega agrees. “If we are going to increase the number of college graduates in New Mexico, we must find new ways to make higher education accessible and affordable in our local communities,” she said, adding: “We at UNM see the Higher Learning Center proposed for Santa Fe as an excellent way to help build the economy and grow an educated workforce for New Mexico. We look forward to collaborating with Santa Fe Community College to make the center a reality.”

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Eastern New Mexico University is another state institution interested in a possible partnership in the Higher Learning Center. “I think this is a wonderful opportunity for the people of Santa Fe,” said ENMU President Steven Gamble. “The Higher Learning Center will bring opportunities for bachelor’s and master’s degrees that do not currently exist for the community. I do not know of a better, more cost effective way to provide access to higher education to people in Santa Fe.”

One of the purposes of the Higher Learning Center is to bring existing university degree programs together in an environment where resources can be shared in order to better serve the needs of local students. “Students will be the beneficiaries of the Higher Learning Center concept,” Dr. Ortego said. “In one facility they will be able to attend lower-division courses at the low community college rate, before enrolling for the final two years of a bachelor’s degree in a university program. Over the course of a four-year education, students could expect to save thousands of dollars, while the university providers save costs of overhead.”

“I believe housing multiple college and university programs in one location provides students and returning adults unprecedented educational offerings that will help lead to increased job opportunities,” she said. “We look forward to embarking on a new opportunity to provide accessible, affordable bachelor’s and master’s degree programs in Santa Fe.”

In addition to UNM and ENMU, institutional supporters of the Higher Learning Center include: Northern New Mexico College; Institute of American Indian Arts; New Mexico Highlands University; New Mexico State University; Laureate Education, Inc.; New Mexico Tech and Western New Mexico.

About Santa Fe Community College

For more than 25 years, Santa Fe Community College has been the gateway to success for individuals and the community by providing affordable, high quality educational programs that serve the social, cultural, technological and economic needs of a diverse community. The college serves more than 14,500 students per year in its credit, noncredit and adult basic education programs. For further information, visit www.sfccnm.edu or call (505) 428-1000.

About The New Mexico Higher Education Department

The New Mexico Higher Education Department develops and coordinates relevant policies, programs and services that provide advocacy and support equitable access to college to enable all New Mexicans to succeed in reaching their full potential through education.

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