MnSCU: Retooling Minnesota for Recovery

Valerie Ong
Education Fellow
Minnesota 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When out-of-work Minnesotans needed access to education, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU) was there — in 47 communities across 54 campuses in every corner of the state. During the economic downturn, MnSCU played a critical role in helping displaced Minnesota workers quickly retrain and upgrade their skills to compete for jobs in new industries or attain higher-paying, more stable careers. MnSCU’s affordability and accessibility were especially important for non-traditional\(^1\) students looking to reenter or advance in the workplace.

MnSCU’s enrollment was steadily increasing before the 2008-2009 recession; still, it saw a 16 percent total increase in credit-seeking students from FY2006 to FY2010. By FY2010, MnSCU’s credit-seeking head count rose by 38,315 to 276,977 since FY2006, with nearly a seven percent increase from FY2009 to FY2010.

The 25-34 age category had the highest head count increase in credit-seeking students, with an additional 15,629 students from FY2006 to FY2010, bringing the group’s total head count to 59,464. Students in this age category comprised 21.7 percent of MnSCU’s total credit-seeking enrollment in FY2010.

Typically, non-traditional students have diverse economic backgrounds. Some are young professionals displaced by the recession who are seeking to upgrade their skills. Others are students returning to college to finish a degree program. Many are first-time students or working parents.

Showing MnSCU’s importance to non-traditional students, credit-seeking enrollment for those 55 and older comprised the second largest percentage growth at 32 percent. While the actual student head counts were much lower than other groups, these 1,162 additional students pushed the total 55+ head count to 4,789.

By FY2010, non-traditional students were graduating with degrees in four main fields: health care, liberal arts, business, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) respectively.

\(^1\) For the purposes of this report, a non-traditional student is defined as any student age 25 or older. The student may or may not have had former degrees or higher education certification. The student may take courses for credit or non-credit.
Thirty-three percent of non-traditional students graduated from health programs in FY2010. One correlation shows many of these students attended institutions with the highest overall non-traditional enrollment rates. They include Metropolitan State University, Dakota County Technical College, Minnesota West Community and Technical College, and South Central College.

These graduation proportions reflect the growing demand for well-trained, highly skilled health care workers, particularly as baby boomers age generating greater health care needs over the next few decades. It is critical that state policymakers invest in these medical training programs, especially in Greater Minnesota communities where skill supply has been traditionally low.

While MnSCU plays a significant role in providing reliable and accessible education resources to train a quickly adaptable, efficient workforce that will help grow Minnesota’s economy, state policymakers are retreating from their obligations to invest in higher education. This is undermining MnSCU’s key strengths: affordability and accessibility.

Previous Minnesota 2020 (MN2020) analysis examining all publicly funded higher education, including the University of Minnesota, showed a correlation between declining state investment and sharp tuition increases, nearly 60 percent when adjusted for inflation. This has resulted in a “division between higher education funding from the state general fund and tuition that has gone from about a 70-30 split [with 70 from the state] in FY2001 to a nearly 50-50 split in 2010,” according to MN2020’s prior analysis.

MnSCU is a vital part of the overall infrastructure for many rural communities and Greater Minnesota’s regional centers, supplying area businesses with trained workers who already live and are invested in these communities.

Not fully reflected in the total credit-seeking enrolment numbers are more than 150,000 who take credit and/or non-credit coursework through MnSCU to become more productive employees or upgrade their job skills. This endeavor includes MnSCU partnerships with more than 6,000 employers who use college or university faculty for job-site training or who make worker subsidies available for on-campus courses.

From high school graduates to young professionals to long-time workers, MnSCU has been there for Minnesotans, at many stages of life and career, to help students increase their intellectual capital. In order to sustain this academic infrastructure, policymakers must remain committed to Minnesota’s tradition of investing in education at all levels.
KEY FINDINGS

- MnSCU has been a critical asset in educating and retraining Minnesota workers displaced by economic downturns, maintaining a steady enrollment increase from FY2006 to FY2010, especially among non-traditional students.
- Even with years of hands-on work experiences, non-traditional students are returning to institutions of higher education to gain academic credentials to become more marketable in a highly competitive workforce.
- Students in the 25-34 age group had the highest enrollment increase among non-traditional students since FY2006, with a 15,629 head count increase.
- While non-traditional students graduated from a variety of programs in FY2010, namely the liberal arts (18 percent), business (15 percent), and STEM (10 percent), the majority of students (33 percent) graduated from health programs.
- Non-traditional students select MnSCU colleges and universities for three key reasons: location, affordability, and flexibility. MnSCU operates 54 campuses in 47 communities across the state and offers significantly lower tuition rates compared to private alternatives.
- MnSCU funding cuts will threaten Minnesota’s ability to maintain and grow a highly skilled workforce.
- MnSCU is a resource for more than 6,000 employers to send their workers directly to the state’s community and technical colleges for job-related training or provide on-site training or classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- State policymakers must maintain sufficient investments in MnSCU programs.
- MnSCU must continue expanding its health care educational opportunities, especially in Greater Minnesota.
- MnSCU must continue and enhance its outreach and support for non-traditional students.
- MnSCU must increase outreach to employers seeking assistance with workforce and on-the-job training.
INTRODUCTION

Generations ago Minnesota policymakers had the foresight to establish affordable, publicly funded community and technical colleges, and universities throughout the state, setting up a vital academic infrastructure accessible to all Minnesotans. Through subsequent policymakers’ stewardship, these higher education intuitions grew, adapted to changing economies, and became powerful contributors to Minnesota’s economic strength. In 1991, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law merging Minnesota’s community and technical colleges and state universities into one system known as Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). This took effect in 1995.

MnSCU currently serves approximately 277,000 students in credit-based courses and 157,000 students in non-credit courses. More than 100,000 are non-traditional, credit-seeking students. MnSCU’s 54 campuses in 47 communities across the state help meet the unique needs of many non-traditional students who have full or part time jobs and hold various family responsibilities.

MnSCU also offers a variety of degree and certificate options that allow non-traditional students the flexibility of getting academic credentials that do not required a traditional four-year bachelor’s degree commitment. Non-traditional students can also pursue their education at multiple colleges and universities within the system and can often transfer credits easily. Furthermore, most of MnSCU’s 32 institutions provide a more affordable alternative to private schools and even the University of Minnesota.

MnSCU’s long-term sustainability requires prudent and robust state investments and support, which are now in decline because of no new tax policy.

This report examines several major areas, including:

1) MnSCU’s five-year (FY2006 to FY2010) shift in age demographics;

2) Which colleges and universities serve the largest proportion of non-traditional students;

3) Which professional and career training fields are in highest demand;

4) Minnesota policy recommendations for public higher education.

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2 MnSCU’s official institutional count is 32. However, data used in this report include 37 colleges and universities. MnSCU has combined all five Northeast Higher Education District colleges into one intuition because these colleges have one president overseeing all of them. Similarly, Bemidji State University and Northwest Technical College in Bemidji share one president. MnSCU officially counts intuitions by the number of corresponding presidents.
Minnesota State Colleges & Universities

Courtesy of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT

MnSCU is aging slightly, especially in the 25-34 category, as shown by Table 1 below. At the same time the proportion of non-traditional students has risen, there has been a proportional decrease in traditional students. In FY2006, students in the 25-34 age category comprised 18.7 percent of MnSCU’s known credit-seeking students. By FY2010, that category increased to 21.7 percent, bringing its total head count to 59,646. The other age category that saw its percentage rise comprised those 55 or older, which increased by 0.2 percent. The percentage of known head count for the 45-54 age category remained steady over the period. However, the 35-44 group decreased 0.6 percent in the percentage of known head count to 9.1 percent from FY2006 to FY2010. This can be attributed to an eight percent decline in Minnesota’s population in the same age category and the same time period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Head Count</th>
<th>% of Known Head Count</th>
<th>Head Count</th>
<th>% of Known Head Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 or less</td>
<td>44,056</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>50,768</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>49,863</td>
<td>21.30%</td>
<td>54,705</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
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<td>21-24</td>
<td>56,560</td>
<td>24.20%</td>
<td>64,001</td>
<td>23.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>43,835</td>
<td>18.70%</td>
<td>59,464</td>
<td>21.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>22,680</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
<td>24,887</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>13,390</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>15,550</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>3,627</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
<td>4,789</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4,651</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>238,662</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>276,977</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

MnSCU’s system-wide, non-traditional student head count, as a proportion of overall students, increased by 3.8 percent from FY2006 to FY2010. In contrast, MnSCU’s system-wide traditional student head count as a proportion of overall students had decreased by 2.5 percent over the same time period.

For the purposes of this report, a traditional student is defined as those younger than 25 years old. Course-load and full or part time status were not considered in indentifying traditional students. Note that MnSCU data provided for this report consolidates all students 18 and younger into one statistical category, some of the students identified in the traditional category may be high school students taking college coursework.
Non-traditional Students’ Choice, FY2010

Non-traditional student growth occurred at the state’s community and technical colleges. In FY2006, non-traditional students comprised 39.1 percent of credit-seeking enrollment at MnSCU’s community and technical colleges. By FY2010, that percentage had increased by 3.1 percent, to 42.2 percent.

Universities also aged slightly in their proportion of total known head count, although much of this growth occurred in the 25-34 category and mainly at Metropolitan State University. The categories comprising age 35-54 lost students and declined in their proportion of head count by 1.1 percent at the universities. Still, the proportion of 55+ students grew by 0.1 percent, thanks mostly to a large gain at Metropolitan State University.

| TABLE 2 |
| MNSCU AGE BREAKDOWN |
| Percent of total Enrollment during FY2010 |
| Traditional Students Ages <18 - 24 | Non-traditional Students Ages 25 + |
| MnSCU Universities | 71% | 29% |
| MnSCU Colleges | 57.9% | 42.2% |
| Total MnSCU System | 61% | 38.2% |

In FY2010, non-traditional students comprised 29 percent of MnSCU’s total head count at universities. However, community and technical colleges attracted many more non-traditional students with 42.2 percent, as shown in Table 2. Metropolitan State University was the exception to this trend, with 73.2 percent of non-traditional students comprising its total population.

Age Categories

25-34

Metropolitan State University plays a vital role in educating and retraining non-traditional students, especially those in the 25-34 age category. By FY2010, this category accounted for 41.6 percent of the intuition’s credit-seeking head count, compared to 17.6 percent at universities and 21.7 percent system wide.

Among the community and technical colleges, Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) and Hennepin Technical College (Hennepin) have the highest proportion of students in the 25-34 age category at 33.2 percent and 29.4 percent, respectively in FY2010. The total proportion of 25-34 year olds at the state’s community and technical colleges was 23.5 percent in FY2010. Bemidji’s Northwest Technical College led all Greater Minnesota schools in the category with 29
percent of students age 25-34. Other Greater Minnesota schools with a high proportion of 25-34 year-olds include Hibbing Community College and Southeast Technical College (Winona and Redwing).

35-44

At 18.3 percent of its total head count in FY2010, Metropolitan State University again lead all MnSCU intuitions in its proportion of 35-44 year olds, well above state universities’ overall 6.5 percent total head count. However, the state’s six other universities were below the proportion in this age category. Dakota County Technical College (16.2 percent) and Hennepin Technical College (15.1 percent) were the highest among the college and tech schools in their proportion of those 35-44. The percentage of total head count for 35-44 year olds at the state’s community colleges and tech schools was 10.2 percent and 9.1 system wide in FY2010. Minnesota West Community and Technical College, with campuses in the southwest corner of the state and South Central College, with North Mankato and Faribault campuses, were among the critical Greater Minnesota colleges in serving this age category.

45-54

While a metropolitan area school had the highest proportion of students in the 45-54 age category, this age group comprised significant proportions of total head count at several schools in Greater Minnesota. In FY2010, South Central College (11.1 percent) and Minnesota West Community and Technical College (10.9 percent) were not too far behind Dakota County Technical College (12.8 percent) in their total proportion of students 45-54. Riverland Community College (9.4 percent), with campuses in Austin, Albert Lea, and Owatonna has also been a critical Greater Minnesota link for students 45-54. The percentage of total head count for credit-seeking 45-54 year olds at the state’s community colleges and tech schools was 6.5 percent and 5.7 percent system wide.

Among the state’s universities, Metropolitan State again played a critical role in educating the 45-54 population, with the age group having comprised nearly 11 percent of its head count. This is compared to the university total percentage, excluding Metro, of 3.2 percent.

55+

For students 55 and older, Greater Minnesota schools serve a critical educational role. At 5.4 percent in FY2010, Riverland Community College had the highest proportional credit-seeking head count of all state institutions. South Central College’s 55 plus population was 5.1 percent, with Minnesota West Community and Technical College at 4.8 percent in FY2010. The percentage of total head count for credit-seeking students 55 and older is 2 percent at colleges and 1.7 percent system wide, for a total population of just under 4,800.
**EXPLAINING THE TRENDS**

**In the Metro Area**

Metropolitan State University attracted the largest number of students between the ages of 25 to 44, with almost twice MnSCU’s percentage of total institutional head count for this age group by FY2010. Among the state’s seven universities, Metro State had the largest five-year percentage increase for students 25-34. Metro State had a 22.2 percent increase compared to a 15.7 percent average increase for universities overall in the same age group from FY2006 to FY2010. (41.6 percent for the 25-34 category compared to the 21.7 percent of total institutional head count; 18.3 percent for the 35-44 category compared to the 9.1 percent of total institutional head count).

Cynthia DeVore, Director of Institutional Research for Metropolitan State University explains that the university has always “catered” to non-traditional students, with the average student age at 32.

DeVore describes several factors that make the university particularly attractive to non-traditional students: Metropolitan State University is a 100 percent commuter campus with no on-campus housing and is working adult friendly.

Metro State focuses on helping non-traditional students complete their degrees, with 56 percent of students transferring in from 10 two-year MnSCU colleges in the metro area, explains Robert Heuermann, Vice President for University Advancement.

The university is flexible in terms of coursework scheduling and allows skilled workers without college credentials to test out of subjects that they may have mastered on the job. For example, a non-traditional student without a college degree or past coursework may have started out working in data entry, then moved on to bookkeeping at an accounting firm. A non-traditional student may have years of experience in his or her field, which could qualify that student to test out of introductory courses in that field, explains DeVore.

Non-traditional students might also feel more comfortable in a setting where there is diversity in age, ethnicity, race and religion, observes DeVore.
Hennepin Technical College serves a crucial role training workers in Minnesota’s hands-on industries, such as construction, mechanics, manufacturing, landscaping and culinary arts, according to the school’s website. It also has an extensive law enforcement program. By FY2010, Hennepin Technical College actually had MnSCU’s highest overall head count in the 45-54 age category, with 926. It also has the third largest proportion of non-traditional students between the ages of 25 and 44, well above the average percentage of total institutional head count for this age category.

Carole Carlson, Executive Director of Institutional Advancement for the college believes non-traditional students chose Hennepin to upgrade their skill. The school’s flexibility allows a worker to take classes without interrupting his or her work schedule.

Dakota County Technical College has the largest proportion of non-traditional students between the ages of 45 and 54, with double the percentage of total institutional head count for this age group (12.8 percent compared to 5.7 percent of total institutional head count). It also has the second largest proportion of non-traditional students between the ages of 35 to 44, well above the percentage of total institutional head count, and trailing closely behind Metropolitan State University (16.2 percent compared to 9.1 percent of total institutional head count).

Carrie Schneider, Director of Institutional Research and Planning for Dakota County Technical College points to the college’s strong customized training program as a key reason for why non-traditional students are attracted to the school. Dakota County Technical College offers mainly two-year programs and shorter length programs which accommodate the needs of non-traditional students who are looking for additional or specific training rather than long-term programs or full time enrollment.

Schneider believes that the increase in percentage of total institutional head count at Dakota Community Technical College can be attributed to the college’s 2007-2010 strategic plans to increase enrollment of students between the ages of 25 to 44. The plan focuses on improving customized training opportunities for non-traditional students.
In Greater Minnesota

MnSCU’s Greater Minnesota campuses serve a vital role to countryside communities, some of which have seen major employment shifts and the need for new and upgraded skill sets. The state’s publicly-funded educational system has a widespread, but necessary, infrastructure, serving more than 40 Greater Minnesota communities at 26 schools. While every institution provides its students tremendous benefit, the following sections highlight some of the schools serving the highest proportions of non-traditional students.

Southwest Minnesota

Minnesota West Community and Technical College spreads across five campuses providing people in the state’s southwest corner convenient, nearby access to an institution of higher education. It offers a variety of technical and academic courses and degrees, from accounting and agriculture to small business management and wind energy technology, according to its website.

By FY2010, it had among the state’s highest proportions of non-traditional students, with 47.6 percent of the head count older than 25 compared to the state community and technical college’s total percentage of head count of 42.2 percent. In FY2010, it accounted for the state’s third largest proportion of non-traditional students 45 years old and above. (10.9 percent for age category 45-54 compared to 6.5 percent of total head count among colleges; 4.8 percent for age category 55 and over compared to 2 percent of total head count colleges.)

When manufacturing operations had shut down, especially in Pipestone, Minnesota West Community and Technical College helped train and retrain displaced jobseekers and workers looking for more career stability, according to Crystal Strouth, the schools’ registrar. Minnesota West’s customized training department made outreach efforts, holding brown bag sessions to help answer questions. During this recruitment and enrollment period, college staff noticed many incoming students did not have basic college skills and took simple yet helpful steps to make sure that there was enough developmental course sections open, allowing non-traditional students to be better prepared before taking college level courses.
South Central Minnesota

With campuses in North Mankato and Faribault, South Central College’s name is apt for the area of Minnesota it serves. From FY2006 to FY2010, its total head count had grown at a rapid 29.5 percent to 6,247. That expansion is well ahead of Minnesota’s 20.3 percent college and tech school average and nearly double MnSCU’s system wide growth rate, over the last five years.

At 16.2 percent of the total head count, South Central shares the largest proportion of students 45 and older with Dakota Tech (11.1 percent for age category 45-54 compared to the 6.5 percent of total institutional head count among colleges; 5.1 percent for age category 55 and over compared to the 2.0 percent of total institutional head count among colleges).

Convenient locations, wide variety of program options and small class size, make South Central attractive to non-traditional students, says Dena Colemer, the school’s research, planning and grants director. Many South Central College students generally live within 60 miles of either campus. Non-traditional students are particularly interested in the farm business management and health programs.

Northwest Minnesota

Minnesota State Community and Technical College, with campuses spread through the northwest, plays an important role in helping keep this sparsely populated area of the state supplied with nearby workers. While this school kept pace with Minnesota’s overall five-year growth (FY2006 – FY2010), among community and technical colleges, it saw a huge jump in the youngest proportion of non-traditional students. In the 25-34 age group, Minnesota State Community and Technical College grew by 62.2 percent, making it one of the state’s fastest growing schools in the age group. The age category saw 35.6 percent system wide growth and 43.6 percent growth at colleges and tech schools.

Bemidji’s Northwest Technical College also experienced significant growth among 25-34 year olds. While its total head count is significantly lower, Northwest Tech increased from a head count of 302 to 734, roughly 143 percent in that age category. A similar growth trend continued at Northwest Tech across all age categories from FY2006 to FY2010, with a 74 percent increase, bringing the college’s total head count to 2,543.
Northeast and the Range

The Northeast Higher Education District—which MnSCU considers one institution in its official 32 institution count—actually has five colleges serving mainly Iron Range towns, with Rainy River at International Falls. This region was hit particularly hard by the economic downturn in 2008 and 2009. The institution’s two largest colleges, Hibbing and Mesabi, had a 15 percent combined growth rate (FY2006 – FY2010), just a notch off the system wide 16 percent increase for all ages. However, in the rapidly increasing 25-34 age category, Hibbing experienced a 62 percent growth rate, well ahead of the 43.6 percent average growth for community and technical colleges.
THE CASE FOR MNSCU: THE ECONOMIC RECESSION’S IMPACT

Dewey Pihlman, Lake Superior College

At age 70, Dewey Pihlman decided he would enroll at Duluth’s Lake Superior College. Pihlman owned and operated his own machine company for 30 years. In 2002, he lost many of his contracts, mainly because of outsourcing, he says. Pihlman continued losing customers as the economy hit the decade’s first recession in 2001. He closed his company and stored all of his equipment. In the meantime, Pihlman worked as a building contractor consultant. However, the 2008-2009 recession hit and Pihlman lost another job and the company he spent a lifetime building.

With Cook County Higher Education Services’ support and guidance, Pihlman recently started taking classes at Lake Superior College for Integrated Manufacturing Technology to acquire computer design skills he felt he was lacking. While Pihlman has had years of experience in tooling and molding, he believes that he needed to fill an educational gap that would allow him to become more marketable in the future. Veterans Administration funding helps Pihlman pay for his education.

Dawn Kuehl, Minnesota West Community and Technical College - Pipestone Campus

Dawn Kuehl worked for 22 years as a purchasing representative at the US Marine plant, a boat manufacturing facility in Pipestone, MN. Due to the economic recession, the company closed the plant in 2008 to move the production out of the country. Kuehl lost her job four months later.

Kuehl was eligible for two years of free college courses and unemployment benefits under the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), a program run by the U.S. Department of Labor which provides several services and benefits to employees who have lost their jobs due to shifts of production outside the United States.

Kuehl took the opportunity and enrolled in a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program at Minnesota West Community and Technical College’s Pipestone campus.

Kuehl chose the nursing program for several reasons, especially long-term job security. She believes that it is unlikely that her job in the health field will be outsourced, like her former employment.
PERTINENT PROGRAMS

The top three programs from which non-traditional students graduated are health (33 percent), liberal arts (18 percent), and business (15 percent).

Figure 10: Percent of Graduates by Program/Major Grouping & Age FY 2010

Health

Kuehl’s story is a familiar post-recession Minnesota narrative—from the prairie to the metro through the Range. Laid off workers, those underemployed or people seeking more career security have turned to their local community colleges and universities for training in the expanding health field.

A large number of non-traditional students are in health programs. Nursing degrees are in such high demand that there is a waiting list for the bachelors of science in nursing program at Metropolitan State University, explains Robert Heuermann, Vice President for University Advancement.

Non-traditional students are drawn to health programs for several reasons. Michele Miller, another Minnesota West Community and Technical College student, decided to enroll in the college’s Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program so she would “never be without a paycheck.” Miller believes that the health field will always be in demand. Those in registered nurse (RN) programs
share similar thoughts about job security. In many Greater Minnesota towns, health services jobs also tend to pay better than the average wage.

After 27 years as an engineer, Darrell Martin decided to enroll in a RN program at Normandale Community College. He hopes this decision to pursue a career in nursing will provide him with the flexibility to secure employment locally and internationally.

Previous Minnesota 2020 analysis has found that Minnesota needs skilled, dedicated health care professionals, especially in hard-to-find areas of primary care and rural care, according to a 2009 Best Practices report. Health care needs are expected to grow all over Minnesota as the baby boomer generation ages.

Steve Hine, Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Director for Labor Market Information believes the trend of non-traditional students enrolling into health programs will continue. There will not be a rapid enough influx of newly trained traditional college students as the more experienced workers (many from the baby boomer generation) leave the market. Hine, therefore, predicts that existing workers, even those already in the medical field, must advance their skills by returning to college or universities for more training.

According to DEED, the top projected labor market growth areas for 2009 to 2019 are in the health field, which include personalized and home care aides and RNs. Together, they are projected to create some 51,000 new jobs over the given time period.

Given this context, it is important that MnSCU health programs are of high quality. One way this is achieved is through college and university partnerships with clinical agencies. Jennifer Eccles, Director of Nursing for the School of Nursing at Anoka Ramsey Community College explains that it is important for nursing students to gain practical experience and guidance through clinical partnerships. As someone who worked in the hospital setting as well, Eccles believes that hospital and clinical agencies are happy to have students and glad to help them learn. However, Eccles explains that many clinical facilities are overwhelmed with clinical placement requests. It is therefore necessary that both parties continue to work together, especially to align schedules so that partnerships can be further developed.

**Liberal Arts**

The relatively high percent of graduates from liberal arts programs at MnSCU in FY2010 may be due to the fact that the liberal arts encompass a wide range of subjects, from chemistry to philosophy, explains Linda Kohl, MnSCU’s Associate Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs.

Many students and employers view liberal arts as the cornerstone of a college education, including some high tech leaders, according to a 2009 MnSCU workforce report. The report summarizes MnSCU’s visits with more than 350 private-sector Minnesota companies. It found that while highly skilled workers—not general laborers—are needed, employees must also possess certain types of business and social skills, which a liberal arts education tends to help build. A few companies surveyed hire highly skilled engineers. However, their engineers’ knowledge of the product is
only part of the businesses’ needs. Most of these companies are built on relationships, trust and an engineers’ ability to empathize with customers and troubleshoot their problems. Such skills tend to be taught in psychology or sociology courses rather than in math, physics and chemistry.

Many Minnesota-based firms, including those in the tech sector, conduct business with overseas companies. Therefore, there is a high demand for global awareness, language skills, and understanding different learning styles, among a long list of others.

The 2009 MnSCU report indicates that 62 percent of the companies interviewed were in Greater Minnesota, demonstrating the need for MnSCU to maintain and grow its presence outside the metro area.

**Business**

Skills employers highlighted in the MnSCU report also include techniques usually taught in general business or marketing classes, such as team management, sales techniques and customer service. Once again, it demonstrates how critical it is for the state’s colleges and universities to have strong business programs, especially for non-traditional students who might have many years of hands-on experience, but need stronger business skills to advance in the workplace.

Roger Wedin, Director of Policy and Education for the Duluth Chamber of Commerce, notes that the business world is shifting from an environment focused on routine processes to one where all workers need to be innovative, have some basic team-building skills and collaborate to be more productive. Hine, from DEED, explains that the need for multi-skilled, versatile workers is attracting more non-traditional students.

Anticipating this type of demand, Dakota County Technical College’s Apple Valley location added a new business program in 2003.

With approximately 80,000 farms in Minnesota and one in five Minnesota workers with agriculture related jobs, agriculture continues to be a larger business affecting all levels of the state’s economy. MnSCU has recognized this and offers many non-traditional students a way to increase their agribusiness skills. South Central College and Minnesota West Community and Technical College are among the higher education institutions with a large number of non-traditional students attending their farm business management programs. MnSCU instructors hold “educational gatherings,” meeting farmers in their fields or at a coffee shop. According to Jim Boerboom, deputy commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, the program is a “systematic, long-term educational process to teach farmers how to make decisions and reach their goals.”
THE CASE FOR MNSCU

Non-traditional students chose to enroll at MnSCU for three key reasons: location, affordability, and flexibility.

Location

MnSCU has 54 campuses in 47 communities; they include seven universities and a combination of community and technical colleges, which means most Minnesota students don’t have to travel very far to find a high quality educational opportunity. Non-traditional students who have established family households or hold full or part time jobs can continue with their roles without having to relocate or having to commute over long distances to attend a MnSCU campus at a convenient location.

Affordability

MnSCU is still a great low-cost higher education option for Minnesota students even though tuition and fees continue to rise, due mainly to state budget cuts. MnSCU community and technical colleges average 2010-2011 school year tuition was about $5,000. MnSCU’s universities cost a little more at approximately $6,500. The University of Minnesota’s 2010-2011 tuition is roughly $9,800, still a reasonable price for higher education. Meanwhile, most of Minnesota’s private schools’ tuitions exceed $20,000, although scholarship and grant money usually help minimize costs.

Tuition and fees have continually risen, but state funding in real dollars and adjusted for inflation have not kept up. State funding enables MnSCU to keep its tuition affordable so that all students have access to a higher education and workforce training. In FY2006, the state paid $1.06 for every dollar a student paid in tuition. In contrast, the state paid only 78 cents for every $1 paid in tuition.

Previous Minnesota 2020 analysis, examining all publicly funded higher education showed the correlation between declining state investment and a sharp tuition rise. This has resulted in division between higher education funding from the state general fund and tuition that has gone from about a 70-30 split in 2001 [with the state covering 70 percent] to a nearly 50-50 split in 2010. This has resulted in a 60 percent tuition spike during the last decade after adjusting for inflation.
MnSCU leaders have and continue to try their best to protect students from shrinking state investment in higher education. This means that tuition growth does not fully reflect the entirety of state funding cuts.

These cuts in education funding will limit accesses to Minnesotans looking to upgrade their skills and advance in the job market. Financial circumstances may be particularly difficult for non-traditional students who have lost their jobs due to the recession or are struggling to sustain their households. Furthermore, this declining investment is hurting more than just students; it is negatively impacting the economy. MnSCU estimates that for every dollar of net state appropriation, $10.87 return to the state’s economy.

**Flexibility**

MnSCU’s 3,900 educational programs comprise a wide variety of degrees (associate, certificate, bachelor’s, diploma, graduate and post-graduate) as well as credited and non-credited courses.

All MnSCU two year community and technical colleges have open admissions policies, which allow anyone with a high school diploma or GED to enroll. This policy can help to ease the enrollment process, which can be discouraging to non-traditional students who have been out of school or an academic setting for several years.

Ryan Yunkers, Assistant Director for Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Student Union and Activities for Leadership has a third of his time allocated to non-traditional student efforts. Yunkers believes that the university is successfully welcoming non-traditional students because it has a physical space specifically for non-traditional student use as well as the resources and programmatic support from the university.
**CONCLUSION**

Minnesota’s economic strength is dependent on a strong academic infrastructure. Highly-skilled, flexible, and innovative workers will help Minnesota companies compete with firms closer to east and west coasts where many competitive companies are situated, overseas, and in other high-skilled labor markets. On-going state investment in higher education, not continued cuts, is necessary to sustain and grow this adaptable, multi-skilled labor force.

MnSCU plays an especially important role for our current labor force in down economies, offering a convenient and affordable platform for workers to retrain and upgrade their skills. While, non-traditional students have always attended MnSCU to improve their standing in the workforce, some institutions have provided support to greater pools of people in their communities the past few years.

Even as the economy rebounds, there remains a need for a strong and wide reaching MnSCU. As technology continues to change and develop, workers in some fields may require annual retraining to operate advancing machinery or software. New industries are developing and growing, requiring new types of skills. The health field must adapt to two major trends that will require more workers and uncommon health care skills: an aging baby boomer population and IT training for online medical recordkeeping.

MnSCU’s relationship with more than 6,000 employers statewide also makes it an excellent state asset to train and retrain future workforces, ensuring a flowing cycle of skilled human capital. Locations throughout Minnesota, affordable tuition, and flexibility make MnSCU ideal in meeting the educational needs of non-traditional students where they are in life, literally and metaphorically.

Unlike many higher education institutions that educate other states’ workforces, 80 percent of MnSCU graduates stay in Minnesota to work or further their studies. Therefore, it’s imperative that these students attend well-funded institutions that attract highly qualified faculty and staff. Investing in MnSCU will return dividends to Minnesota’s future economy.
## APPENDIX A

### ALL INSTITUTION TREND REPORT: END OF YEAR HEAD COUNT, CREDIT STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>FY 2006</th>
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<th>FY 2009</th>
<th>FY 2010</th>
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APPENDIX B — LIST OF MNSCU INSTITUTIONS BY REGION

Northwest

Bemidji
Bemidji State University
Northwest Technical College
Brainerd
Central Lakes College
Detroit Lakes
Minnesota State Community & Technical College
East Grand Forks
Northland Community & Technical College
Fergus Falls
Minnesota State Community & Technical College
Moorhead
Minnesota State Community & Technical College
Minnesota State University Moorhead
Staples
Central Lakes College
Thief River Falls
Northland Community & Technical College
Wadena
Minnesota State Community & Technical College

Northeast

Cloquet
Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College
Duluth
Lake Superior College
Ely
Vermilion Community College (Northeast Higher Education District)
Eveleth
Mesabi Range Community & Technical College (Northeast Higher Education District)
Grand Rapids
Itasca Community College (Northeast Higher Education District)
Hibbing
Hibbing Community College (Northeast Higher Education District)
International Falls
Rainy River Community College (Northeast Higher Education District)
Virginia
Mesabi Range Community & Technical College (Northeast Higher Education District)

Central

Alexandria
Alexandria Technical & Community College
Hutchinson
Ridgewater College
Pine City
Pine Technical College
St. Cloud
St. Cloud Technical & Community College
St. Cloud State University
Willmar
Ridgewater College

Metro

Anoka
Anoka Technical College
Bloomington
Normandale Community College
Brooklyn Park
North Hennepin Community College
Hennepin Technical College
Cambridge
Anoka-Ramsey Community College
Coon Rapids
Anoka-Ramsey Community College
Eden Prairie
Hennepin Technical College
Inver Grove Heights
Inver Hills Community College
Minneapolis
Metropolitan State University
Minneapolis Community & Technical College
Rosemount
Dakota County Technical College
St. Paul
Metropolitan State University
Saint Paul College
White Bear Lake
Century College

Southwest

Canby
Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Granite Falls
Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Jackson
Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Marshall
Southwest Minnesota State University
Pipestone
Minnesota West Community & Technical College
Worthington
Minnesota West Community & Technical College

Southeast

Albert Lea
Riverland Community College
Austin
Riverland Community College
Faribault
South Central College
Mankato
Minnesota State University, Mankato
South Central College
Owatonna
Riverland Community College
Red Wing
Minnesota State College - Southeast Technical
Rochester
Rochester Community and Technical College
Winona State University
Winona
Minnesota State College - Southeast Technical
Winona State University
REFERENCES


Wedin, R. ((2011, April 28). Telephone interview.


Minnesota 2020 is a progressive, non-partisan think tank, focused on what really matters.

2324 University Avenue West, Suite 204, Saint Paul, MN 55114
www.mn2020.org