



BRIEF

Southern New Hampshire U makes bid for Pennsylvania's community college graduates

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Dive Brief:

- Students at Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges will be able to transfer up to 90 credits to Southern New Hampshire University and complete a bachelor's degree online through a new agreement between the institutions signed Wednesday.
- The online giant will charge students \$288 per credit hour, a 10% discount from Southern New Hampshire's rate and lower than what they would pay at nearly any other public college in the state.
- The deal comes as competition for online students heats up, and as many of Pennsylvania's public four-year colleges grapple with enrollment declines.

Dive Insight:

Articulation agreements are common in higher ed, but this is the first such agreement between all of the state's community colleges and a four-year institution.

Elizabeth Bolden, president and CEO of the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges (PCCC), told Education Dive the agreement isn't intended to drive students toward a single institution but rather to give them "one more option" to complete their bachelor's degrees.

"This is really about providing a pathway for students that have barriers that don't allow them to take advantage of our current articulation agreements," she said. The colleges together have more than 5,000 articulation agreements with other educational institutions, which Bolden's office noted tend to be program-specific.

Bolden said the commission has ongoing talks with four-year colleges in the state about expanding transfer pathways, and hopes "they can end up with a similarly exciting agreement."

The deal could increase competition for online students who live in the state, The Philadelphia Inquirer reported. Currently, the online-only Penn State World Campus charges students between \$576 and \$617 per credit for its undergraduate classes.

It could also push Pennsylvania's public four-year colleges to lower costs for community college graduates, the publication noted.

Last year, Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (Passhe) asked the state legislature for \$100 million spread out over five years in order to help its 14 institutions expand online and share services.

The system's enrollment has dropped by 20% in the past decade, according to local media reports. Some particularly hard-hit colleges — such as Cheyney and Mansfield universities — now have fewer than half the students they had in 2010.

Although it's too soon to know if more Pennsylvania students will opt to complete their bachelor's degrees at Southern New Hampshire, the online university is already a "popular transfer destination" for them, according to a PCCC press release. Close to 500 students transferred to Southern New Hampshire from a Pennsylvania community college in the 2018-19 academic year.

However, of the roughly 30,000 students who transfer from the PCCC system to a four-year college each year, 85% select one in the state.

Southern New Hampshire is not exploring statewide partnerships with other community colleges at this time, a university spokesperson told Education Dive in an email.

But the arrangement with PCCC schools is similar to one Southern New Hampshire struck with the Kentucky Community and Technical College System last year. It, too, gives graduates from that system a 10% discount for online tuition and lets them transfer up to 90 credits toward a bachelor's degree.

It also highlights efforts by online universities to bring in new students by offering them transfer pathways and tuition discounts.

Degree-seeking students at Western Governors University, for example, are eligible for up to \$2,000 in scholarships if they graduated from one of its partner community colleges.

And last year, Colorado State University System's Global Campus (CSU-Global) teamed up with Kenzie Academy, an Indianapolis-based career training school, to create a transfer pathway. Under the agreement, students can apply credits earned at Kenzie toward a bachelor's degree at CSU-Global and receive a 10% discount on tuition.