

## News

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### Where For-Profit and Nonprofit Meet

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The line between for-profit and nonprofit education continues to blur in Massachusetts.

Earlier this year, the Princeton Review signed [a deal with Bristol Community College](#), in Fall River, to offer accelerated health science degree programs to students willing to pay a higher tuition. These programs are offered in hybrid fashion, combining online coursework with in-person lab time. They are taught by Bristol faculty members but delivered by the Princeton Review, which pays for the expensive lab equipment and new teaching facilities. Otherwise, the only difference between these and traditional health science programs at Bristol is that the Princeton Review-sponsored programs can be completed in about half the time, but only if students fork over \$100 more per credit hour -- \$246 instead of \$146. This tuition differential is then given to the Princeton Review.

After months of planning and negotiations with concerned faculty, the accelerated classes in medical information and coding, massage therapy and general health science began last week at Bristol. While officials there defend their decision to team up with the Princeton Review -- arguing that they have found a way to expand access for their students in tough economic times without surrendering their academic integrity -- administrators at other institutions around the state are considering whether they should enter into similar agreements with the for-profit company. Faculty groups, however, remained concerned about Princeton Review's plans to expand within Massachusetts, arguing that those plans threaten the traditional public mission of community colleges.

#### Considering Collaboration

This summer, the Princeton Review approached Quinsigamond Community College, in Worcester, about entering into a health science partnership similar to the one with Bristol. As in that one, students would pay a higher tuition for an accelerated program.

Gail Carberry, president at Quinsigamond, noted at a [Board of Trustees meeting in July](#) that the partnership is "still in the early exploratory stage" and is "not without controversy." She added that once college officials had the opportunity to "discuss the concept" and meet with relevant officials at the Princeton Review and Bristol, she would return to the trustees with a recommendation. This has yet to be done.

Upon hearing of the idea at the board meeting, the college's union representatives expressed concern about any partnership with the Princeton Review. Andria Schwartz, physics professor and president of the Quinsigamond Community College Professional Association -- a local union chapter affiliated with the National Education Association -- wrote in a [letter to faculty last month](#) that she had heard two main concerns: a "philosophical aversion to a for-profit model of education" and the "retention of ownership of course material." For instance, in the Princeton Review's deal with Bristol, the company gains ownership over all course materials after paying faculty members a stipend for creation of these materials.

In an interview with *Inside Higher Ed*, Schwartz further explained the faculty opposition to any partnership with the for-profit company.

"It's the union's opinion that it's never a good idea to go looking into these types of partnerships," Schwartz said. "Our president might see this as a good source of revenue during tough economic times. But the worry I have is, if we show the state legislature that we can find funding for expansion of our programs elsewhere, then they would see that and say they don't need to bother funding us at all. Also, there's a lot of concern among community college faculty that partnering with Princeton Review is against the philosophy of community college, against the philosophy of public higher education. Charging that extra tuition differential is all about making money for their shareholders."

Schwartz is encouraging Quinsigamond's administration, instead, to consider partnerships with nonprofit entities to expand health science capacity, such as working with a local hospital or medical school. So far, though, union faculty members have had no voice in the college's discussions of a potential partnership with Princeton Review, she said.

Dale Allen, Quinsigamond's vice president for community engagement, confirmed the lack of union involvement so far but cautioned that the college's administration had only had cursory discussions about the partnership's viability. He added that if the conversation proceeds beyond that to issues of curriculum, faculty voices would be included.

As for the college's immediate interest in the Princeton Review's offer, Allen noted it was mostly because of ballooning enrollment and concern about crowded facilities. Quinsigamond's enrollment has grown 49 percent in five years. Allen also noted that the college has been considering expanding its health science programs in some way for at least two years, but lacked the funding to do so.

"If there's a private partner that would provide increased access for our students and provide new facilities ... we would be very interested in that conversation," said Allen, explicitly noting that the college's administration had no upfront aversion to working with a for-profit entity. "As long as we're doing it for the greater good."

Though Allen admitted he was aware of the controversial nature of such a partnership, he said the college was interested in at least gathering some more information about how the deal has played out so far at Bristol.

"We want to gather the facts, first and foremost, and present the pros and cons in a way so that we can understand what they are," Allen said. "We agreed that once this was up and running at Bristol we'd get down there and see how it's working."

### **Defending the Deal**

After hammering out a [37-page contract with Princeton Review](#) and negotiating a [three-year agreement with the state's faculty union](#), Bristol Community College was finally able to offer accelerated delivery of its health science programs this semester.

Sally Cameron, Bristol spokeswoman, noted that about 100 students have started classes in three degree programs so far. Many of them, she said, are students who would not otherwise have been able to enroll in the college's traditional face-to-face programs.

For instance, Carin Doyle is a 32-year-old single mother of two who works as an assistant at an alcohol and drug rehab center in the area. She is studying to earn a certificate in medical coding. Eventually, she hopes to pursue an associate degree in medical technology so she can help her rehab center with digital conversion of its medical files.

"If it weren't for this option, I wouldn't have been able to take any classes here at the college," Doyle said. "With a job and kids, I just couldn't go to school normally for four or five days a week. Being online, this makes the classes flexible. But also, I like being able to go in and have my lab in person every now and then to interact with my professor and classmates."

Doyle, who did stints at two online for-profit institutions, Katharine Gibbs College and Ashford University, without earning a credential, said she probably would have considered yet another online offering if not for Bristol's new program. She also said that between financial aid and some assistance from her parents, she has been able to cover the program's higher tuition.

Without support from the Princeton Review, Cameron said, the college would not have had the resources to expand its health science program in this way, potentially leaving working students like Doyle with fewer options to further their educations. Ultimately, Cameron believes that Bristol has found a way to work with a for-profit entity in a way that serves students while upholding the college's traditional academic mission.

"Princeton Review has not interfered with any of our academic decisions," said Cameron, noting that, for example, admission criteria for the new accelerated programs are identical to those for Bristol's traditional offerings. "I hope we've found a way to make this work. ... This is not a for-profit looking to come in and hijack our academic integrity. They want this to be a program that works to address work force needs in various communities, which is what community colleges also want."

Cameron, who calls herself "community college born and bred," admitted that a sour financial situation had encouraged Bristol's consideration of this deal. Still, she defended it.

"That's been the biggest challenge for us, showing that we can lead our state in making this happen and show it's possible to maintain academic integrity and maintain our soul as an institution," Cameron said. "We're in a new world. There's just not enough state money to do what you're needing to do. It's to the private sector's benefit to have well-trained nurses. I, myself, would prefer that these students not have to pay extra, but to make expensive projects run, that's what we need to do."

### **Concerns Remain**

Princeton Review officials could not be reached for comment. Statewide faculty union representatives, however, question the partnership at Bristol and have significant concerns about the expansion of Princeton Review-sponsored programs to other Massachusetts community colleges.

"I'm still not crazy about the idea," said Joe LeBlanc, president of the Massachusetts Community College Council, which is affiliated with the NEA. "In the purist world, the state would give us all the aid we required and we would have all full-time tenured faculty. But after meeting with Bristol faculty in a big group -- not saying that there weren't some folks who were opposed to the concept -- it appeared that instructors in the allied health fields were on board. So, we tried to negotiate a [mutual memorandum of agreement] to protect them in the best way that we could."

Though LeBlanc and the statewide union finally agreed to a deal, he still has some reservations about it. For instance, he said he would prefer it if full-time faculty members could count any courses taught in this Princeton Review model as part of their regular load. Under the current deal, they cannot. Also, like the faculty union at Quinsigamond, he does not like that Bristol faculty lose ownership of their course materials when they teach a Princeton Review-sponsored course.

Still, LeBlanc noted that the current deal with the faculty union only lasts three years, at which point it can be either renewed or discontinued, and that the union will have a seat at the table when it comes to reviewing the program. Also, he said the deal reached by the statewide union only concerns Bristol. If other community colleges around the state wish to enter into similar deals with the Princeton Review, there will have to be similar union negotiations for permission to be granted.

"If [the Quinsigamond union chapter], for example, wants to dig in its heels on this issue, the Princeton Review won't have a program at the college," said LeBlanc, noting that he was not sure whether the partnerships had any possibility of working elsewhere in the state. "If there wasn't broad-based support for it and they couldn't find folks to teach the courses, then they'd pass it up and take away the idea entirely. Right now, we just have to wait and see what happens."

— **David Moltz**

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