

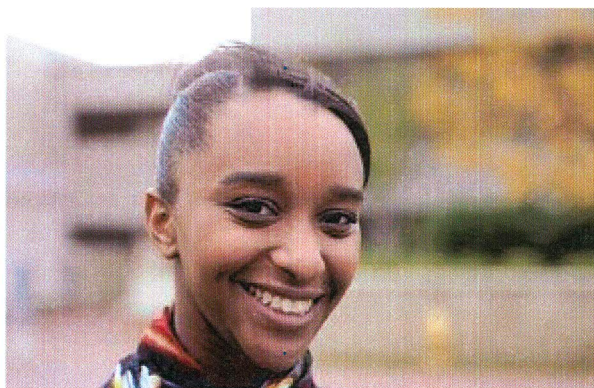
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### 4-year schools seek community-college recruits

Increasingly, four-year colleges are setting their sights on the growing talent pool at community colleges, as those schools have become attractive, less-expensive options for students during the economic downturn. More students are using two-year schools to bolster their credentials — and statistics show they are more likely to transfer to four-year programs.

By Joe Burris

The Baltimore Sun



BALTIMORE — When Luke Fisher of Westminster, Md., graduated from high school five years ago, he had doubts that he could excel at a four-year school. He turned down an offer to attend Towson University, opting for Carroll Community College.

Fisher would become editor of the campus newspaper and a peer mentor for first-year college students. He is set to graduate this spring with an associate degree and plans then to pursue his bachelor's degree. He's found a couple of area schools — including the University of Maryland and Hood College — that appear particularly eager to have him.

"Their transfer advisers went above and beyond trying to get me to visit their campuses," Fisher said.

He's confident such attention will lead to acceptance — and he's not alone. Increasingly, four-year colleges are setting their sights on the growing talent pool at community colleges, as those schools have become attractive, less-expensive options for students during the economic downturn.

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Nationally, community-college enrollment has increased by more than 20 percent in the past three years, according to the American Association of Community Colleges.

Students who have attended two-year institutions say their experiences have defied expectations about college life.

"Most of my friends, more than 30, go to community colleges. I never would have thought that coming out of high school," said Howard Community College student Quinn Stewart, of Baltimore, who will transfer to Towson after graduating this fall.

Stewart considered a West Coast arts college while in high school but decided to enroll at Howard CC as an international-studies major while taking math and science courses that she needed. She plans to continue her major at Towson.

School officials have eased the way by strengthening agreements on transferring credits from two- to four-year programs.

"There are more students going to community colleges, and we are now accepting more of those students," said Freeman Hrabowski, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. He and other four-year-college officials say their schools are offering more financial assistance to community-college students — particularly those who excel in two-year programs.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County also offers discounts to community-college graduates.

"The students who are best have completed their (Associate of Arts) degree," Hrabowski said. "They have a sense of completion. They understand a great deal about college-level teaching and responsibilities of college students, and they are typically quite mature."

Samantha Solovieff, of Annapolis, is slated to graduate from Anne Arundel Community College in December. She is waiting to learn if she's been accepted to a four-year school.

The former student-association president has her sights on the University of Maryland, College Park. She says she came away from meetings with representatives from that school believing they were impressed with her leadership experience.

"I definitely feel wanted at Maryland; I pretty much feel like I'm expected to get in," Solovieff said. "There's no question of it, because of how much they've been involved with (AACC). I'm not bragging or anything, but I feel like as an institution they want me, and that's a nice feeling to have."

Local community colleges say more four-year schools are sending representatives to their transfer days, at which students are given information and help moving from one school to the next.

Sixty institutions attended a recent transfer day at Howard Community College.

Dorothy Plantz, the school's interim director of admission and advising, said that while four-year universities once sent a single representative to such events, many now are sending representatives from each of their schools.

Some students say representatives from four-year schools now are more visible on campus year round.

"I see a representative at least three times a week," said Harford Community College student Nick Greives. "They're in our student center at the very top floor, so it's a very high-traffic area. Towson's always here. I've seen two branches from UMUC, Salisbury. They're just excited to have our students with them because they know that we're ready to go."

Former Howard CC student Sarah Blake of Columbia transferred recently to Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa. She said she considered schools in the Washington area, but Dickinson offered her \$46,000 in scholarships, enabling her to attend the school at around the same price as she paid at Howard CC.

"All of my friends are already piling on the debt and have loans from the bank, but I'm paying for college out of pocket, basically," Blake said.

Dickinson President William Durden said the school recently formed partnerships with several community colleges, including Howard, and is working with the students while they are still at the two-year institution to make the transition easier. He said he's invited community-college students to his home for dinners, where he's introduced them to Dickinson faculty members who also graduated from two-year schools.

"It's adding to the diversity of perspective in our environments," Durden said. While four-year students will "always dominate" Dickinson's enrollment numbers, he said, the growing visibility and achievement of community college could prompt higher-education officials to develop new alternatives to the traditional four-year school.

"What if there are institutions in the future that say, 'We're just going to do the last two years?'" Durden asked. "How do we contribute to the national puzzlement about how do we afford higher ed?"

"That process can elicit ideas that might be put out there to change American education."