

March 2017

## Panel: Creative Partnering with Community Colleges - Handout: Three Plus One Equals Affordable NJ Higher Education (A. Houshmand)

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### Recommended Citation

(2017) "Panel: Creative Partnering with Community Colleges - Handout: Three Plus One Equals Affordable NJ Higher Education (A. Houshmand)," *Journal of Collective Bargaining in the Academy*. Vol. 0, Article 42. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58188/1941-8043.1729>  
Available at: <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/jcba/vol0/iss12/42>

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## Three plus one equals affordable N.J. higher education | Opinion

By Ali A. Houshmand | South Jersey Times Guest Columnist | Posted on November 27, 2016 at 8:05 AM

What we need is creativity. What we need is collaboration. What we need is continued commitment to provide the best education possible -- the best affordable education possible -- for New Jersey college students.

The New Jersey College Affordability Study Commission, of which I was a member, recently issued a report with wide-ranging suggestions to address the cost of college. State Sens. Stephen Sweeney and Sandra Cunningham used that report, in part, to craft 10 bills, each with the goal of enabling more middle-class and low-income families to send their children to college. The Senate Higher Education Committee approved those bills earlier this month, and its Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee will evaluate them in December.

The bills propose many solutions, but one in particular, the 3+1 degree program, has garnered significant attention.

As the president of the four-year institution that introduced 3+1 programs to our state, I'd like to provide some clarity about Rowan University's program.

Rowan University, Rowan College at Gloucester County and Rowan College at Burlington County recently entered into unique agreements that keep each institution independent while improving college pathways at lower costs for many New Jersey students. Because of these close relationships, we are mutually committed to each other's success. This led us to develop creative new solutions, such as 3+1 programs.

Students enrolled in the 3+1 program complete their associate degree at either community college. In their third year, they take Rowan University-approved courses taught by university-approved faculty -- but

at the community colleges, at community college prices. The fourth year comprises courses taught by university faculty on the Rowan University campus.

Students will benefit in many ways:

-- The majors offered are in key subject areas where we see some of the greatest needs, such as nursing, law and justice, and education.

-- The first- and second-year classes teach the same information as their equivalent courses at the university. The curriculum is aligned, so that students can move into their third year better equipped to complete their bachelor's degree than if they simply had transferred after earning associate degrees.

-- Community college instructors who teach the third-year courses hold the same credentials as adjuncts who teach at four-year institutions across the state. In many cases, they come with a strong industry background as well as an educational one.

-- Students earn a bachelor's degree at roughly one-half the cost, \$25,000, versus \$48,000 for a four-year Rowan University commuter student.

-- Underutilized class space at community colleges is better used, helping Rowan University address its need for more space, avoid costly construction and reduce pressure for more state funding.

The 3+1 program is especially important in South Jersey, which has approximately one four-year seat for every 100 residents, compared to North Jersey, with one for every 30 residents. Increasing the number of college graduates improves the job market and the overall economy.

As the programs and process mature, we will work with our community college partners and local industries to develop specific work

force-related degrees to respond to the shortage of skilled workers in our region and state.

### **New thinking is needed**

Higher education historically has been resistant to change, a great fan of the status quo. We can afford that no longer. Students can afford that no longer. New Jersey can afford that no longer.

Our state invests \$150,000 to \$200,000 per student in K-12 education, then watches that investment potentially disappear when 30,000-plus students leave New Jersey annually for college because of a lack of capacity or affordability. State institutions, such as Rowan University have an obligation to maximize that investment.

Public higher education also cannot depend on public funding to solve all its woes. State government should continue to underwrite a much larger portion of public higher education costs, but long gone are the days when we can hold students hostage because of lack of state funding.

Rowan takes seriously New Jersey's investment and faith in it, most notably now that it is a state-designated research university. It takes seriously the issue of quality as reflected in the heightened quality of its faculty and student body.

Most community college students start there because they can't afford a four-year college or need more academic preparation. When they work hard and prove themselves academically, they should have the same opportunity to gain a baccalaureate degree as those with greater financial capability. State universities owe that chance to our residents.

*Ali A. Houshmand, Ph.D., is the president of Rowan University.*