



Eastern Connecticut State University

# NEWS

October 18, 2007

**For Immediate Release**

Contact: Dwight Bachman, Public Relations Officer  
(860) 465-5114 or [bachman@easternct.edu](mailto:bachman@easternct.edu)

Edward Osborn, Director of University Relations  
(860) 465-5043 or [osborne@easternct.edu](mailto:osborne@easternct.edu)

## **Eastern Connecticut State University Wins Grant to Increase Graduates from Underrepresented Populations**

*Two of Connecticut's four state colleges to be part of multi-year, regional initiative  
aimed at promoting success of underrepresented students*

**Willimantic, Conn.** – Eastern Connecticut State University has been named a recipient of a \$100,000 grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation to participate in the foundation's Project Compass, a program designed to help increase the number of young people from underrepresented populations who graduate with four-year degrees. One of six universities chosen, Eastern will be awarded an initial grant of \$100,000 to support a year of planning and capacity building.

“We are thrilled to have been awarded this Project Compass planning grant,” said Eastern President Elsa M. Nuñez. “The generosity and vision of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation in making this grant is much appreciated. We will use these funds to support initiatives in our new Strategic Plan that are designed to improve the retention and graduation rates of underrepresented students, including the development of a comprehensive, stage-based advising program for all Eastern students.”

The initiative will serve students from various populations who are currently underrepresented on New England college campuses -- from first-generation immigrant students in Connecticut to Native American populations in northern Maine, from urban students of color

to rural low-income learners. The colleges will work to identify challenges to academic success for these populations in order to help students persist and graduate.

At Eastern, the project team will develop a multivariate statistical model to refine information about its identified cohort of underserved students (low-income, minority and first-generation undergraduates). Using focus groups, the team will then collect and analyze new data about these students' needs to develop a targeted, comprehensive support services delivery strategy to help increase retention and graduation rates.

The initiative is being launched at a time when college retention is a major issue in higher education, especially for low-income students and students of color, who are the fastest-growing segments of New England's population. Project Compass will support innovative institutional programs and strategies that strive to eliminate achievement gaps and significantly increase academic success, retention and graduation rates for minority and low-income undergraduate students.

“With Project Compass, we’re continuing the foundation’s longstanding commitment to college success for underserved students,” said Nellie Mae Education Foundation President and CEO Nicholas Donohue. “We’re excited to work with Eastern Connecticut State University and hope that, in doing so, we can help inspire and nurture the type of bold thinking around postsecondary education that will be necessary if we want to ensure that the majority of all learners acquire the skills needed to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

The new initiative will be administrated by the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. It will create a learning community of colleges and universities that will measurably improve academic outcomes for underrepresented students, while at the same time change institutional policies and practices to sustain and expand those efforts.

“NERCHE looks forward to working with these six campuses to shape institutional responses that increase the retention and academic success of underrepresented students,” said John Saltmarsh, director of NERCHE. “The foundation’s investment in Project Compass is critically important for exploring and creating effective models for institutional change.”

Five other public colleges from around New England have also been chosen to join Eastern in the foundation’s new initiative: Western Connecticut State University; Bridgewater State College (Bridgewater, MA); Lyndon State College (Lyndonville, VT); the University of Massachusetts, Boston; and the University of Maine, Presque Isle.

The initiative will be organized into two phases. The first phase will fund the six institutions for a planning and capacity-building year. During the second phase, the foundation will award up to four years of annual implementation grants of \$150,000 - \$200,000. The second phase grants are contingent upon the institutions’ yearly progress on objectives developed during the planning year.

**For more information on Project Compass, please visit [www.nmefdn.org](http://www.nmefdn.org)**

Eastern Connecticut State University is part of the Connecticut State University (CSU) system and is the state’s public liberal arts university. Eastern serves more than 5,000 students each year on its Willimantic campus.

#####

**The Nellie Mae Education Foundation** is the largest philanthropic organization in New England that focuses exclusively on promoting access, quality and effectiveness of education. Established in 1998, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation provides grants and other support to education programs in the region designed to improve underserved students' academic achievement and

access to higher education. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation also funds research that examines critical educational opportunity issues. Since it was established, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation has distributed nearly \$72 million in grants. Currently, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is realigning its program investments. It will continue to focus its grant making on strategies that support underserved learners while building knowledge about how to dramatically improve outcomes for the majority of New England's learners. While the funding focus transitions to new program work, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is building on what has been learned through successes in order to define the future. The emerging program areas include early learning, the use of time in learning, the examination of the pathways involved between secondary and postsecondary education, and adult learning with a focus on postsecondary opportunities. For more information on the Nellie Mae Education Foundation's current work, visit [www.nmefdn.org](http://www.nmefdn.org).

**The New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE)** is a center for inquiry, research and policy. NERCHE supports administrators, faculty, and staff across the region in becoming more effective practitioners and leaders as they navigate the complexities of institutional innovation and change. NERCHE focuses on higher education institutions as complex workplaces. We provide resources for practitioners who are exploring innovative ways to shape higher education and create opportunities for learning and applying their collective knowledge and experience. NERCHE's research projects, programs, and activities draw upon the practitioner perspective to improve practice and to inform and influence policy, moving from the local to regional and national levels. For more information, visit [www.nerche.org](http://www.nerche.org)

##