

UMass Lowell, Haverhill: Satellite campus enters second semester of operation

News February 27, 2018



UMass Lowell's satellite campus in Haverhill opened for the fall 2017 semester. (Amanda Sabga/Eagle Tribune)

Hannah Manning
Connector Editor

Seventy-five students enrolled in its first semester. Eight courses running in the fall, another 8 in the books for this spring. Three degree paths offered: business administration, criminal justice and psychology. Free parking for students in the lot across the street from Harbor Place. An already-indelible impact on the city.

It is an impressive amount of success achieved in such a short time. But UMass Lowell's Haverhill satellite campus is just getting started. Dr. Steve Tello, the vice provost for innovation and workforce

development at UMass Lowell, said that the university's goal is to enroll upwards of 200 students in the campus housed at Harbor Place.

Yet 75 students in its first semester of operation was an indication of its immediate success and impact on the city. Haverhill students already showed their appreciation on the first night UMass Lowell opened up the campus.

"Our students over in Haverhill didn't really have a place to call their own. And when they walked in that night they were beaming. They were giddy with excitement because it was like their place. It was brand new. It had the equipment. It made them feel a part of the campus," said Tello.

UMass Lowell offers only three degree pathways at the satellite campus, picked by looking at the most popular associate programs at Northern Essex. It is intended for students who obtained their associate degrees at Northern Essex and want to embark on their bachelor's without having to factor in a sometimes-frustrating commute to Lowell.

For a campus centered around convenience, the Haverhill campus delivers on a grand scale. Students are issued a student identification card which gives them access to a study area in Harbor Place, free transportation via the MVRTA and several other benefits that are awarded to students who attend classes on the main campus.

The satellite campus was a project that had been in the works for years. According to Tello and Stephanie Guyotte, the associate director of the Haverhill campus's Innovation Hub, UMass Lowell had been hoping to establish a campus in Haverhill before the Harbor Place project was announced in 2016.

The city of Haverhill had struggled for over 40 years to make use of its abandoned Woolworth's store. The massive property closed in the late 1960s and the family that owned the building fought with the city about what to do with it. As the years went on the Woolworth building mirrored its city's decline into economic disparity. It rotted from the inside, left abandoned on the corner of Merrimack Street and the Ralph Basilere Bridge, a bitter memory of what was once a booming downtown. Then UMass Lowell stepped in.

The university recognized that Northern Essex Community College was a significant feeder of students transferring in. For a school on a quest to expand its reach throughout the Merrimack Valley and climb national rankings, it quickly decided that Haverhill was a market that could be tapped even further. Haverhill likewise needed the boost of a university presence in its developing downtown.

"I think the hope of the planners in Haverhill was that by bringing... the university and a new building and new tenants to that end of the street would help some of that development to sort of continue from Washington Street down into Merrimack," said Tello.

The city of Haverhill and UMass Lowell worked very closely together to ensure that the project was mutually beneficial. Guyotte says that the Greater Haverhill Foundation, newly-elected state representative Andy Vargas and the Greater Haverhill Chamber of Commerce have been involved with the development of the Harbor Place project.

UMass Lowell takes up two floors out of Harbor Place; on the second floor of the building are classrooms and the Innovation Hub takes up the third floor. There is over 11,000 square feet of space in the Innovation Hub in Harbor Place, according to a pamphlet created by the university.

The Innovation Hub is a particularly exciting aspect of the new satellite campus.

“We have space for roughly 30 companies there, between offices and dedicated desk space. And then also we hope to involve students through... student staffing [and] internship opportunities at these companies and then combining it with some of the classroom staff through programs and entrepreneurship,” said Guyotte.

There is still more space to go around. Tello and Guyotte said that half of a floor in the building was left bare intentionally in order to factor in possible expansion. Any students worried that potential expansion into Haverhill will add to their student bill have nothing to worry about, Tello says.

“[Chancellor Jacquie Moloney] has made it very clear that when we expand into other cities and regions we need to come up with a model that doesn’t cost the campus any money and doesn’t cost to students any money. We have to figure out how to cover those expenses,” said Tello.

The university looks forward to the summer semester, where it hopes to workshop some interesting courses which may intrigue students from the Haverhill area. Tello and Guyotte point out that because Harbor Place is so close to one of Haverhill’s two Commuter Rail stops, students along the Haverhill line are welcomed to stop by and take classes.

“As we grow it will be a really, you know, exciting and vibrant place and we are very excited about it,” said Guyotte.

Tello says that the whole endeavor represents the university’s commitment to the region, and it hopes to bring prosperity as well as education to the Merrimack Valley.

“People know we’re in Lowell, we create jobs in Lowell, we educate the students, but by moving to Haverhill... we’re taking several things that we found successful there and starting to share them with the neighboring cities and towns,” said Tello.

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Hannah Manning

Hannah Manning is the managing editor of the UMass Lowell Connector. A native of Haverhill, Mass., she is a junior working towards her bachelor's in English with a concentration in journalism and professional writing. She likes hockey, music and her fellow staff members at the Connector.