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New Alliance Promotes Online Degrees with Regional SUNY Community Colleges

State University of New York (SUNY) officials have announced an online learning initiative featuring online degree access from six of Western New York's community colleges. The **O**nline **W**estern New York **L**earning Alliance (OWL) includes Corning, Erie, Finger Lakes, Genesee, Jamestown and Monroe Community Colleges, which together offer 34 fully online associate degrees and certificates.

"SUNY is a late-comer to the statewide consortium game" says Bob Knipe, Dean of Learning Technologies at Genesee. "It's been a significant challenge to arrange collaboration and pool resources at the state level, among community colleges anyway, so we decided to do it regionally. So far it's working, and it's our hope that OWL will become a regional collaboration model for others in New York State, and elsewhere."

Most community colleges market their offerings only within their service area, which makes little sense for online programs. "But public colleges can't compete with the for-profit schools' huge marketing budgets and control of search strategies. Also, the recently launched *OnlineCommunityColleges.org* is a great idea but isn't yet scalable to smaller or mid-sized colleges" according to Larry Dugan, Director of Online Learning at Finger Lakes. "With OWL, we pooled our resources and contracted with a web-search firm to at least let working adults in the region know we're very much in the game, as a quality and more affordable online degree option."

Students access the OWL Alliance (www.owlwny.org) to explore courses or degrees which fit their academic interests, needs and schedule. Students matriculate (enroll) in one of the six OWL colleges, but can take online courses from the entire OWL network, seamlessly transferring and earning credits from more than one college. Upon completion of required coursework, students earn a degree from their "home" college. All online degrees from OWL colleges are transferrable to SUNY other institutions. OWL colleges are fully accredited and have in place articulation agreements with many baccalaureate colleges.

According to James Jansen, Assoc. Academic VP at Corning CC, "In addition to helping students complete an Associate's degree using the combined resources of six colleges, OWL can become a means to extend online degrees through baccalaureate institutions, using the same seamless transfer processes. While the main focus would be helping students move on to SUNY baccalaureate institutions, OWL may also direct students to other affordable, high quality schools."

The OWL Alliance includes an identified "conciierge" at each college, who helps new online students establish individual goals, facilitate enrollment and advisement, assist with navigation of business processes and provide academic support. "I'm excited to perform the role of online conciierge. We have an opportunity to listen to students, work with the other conciierges to find the right program and courses, and walk them through the processes. It's a one-stop shop. The OWL alliance helps us provide better service to students" adds Cori Dunagan, Director of Distance Learning at Jamestown CC.



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“This is fantastic news for Western New Yorkers seeking a college degree while also managing responsibilities at home and on the job,” said SUNY Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher. “By making 100 percent of the required coursework available online, the OWL alliance makes a SUNY degree more accessible and attainable for many students, and contributes to degree completion, some of our primary objectives as providers of public higher education. Congratulations to each of the campuses involved in the OWL alliance.”

“Not only does OWL enable working adults with tight schedules to complete their degree in a timely fashion, but we believe this will lead to other dynamic, cooperative opportunities,” said Martie Dixon, Assistant Academic Dean at Eric CC. “We’ve all been offering online degrees for years, but this is the first time a group of SUNY colleges have collaborated in a way that really opens new doors to a quality, flexible and affordable online degree.”

“This is just the beginning. OWL will grow to include access to career and other services, helping students stay in the region after degree completion. OWL can provide them with lifelong learning opportunities” said Terry Keys, Assistant Vice President, Monroe CC.

For more information about the OWL Alliance, go to www.owlwny.org.

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