

Atlantic Cape a more affordable option

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in Cape May City," he said.

Financial decision

The cost of a four-year college may play into the decision to attend Atlantic Cape.

"In speaking with the students and especially their parents, they are fully aware of what the economic impact is going away to a four-year school where they're going to end up with maybe \$100,000 worth of student loans," said Kristen Jackson, director of admissions for Atlantic Cape. "They see the true value in the education that we can provide, the convenience and the fact that they're taking courses they will be able to transfer onto a senior institution if they like to, saving money along the way."

She said she thought parents understood the economic impact more than the students.

Castellucci said LCMR students see Atlantic Cape as an option to help them save money and build some savings to go to a four-year school after they get their two-year degree.

The NJSTARS Program allows the top 15 percent of graduating high school students to attend Atlantic Cape at no cost, which attracts strong students, he said.

Castellucci said the college is a great bargain.

"We are starting to send better students, or the reason more and more students are going to ACCC seems to be financial," Castellucci said.

He said years ago he predicted a trend of community colleges becoming more of an option for middle-class students when the cost of college continued to rise, since it allows students the opportunity to graduate with less debt. Castellucci said he saw students signing up for annual student loans of \$25,000 to \$30,000 at private or for-profit colleges. Community college is an option for students who do not wish to graduate with huge student loan debt, he said.

Mohammed Shawi, of Egg Harbor Township, said he attends Atlantic Cape because the school is close to home and didn't require students take the SAT college admission exam.

Shawi is originally from Syria. He came to the United States with his family as a high



Kristen Kelleher/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The Main Campus of Atlantic Cape Community College in Mays Landing. The two-year school attracts a mix of students interested in two- and four-year degrees, and facilitates transfers but also offers dual-admissions programs with Fairleigh Dickinson University and Rutgers University.

school sophomore.

"I didn't really know about SATs and all of the stuff you needed to do about going to college," Shawi said. "To do it all over again, I would probably still choose to come to Atlantic Cape."

Shawi's older brother also attended Atlantic Cape, which was one of Shawi's deciding factors in choosing to attend.

His brother currently attends Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

"He was the one who recommended the school. It was my best bet to come here anyway, because it's one of the cheapest schools around," Shawi said. "I don't remember reading about a school cheaper than Atlantic Cape, and with the quality of the classes they have here, it's something that was really worth it."

Shawi is in his fourth year studying biology at Atlantic Cape, after taking one year off from school.

He said he knew what he wanted to study when he arrived. He also knows what he wants to do when he finishes at Atlantic Cape.

Shawi wants to complete a bachelor's degree in biology and attend medical school. He is unsure where he wants to transfer to once he graduates from Atlantic Cape, but is looking to Rowan University and Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

At Atlantic Cape, Shawi is president of the student government association and a member of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society.

"The deans and a lot of the head faculty are really student-oriented," Shawi said of his experience at Atlantic Cape. "For instance, the dean of students, he held a couple events this semester alone. The first one, this was more toward freshmen, an event about how to construct a useful study schedule and how to keep on it and the better way to take notes."

Shawi also said Atlantic

Cape is building a new student life building on campus. The college surveyed students before construction began to see what they wanted in the center.

"I felt that if I went to a four-year school right away from high school, would have been much harder to absorb everything," Shawi said. "I would have probably had to have a dorm there and live on campus. Here I can say home ... I can focus more on my school work, and it's closer to family, closer to everything, closer to home."

Shawi said he knows many students who advanced to four-year colleges after Atlantic Cape.

He knows several students who went to Rutgers University-New Brunswick, one who went to the University of Pennsylvania, New York University, Rowan, Stockton and more.

LCMR guidance counselor Heather Donohue said financial aid seems to be one of the biggest deciding factors for the student who could go to a four-year college and get into a four-year school and be successful. Students who attend any college apply to FAFSA, a federal student aid program, she said.

Atlantic Cape also offers specific scholarships, Donohue said.

"A typical students taking 12 credits at ACCC can expect to pay about \$1,661," she said. She said students who struggle academically may benefit from the smaller class size of a community college.

LCMR offers career exploration beginning in seventh grade. Castellucci said a technology device called Naviance looks at a student's interest and matches those to careers. The earning potential of careers, the amount of training needed, the cost of education and what it takes to get into a particular school are also examined.

"Over the course of six years in our district, we help them develop that reality, help them to begin to understand what you need to do here to get there," he said.

Castellucci said students tend to pursue careers they see around them, which in the case of Cape May County is teachers, law enforcement, culinary

and business owners. The regional school district creates a personalized learning plan for students, he said.

Attractive programs

Jackson said the typical student is not sure what they want to do with their lives.

The college's general studies program allows a student "to take a little bit of everything," she said.

From that program a student may discover they like business or math or there are more interested in the liberal arts, said Jackson.

"They can continue on or use those courses working toward a career program," she said.

The college sees a mix of those interested in two- and four-year degrees. A number of students from Cape May County need to attend Atlantic Cape's May's Landing campus, she said.

"We do offer some programs fully on the Cape May County Campus," Jackson said. "The majority of our programs would involve a student at least taking a few classes on the main campus."

Atlantic Cape has options for students to take advantage of dual-admissions programs for four-year and graduate degrees.

Dual-admissions programs include partnerships with Fairleigh Dickinson University and Rutgers for local residents to complete undergraduate and advanced degrees taking courses at Atlantic Cape.

Atlantic Cape also has articulation agreements with nearly 40 colleges and universities.

Articulation agreements are transfer partnerships between two-year and four-year colleges.

Culinary arts and law enforcement programs at the college attract LCMR students, Castellucci said.

Some seniors elect to take courses at Atlantic Cape, he said.

"Our kids can go to ACCC with some of their law enforcement credits so they can get their degree in less time," Castellucci said.

The high school's culinary program offers a similar transfer of credits. He said those with a two-year culinary degree are very employable in

this area.

A sizable number of students who graduate from Lower Cape May Regional High School enroll at Atlantic Cape Community College.

Jackson said for the fall 2014 semester, the college received 101 applications from Lower Cape May Regional graduates with 53 enrolling.

In the fall of 2013, Atlantic Cape received 123 applications from regional school graduates with 58 enrolling at the college, she said. Lower Cape May Regional High generally graduates 200 to 225 students each year, said Jackson.

"That doesn't even cover students who end up going away for school and then might come back and take classes at Atlantic Cape whether they're a visiting student or they decide to transfer back home and take classes with us to earn the Associates degree here," she said.

Ocean City and Mainland

Erik Ortolfo, Ocean City High School director of guidance, said Ocean City's class of 2010 included 96 students who enrolled at Atlantic Cape. The class of 2011 included 72 students, 86 in 2012, 100 in 2013 and 44 in 2014.

Last year's class was one of Ocean City's strongest academically, Ortolfo said, which could account for the decline in enrollment at Atlantic Cape. Ocean City graduated 306 students in 2014.

Between 80 percent and 90 percent of graduating Ocean City High School students attend either a two-year or a four-year college.

Ortolfo said few students from Ocean City attend Atlantic Cape through the NJSTARS program.

NJSTARS students who earn associate degrees with a 3.25 grade point average or better are eligible for up to \$2,500 per year in scholarships at any New Jersey public or independent TAG-participating four-year college or university.

In 2014, 67.6 percent attended a four-year college and 20.6 percent went to a two-year college.

"Those who go with aspirations to transfer, or a program like culinary, with that in mind, they're very successful," Ortolfo said.

At Mainland Regional High School in Linwood, between 25 percent and 30 percent of graduates enroll at Atlantic Cape, director of guidance Nathan Lichtenwalner said.

"In this region, we have about 85 to 90 percent of our students who are going to college," Lichtenwalner said. "We're usually around 60 percent go to a four-year school and another 20 to 30 percent to a two-year school."

At Mainland, students are expressing more and more interest in Atlantic Cape, particularly during the 2014-15 school year, he said.

Mainland's average graduating classes vary between 350 and 400 students, Lichtenwalner said.

In 2014, Mainland graduated 357 students. The senior class of 2015 is currently just under 350 students.

Of those who graduate, between 25 percent and 30 percent attend Atlantic Cape.

Lichtenwalner said he felt the increase in interest in Atlantic Cape might be tied to the struggling economy and the increasing cost of obtaining a bachelor's degree.

Overall, however, economic concerns have not deterred students from pursuing higher education.

Mainland's class of 2014 had the highest percentage

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 12:00, 3:30, 7:00, 10:00
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