

# QCC brings college to students with new learning hubs in Great Brook Valley and Main South

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Posted Jul 30, 2018 at 7:56 PM Updated Jul 31, 2018 at 5:48 AM

WORCESTER – Quinsigamond Community College's newest off-campus location is not exactly evocative of collegiate life.

Located in a nondescript building in the heart of Great Brook Valley, where it is tucked upstairs in a space not much bigger than a typical dorm room, the Community Learning Hub contains a printer, a row of four computers and chairs, and little else.

But college officials see the new venture, which also will roll out a similar site Wednesday in Main South, as representing perfectly the mission of higher education: to help students learn. Specifically, the initiative is aimed at accommodating two areas in the city that are home to hundreds of the college's students by bringing the college to them.

"If we can save them an hour's time, and give them a place to study" as an alternative to having to travel to Quinsigamond's main campus several miles away, said its president, Luis G. Pedraja, "then we've been successful, and helped the college."

The reality for many students living in and around Great Brook Valley and the Catholic Charities site on Hammond Street, where the Main South hub will be located, is that transportation, internet access, and even a functioning printer are not always easily accessible where they are.

Deborah L. Gonzalez, director of Community Bridges at Quinsigamond, said one student told her at Thursday's soft opening of the Great Brook Valley hub that lack of access can even end up costing money.

“Every time she needed to print something and couldn’t get to the college, she’d have to go the Staples down the street and pay \$20” to use the store’s printer, she said.

The investment on the college’s part to remedy the situation isn’t great, Mr. Pedraja said. For the Great Brook Valley location, which will officially open in early September, Quinsigamond just needed to buy the equipment and materials. A key to the initiative, he added, is the partnerships the college has formed with community organizations that are hosting the hubs.

“I think our partners have been remarkable, working with us,” Mr. Pedraja said. “It’s said it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a community to educate our college students.”

In particular, college officials believed it was important to find locations for the community hubs that had built-in support systems already in place, according to Ms. Gonzalez. Quinsigamond already had Adult Basic Education and HiSET preparation programs at Great Brook Valley, for instance, and the housing complex also has wrap-around services of its own, she said.

The neighborhood and a one-mile ring around it contains around 560 Quinsigamond students, she added, while the same-size area in Main South surrounding the Catholic Charities hub is home to approximately 460 students.

The community hubs will be open to anyone who shows a current Quinsigamond student card, Ms. Gonzalez said.

Those students will be able to use the internet, print out documents, or just study, according to college officials. They will also hopefully stay on top of their college workload, Mr. Pedraja said, a key objective for a college that like many in the community college system is always looking to improve retention and graduation rates.

“It keeps them engaged, and keeps them connected to the college,” he said.