Advantage Program grows between BU, SUNY Broome

When Hannah Getchell of Windsor sifted through her top choices for college, she wanted something close to home.

She was denied admission to Binghamton University, but she's taking another approach: the Binghamton Advantage Program, which allows enrollees to transfer to BU after taking classes at SUNY Broome Community College.

"I always liked BU, I know it's a great school. With this, admission is guaranteed, and it will get me used to the college experience," said Getchell, 18.

Through the program, students are guaranteed admission to BU after two years of classes as long as they've maintained a 3.0 GPA, and students in most disciplines can transfer after one year if they have at least a 3.2 GPA. In the meantime, Advantage students can live on BU's Vestal campus and commute to SUNY Broome in Dickinson.

The program has seen marked growth in its four years of existence: This year's Advantage class is about 220 students, compared to 2011's 40 enrollees, said Jenae Norris, of Endwell, director of admissions for SUNY Broome. That's more than five times the number in the inaugural class. In both years, about 600 students whose BU applications were rejected were offered admission to the Advantage program.

The Advantage program's success has spurred its coordinators to consider setting an admissions cap for the program in the future.

For now, Randall Edouard, interim assistant provost and interim director of undergraduate admissions at BU, said program coordinators are pleased with the growth in participants.

"Ultimately there will need to be a cap, but based on the slots at our institutions now, we don't have to worry about it yet," he said.

By comparison, for the 2014-15 year, BU is expecting about 2,500 students to enroll as freshmen out of a pool of just over 28,000 applicants.

More students coming from the Advantage program also means increased transportation demands, Edouard said. Six direct-route shuttles currently run between BU and SUNY Broome. If a student misses the shuttle, they often take a B.C. Transit public bus, which sometimes requires more transfers and, therefore, more time, said Zach Dubord, assistant director for transfer student initiatives and services for BU.
Edouard said BU officials are talking with B.C. Transit to determine whether more buses can travel directly between the two colleges.

"We're in partnership with them, we're talking with them, they understand our capacity has grown," he said. "Those negotiations are ongoing."

Allowing students to take classes at Broome while they live and participate in campus life at BU gives them a taste of the university's culture, Norris said.

"It gets the students acclimated," she said. "They have a (Binghamton) student ID at the same time that they're taking our academic classes."

Costs are structured with a similarly hybrid approach. Students pay SUNY Broome tuition, at about $4,070 for in-state students compared to BU's $6,170 tuition for the 2014-15 year. Students also pay a $2,224 Advantage Program fee, but do not pay the extra fees required of students accepted at each institution under traditional programs. Financial aid is available.

Students can live in the BU residence halls, where they pay about $15,000 for room and board. Students like Getchell, who reside in Broome, Tioga or southern Chenango counties, also can choose to reside at home.

SUNY Broome is introducing a similar, though separate, initiative with SUNY Cortland's physical education programs. Kevin Drumm, SUNY Broome's president, said Cortland officials reached out to the college to start a pilot program this fall that would allow guaranteed admission to Cortland after taking classes at SUNY Broome first.

Both programs help students by providing a direct track for transfers, Drumm said.

"It's easier than a sophomore trying to decide on their own where they want to transfer. They may not have enough credits to do so," he said. "We're smoothing the pipeline out."