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## GREATER NEW YORK

### College Building Booms, And City Reaps Benefits

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Spending on higher-education construction in New York City will top \$2 billion this year and will continue near that level for the next three years, according to a new survey by a building industry trade group.

The report, underwritten by some of the city's biggest universities, says New York—with 105 institutions of higher learning—has the largest population of college and university students in the country.

Education was a bright spot in the city even as private-sector construction languished through much of the downturn, when there was little demand for new offices or apartment buildings.

Frank Sciamè, chief executive of Sciamè Construction, said his company is doing a half-billion

dollars of post-secondary construction work, about twice as much as before the recession. In 2006, he said, the firm was more focused on hotels and condos.

"It's become a nice part of our workload," Mr. Sciamè said of the higher education market.

The strength of the city's postsecondary institutions has helped attract new companies and diversify the city's economy so it doesn't rely so heavily on the financial industry.

"The residential market is increasing, but not this much," said Richard Anderson, president of the New York Building Congress, the trade group that issued the report. "Cultural facilities are doing well, but not quite as well. Higher-education may be the largest individual sector in the city doing this much construction."

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# A College Construction Boom

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The report, underwritten partly by New York University, the City University of New York and Columbia University, paints a rosy picture of the city's market for academic facilities.

Among the school expansion plans are Columbia's 6.8 million-square-foot Manhattanville campus, NYU's 1.9 million-square-foot growth plan, and the construction of Cornell Tech, a new school on Roosevelt Island.

Manhattan's Pace University acquired sites in the Financial District several years ago to build residence halls for a growing student body.

The president of Hunter College, Jennifer J. Raab, said real-estate strategy has been a top priority and has helped improve academics. She pointed to the school's Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at the former home of President Franklin Roosevelt, reopened by Hunter in 2010.

"It's hard for anyone to turn down an invitation to speak at Roosevelt's home," she said.

But some academics question the impact of aggressively increasing school footprints throughout the five boroughs.

"NYU's mission is not to make money for construction workers," said Mark Crispin Miller, professor of media studies at the school. "The thrust of their argument for expansion is economic...And we ought to be considering expansion in an academic context, not a financial one."

An NYU spokesman said the school "builds because of its academic needs."

For some schools, construction has come at a price. The Cooper Union, a Manhattan arts and engineering college, opened a new



**A development owned by Columbia University in Harlem.**

academic building in 2009, before the school announced it would be forced to charge undergraduate tuition for the first time in school history to avoid insolvency.

Parts of an ambitious NYU plan to expand in Greenwich Village were barred earlier this year by a judge who said at least part of the project requires state legislation. School officials are appealing the decision.

"I've lived in the Village my entire adult life and I don't remember anything that big," said David Gruber, chairman of Manhattan's Community Board 2, of NYU's expansion plan. "I can imagine this is going to be massively inconvenient."

At Columbia, some professors fear expansion could come at a

cost to academics. "There is certainly support for Columbia to expand the space available for teaching and research, but we are concerned that the high costs of expansion had led to deferred maintenance on the [campus] already existing," said William Zajc, a physics professor.

City officials see postsecondary institutions as an important driver of economic growth, both through construction jobs and by providing a pull to companies eager to be near a well-educated workforce.

The report recommends New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio establish an office for higher education. An aide to Mr. de Blasio said his office will review the recommendations.