

Office of Higher Education

At a Glance

KEITH M. NORTON, Acting Executive Director

Established by CGS Sec. 10a-1d

Central office - 61 Woodland Street, Hartford, 06105-2326

Number of full-time employees - 28

2015-16 Recurring Operating Expenses - \$47.1 million

Organizational structure - Division of Academic Affairs; Division of Programs and Student Services; Division of Finance and Administration

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Agency Mission

The Office of Higher Education seeks to advance the promise of postsecondary education for all Connecticut citizens, and to advocate on behalf of students, taxpayers, and the postsecondary schools and colleges under its purview. The Office carries out its mission by assuring that students have access to postsecondary institutions which meet the highest standards of academic quality, by administering the state's student financial aid programs, by serving as an information and a consumer protection resource, and by fostering interaction and collaboration among postsecondary institutions and other entities.

In April, Keith M. Norton was appointed Acting Executive Director of the Office of Higher Education by Governor Dannel P. Malloy following the retirement of Jane A. Ciarleglio who had been with the agency, and the former Department of Higher Education, since 1995.

Statutory Responsibility

The Office of Higher Education is charged by statute to uphold state standards of academic quality, to administer college financial aid, and to operate a variety of programs including the Alternate Route to Certification.

To maintain standards of quality, the Office licenses and accredits independent colleges and universities, licenses in-state programs offered by out-of-state institutions, and regulates the operations of Connecticut's postsecondary career schools which include occupational schools, hospital-based schools, and barber and hairdressing schools.

As of July 2016, among degree-granting private institutions, 19 non-profit, three for-profit and 12 from outside the state were approved by the agency to operate in Connecticut.

Among non-degree schools, 54 occupational schools, six hospital-based schools, and 41 hairdresser and barber schools were approved to operate.

The agency's other major statutory responsibility is to administer state student financial aid funds which are disbursed through the Governor's Scholarship Program. Other state programs managed by the agency include the Alternate Route to Certification and the Minority Advancement Program. In addition, the agency oversees the Higher Education State Matching Grant Fund, the Endowed Chair Investment Fund, and the reporting requirements for the Connecticut Higher Education Trust Advisory Committee.

Federal responsibilities include serving as the State Approval Agency for programs enrolling veterans, and as the state's lead agency for AmeriCorps, the national service program. The Office also administers the higher education portion of the federal Improving Teacher Quality Grant Program, and the John R. Justice Grant Program; and serves as a clearinghouse for student complaints as stipulated in federal regulations.

Public Service

Building a highly-educated workforce to meet Connecticut's economic and societal needs serves as the framework for the Office of Higher Education's public service activities.

To prepare talented adults to become teachers, the Office conducted its summer and weekend Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) programs.

ARC's summer 2015 program prepared 37 adults for teacher certification in English, mathematics, life and physical sciences, and world languages (Chinese, German, Italian and Spanish). Forty-six percent of the graduates hold master's and/or Ph.D. credentials, and 30 percent are from minority groups.

ARC's 2015-16 weekend program prepared another 37 individuals to teach English, mathematics, life and physical sciences, and world languages (Arabic, French, Latin and Spanish), family consumer science and technology education. Thirty-eight percent of these graduates have advanced degrees, and another 22 percent are from minority groups.

Overall, 91 percent of the graduates of both ARC sessions are prepared to teach in shortage areas. ARC is Connecticut's seventh largest teacher preparation program, and produces the state's greatest number of world language teachers. Approximately 37 percent of ARC graduates work in urban districts. Since 2006, at least 54 ARC graduates have received prestigious honors, including the national Presidential Excellence in Teaching for Mathematics and Science, Connecticut Teacher of the Year, and District or School Teacher of the Year. Many graduates also serve as public school principals and administrators.

For in-service teachers, the Office of Higher Education awarded \$470,099 in federal Teacher Quality Partnership Grants to three teacher professional development projects in mathematics and science. The projects – conducted by Central Connecticut State University, Quinnipiac University, and the University of Hartford - will serve 112 teachers of nearly 10,000 students across 20 districts. The projects were selected from nine applications following a competitive review process. Operated by partnerships of colleges and school districts, the projects aim to strengthen teacher content knowledge and instructional skills. Priority is placed on proposals which address the Common Core State Standards and the state's new social studies frameworks.

The agency's Education & Employment Information Center (EEIC) counseled thousands of persons in search of training opportunities and new careers, and participated in college and career fairs across the state. The EEIC maintains a large electronic library of information on student financial aid, career planning, finding a teaching job, preparing for college and similar topics. In addition, the EEIC fields the majority of inquiries received by the Alternate Route to Certification, and student complaints involving independent colleges and postsecondary career schools.

A major portion of the agency's public service role is carried out by the Connecticut Commission on Community Service which is administered by the Office. The Commission, whose members are appointed by the Governor, promotes engagement in service and volunteer efforts, and oversees Connecticut's AmeriCorps state programming. In exchange for a year of service, AmeriCorps members receive a federal Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$5,730 that can be used to pay for college or to pay back qualified student loans. With the support of the Governor's Office, the Commission solicited Connecticut colleges and universities to join the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award Match Program. Seven institutions are participating: Asnuntuck Community College; Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Connecticut State Universities; Sacred Heart University; and the University of Connecticut. Since 1994, more than 13,000 Connecticut residents have served more than 18 million hours and have qualified for more than \$42.1 million in Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards.

This year, AmeriCorps provided nearly 800 individuals with opportunities to serve at community-based organizations such as the Regional Youth/Adult Social Action Partnership (Bridgeport), Knox, Inc. (Hartford), the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (New Haven), FoodCorps (New London), the New England Science and Sailing Foundation (Stonington), Northwestern Connecticut AHEC (Waterbury) and Teach for America-Connecticut. AmeriCorps members tutored and mentored children, supported veterans and military families, provided health services, restored the environment, responded to disasters, increased economic opportunity, and recruited and managed volunteers.

In April, nearly 30 Connecticut mayors participated in the Corporation for National and Community Service's Mayors Day of Recognition for National Service. Mayors or first selectmen from Berlin, Hartford, New Haven and Norwalk held special events and issued town proclamations to salute volunteers.

The Office of Higher Education continued to operate the Minority Advancement Program (MAP), which gives middle and high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds the skills, knowledge and academic support they need to succeed in college. MAP provides funds, on a competitive basis, to Connecticut colleges and universities to support activities that strengthen student college readiness, retention and graduation. MAP consists of two grant programs: the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program (ConnCAP), and the Connecticut College Access and Success Program (ConnCAS). For 2015-16, the five programs funded by ConnCAP provided 625 middle and high school students with counseling and college preparation activities. Eight colleges received ConnCAS funds to help 415 students succeed in their studies.

Improvements/Achievements FY 2015-2016

During the year, the Office of Higher Education continued to administer the Governor's Scholarship Program (now in its second year), and review and approve new academic programs proposed by Connecticut independent colleges and universities.

Working with college financial aid officers, the Office of Higher Education distributed \$41.6 million to 17,923 undergraduates enrolled in Connecticut's public and private colleges and universities through the three components of the Governor's Scholarship Program: 1) a need-based merit scholarship administered directly by the Office of Higher Education, 2) a need-based grant program administered by participating colleges, and 3) an academic incentive award given to students who have received a Governor's Scholarship need-based grant, and who have completed a minimum of 30 credits and ended the year with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or better. Overall, 759 students received \$886,903 in Academic Incentive Awards.

In addition, the agency administered a variety of other aid programs designed to encourage students to prepare for specific careers. The federal John R. Justice Grant Program is a loan reimbursement program for public defenders and prosecutors who commit to working in their current jobs for at least three years. Connecticut received \$33,084 for 2015 which was distributed to 67 grantees.

To strengthen diversity in the state's teacher workforce, the Office of Higher Education awarded Minority Teacher Incentive Grants to 55 minority students, and loan reimbursement stipends to 47 former grant recipients who are now teaching in Connecticut. The Office awarded similar grants from private funds to minority students selected as Weisman Scholars who are preparing to teach mathematics and science.

Apart from financial aid, the agency's other major focus centered on licensing and accrediting academic programs. This year, the agency evaluated 37 proposals for program licensure submitted by Connecticut private colleges, and 11 applications for program relicensure from colleges located outside of the state.

Additionally, the agency reviewed six applications for in-state institutional re-accreditation, and two applications for re-licensure of out-of-state institutions.

Approved applications for program accreditation totaled 46, enabling colleges to graduate students and confer degrees for the first time. Among these, seven were at the associate's level, 21 were at the bachelor's level, three were graduate certificates, 14 were at the master's level, and one was at the doctoral level. The Office also evaluated 22 requests for modifications to already-approved programs.

The proposals for new academic programs spanned a variety of fields, generally reflecting workforce needs: 25 were in health sciences, 31 were in business, 18 were in engineering, five were in security and protective services, and 10 were in journalism/media with the remainder in the liberal arts and other subjects.

Regarding the state's postsecondary career schools, the Office of Higher Education approved two new occupational schools, re-approved 21 existing schools, investigated 16 formal complaints, and worked with seven schools that closed in compliance with state statutes. The agency also re-approved the operation of one Connecticut hospital-based school.

Carrying out its oversight of hairdresser and barber schools, the agency approved 16 new schools, and re-approved six existing schools, investigated eight complaints and closed two schools in compliance with state statutes. In February, one school with six branch campuses closed unexpectedly, leaving nearly 800 students displaced. To help students regain their education footing, the Office of Higher Education held a workshop to facilitate transfer and loan

forgiveness, and provide counseling. Workshop participants included representatives from the U.S. Department of Education, the Connecticut State Departments of Education, Labor and Public Health, and other career schools.

As the Connecticut State Approving Agency (SAA) for veterans' education benefits, the Office of Higher Education processed 96 initial, revised and updated approval actions for institutions and training facilities eligible to enroll veterans; conducted eight inspection visits, two technical assistance visits, and 22 compliance survey visits to schools, colleges and training facilities; and provided information to active duty service members and veterans regarding their educational benefits at 49 outreach events. Staff approved 602 programs and disapproved 251 programs for degree- and non-degree-granting institutions and training organizations at approved facilities; and participated in the 2015 Veterans Stand Down, Heroes4Hire Career Fair and numerous job fairs for veterans.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Office of Higher Education provides information on trends in postsecondary education, and in June published a comprehensive report covering enrollment, admissions, graduation rates, tuition and fees, endowments, state funding, instructional expenses, faculty and staffing, and student financial aid.

Earlier in the year, the Office reported that fall 2015 enrollment at Connecticut colleges and universities fell 1.2 percent to 200,748 students compared to the previous fall. The decrease was due mostly to losses in part-time enrollment at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Overall numbers of undergraduates declined 1.7 percent while graduate enrollment was up 1.3 percent.

The latest graduation statistics show that Connecticut colleges and universities awarded 44,934 degrees in 2014-15, up just 0.8 percent from the previous year and continuing a 14-year upward trend.

Half of all awards (50.2 percent) were bachelor's degrees, 23.5 percent were master's and 15.7 percent were associates. The largest annual increase was in bachelor's degrees with 633 more awarded in 2015. The number of master's degrees also increased, while the number of associate's degrees declined. Connecticut's public colleges and universities produced 83 percent of all associate's degrees, 54 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 33 percent of all master's degrees.

Women earned 58.2 percent of all degrees, dipping 0.6 percent from 2014. Women earned more degrees than men at every degree level, and slightly more than half of all the degrees earned by women were earned at public colleges.

A total of 11,330 degrees and certificates were earned by individuals from minority groups in 2015, representing 25.2 percent of award recipients, up from 23.8 percent in 2014. Black students earned 8.4 percent of awards compared to 8.2 percent in 2014; Hispanic students earned 9.2 percent of awards compared to 8.5 percent in 2014; Asian or Pacific Islander students earned 4.7 percent of awards compared to 4.7 percent in 2014; and white students earned 60.8 percent of awards compared to 63.9 percent in 2014. Award recipients whose race and ethnicity is unknown earned 9.3% of awards as compared to 8.1 percent in 2014.

The proportion of degrees earned in the sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics, criminal justice and business outpaced growth in all other fields. Conversely, the proportion of

degrees conferred in education, and the arts and humanities fell. Over the last 10 years, the largest growth in degrees conferred has been in the fields of technicians and trades, health and fitness, and criminal justice.