

Office of Higher Education

At a Glance

TIMOTHY D. LARSON, *appointed in 2019*

Office of Higher Education established - 2011

Statutory authority – Conn. Gen. Statutes Section 10a-1d

Central Office – 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 707, Hartford, 06103-1841

Number of full-time employees – 26 total (23 filled - 3 vacancies)

2021-22 Recurring Operating Expenses (Including ARPA)- \$ 68.2 million

Organizational Structure: Division of Academic Affairs, Division of Programs and Student Services, and Division of Finance and Human Resources

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 of Higher Education carries out its mission by assuring that students have access to postsecondary institutions that 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.

STATUTORY RESPONSIBILITY

The Office of Higher Education (OHE) 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 (ARC.)

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.

Among degree-granting private institutions, 18 non-profit, two for-profit and six from outside the state were approved by the agency to operate in Connecticut. Among non-degree schools, 48 occupational schools, 3 hospital-based schools, and 29 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 Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program (RWSP.) Other state programs managed by the agency include the Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) and the Minority Advancement Program (MAP.)

Federal responsibilities include serving as the State Approval Agency (SAA) for programs enrolling veterans, and as the state's lead agency for AmeriCorps, the national service program. The Office also administers 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 Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) program. In existence for 35 years, ARC is operated through the Office of Higher Education and is approved by the Connecticut State Board of Education.

The ARC program offers subject-based methods classes and training in core areas of teaching including, but not limited to the Common Core State Standards, classroom management, differentiated instruction, lesson planning, assessment of student learning, special education and Section 504, English Language learners, and integrating technology in the classroom. ARC students observe classrooms and work with Connecticut TEAM trained cooperating teachers and ARC evaluators during an 8-week student practicum experience.

ARC's 2021-2022 program prepared 87 adults in business education, English language arts, family and consumer sciences, mathematics, music, sciences, technology education and world languages (Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian and Spanish). In June 2022, 20% of the 2021-2022 graduating class were from minority groups and 41% held master's and/or Ph.D. credentials.

An extension of the agency's public service role is carried out by the Connecticut Commission on Community Service (Serve Connecticut) which is administered by the Office of Higher Education staff. The Commission is a governor-appointed entity that encourages engagement in service and volunteer efforts and provides oversight to Connecticut's AmeriCorps state programming. With federal funds, the Commission sponsors AmeriCorps, by awarding nonprofit agencies to respond to local needs. In exchange for a service year, AmeriCorps members receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award of up to \$6,495 that can be used to pay for college or to pay back qualified student loans. Since 1994, more than 16,000 Connecticut residents have served approximately 23 million hours and earned education awards totaling more than \$58.4 million. Higher education institutions and other organizations in Connecticut have received more than \$16.5 million in education award payments since 1994.

Last year more than 2,100 Americans of all ages and backgrounds united to meet local needs, strengthen communities, and expand opportunity through national service in Connecticut.

AmeriCorps invested more than \$10.6 million in federal funding to support cost-effective community solutions, working hand in hand with local partners to empower individuals to help communities tackle their toughest challenges. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in Connecticut are preparing today's students for tomorrow's jobs, helping communities and families impacted by COVID-19, reducing crime and reviving cities, connecting veterans to services, fighting the opioid epidemic, helping seniors live independently, and rebuilding communities after disasters. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers served at more than 300 locations across Connecticut, including schools, food banks, homeless shelters, health clinics, youth centers, veterans' facilities, and other nonprofit and faith-based organizations. Through a unique public-private partnership, AmeriCorps and its partners generated more than \$2.9 million in outside resources from businesses, foundations, public agencies, and other sources in Connecticut in the last year. This local support strengthened community impact and increased the return on taxpayer dollars.

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 review basis, to Connecticut colleges and universities to support activities that strengthen student readiness for college as well as retention and graduation. In FY22, MAP was able to reestablish the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program (ConnCAP). The purpose of ConnCAP is to support programs implemented by Connecticut institutions of higher education to develop linkages with public school systems for the purpose of providing motivation and skills development for middle school or high school underachievers. In addition to ConnCAP, OHE continued to fund the Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS) initiative to address those students of color who are placed on academic probation and need additional support to redress their academic standing. A successful student of the PASS program will develop sustainable college acumen skills to remain on track to graduation and be removed from academic probation.

System-wide decreased enrollment in Connecticut colleges and universities have posed a pressing impact on budget planning. Declining enrollment coupled with financial turbulence has created a laser focus on prioritizing retention and implementing targeted interventions to support student success. PASS bridges this gap by tracking persistence data, to ensure campuses are providing an environment that supports student success and has the safeguards in place to keep students on track. Two persistence data strategies the PASS initiative incorporates in implementation are academic milestones and on-track indicators. Establishing milestones give students clear, measurable academic checkpoints to achieve, while on-track indicators outline enrollment and behavior patterns for students to follow. Milestones are step-by-step, academic goals for students to complete in order to graduate. Incorporating these milestones into retention strategies has yielded strong results for institutions. A key milestone monitored, is the return for subsequent semesters. Equally important for supporting students is keeping abreast of on-track indicators. On-track indicators keep students progressing toward their degrees and have been shown to increase a student's chances of graduating. The first level of tracking is remediation. At this stage, students are provided consultation and encouragement to begin remedial or early

college-level coursework to get in front of any significant learning gaps that may present itself in subsequent semesters.

ACHIEVEMENTS/HIGHLIGHTS FY 2021-2022

During the year, the Office of Higher Education continued to administer the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program (RWSP,) and review and approve new academic programs proposed by Connecticut independent colleges and universities.

The Office of Higher Education also implemented a new student financial aid processing system, known as CT Scholars. This new system will bring about significant improvements to the State's ability to manage, administer and analyze all student financial aid programs offered through the Office of Higher Education. CT Scholars is replacing five separate Access databases, that were originally developed decades ago. This modernization effort has taken several years and is the result of focused work by the dedicated staff of our Student Financial Aid division.

Working with college financial aid officers, the Office of Higher Education distributed \$33.4 million to 11,015 undergraduates enrolled in Connecticut's public and private colleges and universities through the two components of the Roberta B. Willis 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.

Additionally, the agency administered the scholarship component of the state's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). GEAR UP is a federally funded college access grant program. The Office of Higher Education disbursed \$2,050,938 in GEAR UP scholarship funds to 1,205 students attending 89 colleges and universities throughout the country.

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 \$36,107 for 2020 which was distributed to 53 grantees.

To strengthen diversity in the state's teacher workforce, the Office of Higher Education awarded Minority Teacher Incentive Grants (MTIP) to 91 minority students totaling \$415,000 and loan reimbursement stipends totaling \$94,769 to 39 former grant recipients who are now teaching in Connecticut.

Apart from financial aid, the agency's other major focus centered on licensing and accrediting academic programs. P.A. 19-26, allows certain non-profit, private institutions of higher education to be exempt from the Office of Higher Education's program approval process. Among the exempt institutions, there were 66 programs approved without undergoing the approval process. Among the 66 programs, 3 were associate degree programs, 22 were bachelor's degree programs, 13 were certificate programs, 25 were master's degree programs

and there were no doctoral degree programs. For the non-exempt institutions, which are still required to go through the Office of Higher Education's program approval process, nine programs were licensed.

At the institutional level, the Office of Higher Education reviewed and re-licensed one institution.

Regarding the state's postsecondary career schools, the Office of Higher Education approved four new occupational schools, re-approved 21 existing schools, investigated 11 formal complaints, and worked with one school that closed in compliance with state statutes. There was one hospital-based re-approval for FY21.

Carrying out its oversight of hairdresser and barber schools, the Office of Higher Education re-approved 8 existing schools and closed 3 schools in compliance with state statutes. There were no new schools approved and 2 complaints investigated for hairdresser and barber schools.

As the Connecticut State Approving Agency (SAA) for veterans' education benefits, the Office of Higher Education processed 26 initial, revised and updated approval actions (including 17 re-approval applications per US DVA mandate) for institutions and training facilities eligible to enroll veterans; conducted three inspection visits, three technical assistance visits, and 17 compliance survey visits to schools, colleges and training facilities; and provided information to active duty service members and veterans regarding their educational benefits at six outreach events. Staff approved 1,024 programs and disapproved 122 programs for degree- and non-degree-granting institutions and training organizations at approved facilities.

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 2020 enrollment at Connecticut colleges and universities fell 3.6 percent to 187,840 students compared to the previous fall. The decline was due mostly to losses in full-time enrollment at the undergraduate level. More specifically, the numbers of full-time undergraduates fell by 3.7 percent while overall part-time undergraduate enrollment was down 5.5 percent.

The latest graduation statistics show that Connecticut colleges and universities awarded 46,891 degrees in 2020-21, up 1.2 percent from the previous year, rebounding from two previous down years.

Just over half of all awards (50.9 percent) were bachelor's degrees, 25.3 percent were masters and 12.8 percent were associates. The largest annual decrease was in bachelor's degrees with 685 fewer awarded in 2021. The number of master's degrees, however, grew by 837. Connecticut's

public colleges and universities produced 78 percent of all associate degrees, 50 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 29 percent of all master's degrees.

Women earned 60.7 percent of all degrees, a slight increase over 2020. 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 14,872 degrees and certificates were earned by individuals from minority groups in 2021, representing 31.7 percent of award recipients, up from 29.7 percent in 2020. Black students earned 9.7 percent of awards compared to 8.9 percent in 2020; Hispanic students earned 11.9 percent of awards compared to 11.4 percent in 2020; Asian or Pacific Islander students earned 6.0 percent of awards compared to 5.8 percent in 2020; and white students earned 57.0 percent of awards compared to 58.1 percent in 2020. Award recipients whose race and ethnicity are unknown earned 3.5% of awards as compared to 3.8 percent in 2020.

The proportion of degrees earned in the Family Sciences, Social Work, and Public Admin and Health & Fitness outpaced growth in all other fields over the previous year. Conversely, Arts & Humanities had the greatest decline year over year. Over the last 10 years, the largest growth in degrees conferred has been in the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics, health & fitness, criminal justice & protective services, and technicians & trades.