

Office of Higher Education

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KEITH M. NORTON, Acting Executive Director

Established by - CGS Sec. 10a-1d

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

Number of full-time employees - 21

Recurring operating expenses - \$41.6 million

Organizational structure -

Division of Academic Affairs; Division of Programs and Student Services; Division of Finance and Administration

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.

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 2017, among degree-granting private institutions, 19 non-profit, three for-profit and 11 from outside the state were approved by the agency to operate in Connecticut. Among non-degree schools, 58 occupational schools, four 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 Roberta B. Willis 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 Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) programs.

ARC's 2016-17 program prepared 73 adults for teacher certification in English, mathematics, sciences, and world languages (Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Italian). Forty-Four percent of the graduates hold master's and/or Ph.D. credentials, and 26 percent are from minority groups.

Overall, 70 percent of the ARC graduates are prepared to teach in shortage areas. ARC is Connecticut's number one producer of STEM teachers and the number one producer of language teachers. Approximately 40 percent of ARC graduates work in high-needs 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 \$513,691 in federal Teacher Quality Partnership Grants to four teacher professional development projects in mathematics and science. The projects – conducted by Central Connecticut State University, Southern Connecticut State University (2), and the University of Hartford - will serve 117 teachers of over 26,000 students across 19 districts. The projects were selected from six 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 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.

An extension of the agency's public service role is carried out by the Connecticut Commission on Community Service which is administered by the Office of Higher Education. 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 \$5,815 that can be used to pay for college or to pay back qualified student loans. Since 1994, more than 14,000 Connecticut residents have served more than 19 million hours and have qualified for Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than \$45,270,000.

This year, AmeriCorps provided more than 650 individuals with opportunities to serve at community-based organizations such as the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut (New Haven), Health360 (Waterbury), FoodCorps Connecticut, Governors Prevention Partnership (Hartford), the New England Science and Sailing Foundation (Stonington), JumpStart for Children-Connecticut and Teach for America-Connecticut. AmeriCorps members tutored and mentored children, supported urban farming and nutrition education, provided health services, restored the environment, increased economic opportunity, and recruited and managed volunteers. Through this unique public-private partnership, the federal investment leveraged an additional \$13,780,000 in other resources to strengthen community impact and build local support.

In April, 34 elected officials representing more than 2,500,000 Connecticut residents, participated in the Corporation for National and Community Service's Mayors Day of Recognition for National Service. Mayors or first selectmen in Ansonia, Berlin, Bridgeport, Bristol, Campbell, Danbury, East Hartford, East Haven, East Lyme, Essex, Fairfield, Griswold, Hamden, Hartford, Killingly, Ledyard, Manchester, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Haven, New London, North Haven, Norwalk, Norwich, Plymouth, Stamford, Torrington, Vernon, Wallingford, Waterbury, West Haven Westport, Wethersfield, Willimantic and Wolcott 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 review basis, to Connecticut colleges and universities to support activities that strengthen student readiness for college as well as 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 2016-17, 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 2016-2017

During the year, the Office of Higher Education continued to administer the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program (formerly the Governor's Scholarship Program), 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 \$35.8 million to 13,155 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.

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 \$36,308 for 2016 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 to 44 minority students, and loan reimbursement stipends to 43 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. Under P.A. 16-36, which provided exemptions to program approval requirements, the agency reviewed and approved only one proposal for program licensure from a Connecticut institution of higher education. In addition, one application for program relicensure from an institution of higher education located outside of the state was also reviewed and approved.

For institutional re-accreditation, the agency reviewed and approved four applications from in-state institutions.

The agency reviewed and approved 24 applications for program accreditation, enabling colleges to graduate students and confer degrees for the first time. Among these, one was at the associate degrees, 14 were bachelor's degrees, one was a graduate certificate, six were master's degrees, and two were doctoral degrees. The Office also evaluated eight requests for modifications to already-approved programs.

The proposals for new academic programs spanned a variety of fields, including health sciences, business, security and protective services, and computing.

Regarding the state's postsecondary career schools, the Office of Higher Education approved seven new occupational schools, re-approved 29 existing schools, investigated 11 formal complaints, and worked with four schools that closed in compliance with state statutes. There were two hospital-based schools which closed, and there were no re-approvals of hospital-based schools for FY17.

Carrying out its oversight of hairdresser and barber schools, the agency approved two new schools, and re-approved 18 existing schools, investigated one complaint and closed three schools in compliance with state statutes.

As the Connecticut State Approving Agency (SAA) for veterans' education benefits, the Office of Higher Education processed 137 initial, revised and updated approval actions for institutions and training facilities eligible to enroll veterans; conducted 12 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 37 outreach events. Staff approved 1,557 programs and disapproved 224 programs for degree- and non-degree-granting institutions and training organizations at approved facilities; and participated in the 2016 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 2016 enrollment at Connecticut colleges and universities fell 0.8 percent to 199,049 students compared to the previous fall. The decrease was due mostly to losses in part-time and full-time enrollment at both the undergraduate level. Overall numbers of undergraduates declined 1.4 percent while graduate enrollment was up 1.7 percent.

The latest graduation statistics show that Connecticut colleges and universities awarded 46,994 degrees in 2015-16, up just 1.1 percent from the previous year and continuing a 15-year upward trend.

Just under half of all awards (48.3 percent) were bachelor's degrees, 23.2 percent were master's and 15.9 percent were associates. The largest annual increase was in graduate certificates with 1,143 more awarded in 2016. The number of master's degrees also increased, while the number of doctorate degrees declined. Connecticut's public colleges and universities produced 82 percent of all associate's degrees, 50 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 29 percent of all master's degrees.

Women earned 58.0 percent of all degrees, dipping 0.2 percent from 2015. 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 11,680 degrees and certificates were earned by individuals from minority groups in 2016, representing 24.9 percent of award recipients, down from 25.2 percent in 2015. Black students earned 8.5 percent of awards compared to 8.4 percent in 2015; Hispanic students earned 9.4 percent of awards compared to 9.2 percent in 2015; Asian or Pacific Islander students earned 4.6 percent of awards compared to 4.7 percent in 2015; and white students earned 58.7 percent of awards compared to 60.8 percent in 2015. Award recipients whose race and ethnicity is unknown earned 7.2% of awards as compared to 9.3 percent in 2015.

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 architecture, law and library science 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.