

Office of Higher Education

At A Glance

TIMOTHY D. LARSON, Executive Director

Established - 2011

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

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

Number of full-time employees – 27 total (20 filled - 7 vacancies)

2018-19 Recurring Operating Expenses - \$ 37.175 million

Organizational structure — Division of Academic Affairs; Division of Programs and Student Services; 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 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.

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, 57 occupational schools, three hospital-based schools, and 33 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.

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 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.

ARC's 2018-19 program prepared 70 adults for teacher certification in business education, English, family consumer science, mathematics, sciences, technology education and world languages (Chinese, French and Spanish). Eleven percent of the graduates hold master's and/or Ph.D. credentials, and 31 percent are from minority groups.

Overall, 73 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.

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. 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 \$6,095 that can be used to pay for college or to pay back qualified student loans. Since 1994, more than 15,000 Connecticut residents have served more than 21 million hours and have qualified for Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards totaling more than \$51.2 million.

Last year more than 2,100 Americans of all ages and backgrounds met local needs, strengthened communities, and expanded economic opportunity through national service in Connecticut. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) invested more than \$9.9 million in federal funding to support cost-effective community solutions, working hand in hand with local partners to empower citizens to solve problems. AmeriCorps members and Senior Corps volunteers are preparing today's students for tomorrow's jobs, reducing crime and reviving cities, connecting veterans to services, fighting the opioid epidemic, helping seniors live independently, and rebuilding communities after disasters. National service participants served at more than 400 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, CNCS, its grantees, and project sponsors generated more than \$6.3 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 FY19, MAP launched a new initiative - Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS) 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. Since its creation in state statute in 1983, MAP initiatives, like PASS, has significantly helped Connecticut colleges and universities recruit, enroll, and retain minority students. Currently, the focus has shifted to improving the retention and graduation rates of minority students at Connecticut colleges and universities.

Improvements/Achievements FY 2018-2019

During the year, the Office of Higher Education continued to administer the Roberta B. Willis 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 \$33.4 million to 11,266 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 \$908,286 in GEAR UP scholarship funds to 1,081 students attending 100 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 \$37,513 for 2017 which was distributed to 64 grantees.

To strengthen diversity in the state's teacher workforce, the Office of Higher Education awarded Minority Teacher Incentive Grants to 39 minority students totaling \$190,000, and loan reimbursement stipends to 32 former grant recipients totaling \$78,047 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 112 programs approved without undergoing the approval process. Among the 112 programs, 4 was an associate degree program, 44 were bachelor's degree programs, 24 certificates, 31 were master's

degree program and nine were doctoral degree programs. For the non-exempt institutions, which are still required to go through the Office of Higher Education's program approval process, one program was licensed and two programs were accredited.

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 25 existing schools, investigated two formal complaints, and worked with nine schools that closed in compliance with state statutes. There were two hospital-based re-approval for FY19.

Carrying out its oversight of hairdresser and barber schools, the Office of Higher Education re-approved 12 existing schools, and closed five schools in compliance with state statutes. There were no new schools approved and two complaints investigated for hairdresser and barber schools.

As the Connecticut State Approving Agency (SAA) for veterans' education benefits, the Office of Higher Education processed 94 initial, revised and updated approval actions for institutions and training facilities eligible to enroll veterans; conducted six inspection visits, four technical assistance visits, and 18 compliance survey visits to schools, colleges and training facilities; and provided information to active duty service members and veterans regarding their educational benefits at outreach events. Staff approved 489 programs and disapproved 111 programs for degree- and non-degree-granting institutions and training organizations at approved facilities; and participated in the 2018 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 2018 enrollment at Connecticut colleges and universities rose 0.1 percent to 198,889 students compared to the previous fall. The increase was due mostly to gains in full-time enrollment at the graduate level. More specifically, the numbers of full-time graduates grew by 1.8 percent while overall full-time enrollment was up 0.4 percent.

The latest graduation statistics show that Connecticut colleges and universities awarded 46,592 degrees in 2017-18, down 1.3 percent from the previous year, ending a 19-year upward trend.

Just under half of all awards (49.6 percent) were bachelor's degrees, 24.2 percent were masters and 14.3 percent were associates. The largest annual decrease was in bachelor's degrees with 397 fewer awarded in 2018. The number of associates' degrees and graduate certificates also declined. Connecticut's public colleges and universities produced 80 percent of all associate's degrees, 51 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 30 percent of all master's degrees.

Women earned 58.6 percent of all degrees, remaining flat from 2017. Women earned more degrees than men at every degree level, and slightly less than half of all the degrees earned by women were earned at public colleges.

A total of 12,748 degrees and certificates were earned by individuals from minority groups in 2018, representing 27.4 percent of award recipients, up from 26.1 percent in 2017. Black students earned 8.6 percent of awards compared to 8.6 percent in 2017; Hispanic students earned 10.7 percent of awards compared to 9.9 percent in 2017; Asian or Pacific Islander students earned 5.2 percent of awards compared to 4.8 percent in 2017; and white students earned 58.1 percent of awards compared to 56.4 percent in 2017. Award recipients whose race and ethnicity is unknown earned 5.4% of awards as compared to 8.2 percent in 2017.

The proportion of degrees earned in the sciences, technology, engineering, mathematics, and business outpaced growth in all other fields over the previous year. Conversely, all other disciplines declined 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 and fitness, and business.