



Office of Higher Education

AT A GLANCE

TIMOTHY D. LARSON, *Executive Director 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 (24 filled/1 filled with a TRW/ and 1 vacancy.

2022-23 Recurring Operating Expenses \$38,047,850 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 agency 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 (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.

To maintain standards of quality, OHE 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, 62 non-profit, two for-profit and three from outside the state were approved by the agency to operate in Connecticut. Among non-degree schools, 43 occupational schools, 3 hospital-based schools, and 28 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 has executed an Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) program for 36 consecutive years. ARC is operated through the Office of Higher Education and is approved by the Connecticut State Board of Education.

ARC's mission is to provide a time-condensed pathway to teaching credentials for adults who have a strong desire to become teachers and who possess strong academic and content backgrounds as well as a wide array of life and professional experiences. ARC 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 and work in classrooms Connecticut TEAM trained cooperating teachers and ARC evaluators during an 8-week student practicum experience.

The 2022-2023 program prepared adults in business education, English language arts, family and consumer sciences, mathematics, sciences, technology education and world languages (Chinese, French, German, Italian and Spanish). In June 2023, 23% of the graduating class were representative of minority groups and 43% 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 OHE 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 \$6,895 that can be used to pay for college or to pay back qualified student loans. Since 1994, more than 17,000 Connecticut residents have served approximately 24 million hours and earned education awards totaling more than \$60.2 million. Higher education institutions and other organizations in Connecticut have received more than \$17.8 million in education award payments since 1994.

Last year more than 2,300 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 \$9.5 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 \$2.7 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.

Healthy Communities, sponsored by Community Health Center, Inc., was developed in direct response to AmeriCorps' newest health initiative – Public Health AmeriCorps. Public Health AmeriCorps is the result of a historic partnership between AmeriCorps and the CDC. Healthy Communities successfully competed at the national level and was awarded federal AmeriCorps funding. Healthy Communities hosts 15 AmeriCorps members who participate in various activities related to outreach, education, linkage to care, retention in care, COVID vaccination and engagement in healthcare and support services in Bristol, Clinton, Danbury, Enfield, Groton, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, New London, Old Saybrook, Stamford, and Waterbury.

The Office of Higher Education continued to operate the Minority Advancement Program (MAP), which gives underachieving middle, high school, and undergraduate college students of color the skills, knowledge, and academic support they need to graduate high school and succeed in post-secondary education. On a competitive review basis, MAP funds the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program (ConnCAP) and the Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS) program. In FY23, the MAP programs served 2,235 students.

The ConnCAP program develops linkages with public school systems and Connecticut colleges and universities to provide motivation, skills development, and academic support for underachieving middle and high school students of color. The program aims to 1) increase the retention, persistence, and graduation rates of pre-college minority students, 2) provide students with opportunities to earn college-level credits, and 3) prepare students for successfully enrolling and graduating from college. In FY23, the ConnCAP program funded nine higher education institutions and one nonprofit organization, serving 1520 middle and high school students. The nine higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations funded were Southern Connecticut State University, University of Connecticut- Avery Point, University of Connecticut- Stamford, University of Connecticut- Storrs, University of Connecticut-Waterbury, Western Connecticut State University, Goodwin University, Manchester Community College, Quinnipiac University, and The Athlife Foundation.

The PASS program addresses underachieving college-level students of color who are placed on academic probation and need additional support to redress their academic standing. The PASS program aims to support students through 1) developing sustainable college skills, getting off probationary status, and remaining on track for graduation, and 2) improving retention, persistence, and graduation

rates. In FY23, the PASS program funded nine State of Connecticut public higher education institutions, serving 715 probationary college students. The nine State of Connecticut public colleges and universities funded were Capital Community College, Central Connecticut State University, Housatonic Community College, Manchester Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, Southern Connecticut State University, Tunxis Community College, University of Connecticut Storrs, and Western Connecticut State University.

State-wide decreased immediate college enrollment rates for Connecticut colleges and universities have heightened the focus on retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Likewise, students of color also earn fewer credits per semester while enrolled in college. Students of color earn fewer college credits, which affects these populations' retention, persistence, and graduation rates, which are lower than state and national averages. To combat these detrimental trends, the MAP programs help Connecticut colleges, and universities focus on students of color in efforts to improve their retention, persistence, and graduation rates. The ConnCAP program's efforts provide a college experience for middle and high school students of color along with their families. These experiences help students of color, and their families understand the academic demands of earning a degree. High school students can earn college credits, saving money, while receiving support from the MAP program through socio-emotional and academic support services provided by grantees. The PASS program efforts provide students of color enrolled in college on academic probation additional lifelines of academic and socio-emotional support. These supports address the skills and mindset necessary to get off probation and persist to graduation. Grantees, individually address students' needs and create academic plans to increase their GPA, while also addressing socio-emotional issues that are present and hindering college success. Together the MAP programs provide opportunities to improve social mobility and increased educational equity. These opportunities are essential to underachieving students of color as they often have limited resources and are underserved, which limits their academic achievement.

ACHIEVEMENTS/HIGHLIGHTS FY 2022-2023

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 \$32,511,297 million to 10,573 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 \$612,156 in GEAR UP scholarship funds to 195 students attending 32 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 \$35,455 for 2022-2023. which was distributed to 35 grantees.

To strengthen diversity in the state's teacher workforce, the Office of Higher Education awarded Minority Teacher Incentive Grants to 88 minority students totaling \$390,280, and loan reimbursement stipends to 46 former grant recipients totaling \$115,000 who are now teaching in Connecticut.

Apart from financial aid, the agency's other major focus centered on licensing and accrediting academic programs. With the passage of P.A. 23-204, certain non-profit, private institutions of higher education are now exempt from the Office of Higher Education's program approval process. Among the exempt institutions, there were 634 programs approved without undergoing the approval process. For the non-exempt institutions, which are still required to go through the Office of Higher Education's program approval process, two programs were licensed.

Regarding the state's postsecondary career schools, the Office of Higher Education approved one new occupational school, re-approved 14 existing schools, investigated 73 formal complaints, and worked with zero schools that closed in compliance with state statutes. One occupational school closed out of compliance with state statutes. There was one hospital-based re-approval for FY 2022-23.

Carrying out its oversight of hairdresser and barber schools, the Office of Higher Education re-approved six existing schools and closed zero schools in compliance with state statutes. There were zero new schools approved and 15 complaints investigated for hairdresser and barber schools.

As the Connecticut State Approving Agency (SAA) for veterans' education benefits, the Office of Higher Education processed 62 initial, revised and updated approval actions for institutions and training facilities eligible to enroll veterans; conducted six inspection visits, and 32 Risk Based 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 1,185 programs and disapproved 117 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 2022 enrollment at Connecticut colleges and universities grew 5.0 percent to 189,371 students compared to the previous fall. The growth was due mostly to gains in part-time enrollment at the undergraduate level. More specifically, the numbers of part-time undergraduates grew by 7.9 percent while overall full-time graduate enrollment was up 12.6 percent.

The latest graduation statistics show that Connecticut colleges and universities awarded 47,753 degrees in 2020-21, down 0.9 percent from the previous year, after rebounding from a down year the year prior.

Just over half of all awards (52.5 percent) were bachelor's degrees, 23.3 percent were masters and 12.6 percent were associates. The largest annual increase was in bachelor's degrees with 1356 more awarded in 2021. The number of associate and master's degrees also declined. Connecticut's public colleges

and universities produced 77.9 percent of all associate degrees, 48.5 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 28.9 percent of all master's degrees.

Women earned 60.0 percent of all degrees, a slight increase over 2020. 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 15,220 degrees and certificates were earned by individuals from minority groups in 2021, representing 31.9 percent of award recipients, up from 29.9 percent in 2020. Black students earned 9.5 percent of awards compared to 8.8 percent in 2020; Hispanic students earned 12.0 percent of awards compared to 11.5 percent in 2020; Asian or Pacific Islander students earned 6.1 percent of awards compared to 5.9 percent in 2020; and white students earned 56.7 percent of awards compared to 58.0 percent in 2020. Award recipients whose race and ethnicity are unknown earned 3.4% of awards as compared to 3.8 percent in 2020.

The proportion of degrees earned in the Family Sciences, Social Work & Public Administration and Various Technicians & Trades outpaced growth in all other fields over the previous year. Conversely, most 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 & fitness, criminal justice & protective services, and technicians & trades.