



Office of Higher Education

AT A GLANCE

TIMOTHY D. LARSON, *Commissioner 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 – 30 total (23 filled plus 2 TRWs/ and 5 vacancies.)

2023-24 Recurring Agency Expenses \$13,723,774 million¹

Organizational Structure: Executive Office, Division of Academic Affairs, Division of Programs and Student Services, and Division of Finance

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 authorizes independent colleges and universities, authorizes out of state institutions to teach Connecticut students via distance learning, approves NC-SARA memberships for Connecticut Institutions and regulates the operations of Connecticut's postsecondary

¹ *Expenses were significantly lower in FY24 than in other years due to the provisions of PA 23-208.*

career schools.

Among degree-granting private institutions, 23 non-profit and two for-profit were approved by the agency to operate in Connecticut. One new institution was granted authorization, and two institutions were closed. 25 Connecticut institutions were granted SARA membership. CTOHE maintains a program database that tracks information on all academic programs across the state. This year, 5,018 updates were made to the database. Among non-degree schools, 94 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 2023-2024 program prepared adults in business education, English language arts, family and consumer sciences, mathematics, music, sciences, technology education and world languages (Chinese, French, German, Italian and Spanish). In June 2023, 35% of the graduating class were representative of minority groups and 68% of the ARC candidates were employed as full-time teachers across Connecticut while enrolled in the rigorous Program.

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 \$7,395 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 \$61.8 million. Higher education institutions and other organizations in Connecticut have received more than \$18.3 million in education award payments since 1994.

Last year more than 2,400 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 \$9.6 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 200 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 \$3.1 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.

College Renaissance Corps and Campus Climate Action Corps, both sponsored by Campus Compact, successfully completed the Connecticut Commission on Community Service's 2023 AmeriCorps state formula planning grant process and were awarded operational funding to launch program operations in fall 2024. Both programs serve as career pipeline programs. College Renaissance Corps (CRC) will engage 25 AmeriCorps members at community colleges as near-peer mentors linking underrepresented students to careers in high-demand Connecticut industries in the advanced manufacturing sector, such as manufacturing technology, computer science and information technology and applied engineering. CRC's service area will include Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Haven, and Manchester. Campus Climate Action Corps (CCAC) will engage 40 AmeriCorps members at higher education institutions in activities that increase energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse emissions, and improve ecosystems in the state. CCAC's service area will include Fairfield, Hartford, Middlesex, New Haven, Tolland and Windham Counties.

Healthy Communities, sponsored by Community Health Center, Inc., was developed in direct response to AmeriCorps' newest health initiative – Public Health AmeriCorps. Embarking on its third year in operation, 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. In addition to meeting community health needs, Healthy Communities serves as a career pipeline program for individuals interested in entering the health care sector, which is recognized as a high need sector in Connecticut. 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), designed to provide disadvantaged middle, high school, and undergraduate college minority students the skills, knowledge, and academic support to graduate high school and succeed in post-secondary education. On a competitive review basis, MAP allocates funds to the Connecticut Collegiate Awareness and Preparation Program (ConnCAP) and the Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS) program. In FY24, the MAP programs served 1,775 students.

ConnCAP is a competitive grant program that partners with Connecticut colleges and universities to offer pre-college programs that support disadvantaged middle and high school students. The ConnCAP program has two goals. The first is to help disadvantaged students improve their academic skills and graduate from high school. The second is to help disadvantaged students enroll in college and succeed in a postsecondary degree program. To achieve these goals, OHE and the ConnCAP programs will develop relationships between Connecticut's public-school systems and the grantee IHEs to support disadvantaged middle and high school students in graduating high school and preparing them for college.

A Disadvantaged student is unlikely to achieve their academic potential without programmatic intervention due to circumstances outside their control. ConnCAP programming is delivered year-round (fall, spring, and summer). ConnCAP programs provide students with at least thirty weeks of programming during the traditional fall and spring semesters. Summer ConnCAP sessions are a minimum of one week (five days) of intensive programming. In FY24, the ConnCAP program funded eight higher education institutions and one nonprofit organization, serving 1100 middle and high school students. The eight 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, Quinnipiac University, and The Athlife Foundation.

PASS is a competitive grant program initiative of the Minority Advancement Program (MAP) to address undergraduate minority students on academic warning or probation who need additional support to improve their academic standing and remain on track to graduate. PASS is implemented by Connecticut public institutions of higher education (IHE) during the traditional fall and spring semesters. The need for the PASS program arises from a consistent pattern of minority students (mainly Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino) enrolling in and graduating and earning a postsecondary degree at lower rates. Data for Connecticut for 2023 indicates that 12% of Black or African American and 16% of Hispanic or Latino students showed lower rates of total enrollment than White students at 52% [1]. Similarly, 54% of Black or African American and 62% of Hispanic or Latino students showed lower graduation rates than White students at 75% [2].

[1] The Chronicle of Higher Education. (2022, August 15). Compare the states. <https://www-chronicle-com/article/almanac-states>

[2] The Chronicle of Higher Education. (2022, August 15). Compare the states. <https://www-chronicle-com/article/almanac-states>

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

persistence, and graduation rates. In FY24, the PASS program funded nine State of Connecticut public higher education institutions, serving 675 minority 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, disadvantaged minority students earn fewer credits per semester while enrolled in college, affecting these populations' retention, persistence, and graduation rates, which are lower than state and national averages. MAP programs help Connecticut colleges and universities focus on improving these students' college enrollment, success, retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Specifically, ConnCAP programs help students and families apply to colleges, apply for financial aid, save money, and earn college credits while in high school. Meanwhile, PASS programs assist college students with academic and socio-emotional support services. MAP programs provide opportunities to improve social mobility and increase educational equity. These opportunities are essential to disadvantaged minority students as they often have limited resources and are underserved, limiting their academic achievement.

ACHIEVEMENTS/HIGHLIGHTS FY 2023-2024

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 \$59,844,226 million to 13,055 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 Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program, American Rescue Plan Act grant program administered by participating colleges.

Additionally, the agency administers the Minority Teacher Incentive Program that provides grants and college loan reimbursement stipends to minority group members who are enrolled as undergraduates in Connecticut teacher preparation programs. To qualify for the grant portion, a student must be a full-time college junior or senior enrolled in an undergraduate teacher preparation program and be of African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American or Native American heritage. The agency issued \$362,496 in grant awards and \$84,173 in reimbursement stipends in 2023-2024.

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 \$80,783 for 2023-2024. which was distributed to 27 grantees.

To strengthen diversity in the state's teacher workforce, the Office of Higher Education awarded Minority Teacher Incentive Grants to 80 minority students totaling \$362,496, and loan reimbursement stipends to 34

former grant recipients totaling \$84,173 who are now teaching in Connecticut.

During the 2023 Legislative Session, lawmakers created two additional programs to be housed within the Office of Higher Education. The first, an Adjunct Professor Incentive Grant, was created to incentivize health care professionals to become adjunct professors at the state's public institutions of higher education. 13 incentive grants in the amount of 260,000 were awarded in 2024. The second program, the Student Loan Reimbursement Program (SLRP) was created in 2023 yet funding to implement the program was not received until July 1, 2024. The agency anticipates the program to go live by January 1, 2025.

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 6 new occupational school, re-approved 30 existing schools, investigated 38 formal complaints, and worked with 3 school that closed in compliance with state statutes. No occupational school closed out of compliance with state statutes.

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 July 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 2023 enrollment at Connecticut colleges and universities grew 3.0 percent to 195,033 students compared to the previous fall. The growth was due to gains in full-time and part-time enrollment at the undergraduate level. More specifically, the numbers of full-time undergraduates grew by 2.3 percent while overall part-time graduate enrollment grew by 12.6 percent.

The latest graduation statistics show that Connecticut colleges and universities awarded 48,508 degrees in 2021-22, up 1.6 percent from the previous year, after rebounding from a down year the year prior.

Just over half of all awards (51.6 percent) were bachelor's degrees, 25.4 percent were masters and 12.0 percent were associates. The largest annual increase was in master's degrees with 700 more awarded in 2022. The number of associate and undergraduate degrees also declined. Connecticut's public colleges

and universities produced 76.4 percent of all associate degrees, 46.4 percent of all bachelor's degrees, and 27.4 percent of all master's degrees.

Women earned 61.6 percent of all degrees, a slight increase over 2021. 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 15,827 degrees and certificates were earned by individuals from minority groups in 2022, representing 32.6 percent of award recipients, up from 31.9 percent in 2021. Black students earned 9.3 percent of awards compared to 9.5 percent in 2021; Hispanic students earned 13.1 percent of awards compared to 12.0 percent in 2021; Asian or Pacific Islander students earned 6.3 percent of awards compared to 6.1 percent in 2021; and white students earned 56.6 percent of awards compared to 56.7 percent in 2021. Award recipients whose race and ethnicity are unknown earned 3.0% of awards as compared to 3.4 percent in 2021.

The proportion of degrees earned in the Agriculture & Resource Conservation, Health & Fitness, and Other (Architecture, Law & Library Science) outpaced growth in all other fields over the previous year. Conversely, Technicians & Trades 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, Family Science, Social Work & Public Administration, and Agriculture & Resource Conservation.