

Issues Regarding Program Approval for Private Non-Profit Colleges

The merger of the public college and university systems raises the question of whether the State will continue to regulate the academic programs of non-profit colleges and universities that are licensed in Connecticut and accredited by a regional accrediting body. Currently the statutes require that all academic programs of most of these institutions be brought to the DHE to go through a staff and board of Governors' process for approval. With a merger, these institutions would be bringing their programs for approval to an entity that manages their competitors.

Connecticut's program approval process for the non-profit independent higher education sector is different and more restrictive than in most other states. Data collected by CCIC show that thirty-nine states have no state program approval required for independent colleges. Eleven states have some kind of approval although in four of these cases, it is limited or by exception or consists of a review rather than approval process.

In this dire economic time, it is appropriate to review what state regulation adds value. These independent non-profit institutions do not receive state support for their programs. Accordingly, because their money and academic reputations are at stake, only the academically and financially strong programs for which there is a market are ultimately offered. There is no need for further state review.

Some key points:

- Private not for profit colleges and universities in Connecticut strive to provide relevant and sought after majors and degree and certificate programs. They connect with the employer community through advisory relationships, internships, research collaborations, guest teaching opportunities and statewide economic development efforts. Many of them also link with area community colleges regarding program articulation. In developing new programs, they assess the academic foundations and rigor, institutional fit, available teaching, support and faculty resources and market viability. Proposed programs at these regionally accredited institutions go through various extensive on-campus reviews at both the academic and fiscal levels.
- There are already outside reviewers looking at independent college programs. NEASC looks at the whole institution on a regular basis and reviews it based on eleven standards of institutional quality. Additionally, various academic disciplines have reviewing authority that takes into account the strength and quality of academic programs. Among others, these include national reviewing agencies in engineering, business, and the health professions.
- The process for new academic program approval on a campus is multi-layered. Generally, colleges conduct some kind of analysis of market need to ensure program viability. The appropriate academic departments

develop new program proposals. There is a careful analysis of curriculum, fit with institutional mission, teaching and other resource needs. Upon approval at the department level, proposals move through department, school and campus-wide faculty and policy committees and usually receive board or cabinet approval.

- It is in our best interest, and more importantly, the interests of our graduates and the employers of our graduates, to offer degree programs of the highest quality. Colleges and universities solicit input from employers to ensure that the degree programs they offer and that the skills they provide are appropriate to fill market needs.
- We are not suggesting that the DHE no longer license or accredit our institutions as a whole.
- Program review has nothing to do with student financial aid, which guarantees that Connecticut students are able to attend the Connecticut colleges that are right for them. Other states that do not currently have program approval for private colleges do provide state funded student financial aid and, in some cases, institutional aid.