

Board of Governors for Higher Education
Department of Higher Education
State of Connecticut



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Commissioner Lewis to Retire in February

HARTFORD, Sept. 19 — Higher Education Commissioner Valerie F. Lewis today announced her decision to retire from her post as of February 1.

Lewis has headed the 55-member Department of Higher Education since November 2000. She was appointed by the Board of Governors for Higher Education which conducts planning and policy-making for Connecticut's 47 colleges and universities as well as licensure and accreditation of academic programs and institutions, and is staffed by the Department of Higher Education. The state's 70 private occupational schools and Alternate Route to Certification also fall under the agency's purview.

Announcing her decision at today's monthly meeting of the Board of Governors in Hartford, Lewis said she "feels enormously privileged to have served as commissioner of a higher education system that is a deep and rich resource to every Connecticut citizen.

"It is especially gratifying to retire in a year when Connecticut has committed important new financial aid resources to keep our colleges affordable," she noted, referring to this year's historic 67 percent increase in funds for state-sponsored student aid programs. "It has been an honor to work for so many years with exceptional colleagues across the state's academic and political landscape who share an understanding that education, at all levels, is a catalyst for strengthening both the state's economy and individual futures."

Frank W. Ridley, chairman of the Board of Governors, said he fully understood Commissioner Lewis' decision but nonetheless accepted it with regret. "We owe Valerie great gratitude for building a climate of consensus and partnership both within and outside of higher education, especially with those concerned about workforce issues. Her leadership has spurred colleges to collaborate rather than clash, keeping the focus of policy-making always on students. We wish Valerie the very best in her well-deserved retirement and hope our future work will build on her significant legacy."

As Commissioner, Lewis has been a passionate advocate of controlling tuition costs and boosting aid and access for needy students. Over her tenure as Commissioner, funds for state student aid programs have climbed an impressive 93 percent. A statewide review of the Board's public college tuition policy in 2004 maintained limits on annual tuition growth as well as a 15 percent set aside of all tuition revenues for aid for needy students. Lewis also led the development of the state's first accountability system for higher education under which the Department annually produces a comprehensive report on the system's progress for use by policymakers and administrators.

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Lewis joined others in spearheading the creation of iCONN, Connecticut’s Digital Library, and oversaw the implementation of a revised undergraduate curricular framework for general education now in place at all Connecticut colleges and universities. She led efforts to increase the number of programs and degrees awarded in nursing and helped to broker the Guaranteed Admission Agreement between the University of Connecticut and the 12 community colleges. Lewis guided five new institutions into being, including Goodwin College, and expanded the scope and offerings of the state’s Alternate Route to Certification in response to teacher shortages. She is currently working on creating a statewide nanotechnology curriculum and shared “nano-hub” facilities for researchers and community outreach.

In addition to her duties as Commissioner, Lewis has been an active member of the State Higher Education Chief Executive Officers organization for which she served as president in 2003-04. She also serves as an ex officio member of the State Board of Education and on board of the Connecticut Student Loan Foundation, Connecticut Innovations, Inc., the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission, the Governor’s P-16 Council among other state groups in addition to the Boston-based New England Board of Higher Education.

Lewis has spent nearly her entire career in Connecticut higher education, starting in 1969 as a director of admissions and faculty member at the then-independent Hartford College for Women. In 1985 she began her graduate work at the University of Connecticut where she also served as a graduate assistant to the president and vice president for academic affairs. In 1987, she joined the Department of Higher Education as a consultant, moving up to special assistant to the commissioner and then deputy commissioner in 1993. Following the retirement of the Department’s previous commissioner, Andrew De Rocco, in June 1999, Lewis served as interim commissioner before being named commissioner the following year.

The Board of Governors will conduct a national search for her replacement.

In addition to Chairman Ridley, members of the Board of Governors are: Brian J. Flaherty, Vice-Chairman; William Aniskovich; William A. Bevacqua; Dorothea E. Brennan; James H. Gatling; Ross H. Hollander; Harry H. Penner, Jr.; Jean E. Reynolds; Robert Robins; and Albert B. Vertefeuille.

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