

News Release

Contact: Connie Fraser 860/947-1801 (W)
860/347-6679 (H)
cfraser@ctdhe.org

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



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Connecticut Colleges Produce Steady Supply of Graduates But Degrees Lag in Sciences and Nursing

HARTFORD, March 6 — Connecticut colleges and universities produced 29,687 graduates last spring, continuing a steady climb since the mid-1990's, with more degrees going to minorities, women and post-graduate students than ever. But the numbers of graduates in fields critical to the state's workforce — biology, physical sciences and nursing — are still dropping, and even recent gains in computer sciences appear to be leveling off.

These findings are contained in a report prepared by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education analyzing trends in degrees awarded by the state's public and independent colleges and universities using the latest data compiled for the 2000-01 academic year. The report shows that last spring's total is up 3.5% from a decade ago. Fifty-seven percent of all degrees were in the popular fields of business, education, health professions, social sciences and the liberal arts.

"Recent news about growing enrollment is just half the story," stated Higher Education Commissioner Valerie F. Lewis in announcing the latest figures today. "Clearly, our colleges are making sure students reach the finish line and gain their degrees. This is good news for Connecticut's employers.

"We remain very concerned, however, about the shrinking supply of graduates in the sciences, technologies, and nursing as well as in certain fields of teaching," stated Lewis. "Our performance record in these high-demand careers is mixed at best. We must focus on attracting students to these key industry clusters to meet all of the state's workforce needs."

The report notes that while the number of graduates in computer sciences continued to grow, the annual rate of increase (3.2%) is the smallest recorded since 1997 and is well below industry demand as reported by the Connecticut Department of Labor. Degrees in biology and the physical sciences are down 12.2% and 2.4% respectively. The only upward trend in the hard sciences was a hike of nearly 8% in engineering.

Across the important allied health fields, the number of degrees inched up 1.0% to 2,916 but is down 12.6% from 1997. While the State Labor Department estimates annual openings for registered nurses to be 947, Connecticut colleges produced just 737, down 26% from four years ago.

With 3,300 students receiving teaching certificates last year, the report confirms conclusions by the State Department of Education that Connecticut has an adequate supply of teachers except in the

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shortage areas of mathematics, music, remedial reading/language arts, school/library/media, Spanish and technology education.

Nearly half (48%) of last year's graduates earned bachelor's degrees, followed by master's (28%) and associates (15%). The greatest growth in type of degrees has occurred at opposite ends of the spectrum: the numbers of both certificates and graduate degrees are up, while bachelor's are down slightly and associates more so. Graduate degrees now make up more than a third of all awards.

Public colleges awarded 49% of all degrees, down from their 52% share 10 years ago due mostly to a larger rates of growth at the state's independent colleges and fewer numbers of associates granted by the publics. The state's independent colleges now produce 51% of all degrees, up 3% over the same time period.

Women, with 58.4% of all degrees, continue to outpace men in degree attainment but they earn proportionately more associates and fewer doctoral and first-professional awards than their male counterparts.

Degrees to minority students climbed 4.0% to 4,621, continuing an upward trend for at least 13 years. But their share of all degrees (15.6%) remains considerably below their representation of 20.7 percent in the state's general population. This is particularly true for Hispanic and African American graduates. Compared to white students, minorities earn proportionately more certificates and associates than white students (27.5% compared to 18%), and less at the bachelor's and advanced levels (72.8% compared to 81.9%).

Copies of the Department's report, "2000-01 Degrees Conferred by Connecticut Institutions of Higher Education," are available at www.ctdhe.org or by calling 860/947-1848.

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