

News Release

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



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Connecticut Colleges Produce Surge of Graduates

MANCHESTER, Dec. 17 — In good news for the state's employers, recent enrollment gains have fueled a surge of college graduates in Connecticut. In the second consecutive year of growth, degrees awarded last spring by Connecticut colleges jumped 6.6 percent to 32,499, the largest annual gain in at least 16 years. Degrees were up across all levels and in nearly all fields important to the state's economy with the exception of nursing and teacher shortage fields.

Higher Education Commissioner Valerie F. Lewis presented the annual totals to the Board of Governors for Higher Education at a meeting held today at Manchester Community College.

"We expected these gains based on growing enrollment, but the extent of this increase is truly impressive," Commissioner Lewis stated. "This is peak performance by our students and colleges that will nourish our workforce for years to come. All should be commended for work well done."

She noted, however, that "nursing and teaching remain cause for concern. We must focus on these fields and explore incentives to attract more people to these areas for the sake of our children and the quality of all of our lives. And this underscores the need in the public system to rehire faculty in these critical workforce areas — an issue the legislature has asked us to monitor."

The findings on degrees awarded in 2002-03 are contained in an annual report prepared by the Connecticut Department of Higher Education. The report shows that last spring's total is up 10 percent from a decade ago. The five most popular fields are business, education, social sciences and history, health professions and the liberal arts. Fifty-six percent of all degrees were in these fields. The report also finds that:

*The statewide gain of 6.6 percent is due largely to a 16 percent increase in the number of degrees awarded by the University of Connecticut. This also helped boost the public sector's number of degrees by 10 percent. The public system now produces just under half of all degrees awarded in Connecticut, and might soon award a majority of degrees for the first-time since 1997-98.

*In fields important to the state's five key "industry clusters" of bioscience, aerospace, software/information technology, metal manufacturing and maritime, degrees are up 21 percent in computer science, 12 percent in engineering and 8 percent in biology, although the latter two fields continue to lag behind previous peaks. Physical sciences continued its general downward trend, though this year only by 0.5 percent.

(MORE)

*Of Connecticut's 15 teacher preparation programs, the four largest producers are in the public sector: Southern Connecticut State University (with 829 awards), Central Connecticut State University (557), the Department of Higher Education's Alternate Route to Certification (424) and the University of Connecticut (360).

*Only 685 or 19 percent of the 3,651 teacher preparation awards were in the state's nine critical shortage areas with the fewest graduates in library media specialists (11), bilingual education (21) and consumer and home economics (28). In contrast, awards in elementary and early childhood education accounted for 35 percent of all teacher preparation degrees.

*Degrees across all health fields slipped 0.5 percent with nursing down a full 5.3 percent to just 753, significantly below the Department of Labor's projected annual need of 1,235. Over the last five years, nursing degrees have fallen 14 percent.

*The number of degrees awarded to minority students rose 10.3 percent but remain over-represented at the two-year level and not reflective of Connecticut's larger population.

*Women continue to earn the vast majority of degrees (59 percent), and are the majority at every degree level except for doctorates and first-professionals where they are expected to become the majority in the very near future.

Copies of the Department's report, "*2002-03 Degrees Conferred by Connecticut Institutions of Higher Education*," are available at www.ctdhe.org or by calling 860/947-1848.
