Testimony for the Higher Education & Workforce Advancement Committee
From
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you on the approval process for new programs in the state of Connecticut and to support the concept raised by SB 1139, An Act Concerning Changes to Program Approval for Private Colleges.   I am pleased to hear that the Office of Higher Education is considering adopting a more streamlined approval process for independent Colleges and Universities. I believe a streamlined process will be able to ensure quality programs and allow institutions to respond more quickly to the needs of our students.

Before coming to Connecticut, I worked for 10 years at a private, non-profit higher education institution in Massachusetts that was excluded from the state approval process due to its historic nature. This institution did not have to seek approval for new programs or program modifications as long as the programs were covered by the charter of the College. As a result, the institution was able to respond to the need for new programs to meet workforce demands and expand into emerging areas in a competitive and aggressive manner. The College responded by creating new and innovative programs. These programs responded to the workforce needs and provided the College with a competitive edge that included the ability to recruit students from other states. Examples included accelerated formats, which were mainly four year baccalaureate degrees that were completed in three years, allowing the students to enter the workforce more quickly. We also developed new programs or modified existing programs to include the use of technology in the delivery methods, these included both online and real-time video linking between multiple campuses. These delivery methods improved access to the academic programs for students. As the needs of employers changed, we were able to meet the demands by developing programs to increase the level of education of the workforce. For example, we created B.S. programs for fields with high numbers of Associate or Certificate trained workers. These programs were often the first in the state and region and provided graduates with increased career possibilities. Because the institution was well established the quality of the programs did not suffer. There was extensive internal and external review. All of the programs were subject to approval by the regional accrediting body and many of the programs required specialized accreditation.

Similarly, the University of Saint Joseph has an extensive internal approval process for all of its new programs.   A complete program proposal is developed. The proposal includes a feasibility study with a financial proforma, the resources required, a timeline for implementation, analysis of competitor programs, analysis of job prospects for the graduates, curriculum outline and

new course syllabi.   The proposal is approved by a Department and/or School and is the reviewed by a faculty Curriculum Committee and often revisions are required. Once approved by the Curriculum Committee it is discussed and voted on by the Faculty Committee of the Whole, which is the faculty governance system at USJ. Following approval it is reviewed and approved by the Provost and the President. Revisions are generally made throughout the process. Finally, it is presented to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees and based upon a recommendation from the Committee it is voted on by the full Board of Trustees of the University. This process generally takes one year or more.

New programs must also be submitted to NEASC and are usually reviewed at the time of a full accreditation visit unless it is considered to be a substantiative change, which usually means an institution offering a higher degree. Many programs require specialized accreditation, which entails a multi-year process, usually with several milestones along the way. Site teams, consisting of experts in the field, visit the university for 2-3 day visits, usually several times during the process and feedback is provided to improve the program. Once approved there are extensive reporting requirements that ensure quality of the program. In my experience in Connecticut, state approval for new programs and program modifications for private, non-profit institutions requires different documentation than the regional or specialized accreditors. Therefore, additional time and money is spent on creating these documents and then the approval process itself adds time to the process. This can cause a delay in responding to the needs of the market as well as students.

Further, the value that the current process adds to the development of new programs or program modifications is limited. I currently serve as a member of the Advisory Committee on Accreditation.   I believe all of the members of the ACA do their best to provide helpful feedback to new programs and to uphold the standards. However, beyond the input provided by the OHE staff during the process, I do not believe the ACA members provide input that significantly increases the quality of the programs coming before the group.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions.