



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for
Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
from
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Writing on behalf of Sacred Heart University, college students in Connecticut, future students seeking a higher education in our State, and all Connecticut residents and businesses, I am submitting testimony **in favor of S.B. 1**, an ACT CONCERNING INNOVATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CONNECTICUT'S ECONOMIC FUTURE, **and in opposition to S.B. 414**, AN ACT CONCERNING THE TAX ON COLLEGE PROPERTY, **and S.B. 413**, AN ACT CONCERNING A TAX ON CERTAIN ENDOWMENT FUNDS OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

S.B. 1 seeks, in part, to support Connecticut's institutions of higher education in their work to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship among students and faculty in an effort to promote economic growth in our state. At Sacred Heart University, we are already doing extensive work in this area, but welcome the opportunity to coordinate better with the State, the business community and other colleges and universities to elevate the visibility of that work and to form stronger partnerships within our regions.

In the spirit of entrepreneurship, Sacred Heart University has developed dynamic relationships with regional employers, organizations and municipalities that include marketing research and forecasting, on-the-job training, job shadowing, environmental restoration and preservation and multiple collaborative learning opportunities. We also have campuses in Ireland and Luxembourg and provide service and student training opportunities in many nations across the globe.

SHU's five colleges (Business, Health Professions, Nursing, Arts & Sciences and Education) actively pursue opportunities to place our students in learning roles within the community. For example:

- A group of students and faculty from our business college annually spend their spring semester working on an economic outlook plan for the state of Connecticut. This includes economic and financial forecasting and a comprehensive review of business growth, banking, unemployment and housing.
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- The SHU Problem-Based Learning Lab (PBL) is an interdisciplinary experiential learning program that has been designed to expose students to business problems requiring real-time applied solutions. The PBL program targets community organizations, municipalities and businesses looking to address growth and marketing opportunities and to enhance or influence public perception, working in partnership to help create and implement innovative action plans.
- The [Jack Welch College of Business](#) partnered with Starwood Hotels and Resorts to provide [digital marketing](#) training for high school students participating in the city of Stamford's Mayor's Youth Employment Program. The students participated in three weeks of classroom training from SHU professors and Starwood employees, followed by two weeks shadowing Starwood employees, all the while working in teams of four to develop a digital marketing campaign. At the conclusion of the program, the students presented their ideas to the Starwood senior leadership team. This is one of several partnerships between SHU and the business community in Stamford that have come as a direct result of SHU's decision several years ago to open a Graduate Center in downtown Stamford to serve the needs of business professionals there and in Westchester County.
- SHU's College of Health Professions has worked with Stamford Hospital to launch a new full-time, 27-month [master of physician assistant studies \(MPAS\) program](#), with an initial class of 28 students starting in fall 2016. More than 800 potential students have applied to attend the program since the application process opened last April, reflecting the rapid nationwide growth in demand for physician assistants. The program will comprise a 12-month classroom phase followed by a 15-month clinical phase providing 2,000 hours of experience in several medical specialties. All students will complete clinical rotations primarily at Stamford Hospital, along with other SHU-affiliated hospitals and health-care sites.
- On the arts front, SHU sponsored its first FTMA Annual Film Festival in 2014 in Stamford with a follow-up in 2015 in Fairfield. This four-day creative event celebrates the cinematic arts with a wide variety of screenings, master's classes, presentations, workshops and social activities and is free to the public. Interactive activities focus on the works of student artists, who are joined by highly accomplished television and movie legends. FTMA is SHU's film and television master's degree program. Located at the University's Stamford Graduate Center, the program is attracting student writers and aspiring filmmakers and producers from across the country. FTMA is committed to cultivating and helping to nourish a robust film culture in Stamford and in Connecticut, with a specific focus on story-telling and storytellers.
- The \$1.2M grant that SHU recently received from the National Science Foundation's Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program will help pay for interested math and biology majors to earn a teaching certificate. They will then teach these STEM subjects in high-need school districts, serving two years for every year of their Noyce scholarship.



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- A leader in environmental studies and research, the environmental science & management program within the University's Biology Department has been the driving force behind the multi-phase restoration of Stratford Point in Milford and in another long-term effort to tag, study and preserve horseshoe crab populations in Long Island Sound and along the entire eastern seaboard. These hands-on projects involve faculty, SHU students and many community and high school volunteers, working in conjunction with the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The program runs on private and public funding including grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the prestigious Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund.

There are many other examples, including the creation of a T-shirt design business run by SHU students to support charitable efforts at the school and a coffee shop and creamery opened on campus – and run by students – to teach basic business skills and entrepreneurship. Additionally, students spend countless hours volunteering in local school systems, hospitals and nursing facilities; work and study with the investment communities in New York City; and support neighborhood coalitions, recreation centers and much more.

Additionally, SHU has established highly sought-after undergraduate and graduate programs in high-demand vocations such as IT, gaming, cyber-security, film and television production. These appealing certificate and degree programs attract new students to Connecticut, keep our existing talent in-state and represent the evolving economy and future job growth. The SHU population includes a strong international student presence, as well, which also provides a much-needed boost for the State's economy. The Association of International Educators estimates that the 2,611 foreign college students just in Connecticut's 4th Congressional District add \$106.7 million to the regional economy and support 698 jobs. Statewide, the economic impact from close to 12,000 international students is estimated at \$461.8 million.

I know you will find numerous related examples of school/employer and school/organization collaborations at other colleges and universities. Each of these activities exemplifies the intent of S.B. 1. But creating desirable programming and keeping these critical incubators viable – and affordable – requires more than simply imaginative thinking and execution. There needs to be a consensus among legislators – and public- and private-sector leadership – about the value our higher-education system represents and how to help us continue providing these critical services and programs.



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That means avoiding punitive, costly and desperate acts, mandates and taxes that will stymie growth and limit the very tools we most need to grow.

Sacred Heart University strongly opposes S.B. 414 and S.B. 413. S.B. 414 seeks to revoke Yale University's tax-exempt status for certain parcels of land, and S.B. 413 seeks to tax the Institution's endowment. Yale University, along with all of our institutions of higher education, is one of the strongest economic assets our state has. Attempting to revoke its tax-exempt status is short sighted and will have a lasting negative impact on them as well as on the independent college sector.

With S.B. 1, and S.B. 413 and S.B. 414, we face the kind of "giving with one hand, taking with the other" philosophy that has continually hindered economic growth and vitality in Connecticut. The effort to mandate program approval at Connecticut's private colleges and universities (**S.B. 24, an Act Concerning Program Approval for Independent Institutions of Higher Education**) is a related example. S.B. 24 goes hand-in-hand with the goals expressed in S.B. 1. If passed, new programs can align more effectively with employer needs, competitive trends and economic opportunities, which is exactly the intent of S.B. 1.

We applaud any effort to promote entrepreneurial pursuits and to recognize the value of our State's institutions of higher learning in regard to economic development, training and job growth. At the same time, we decry efforts to undermine Connecticut's strongest existing incubation infrastructure – its successful colleges and universities.

We urge legislators to **support S.B. 1, and S.B. 24**, which will spur the capacity of higher education institutions to promote greater economic growth in this state and to **oppose S.B. 413 and S.B. 414**, which would limit the capacity of one of our state's strongest economic drivers from continuing its vital mission and role in Connecticut's economic future.