



Dean, School of Engineering

Testimony for the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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Hello, my name is Bruce Berdanier. I am the Dean of the School of Engineering at Fairfield University. On behalf of Fairfield University I am submitting testimony in support of SB 24, AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION, which seeks to exempt independent institutions of higher education in Connecticut from the academic program approval process administered by the Office of Higher Education.

Fairfield University has an extensive internal approval process for all of its new programs. A detailed program proposal is developed for all new programs. The proposals are extensive and include a feasibility study with a financial market analysis, the resources required, a timeline for implementation, bench marking of similar programs, projections of job prospects for the graduates, as well as curriculum outline and new course syllabi. Proposals are vetted and approved first at the Department and School levels prior to moving through the university governance process. The initial university review of the curriculum and pedagogy is completed by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. The Educational Planning Committee is second and evaluates if all program costs and resources and projected performance have been given reasonable consideration. Finally, the University Academic Council reviews all aspects of the proposal for final approval. Revisions are generally requested, made and documented at each step throughout the process. Until recently this process generally took up to one academic year to complete. We have worked hard the last two years to make the process more efficient but a minimum process time is typically three to four months for approval after preparation of the program proposal.

In addition, all of the professional schools at Fairfield have to meet requirements for national external accrediting organizations (i.e. ABET for School of Engineering, AACSB for Dolan School of Business, Commission of Collegiate Nursing Education for Egan School of Nursing and Health Studies, and multiple associations for the Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions.) These extensive program reviews occur regularly every few years, require extensive documentation of outcomes assessment and continuous improvement, and include onsite visits for evaluation.

During this difficult economic time, it is appropriate to clear barriers from colleges and universities that are trying to be responsive to the needs of Connecticut employers. Independent colleges and universities are key participants in Connecticut's economic resurgence. At Fairfield over one half of the incoming students in the fall of 2015 were pursuing business degrees, the freshman intake rate in the school of engineering has tripled over the past three years, and the school of nursing is ranked 10th overall in the nation. Six months after graduation 100% of our engineering graduates are either employed or in graduate school. We meet regularly with our

school boards to listen to the needs of the region's employers to ensure that Connecticut's workforce is prepared for the jobs of today and tomorrow through relevant professional programs building on the foundation of a strong liberal arts core.

Given the timing of the process additional review at the state level can mean that a school loses an entire academic year or more before being able to admit students to a new program. An example of a recent "new program" in the School of Engineering was the formation of a 5-year pathway for completion of a BS in any Engineering discipline followed by an MS in Management of Technology (MOT). The engineering graduates of the MOT are highly sought by industries in the region. Currently all of our BS degrees and our MS MOT degree are approved by the State of CT. Yet, we were required to go through the entire proposal preparation, review and governance process at Fairfield as well as the state review process to be able to offer the two degrees in a dual program format. This took a year of time and a significant investment of resources.

Connecticut's program approval process for the non-profit independent higher education sector is different and more restrictive than in most other states. In Connecticut, the Board of Regents institutions, UConn and four non-profit independent institutions are not required to go through the Office of Higher Education for approval of their academic programs. This bill will level the playing field for institutions like Fairfield University.

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