



Sacred Heart UNIVERSITY

Testimony for
The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
By Rupendra Paliwal, Acting Provost for Academic Affairs
Sacred Heart University
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I am writing to urge you to pass S.B. No. 24 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. It is critical that we join the other 36 states who have ended this restrictive control of academic programs in private, nonprofit universities and colleges.

The current practice necessitating that the state's Office of Higher Education review each new program twice—once for licensure and once for accreditation—is burdensome. The federal Department of Education has delegated accreditation oversight to the regional accrediting bodies—NEASC in our case. This regional accreditation review comes in addition to reviews that are internal to each university and, oftentimes, in addition to very rigorous reviews by professional accrediting bodies for disciplines such as nursing, engineering, physical therapy and business. These, along with our own internal review processes, should be sufficient.

When you consider that this extra layer of scrutiny is focused only on the private sector, it gives the impression that the State of Connecticut is uninterested in helping the citizens of Connecticut access all available routes to higher education and indicates a bias toward public institutions. By adhering to the current practices, Connecticut is giving the private sector a handicap that will not serve our students nor the overall reputation of the state.

A primary concern with the state's review process is timing. The process inhibits the private university's ability to respond to the market. Given the timing of the process and the need for a college to advertise a program, this can mean that a school loses an entire academic year before admitting students to a new program.

The state's private colleges and universities serve a very important role for both students and their future employers. They strive to provide relevant and sought-after majors and degree and certificate programs that also meet employer demand. They connect with the employer community through advisory relationships, internships, research collaborations, guest teaching opportunities and statewide economic development efforts. In developing new programs, they assess the academic foundations and rigor, institutional fit, available teaching, support and faculty resources and market viability.



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Proposed programs at these regionally accredited institutions go through various extensive on-campus review. Only the academically and financially strong programs are ultimately offered.

Considering that these programs receive no state funding along with the tough economic times the State is currently facing, it makes sense to weigh which state regulations add value. This is NOT one of them.

Let me reiterate that many, many other states do not have the structure of review that is found in Connecticut. Other states require that both private and public institutions inform them of new programs, but do not insist on evaluating them after they have been evaluated by professionals in the field. The current process leads to a high level of frustration for the faculty and administration of the private institutions in Connecticut. In addition, not one executive in the private sector believes that the current practice makes sense or that it operates in the spirit of American enterprise.