



University of Bridgeport

Stephen Healey, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

To: Higher Education and Advancement Committee
From: Stephen Healey, Ph.D., Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Bridgeport
Re: S.B. No. 24 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

As Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the University of Bridgeport, I submit the following testimony in support of S.B. No. 24 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAM APPROVAL FOR INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

The University of Bridgeport supports this bill to heighten the pace of program development and to make the process of program approval more fair and cost-sensitive.

The University's mission is to offer career-oriented programs set in a deliberately international context on the foundation of a supportive learning environment. It thus crafts programs and recruits domestically and internationally as it seeks to address workforce needs in communities around the world. This context is inherently dynamic, and programmatic recruiting cycles are determined by a range of factors. Because of recruiting cycles, delaying program approval by even a month or two, frequently an entire year's recruiting is sacrificed or compromised. Front-side investment in program development is substantial, so a delay is deleterious and runs the risk of reducing, not improving, quality. Further, the University makes every effort to offer programs in the most affordable fashion.

Public Act No. 13-118 took an initial step toward heightening the pace of program approval, but the University's experience is that the 45 day calendar envisioned by this act constrains both OHE and the University and by no means guarantees an outcome in that timeframe; nor does the process promote program quality. Further, this act may have inadvertently contributed to unequal treatment as regards program approval for private/independent and public institutions. Program revenue has in our experience been compromised, and this 'cost' is either absorbed by the institution or 'passed on' to students. Neither outcome is welcome; nor were they envisioned by PA 13-118.

For example: The University, like many other institutions in Connecticut, is approved to offer programs ranging from a certificate level to that of the Ph.D., and the benefits of this form of regulatory oversight offered by a small staff of people is marginal at best. Just as PA 13-118 was being implemented, the University was approved in September 2013 to offer the Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering, which is designed to serve domestic students as well as students of international institutions. This approval required considerable back-and-forth with OHE staff, even though the University's School of Engineering is highly regarded and offers bachelor's and master's-level programs in Computer Science and Computer Engineering—as well as the Ph.D. The BS-EE program/curriculum was nearly identical with the already-approved structure prevailing in the two other bachelor's programs, one of which (BS Computer Engineering) is accredited by Accreditation Board for Engineering

and Technology, as the BS-EE was designed to be. The approval process delayed implementation through no fault of OHE staff, but for the reason that no one at OHE is trained as an engineer. The University was required to offer a defense of the proposed program structure that no engineer would have doubted or questioned. (Recent accreditation experience with ABET deemed the BS-Computer Engineering program to be of the highest quality.) Prior to 13-118, an Advisory Committee on Accreditation, which though slower as regards program approval, was composed of members who represented a variety of areas of expertise. SB No. 24 will further improve the revision initially conceived in PA 13-118.

For example: The University is taking steps to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. The University has signed an agreement with the Bridgeport Hospital School of Nursing, which will cease offering its diploma program as the University begins offering the BSN. This process has required approval by both the Board of Examiners for Nursing as well as the OHE, the latter as the degree authorizing authority. This duplicative process has been collegially supported by staff on both sides, but it nonetheless has offered little in the way of ensuring program quality that was not already addressed. The University is simultaneously seeking accreditation with the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), which has extensive quality standards surpassing that of OHE. Securing approval of the OHE subsequent to the Board of Examiners delayed offering of this program by several months, which happened to coincide with the most essential part of the recruiting cycle. The first, pre-clinical class is expected to be sub-optimal due to this late start in recruiting. The University has expended several million dollars to develop a clinical training facility, hire administrative staff, and prepare for students. Be it noted for the record: the OHE staff worked with the BOEN staff to ensure that approval was completed in a timely fashion, which the University recognizes and appreciates, but recruiting delay still resulted. This points to a systemic defect, not to an issue related to personnel. SB No. 24 is an appropriate remedy to this systemic defect.

There is also the question of equitable treatment. Older private institutions in Connecticut are 'grandfathered' and do not require OHE approval. Public institutions program proposals are approved via the Board of Regents, yet are nonetheless copied on program licensure requests made by independent institutions. Since the passage of PA 13-118, there is no venue in which private universities interact over issues related to program development with public institutions.

Finally, as regards quality: the University is regionally accredited (which is recognized by CHEA and the US Department of Education), meets state and federal statutory obligations, is programmatically accredited by a range of accreditors, and submits approval material to other state entities (including the State Board of Education and the Board of Examiners for Nursing).

We implore the Committee to recommend passage of S.B. No. 24, both because it is a more reasonable and a more fair approach to program approval.

Sincerely,

Stephen Healey
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University of Bridgeport