

Connecticut State University System

# Academic Excellence Spurs Growth

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**T**he number of students attending the four universities of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS) has topped 36,000 in this new academic year, with the number of full-time undergraduate and full-time graduate students both reaching an all-time high.

Why the record numbers?

First and foremost, it is the caliber of the education being provided, reflecting the commitment of Central, Eastern, Southern and Western Connecticut State universities to student success. Affordability, accessibility, and the recognition by students of the CSUS commitment to Connecticut are all key factors.

And quality begins with the faculty, inspiring students to excel and offering not only knowledge and expertise but encouragement and academic support. Nearly 90 percent of CSUS faculty possess the highest degrees in their fields, and their ranks include Fulbright scholars and exceptional educators, renowned and acclaimed in their respective fields, providing students with access to innovative research, professional journals, and transformational learning.

Connections between theory and practice abound, as evidenced by intern and co-op programs throughout Connecticut, international programs across the globe, and relationships with businesses near and far in a broad range

of fields that build strong bridges, for example, between cutting edge technology in the classroom and the expectations and very real needs of employers.

With nearly nine in ten graduates of the four CSUS universities remaining in Connecticut to pursue their careers, raise families and become active participants in the fabric of life here, it is no wonder that their academic accomplishments bode well for the state.

Overall, CSUS awards the most bachelor's degrees in Connecticut in Mathematics & Statistics, Computer & Information Sciences, and Business, Management & Marketing. Over the past five years, CSUS has awarded the most nursing bachelor's degrees in the state. The number of graduates in the Science/Engineering/Technology fields are also increasing.

Even as the demand for seats in the classroom increases (the number of applications for admission was up 11 percent for this year, following an 18 percent increase over the previous four years), the current economic climate has meant a reduction in available resources. The universities have absorbed reductions in faculty and student support staff, totaling nearly 200, as well as substantial belt-tightening.

Every effort is being made to maintain the quality of the education being provided. In the short term, there is every confidence that can be

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achieved, although should demand continue to grow as resources diminish further, achieving that goal would become more daunting.

Underscoring the responsiveness of the four universities - which together make up Connecticut's largest university system - to the state's future prosperity are specific academic programs established or intensified in recent years. Some examples:

- Helping to alleviate Connecticut's growing shortage of health care professionals, Central launched a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Southern developed an Accelerated Career Entry program, and Western expanded its already successful bachelor's program for registered nurses.
- Central's School of Engineering and Technology launched a new bachelor's program in Mechanical Engineering, and recently received approval to start a Civil Engineering program.
- Responding to local classroom needs, Western offers a Master of Arts in Teaching that provides non-traditional students both a master's degree and teaching certification in one program.
- Southern initiated a graduate-level certificate program in emergency and disaster management.
- Responding to strong demand in health-related careers, Eastern launched a Public Health certificate, an interdisciplinary minor and a concentration in the Bachelor of General Studies program. Other concentrations have

been developed in Sustainable Energy Studies and Environmental Management and Policy.

Of particular note, Central, Eastern, Southern and Western are not only universities of choice but universities of opportunity.

Nearly half of the students (49 percent) are the first generation in their families to attend college, and they reflect a perseverance and zeal for education and advancement that bodes well for our state's future.

Returning veterans also make up an important segment of our university communities, and CSUS honors their service by devoting attention to their specific needs.

This year's freshman class arrived with their sights firmly fixed on obtaining the education necessary to succeed in the "knowledge economy" of an ever-changing and ever more challenging world.

Their decision to pursue higher education here in Connecticut is an affirmation of our state's ongoing investment in the four universities, and underscores the necessity of sustaining the caliber of public education that Connecticut offers its citizens.

**■** *Richard J. Balducci has served on the Board of Trustees for the Connecticut State University System since 1995. A resident of Deep River, he served in the Connecticut House of Representatives and State Senate for two decades, including two terms as Speaker of the House.*

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**The Day**



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