



NEW JERSEY

Association of State Colleges and Universities

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NJASCU Supports Comprehensive Plan for Higher Education; Unable to Support Bachelor's Degree Programs at County Colleges

NJASCU Testimony Senate Bill No. 2535 Concerning Baccalaureate Degree Programs at County Colleges

**Senate Higher Education Committee
May 14, 2018**

As stated consistently and unanimously by New Jersey's higher education leaders, New Jersey needs a comprehensive plan for higher education that would facilitate all sectors working together within the parameters of their respective mission to best serve students in New Jersey. In the absence of such a plan, New Jersey's state colleges and universities are unable to support this legislation (S-2535). Initiating the mission change for county colleges as proposed in this legislation could have the unintended consequence of hurting rather than helping students in New Jersey

- The cost of tuition and fees at county colleges would increase as bachelor's-degree programs are more expensive to offer than associate's-degree programs. The county colleges are likely to require significant investment in infrastructure, technology and equipment, as well as increases in the number and qualifications of faculty. This will lead to increased costs to students, their families and to taxpayers. For county governments, the bill would create an unfunded mandate, with a significant implication for property taxes. As for the county college, this bill will increase tuition and fees for ALL of its students since the infrastructure to support baccalaureate programs is an institution-wide obligation. The State will likewise encounter an increase in pressure to provide additional resources to meet its obligation to fund the growing county college burden.

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- The bill fails to specify how the determination will be made regarding which fields are experiencing or are predicted to experience a critical labor shortage. If this determination is inaccurate, the students in these programs might find themselves with a degree in a highly specialized field of study for which there are few jobs. Moreover, once a determination is made, it is simply unsustainable to expect all county colleges to “ramp up” to establish and maintain the corresponding program, then “wind down” when the critical need is met.
- The financial stability and future growth of our senior public institutions may be undermined, since the decisions regarding new construction of housing, laboratories, and research facilities, and the corresponding creation of jobs at these institutions are based in part on their enrollment numbers over the course of a bachelor’s degree.

The bill also disregards the two-step legal process in place for almost 25 years for an institution to offer programs that exceed its mission. First, the New Jersey Presidents’ Council reviews and makes recommendations to the Secretary of Higher Education “concerning proposals for new programs that exceed the programmatic mission of an institution or that change the programmatic mission of an institution” (NJSA 18A:3B-8.c). “Programmatic mission” is defined under the law to mean “all program offerings consistent within those levels of academic degrees or certificates that the institution has been authorized to grant by the State Board of Higher Education prior to the effective date of this act [1994] or approved thereafter by the commission [which has since become the Office of the Secretary]” (NJSA 18A:3B-3). A slightly more detailed definition appears in the New Jersey Administrative Code: “Programmatic mission” means all program offerings consistent with the levels of academic degrees or certificates that the institution has been authorized to grant by the State Board of Higher Education prior to July 1, 1994, or approved thereafter by either the Commission or the Secretary” (NJAC § 9A:1-1.2).

Put more simply, institutions are categorized under programmatic missions that follow one of these degree programs: associate, bachelor’s, master’s, post-master’s, first-professional, and doctoral. Each of these degree programs is defined under the New Jersey Administrative Code.

Under the second step in the statutory process, the Secretary of Higher Education makes “final administrative decisions over new academic programs that go beyond the programmatic mission of the institution” (NJSA 18A:3B-14.f). The New Jersey Administration Code lists the criteria that the Secretary uses to evaluate requests to exceed an institution’s programmatic mission (NJAC § 9A:1-2.9):

- The objectives of the proposed program(s);

- The relationship of the proposed program(s) to the current institutional mission and the Statewide plan for higher education, if applicable;
- Demonstration of need for the program(s), including present and projected student demand and demand for graduates;
- The effect of the proposed program(s) on existing programs at other institutions;
- The dedication of sufficient resources to implement and maintain the program(s) without eroding the quality of ongoing programs;
- Appropriately qualified students, faculty, and administrators;
- The quality of library holdings, facilities, and equipment; and
- Evidence of strength compared with similar programs in the region and State.

Compared to the proposal in Senate Bill No. 2535, a better approach to supporting and serving New Jersey students is to continue to strengthen transfer agreements between the two- year and four- year institutions. We are very lucky here in New Jersey to have a large array of choices available to students, in terms of academic programming and geographic location. This diversity is a particular benefit for students transferring from New Jersey's county colleges.

The implementation of the Comprehensive Statewide Transfer Agreement in 2009 significantly improved the ability of students from our county colleges to transfer to the public four-year institutions. In fact, the number of transfer students from the county colleges to the senior public colleges and universities increased more than 45 percent between 2006 and 2015.

The institutional members of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities are very proud of their numerous and successful partnerships with county colleges. The proposed mission change for the county colleges would undermine the spirit and intent of the agreement to implement a comprehensive statewide transfer program for higher education.

If the State is inclined to appropriate funding to support "critical need applied science fields", ideally, those resources should be directed to the institutions best suited to efficiently, effectively, and promptly react to meet the need. The public four-year colleges and universities already likely have the infrastructure, faculty, supporting programs, and expertise in place.

A holistic state plan for higher education would address ways to expand choices for all New Jersey students and to build more bridges toward their educational goals, rather than create baccalaureate degree programs at county colleges that have the potential to increase, not decrease, costs to students and taxpayers.

