Fact Sheet: Structure of Higher Education in Ohio

Rather than a centrally controlled system for higher education, Ohio offers a varied network of institutional types, missions, and students served. State policy in higher education is now coordinated by the chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents.

Public Colleges and Universities
Ohio has 37 state-owned institutions of higher education. As structured under Ohio law, each public college and university — regardless of the level it teaches — has its own separate board of trustees, and thus is structurally independent of the other public institutions and of the chancellor. A 2007 executive order and a brief section of the 2009 state budget act named all state-owned campuses, taken as a group, as a “University System of Ohio”. However, neither action changed governance at any of the state’s public institutions; each retains its structural independence.

A total of 14 four-year public campuses teach courses at all levels, with 24 branches offering courses toward degrees awarded at the main campuses. The Ohio State University in Columbus, one of the largest universities in the nation, is the flagship land-grant institution. Ohio University in Athens (1804) is the oldest institution, public or private, in the state.

Two-year public campuses come in three types. Six community colleges offer courses of study from workforce training up to the associate degree and receive public support from local taxes as well as the state; nine state community colleges have no local tax base but are otherwise identical to the other community colleges; and eight technical colleges offer applied degrees and other job training services.

In fall 2012, Ohio’s public colleges and universities enrolled 524,338 students. The state spent $1.94 billion on public campuses and their students in FY2012, not including capital, mostly for direct institutional subsidies (90% of total).

Ohio’s public colleges and universities are represented by the Inter-University Council of Ohio and the Ohio Association of Community Colleges.

Independent Colleges and Universities
Ohio is home to 78 private nonprofit degree-awarding institutions of higher education, with 68 offering bachelor’s degrees or higher and ten offering the associate degree as their highest award.

The oldest independent college in Ohio is Kenyon College (1824) in Gambier. The largest is the University of Dayton, with more than 10,000 students. Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland and the University of Dayton are the principal independent research universities. Religious groups, including churches and religious orders, founded many independent colleges; a number are freestanding seminaries for training in ministry.

In fall 2012, Ohio’s independent colleges and universities enrolled 146,864 students. The state spent $41.0 million in FY12 on independent colleges and their students, mostly for financial aid (95% of total). Independent colleges in Ohio are generally ineligible for capital funds from the state.
Ohio’s private nonprofit institutions are represented by the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio, which has 50 member institutions accounting for 95% of the students in the nonprofit sector.

**For-Profit Colleges and Career Schools**
Ohio’s for-profit higher education sector has 304 institutions with programs extending from short-term certificates to the associate degree, regulated by the State Board of Career Colleges and Schools. Three also have authority from the Chancellor of the Board of Regents to grant bachelor’s and graduate degrees, subject to the same rules as independents. They enrolled 78,002 students in fall 2012, and in FY12 the state of Ohio spent $10.5 million in financial aid on them.

**Board of Regents and the Chancellor**
From 1963 to 2007, the Ohio Board of Regents — a nine-member panel appointed by the governor to nonrenewable nine-year terms — had responsibility for administering state higher education funds, approving new degree programs, authorizing nonpublic and out-of-state campuses to operate within Ohio, and short- and long-term planning. The board appointed a chancellor to hire and direct the staff and its daily work.

The board still exists but with nearly no responsibility: a legislative reform enacted in early 2007 placed regulatory and administrative authority directly in the hands of the chancellor, whom the governor now appoints (subject to Senate confirmation) as a member of the cabinet; after a 2011 legislative change, the chancellor now serves at the governor’s pleasure and no longer has a fixed term of office. Today, the board’s sole responsibility is to conduct an annual study of the condition of higher education in Ohio, including an evaluation of the chancellor.

Today, the chancellor has wide-ranging authority to evaluate and authorize the operation of private colleges and universities. A nonpublic institution, unless it issues degrees only in Bible studies, may not even call itself a college or university or issue a degree without the chancellor’s approval, which must be renewed every 10 years. Also, the chancellor approves new degree programs at all Ohio campuses, public and private, and oversees the expenditure of funds on student financial aid and a handful of other designated state funding programs for which independent colleges are eligible.

The chancellor’s authority over public campuses under current Ohio law is much less than over private. Campuses and their previously approved academic programs may continue to operate in perpetuity; the chancellor only approves new academic programs and administers the state appropriations to the institutions.

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