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FEATURED

State degrees, credentials hit record last year

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer 8 hrs ago



Paula Dehn, Vice President for Academic Affairs & Dean of the College, KWC

Public and independent colleges and universities across the state saw a record number of degrees and certificates conferred for the 2016-17 school year, according to the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

There were 70,146 degrees and credentials earned by students last school year, the KCPE reports, which is up 6.6 percent from the previous year and shows a 34.8 percent gain from a decade ago.

Scott Williams, Owensboro Community & Technical College president, said last week he and his staff are both excited and proud that more people than ever across the state are attaining degrees and credentials. He said this is "extremely valuable" for not just students, but also employers, and in turn, communities.

"It's for the employees and the employer, which will benefit our communities because they will have better-trained and better-educated employees," he said.

A lot of the state's increases are for career-oriented certificates and degrees, the KCPE reported.

OCTC saw a 5.3 percent increase in credentials alone last year, and a big part of that, Williams said, was the introduction of the GO FAME program. GO FAME is the Greater Owensboro Chapter Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education. The employer-sponsored program allows people to work for a company three days a week and attend college two days.

Particularly in the 2016-17 year, the associated science degrees increased by about 9 percent, Williams said.

The school has also seen an increase in the allied health programs and advanced manufacturing, thanks to GO FAME, he said.

With the close relationship OCTC has with Western Kentucky University's Owensboro campus, those associate degrees often transfer to a bachelor of science degree.

Gene Tice, the WKU-O chancellor, said Monday that when OCTC is seeing growth, the school will see the impact from that.

However, while the state's records indicate an upward swing, Tice says WKU-O has maintained a steady flow of graduating 200 to 250 students a year.

"Our enrollment is level, or maybe up two or three students," he said.

The school typically only offers bachelor and master degrees, however, not credentials.

Students who attend Owensboro's campus are juniors or seniors, Tice said, and most of them are studying elementary education, social work and organizational leadership.

"Our organizational leadership degree is growing," he said. "It deals a lot with the teaching of leadership skills and soft skills. Those are the leadership skills that businesses tell us they are looking for."

Paula Dehn, Kentucky Wesleyan College Vice President of Academic Affairs, said Monday the school saw an increase of 23 degrees from 2015-16 to 2016-17.

The KCPE reported that STEM and health credentials increased 7 percent from the previous year, accounting for more than one-third of those awarded, but Dehn said a lot of KWC students are also graduating with degrees in the STEM-H fields.

Most students are graduating with biology, chemistry or health science degrees, which fall into the STEM category, she said.

The school graduates about 130 to 160 students a year, and there are 55 students in the healthy science degree alone, she said.

"Education is also popular," she said. "All of our education majors have gotten jobs before they have graduated."

She said one thing that has helped KWC students with degree attainment has been the school's new Student Success Center, which opened last fall. The center provides tutoring and study sessions for students in need.

"We are really moving forward, and I'm hoping (people) will see bigger things from us in the future," she said.

The Rev. Larry Hostetter, Brescia University president, said Monday that "without a doubt" health services is one of the largest areas students study there in pre-professional programs, like pre-nursing and pre-veterinary.

He said this is probably because there is an increase in general in health care professionals.

"That will continue to grow as the population ages," he said. "There's going to be an ever-increasing need for people in the medical field and health care professionals at all levels."

He said that between 2005-15, BU experienced a 71 percent growth, and he thinks the school's current enrollment of 1,242 students is a direct result of that.

"We decreased a little bit last year primarily because of dual-credit," he said. "But we are holding our own in a very difficult enrollment environment."

He said as an educator, he's happy to see more individuals seeking higher education options.

"That will enhance their own career opportunities as well as help the communities and strengthening the work force."

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