

# Policy Brief

New Legislator Orientation and Training: 2016–2017



Higher Education

December 5, 2016

## **State Agency Overview, Legislature's Role**

Postsecondary education in Nevada is provided chiefly by the institutions of the public Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE). The NSHE (<http://system.nevada.edu/>) consists of two research universities, one State college, four community colleges, and one research institute. It is directed by a Chancellor and governed by an elected 13-member Board of Regents. Acting Chancellor, John V. White, is currently serving while a nationwide search is underway for a permanent replacement.

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Article 11 of the *Nevada Constitution* provides for the establishment and administration of the Board of Regents of the University of Nevada. Section 6 directs the Legislature to appropriate revenues for the support and maintenance of the schools and university. Section 7 provides that the Board of Regents is to control and manage the affairs and funds of the university under such regulations as may be provided by law. Because of the constitutional status of the Board of Regents, the Nevada Supreme Court has ruled in support of the Regents' considerable freedom from legislative control.

Nevada's nonpublic higher education sector is comprised of two nonprofit, private four-year colleges; several for-profit, two-year and four-year institutions; and numerous proprietary institutions.

## **Relevant Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) Chapters**

NRS 396—Nevada System of Higher Education

NRS 397—Western Regional Education Compact

NRS 398—Intercollegiate Athletics

NRS 399—Interstate Compact for Education

## **Issues**

**Teacher Preparation**—Nationally, K-12 teachers are in short supply; the shortage is particularly acute in Nevada. Each year, Nevada's school districts must hire over 3,000 new teachers to keep pace with turnover and growth. At the same time, evidence grows that many new teachers enter the classroom inadequately prepared for the rigors of the profession. These challenges resulted in action during the 2015 Legislature and the recent interim to offer financial aid to college students seeking to become teachers in Nevada, emergency regulations to loosen requirements for the Nevada licensure of teachers from other states, and a discussion concerning how the State's teacher colleges can do a better job of producing more teachers and preparing them for success in the classroom.

**Remediation**—While higher education is responsible for providing a supply of teachers to elementary and secondary schools, those same schools are responsible for providing a supply of high school graduates who might one day enter higher education seeking to become teachers. Unfortunately, most high school students entering college are placed into remedial courses, which bear no credit, upon entering an NSHE college or university. For Nevada's high school class of 2014, 57.7 percent of students entering an NSHE institution were placed in a remedial English or mathematics course. Research indicates this problem may stem from two causes. First, high school academic standards and curriculum are not properly aligned with entry-level college coursework. This problem is largely being addressed through a variety of measures implemented in recent years. Second, there is growing evidence the tools being used to match new college students with appropriate courses may not result in accurate placement. Consequently, NSHE is encouraging its institutions to use other and multiple measures of student readiness for placement in credit-bearing courses.

**Financial Aid**—The onset of the Great Recession and the State budget cuts that followed led costs to be shifted from the State to students, in the form of higher registration fees at a time when family incomes were stagnant. As a result, higher education became less accessible to those who could most benefit—students from lower income families. Nevada’s community college participation rate by low-income students is among the lowest in the nation, 6.4 percent. In addition, although Nevada’s registration fees are affordable compared to other states, the portion of median family income needed to pay for college in Nevada is the highest in the nation, 18.9 percent. Nevada has long had a merit-based financial aid program, the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship; however, beginning in 2015, the State has offered need-based financial aid in the form of the new Silver State Opportunity Grant Program, which received \$5 million in funding over the 2015–2017 Biennium.

**Funding**—Beginning in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, NSHE’s budget began operating under a complex new funding model focused on outputs (course completions and school performance) rather than inputs (student enrollment). A core formula allocates State General Fund dollars based upon completed courses, as measured by student credit hours that are weighted by discipline. An additional pool of performance dollars is available to incentivize institutions in supporting students through graduation; completion measures are given extra weight if achieved in certain disciplines or by minority students. In FY 2018, 20 percent of each institution’s funding will be set aside in the performance pool.

### **2015 Legislative Session—Recent Legislation**

**Assembly Bill 150** (Chapter 207, *Statutes of Nevada*) extended student eligibility for the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship to students who do not meet the minimum high school grade point average requirement but who receive a college entrance examination score that meets the approved minimum score established by the Board of Regents;

**Senate Bill 76** (Chapter 298, *Statutes of Nevada*) revised various provisions governing Nevada’s participation in the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), and **Senate Bill 195** (Chapter 375, *Statutes of Nevada*) moved the Nevada WICHE Office to the Office of the Governor and requires the Governor to propose its budget and appoint its Director;

**Senate Bill 128** (Chapter 373, *Statutes of Nevada*) increased from 6 to 9 the number of credit hours in which a Millennium Scholar must enroll if attending a community college. The bill also increased from 12 to 15 the maximum number of semester credit hours that may be funded on behalf of a Millennium Scholar enrolled in a community college;

**Senate Bill 227** (Chapter 387, *Statutes of Nevada*) created the Silver State Opportunity Grant Program—Nevada’s first need-based financial aid program—to be managed by the Board of Regents. Grants may be awarded to eligible students enrolled in community and State colleges that are part of NSHE; and

**Senate Bill 514** (Chapter 534, *Statutes of Nevada*) provided start-up costs for the development of a medical school at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, with State General Fund support of \$1.2 million in FY 2016 and \$7.1 million in FY 2017. Additional General Fund appropriations of \$18.4 million over the biennium support start-up costs for the new medical school, and \$3.8 million over the biennium supports the expansion of undergraduate and graduate medical education for the University of Nevada School of Medicine.

### **2015–2016 Interim**

After substantial activity related to higher education during the previous two legislative interim periods, the 2015–2016 Interim saw little substantive action. During its end-of-interim work session, the Legislative Committee on Education merely recommended action by the Legislature and NSHE related to expanding or strengthening existing programs.

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