

# Briefing: BHE Degree Granting Authority and Proposals for Reduced Credit Degrees

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MASSACHUSETTS  
Department of  
Higher Education

# Agenda

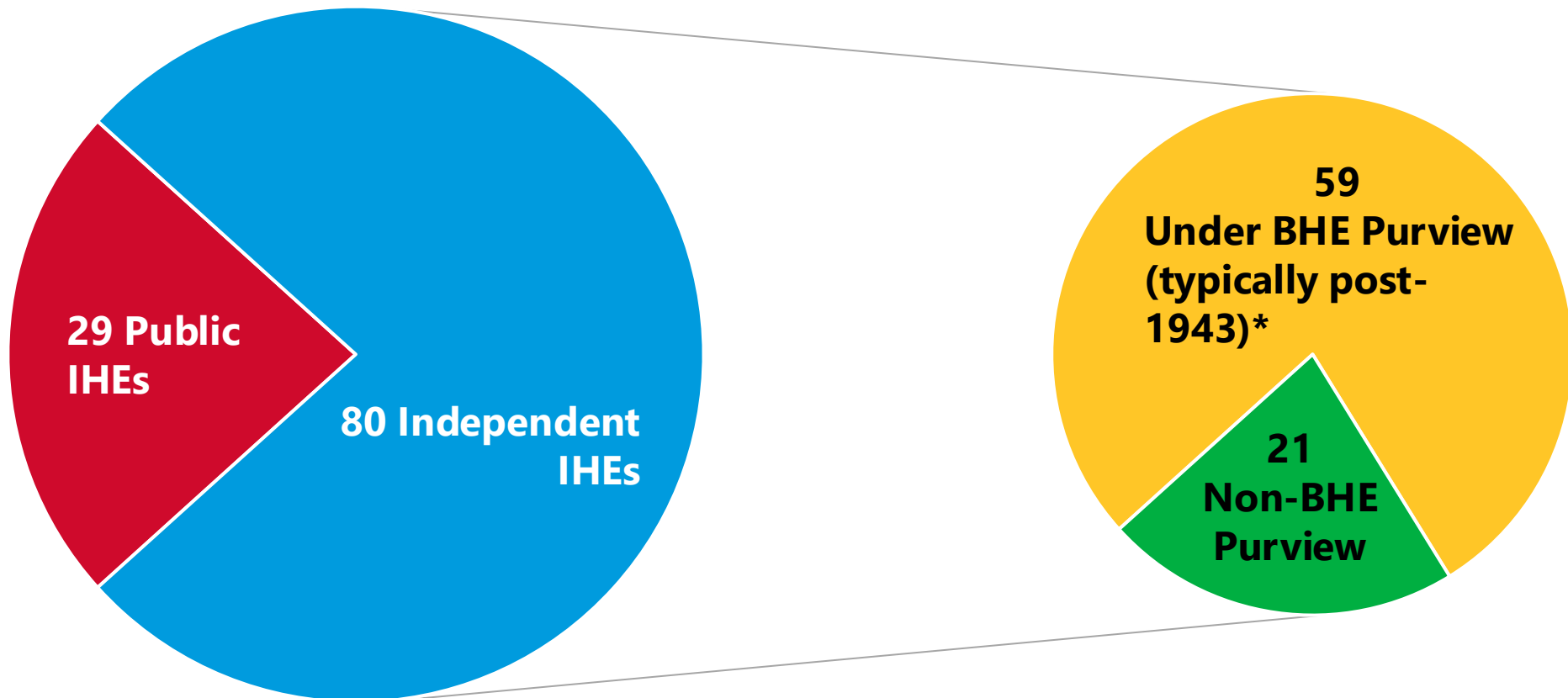
- Context and Overview
  - BHE Statutory and Regulatory Responsibilities (Powers and Duties)
  - Institutional Authorization and Degree Granting Authority
  - BHE Degree Granting Regulations
- National Trend - Reduced Credit Degrees
- Discussion

# BHE Roles and Responsibilities (Powers and Duties)

## Statutory Responsibilities

- MA Public Higher Education: BHE is a coordinating board with some (significant) governing authority
  - *Also, Employer of Record (CBA) for the Community Colleges and State Universities*
- MA Private (and Public) Higher Education- Consumer Protection
  - DHE is responsible for ensuring students and families are well informed and their consumer rights are protected.
  - Examples (*Next Slide*)
    - State Authorization Entity/ Program Approval
    - State Financial Aid
    - Regulator- FARM, CSVP

# Breakdown of MA Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs)



# Higher Education in Massachusetts

- 29 public institutions
  - 15 community colleges
  - 9 state universities
  - 5 UMass campuses
- 80 independent institutions
  - Includes 78 non-profit, 2 for-profit/ proprietary institutions
  - Includes three that are closing and one that is being acquired
- **109 postsecondary institutions operating in MA**

# Higher Education in Massachusetts

## Range and classification of the 80 independent institutions

- 21 institutions not under Board purview – Mix of types, but almost all offer wide array of undergraduate degrees; several are research universities; several offer multiple graduate programs.
- 55 active institutions under Board purview:
  - 31 comprehensive institutions – Multiple degree programs, often offer graduate programs
  - 18 specialty mission/niche institutions
  - 4 single degree program institutions
  - 2 branch campuses: Institution organized outside MA, but has physical presence here.
- *Note: of the three that are closing, two are "comprehensive" and one is a branch campus.*

# Independent Higher Education Institutions

- Institutional authorization/ Program approval (M.G.L. c. 69, s. 30-31C)
  - State law- Any entity chartered (or amends charter) after 1943 and seeks to operate in MA and offer degrees (or courses leading to degree) must be authorized and approved by BHE
  - Federal Law- Post-secondary institutions wanting to receive Title IV funds must be authorized in each state where they operate
- Regulate use of word "college" or "university"
- Conduct IHE Annual Financial Assessments- All private IHEs (new\*)
- Administer NC-SARA Reciprocity Agreement
  - MA institutions wishing to engage in distance learning in other states
- State financial aid administration (\$\$\$M+)
  - Authority to set participation requirements
- Campus Safety and Violence Prevention (new\*)
- Manage Commonwealth's Consumer Complaint System (Title IV)

# Degree Granting Authority

## Private Higher Education Institutions, M.G.L. c. 69, Sections 30-31C

- Scope: All independent IHEs chartered or amended their charters after 1943
- Statutory authority: BHE must establish and enforce standards regarding mission, leadership and organization, financial structures and sustainability, programs of study, faculty and staff qualifications, physical resources , etc.
- Implementation: Regulation (610 CMR 2) and policy (delegated authority to commissioner, AAC 14-35)
- Data on average (annual):
  - 1 to 2 new IHE applications
  - 20 to 25 new degree granting authorizations

## Public Higher Education Institutions, M.G.L. c. 15A, Section 9(a)

- Scope: All public IHEs defined in Section 5 (CCs, SUs, UMass)
- Statutory authority: BHE authorized to “confer upon the boards of trustees the power to offer degree programs after taking into account, among other things, the need, resources and mission of the institution.”
- Implementation: BHE-approved policies and procedures (LOI process)
- Data on average (annual):
  - 12 to 15 new program approvals



# 610 CMR 2- BHE Degree Granting Regulations



# New IHE applications

## 610 CMR 2.07 Snapshot

- Application includes IHE mission, educational objectives, programs, assets and financial support, enrollment plans, budget, admission and graduation requirements, and more
- Visiting Committee performs a rigorous and comprehensive review aligned precisely with regulations in 610
- Board staff members review Visiting Committee report and recommendations and IHE response to review
- Board staff prepare report and motion to bring forward for BHE action

# Board standards regarding degree credits

## 610 CMR 2.07 (3) (c)1, 2

- Specific language regarding number of credits at the associate's and bachelor's degree levels:
- **"An associate's degree shall comprise a minimum of 60 credits, and a baccalaureate degree a minimum of 120 credits."**
- Specific language regarding number of General Education credits:
- **"Baccalaureate degree: 36 credit hours"**

# Context – Charter or Approval

- Typically an institution chartered or approved prior to 1943 is NOT under Board purview except for the matters previously named (e.g. FARM, CSVP).
- An institution's charter may be **broad** and grant authority for all degrees with one or two exceptions, such as medical or law degrees.
- An institution's authority may be **specific**, e.g. the institution must seek authority for each new degree it wishes to offer.

# Context – Board Approval Required

## 610 CMR 2.08 (2) (b)

- A petition for degree authority is required “when it is determined that an institution seeks authority to grant a degree at a new level or to grant a degree significantly different from those for which it is chartered.”
- Staff analysis: A degree that does not conform to the Board’s standards, such as bachelors degrees that contain fewer than 120 credits, requires Board approval.

# National Trend: Reduced Credit Degrees



# “College in 3”

- Originally a consortium of 10 institutions (2021)
- Goals include reducing time (and expense) to the bachelor's degree
- Now a larger more formalized coalition: [College-in-3 Exchange](#)

# “College-in-3 Exchange”

- April 2023: College-in-3 convened the lead faculty from the project's first pilots.
- June 2023: Congress invited the Project to [testify](#) at a special subcommittee on “postsecondary innovation,”
- March 2024: Policy partners advocated for “Experimental Site Status” by encouraging US DOE “to pilot activities to support and encourage accelerated, cost-effective, 3-year bachelor’s degree programs, such as the ‘College-in-3’ project.”
- Also in March 2024: Indiana passed a higher education bill requiring most Indiana institutions to offer at least one three-year degree by July 2025 (Public Law 94).



# Scaling “College in 3”

Current state: “Convener and Cluster” strategy

- “Conveners” may be a lead campus, a regional accreditor, or a national higher education organization.
- “Cluster participants” will have access to the community of early innovators and other participants in their Cluster, as well as the thought-leadership and consultation of the National Exchange leaders.

# Multiple models of “College in 3”

The “College in 3” effort includes not only reducing the required credits for a bachelors degree to fewer than 120 credits, but also degree of at least 120 credits “requiring no more than 3 years of continuous enrollment.”

Department staff is aware of one potential proposal for degree(s) of less than 120 credits.

To best capture this specific concept, and to allow for future consideration of minimum required credits at other degree levels, we are advancing the phrasing of **“reduced credit degrees”**

# Reduced Credit Degrees and Policy

- *What we know:* Massachusetts is probably the only New England state whose higher education board has program approval purview over independent IHEs.
- *What we don't know:* In how many other states higher education boards have this authority.
- *What we believe:* This is an emergent area of policy reexamination.

# Reduced Credit Degrees- Discussion



# Discussion

- Lawrence M. Schall
  - President, New England Commission of Higher Education

