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CONNECTICUT CONFERENCE OF INDEPENDENT COLLEGES CELEBRATES MINORITY ENROLLMENT

(February 27, 2003) West Hartford, Connecticut – In celebration of Black History Month, a period of recognizing the contributions and milestones of African-Americans in our nation, the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC) is proud to announce its recent findings regarding the role of minorities among its 16 member colleges and universities.

CCIC member institutions, which currently enroll 51% of all minority students attending a four-year institution statewide, share a strong commitment to embracing diversity in Connecticut's colleges and universities. Likewise, CCIC members award 58% of all degrees (4-year and above) received by minority students in Connecticut. In fact, contrary to common perception, racial minorities and students from low-income families attend independent colleges at the same rate as public colleges across the nation, according to the Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

With the majority of independent college students coming from low- and middle-income families, programs like the need-based Connecticut Independent College Student Grant Program (CICS), which provides grants to needy Connecticut students, are vital to ensuring access and affordability for low-income minority students. In 2002, CICS grants helped more than 4,700 needy state residents with an average grant of \$3,956, with minorities receiving 25% of those allocations.

Yet, the need is growing. Eighty-four percent of all CICS recipients have Expected Family Contributions of \$13,000 or less, \$10,000 among minority recipients. In addition, Connecticut's college-age population, those 18 to 24 years old, is now higher than in years past, and with an overall economic downturn, the CCIC is forecasting both increased enrollments and greater financial need of those enrolling, making it even more crucial to maintain the current level of CICS funding.

"The member institutions of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges are very proud to serve such an impressively large number of minority students," said Lawrence J. DeNardis, president, University of New Haven and chair of the CCIC board of directors. "With our high retention and graduation rates, and personalized approach, Connecticut's independent colleges and universities provide the most appropriate educational setting for many students. However, it is imperative that we maintain the proper funding to allow us to continue these efforts and to be able to share such success stories."

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With the possibility budget cuts looming, the State should consider what is leveraged by the CICS funds. For starters, in addition to offering higher graduation rates, CCIC institutions have held down college costs, helping twice as many students to graduate in four years than those who attend public institutions. Of key importance is the fact that the cost to the State per degree is \$1,278 among Connecticut's independent colleges and universities versus \$38,549 among the public institutions. This investment is unquestionably returned to the State of Connecticut by securing the backbone of its future workforce, and particularly through the 170,000 alumni living in Connecticut earning over \$9.3 billion annually and contributing \$997 million in tax revenue.

The largest concern regarding a reduction in CICS grant funding is for minority and low-income students in Connecticut. According to Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, Number 122, August 2002, Connecticut's college participation rate for low-income students declined by 50% between FY99 and FY01. The reality is that qualified low-income students already attend four-year institutions at only half the rate of their comparably qualified higher-income peers. "The fear of pending inadequate financial aid is sure to compound declining enrollment among students of low-income families, and in particular, minorities," said Judith B. Greiman, president of CCIC.

As shown through its efforts in signing on to the Amici Curiae brief of the American Council on Education, CCIC is committed to promoting diversity among its student populations and understands the benefits of diversity in advancing higher education. As stated in the brief, "Social science confirms that the interactions student diversity fosters, and institutional commitment to it, are associated with academic success, growth in acceptance of people of different backgrounds, retention of minority students, and other educational benefits for white and minority students." In consciously creating a diverse educational environment, colleges and universities are enabling students to lead "the examined life," or one that more accurately represents the life and communities in which we live.

Founded in 1932, the Connecticut Conference of Colleges (CCIC) represents 16 accredited nonprofit independent colleges and universities in Connecticut. These institutions are bound by a common commitment to quality instruction and dedicated to collaborative efforts that strengthen the independent sector of higher education in Connecticut. CCIC serves its member institutions through government relations, public policy development, research analysis, communications and coordinated member services.

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