

The logo for the Ohio Department of Higher Education, featuring the word "Ohio" in a white, sans-serif font with a white outline, set against a dark blue background.

Department of  
Higher Education



# Choose **Ohio** First

**2020-2021 Annual Report**





## History and Overview

The General Assembly created the Choose Ohio First scholarship program in 2007 to increase the number of Ohio residents completing postsecondary studies in the fields of science (including health professions), technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as teaching degrees or certificates that focus on STEM disciplines. Lieutenant Governor Jon Husted championed the passage of the Choose Ohio First scholarship program when serving as Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives and has taken an active role in the program ever since. The goal of the program is to strengthen Ohio's competitiveness within STEM disciplines by developing STEM scholars and connecting them with Ohio employers.

Under Chancellor Randy Gardner's leadership, the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) manages a competitive process for Ohio's public and independent colleges and universities seeking a Choose Ohio First (COF) designation and funding. Choose Ohio First colleges and universities use COF funds to provide scholarships to Choose Ohio First Scholars. Each institution is responsible for recruiting, selecting, and supporting its Choose Ohio First Scholars. Scholars are provided scholarships and work-based learning experiences that lead to success in their STEM or STEM teacher program. Since the program's inception, the ODHE has conducted multiple, consecutive COF funding rounds, resulting in Ohio educational institutions recruiting new COF Scholars since 2007. In 2020-21, COF scholars were eligible to receive a maximum scholarship of \$8,112, while the average scholarship at a four-year institution was \$4,050 and the average scholarship at a two-year college was \$2,316.

In FY21, the Chancellor awarded a Choose Ohio First designation and \$42.8 million to 57 Ohio institutions through a competitive request for proposal process. The funding will be allocated to each institution over the course of five fiscal years, FY22 through FY26.

As required by [Ohio Revised Code 3333.041](#) (3), this report summarizes the Chancellor's strategy in assigning Choose Ohio First scholarships and describes how the awards are consistent with that strategy.

# Chancellor's Strategy in Assigning Choose Ohio First Designations

In FY21, the Chancellor conducted a competitive proposal process to designate Choose Ohio First institutions and award funding to those institutions for student scholarships. The review panel reviewed and scored 57 proposals from 13 public universities, 16 community colleges, and 28 independent institutions. The total requested amount from the 57 proposals exceeded \$64 million. Scoring of the proposals included evaluation of how each proposal addressed the priorities in the request for proposals, which were based on [ORC 3333.62](#):

- State and regional economic and educational needs;
- Recruitment into STEM fields, including historically under-represented populations;
- Systems of support for scholars;
- Work-based learning opportunities;
- Programs of study; and
- Project rationale

The Chancellor awarded a Choose Ohio First designation and \$42.8 million to 57 Ohio institutions, which began offering scholarships from the FY21 funding round in academic year 2021-2022. Grantees will receive funding on a reimbursement basis as Choose Ohio First Scholars progress through their academic program.



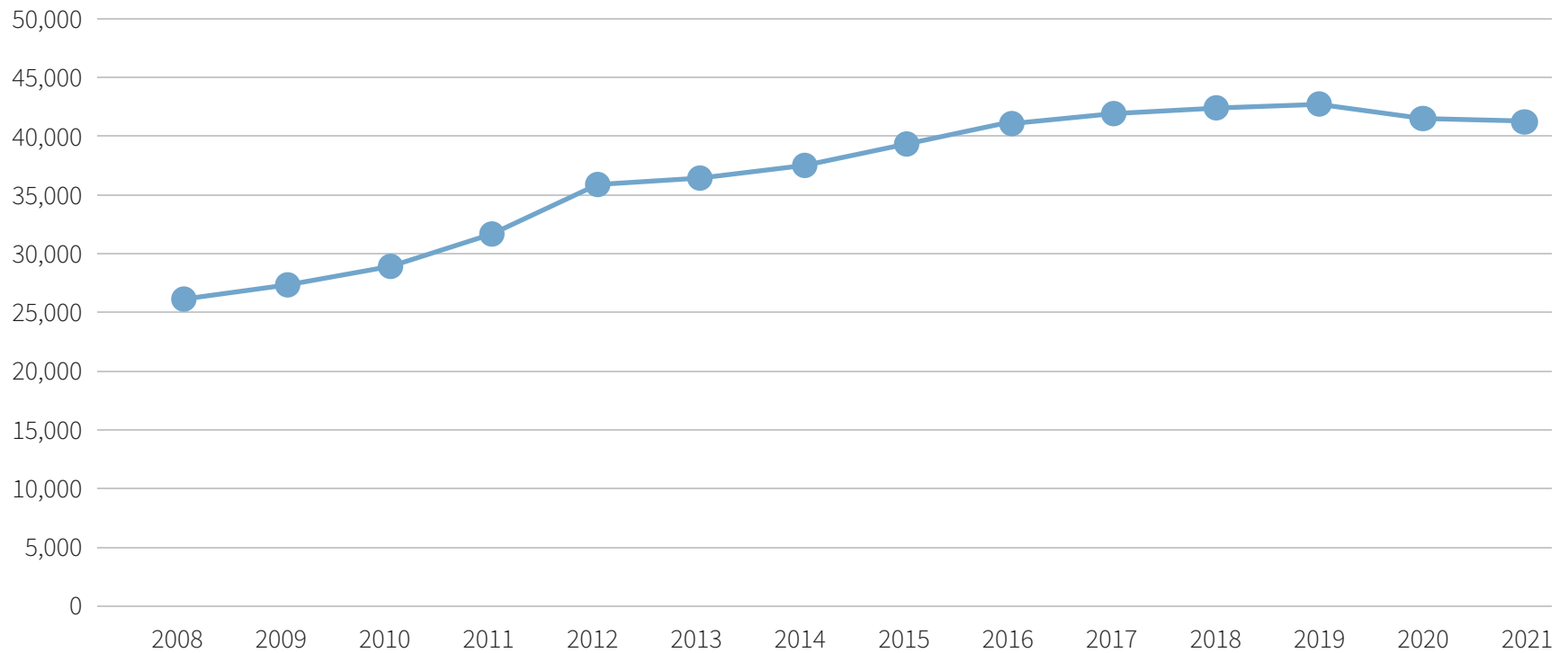
Chancellor Randy Gardner attended the 12th annual Choose Ohio First Scholar Showcase on February 12, 2020 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.

## Expanding STEM Talent in Ohio

Since its inception, the Choose Ohio First Program has complemented the Chancellor’s strategy to strengthen Ohio’s workforce by recruiting and supporting students pursuing STEM degrees and certificates. The number of STEM degrees awarded at Ohio’s public colleges and universities increased from 26,644 total students in FY 2008 to more than 41,000 total students each of the last five years.

### STEM Degrees Awarded at Ohio's Public Colleges and Universities

FY 2008 to FY 2021



Choose Ohio First colleges and universities gave scholarships to 3,995 STEM students this past year. This includes 635 students who were first-time Choose Ohio First scholarship recipients; 31% of those first-time COF scholarship recipients were students who had previously participated in the College Credit Plus program.

Institutions select the specific areas of study to include in their COF program based on the regional and statewide economic and educational needs in Ohio. In FY21, more than 151 unique STEM academic programs were being offered as eligible for COF scholarships by COF-designated institutions. Engineering, information technology, and healthcare-related fields were the three most popular academic program areas.

Ohio's Workforce Success Measures website reports that 70% of Choose Ohio First's public college and university completers, from Academic Years 2015 through 2018, were found to be employed six months and one year after graduation.

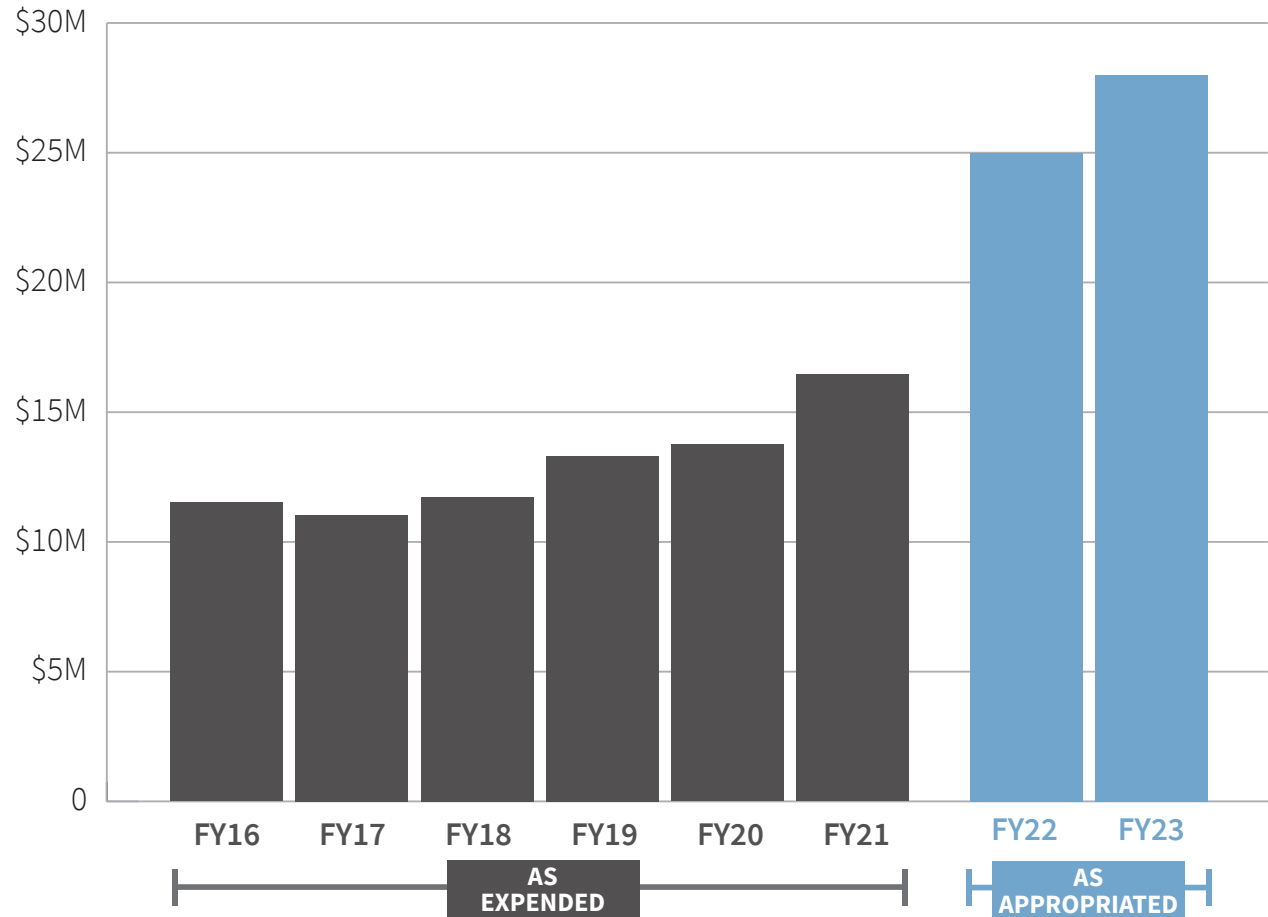
Connecting COF Scholars with co-ops, internship experience in a university, college, or private laboratory, and other work-based learning experiences has been a central principle of the COF program. In FY21 these experiences were strongly encouraged of COF institutions and were included as part of the evaluation of FY21 proposals. In June 2021, the General Assembly passed HB 110, which made these types of experiences a requirement for all COF Scholars.



*Chancellor Randy Gardner talks with Choose Ohio First scholars about their research at the 12th annual Choose Ohio First Scholar Showcase on February 12, 2020 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center.*

The DeWine-Husted administration has enhanced the commitment to Choose Ohio First by increasing the total available funds to Choose Ohio First designated institutions. The table below depicts this increase of funds over eight fiscal years.

### Choose Ohio First Expenditures



## Supporting STEM Students' Success

Institutions with Choose Ohio First designation provide support to their Choose Ohio First Scholars that will help students complete their academic program and connect with employers. The forms of support vary among institutions. Some examples of support provided by Choose Ohio First colleges and universities include:

- Summer bridge programs designed to affirm first-year student commitment and promote academic preparedness;
- Faculty mentoring;
- Cohort and community team building;
- Designated internships and co-op experiences; and
- Cohort-based research projects and publications of STEM research.

These support systems are designed to increase retention and graduation rates for Choose Ohio First Scholars. Many colleges and universities also offer career and post-graduation advising, helping to connect Choose Ohio First graduates with Ohio employers. Through strong recruitment efforts and built-in systems of support, Ohio's public and independent institutions retain a majority of Choose Ohio First Scholars through the completion of their academic program.

Choose Ohio First Scholarships can be used to support students pursuing graduate, baccalaureate, or associate degrees, as well as certificates in designated STEM fields or STEM teaching programs. In academic year 2021, 3,362 Choose Ohio First Scholars were enrolled at a public or independent four-year institution and 633 were enrolled a public two-year institution. Several institutions that received COF awards collaborated with an articulation agreement that allowed students to move from a two-year degree to a four-year degree with a seamless transfer.



## Leveraging Other Resources

The Choose Ohio First Scholarship Program requires designated institutions to match all COF funds dollar for dollar. In academic year 2020-2021, \$16,451,782 was awarded and disbursed to 3,995 Choose Ohio First Scholars attending an Ohio college or university. Participating institutions reported matching contributions totaling \$37 million to support Choose Ohio First Scholars.

Matching funds can be used for a variety of things within the institution's COF program. Approximately \$30 million, or 82% of the total institutional matching dollars, was reported in the form of scholarship dollars. Institutions have also used matching funds to revise and develop new curricula in the STEM disciplines, offer students opportunities to participate in conferences and research symposia, and leverage the involvement of businesses in the professional development of Choose Ohio First Scholars.



*Chancellor Randy Gardner, Dr. John Farver, and Choose Ohio First scholars from Bowling Green State University, at the 12th annual Choose Ohio First Scholar Showcase held on February 12, 2020.*

## Choose Ohio First Funding Cycles

Since 2007, ODHE has issued multiple Choose Ohio First funding rounds, resulting in institutions being able to recruit new COF Scholars. In FY21, the vast majority of the 3,995 students receiving a Choose Ohio First scholarship were funded through one of three funding cycles: the FY21 grant cycle, the FY19 grant cycle, or the FY16 grant cycle.

### **FY22 grant cycle**

Choose Ohio First will add a fourth round of funding to the program portfolio in FY22. In October 2021, the Chancellor released a request for proposals with \$43 million available to Ohio institutions. Proposals were due in December 2021 and awards are expected to be announced in early 2022 to further Ohio's commitment to increasing STEM talent.

### **FY21 grant cycle**

In FY21, a new Choose Ohio First grant cycle began. In this cycle, the Chancellor awarded a Choose Ohio First designation and \$42.8 million to 57 Ohio institutions through a competitive request for proposal process. The funding will support institutions recruiting new Choose Ohio First Scholars every year for five fiscal years, FY22 through FY26.

### **FY19 computer science grant cycle**

In FY21, ODHE administered funding to 35 institutions for scholarships from the FY19 Computer Science Choose Ohio First grant. The FY19 Computer Science program awarded \$20,580,770 through a competitive grant process for fiscal years FY21 through FY25. In FY21, disbursements from this program were made to the 35 institutions to support scholarships for Choose Ohio First Scholars recruited into computer science and related programs.

### **FY16 grant cycle**

In FY21, ODHE awarded funds to 32 institutions to support Choose Ohio First Scholars who began their COF experience during a previous funding cycle in FY16. These funds will help Choose Ohio First Scholars who started their COF educational program during 2017-2021 complete their degree or certificate within the next four years. ODHE committed a total of \$27,063,331 to these institutions for fiscal years FY22 through FY25.

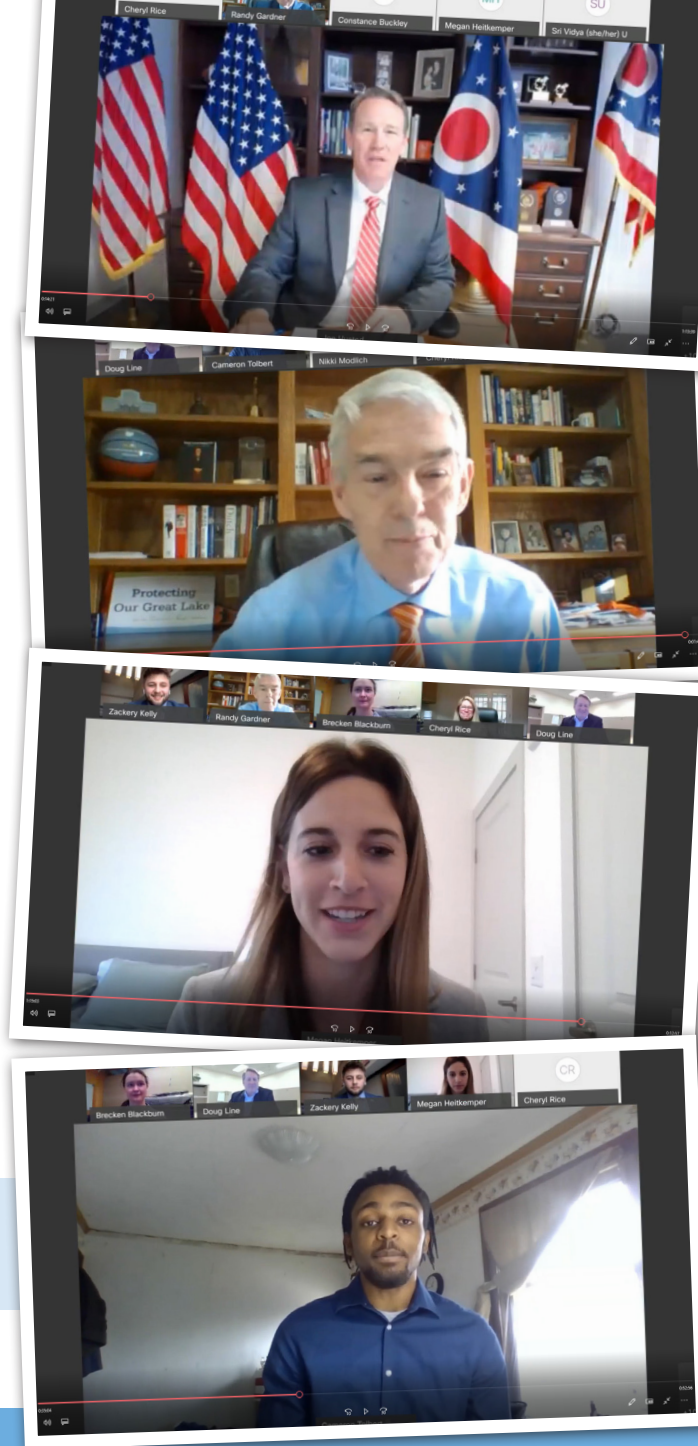
## Choose Ohio First Program Changes

In FY21, COF changed the reporting mechanism for independent institutions and colleges with a COF designation and funding. Beginning on July 1, 2020, COF-designated independent institutions and colleges were required to use the ODHE Higher Education Information (HEI) reporting payments system. Incorporating independent institutions and colleges into the HEI System allows for consistent administration and monitoring across all COF-designated institutions.

HB 110, passed on June 28, 2021, and effective September 30, 2021, made several changes to the Choose Ohio First scholarship program, including expanding eligibility for graduate students and requiring students who receive Choose Ohio First scholarships to engage in a work-based learning experience at least once throughout their course of study. The updated language also further focuses the program on recruiting underrepresented populations into STEM fields.

Choose Ohio First will add a fourth round of funding to the program portfolio in FY22. In October 2021, the Chancellor released the FY22 request for proposals. Through this competitive proposal process, institutions can apply for five years of COF funding for scholarships in STEM-related fields as part of a strategic effort to deepen Ohio's economic strength by developing talent in STEM-related fields through the completion of postsecondary degrees and certificates. Awards are expected to be announced in April 2022.

*This year's annual Choose Ohio First scholars showcase was held online and can be viewed in its entirety at <https://youtu.be/NBBy3w-iQA8>.*



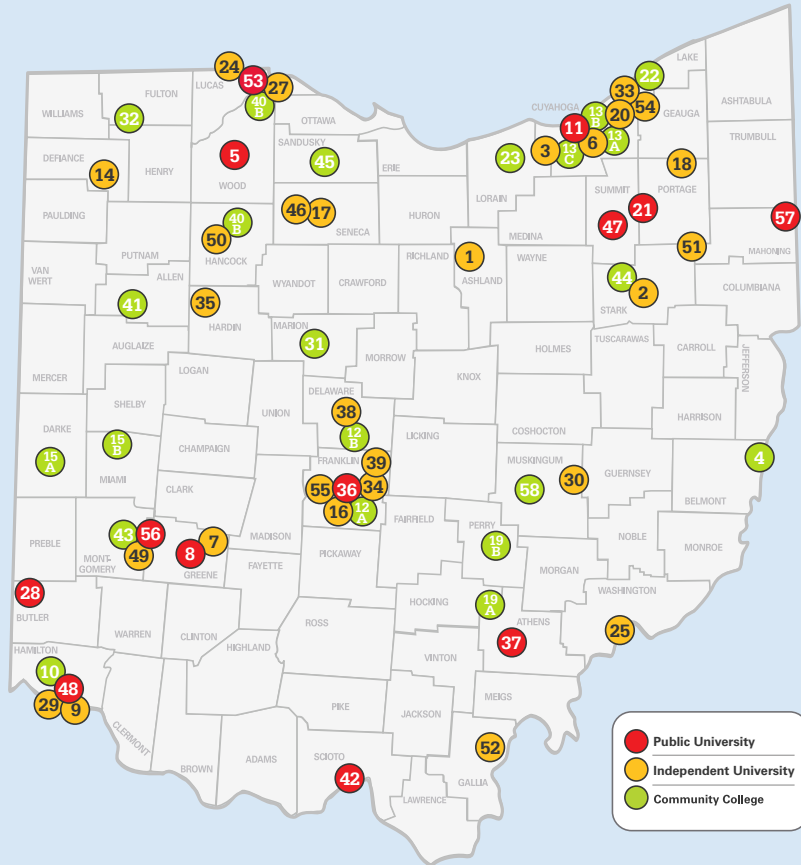
## Conclusion

Choose Ohio First provides a range of educational opportunities to meet the needs of students and employers in Ohio. Retention and graduation rates are high as a result of targeted recruitment, strong wrap-around student support services, and matching scholarship dollars to complement the Choose Ohio First award and encourage completion of STEM degrees and certificates.

Choose Ohio First continues to align with the Chancellor's strategy to strengthen Ohio's competitiveness within STEM disciplines by developing STEM scholars and connecting them with Ohio employers. Under the Chancellor's leadership and with support from the General Assembly, the Ohio Department of Higher Education continues to offer and administer competitive funding opportunities to Ohio's public and independent colleges and universities to provide scholarships in STEM and STEM teaching fields.



In FY21, 58 public and independent colleges and universities had a Choose Ohio First designation, with enrolled scholars receiving scholarship funds through one of the active funding rounds.



- Ashland University
- Aultman College
- Baldwin Wallace University
- Belmont College
- Bowling Green State University
- Case Western Reserve University
- Cedarville University
- Central State University
- The Christ College of Nursing & Health Sciences
- Cincinnati State Technical & Community College
- Cleveland State University
- Columbus State Community College
- Cuyahoga Community College
- Defiance College
- Edison State Community College
- Franklin University
- Heidelberg University
- Hiram College
- Hocking College
- John Carroll University
- Kent State University
- Lakeland Community College
- Lorain County Community College
- Lourdes University
- Marietta College
- Marion Technical College
- Mercy College
- Miami University
- Mount St. Joseph University
- Muskingum University
- North Central State College
- Northwest State Community College
- Notre Dame College
- Ohio Dominican University
- Ohio Northern University
- The Ohio State University
- Ohio University
- Ohio Wesleyan University
- Otterbein University
- Owens Community College
- Rhodes State College
- Shawnee State University
- Sinclair Community College
- Stark State College
- Terra State Community College
- Tiffin University
- The University of Akron
- University of Cincinnati
- University of Dayton
- University of Findlay
- University of Mount Union
- University of Rio Grande
- The University of Toledo
- Ursuline College
- Western Governors University
- Wright State University
- Youngstown State University
- Zane State College



 **OhioHigherEd.org**

---

Ohio Department of Higher Education | 25 South Front Street | Columbus, OH 43215-3414 | 614.466.6000