

May 6, 2013

AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR DANIEL MALLOY, CHAIRMAN ROBINSON, AND MEMBERS OF THE CONNSCU BOARD OF REGENTS

As members of the Central Connecticut State University Faculty Senate, we write out of deep concern for the well-being of our university, our students, and the future of higher education.

The CSU system is critically important to the future of our state. The four CSU schools currently enroll almost 35,000 students. Of CSU students, 49% are the first in their families to attend college and 85% remain in Connecticut after they graduate. In a state marked by extreme education and economic division, we serve the needs of working and middle class families and are one of the few institutions capable of promoting social and economic equality. We have done this largely by applying the model of the “teacher-scholar,” faculty that are committed to both instruction and research and that actively model critical thinking for their students.

As we close this academic year, our ability to fulfill our public mission is in jeopardy. Even though faculty and staff have forgone pay raises, and even though we were promised \$5.5 million in savings from the creation of the ConnScu system, the CSU universities are shouldering new budget cuts, shortages in full-time faculty, and reductions in its adjunct teaching staff. Our students face a second consecutive year of tuition increases. Research, an important component of the teacher-scholar model, is being removed from our mission. Public confidence in the university has been undermined by financial impropriety at the BOR and ConnScu system office.

Governor Malloy is backing a \$2.1 billion investment in the University of Connecticut. UCONN, in turn, has announced that its regional campuses and online programs will offer 18 new degrees, duplicating services offered at the CSU campuses during a period of demographic decline in the number of traditional college-age students. While we applaud all support for higher education, ConnScu has faced budget cuts and been told that the state cannot invest more in higher education. In a time when the state struggles to pay its bills, we do not understand why the state would fund duplicate programs instead of supporting CSU schools that already offer these degree programs and have facilities in place. Investment in UConn’s expansion will effectively restructure higher education in the state and place our unique teacher-scholar approach in peril. These changes to our state’s education system come from administrative pronouncements and without democratic participation from the faculty, students, families, and communities affected.

The problems of our university are part of a larger crisis in higher education. A culture of high-stakes K-12 testing, economic recession, and unemployment has promoted calls for narrow skill development and degree completion over holistic learning. In addition, long term declines in state support have transferred the burden of education costs to students and their families, effectively mortgaging the future of our nation’s youth.

Given the social, economic and educational challenges that face the country and the state, we must recognize that solutions can only come from a broad-based discussion that allows for serious proposals to enter into the public discourse. These discussions must include questioning the growing inequality of wealth, failure to tax the super-rich and failure to challenge national policies that favor foreign wars, bank bail-outs, and cash-rich corporations over working families.

The CCSU Faculty Senate remains committed to providing a high quality, accessible education. We have defined our goals in the document “A Vision of Higher Education for Connecticut and the Nation” (attached and available on the CCSU Faculty Senate website).

We call upon the BOR to conduct an open and meaningful public discussion about the future of education in the state of Connecticut. We reject the restructuring of university systems without the input of the campus community. We believe that faculty, students, and staff have the right to discuss and help decide the future of education in our state.

Sincerely,

CCSU Faculty Senators

A VISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CONNECTICUT AND THE NATION

RESOLUTION OF THE CENTRAL CT STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY SENATE, APPROVED FEBRUARY 25, 2013

The United States’ higher education system has long enjoyed a global reputation for quality, accessibility, and research output. North American workers were able to send their children to publicly supported schools that provided both important learning opportunities and training that led to significant employment. But unregulated global capitalism, war spending, and a lack of political leadership have created a financial crisis that threatens higher education, especially in public institutions like our own. Politicians, administrators, and so-called education reformers have used this opportunity to defund universities, demonize faculty and public employees, and institute curriculum changes that emphasize degree completion over learning and individual development.

As faculty members of Central Connecticut State University, we have a responsibility to help protect educational opportunities for our students and our communities. In Chicago, Quebec, California, and other areas, teachers and students have begun to show that we do not have to meekly accept education cuts or tuition raises. We too can demand a quality, accessible, and affordable education for all who want it. Our vision of education is built on the following principles:

EDUCATION IS AN INDIVIDUAL RIGHT AND A PUBLIC GOOD.

As a society, we face acute economic, social, and environmental problems that can only be solved by an educated citizenry. Education must cultivate critical and creative thinking, sensitivity to cultural difference, and problem-solving. It must provide students with the joy of learning, self-discovery, and the tools to build fulfilling and productive lives.

EDUCATION MUST BE PART OF A LARGER SYSTEM OF ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND SOCIAL WELFARE.

Learning can only happen when students live in secure, supportive, and safe environments. Students and their families must have financial stability and access to adequate health care, mental health, and counseling services.

EDUCATION MUST BE AFFORDABLE.

Rising tuition costs have undermined the value of education. Today, students are forced to work long hours, compromising their ability to study and learn. After college they are faced with huge debts which rob them of their choices and strap them to whatever job they can find. We must stop using students as cash cows to fund the university and the student loan industry. We can do this by ending the diversion of our financial resources to foreign wars, prisons, and tax cuts for corporations and the super-rich. New tuition increases pose a serious threat to the health of the university and must be opposed.

QUALITY EDUCATION MUST BE AVAILABLE TO ALL, REGARDLESS OF GENDER, RACE, OR SOCIAL CLASS.

Connecticut is plagued by economic and educational disparities. As a society, we cannot afford to reserve quality education for wealthy families and provide students in our public institutions with narrow job training programs or quickie degrees. We must break down segregation and provide opportunities for women and minorities to pursue disciplines in which they are underrepresented. The university and all academic programs must reflect the make-up of our communities and be a welcoming place for immigrants, racial minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, ESL students, and all who want to learn.

QUALITY EDUCATION REQUIRES A STRONG CULTURE OF SHARED GOVERNANCE AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH.

Education flourishes when faculty, students, and surrounding communities determine fundamental policies, control curriculum, and oversee the working and learning environment. Attempts to standardize curriculum, mandate high stakes testing, censor faculty and students, and monitor university members' electronic communications undermine the free exchange of ideas necessary to real education.

QUALITY EDUCATION REQUIRES FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS FOR FACULTY AND STAFF.

Teachers perform their jobs best when they have fair compensation, job security, and protection from arbitrary dismissal. Students benefit from the presence of experienced faculty with whom they can develop constructive, long term relationships.

QUALITY HIGHER EDUCATION REQUIRES SUPPORT FOR FACULTY RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY.

Our faculty members are actively engaged in research and creative activity. They make discoveries and conduct research that fuel their teaching and contribute to knowledge. Therefore, they must be actively supported in their endeavors, by means of time and resources necessary for effective research and creative activity.

QUALITY EDUCATION REQUIRES A ROBUST AND SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS.

Learning does not just happen in the classroom. The campus must provide academic advising, mentoring, access to tutoring services and academic coaching, strong research and library facilities, extracurricular activities, cultural, athletic and recreational facilities for use by ALL students, child-care for student- parents, inexpensive and quality housing and meal plans, and mental health and wellness support. Such services must not be limited or rationed for any one segment of the student body, but must be open and accessible to all.