

Dear President Gray,

The CCSU faculty have followed with interest and at times concern the documents, public statements, and media reports regarding Excel CT and the ConnSCU strategic plan. Particularly in light of the leadership vacuum that has hobbled the ConnSCU system in recent years, we support active, ambitious, and effective strategic planning. We recognize the difficulty of such planning under a tight deadline while in the public eye, and realize that the plan is evolving and that elements in the news today may well be re-thought and replaced tomorrow. Nonetheless, we have significant concerns about parts of the plan that appear to be current, and in the spirit of your invitation to all stakeholders to provide feedback, we wish to bring the following concerns to your attention now so that they may be addressed before the plan is finalized.

Specialization. We are not in principle opposed to the idea of identifying specializations or areas of excellence for each CSU campus in order to attract resources and students. Nor are we opposed to identifying STEM as one of CCSU's areas of excellence. However:

- We feel that any such identification done outside the context of a robust defense of our core mission as a regional comprehensive university jeopardizes the university's mission and its ability to continue to serve all of its students. Like all of the CSUs, CCSU is and must remain an autonomous comprehensive university; however many students may be attracted to us based on a particular specialization, far more will come because we are local, affordable, and provide an excellent, broadly-based four year degree. Though dismayingly under-promoted in recent years, this is our core service to the State of Connecticut. No strategic plan that fails to emphasize this and to request appropriate supporting financial resources can garner our support.
- We are concerned about the funding and implementation implications of campus specializations, about which we have been told very little. We are told that attracting funds for a particular specialization will allow other funds to "trickle down" to the rest of the university. But the rest of the university does not exist to support an area of specialization, and "trickled-down" funds are no way to support and enhance a university's core functions. An effective funding proposal in support of our strategic plan must include a direct request for funds to support our core liberal arts curriculum with tenure-track faculty lines and infrastructure.
- Further, while it makes sense to emphasize STEM at CCSU given that we have the system's only School of Engineering and may soon have the only School of STEM, we are concerned about the implications of emphasizing areas at other CSUs that are shared by us all. CCSU has robust programs in the liberal arts and the performing arts: will designating other schools as specializing in those areas lead to a de-emphasis and a de-funding of them at CCSU? This and many related concerns could be addressed by providing additional information about this aspect of the plan beyond the mere designation of specializations.
- Finally, we question the identification of a single specialization for each campus. If CCSU is to be the STEM school, it nonetheless has other excellent programs that attract students, as well as developing programs that if properly supported

could attract still more. If our goal is to win funding from the legislature, it is not unreasonable to think that a broader range of emphases will gain a broader range of support. CCSU has excellent programs in Criminology, Hospitality and Tourism, Education, and Business to name just a few; we are a center of excellence for International Education; and we have growing programs in interdisciplinary studies and writing that, if properly supported, will benefit future generations of students when today's employment-driven emphases have faded.

Online Education. CCSU's faculty support and participate in online education, and it is in that spirit that we have significant concerns about some of the proposals regarding online learning that we have heard associated with Excel CT.

- The centralization of online courses through Charter Oak State College raises both pedagogical and practical concerns:
 - First, like other CSUs, CCSU has developed and continues to develop online courses that address the specific needs of our students and our degree programs. While some of these courses may have value for students at other schools, any plan that would try to impose one-size-fits-all online courses, either by homogenizing the content of our courses or by reducing our ability to offer online courses and forcing us to accept those designed and taught by other institutions, will undermine the integrity of the education we offer.
 - Second, COSC faculty are not part of a collective bargaining unit but are rather contract employees; their rate of compensation is far lower than that of CSU's tenure-track faculty, and their intellectual property rights over their course materials much more limited. The centralization of online courses at COSC raises contractual issues that must be addressed before any such plan proceeds much further.
- The proposal that all ConnSCU students be required to take a certain number of online courses raises similar concerns. In addition to issues of employment and academic freedom, research indicates that some students benefit from online courses and others do not: to impose them as a blanket requirement is unresponsive to student needs.

Consolidation and Centralization. In addition to the centralization of online learning, much of what we hear about Excel CT involves the consolidation of various services and functions to make ConnSCU more of a "system" on the model of SUNY. While cost savings and other efficiencies to be had through consolidation may well be worth pursuing, we are concerned that when "systemization" becomes a principle and a priority, resultant inefficiencies and other disadvantages are too easily overlooked, whether it be the loss of flexibility and local autonomy that may result from the consolidation of "back office" functions like IT or admissions; or the violence done to curricula and academic programs by overhasty and overgeneral transfer and articulation agreements. Please do not mistake this caution for conservatism or a resistance to change: we recognize the potential value of consolidation, but we are also the ones who must live with its consequences. We welcome the opportunity to participate in the planning and implementation of consolidation, and expect that it will be done with care and

deliberation and not committed to before being carefully considered by all relevant stakeholders.

Cooperation and Communication. In addition to the substantive issues above, we also have procedural concerns about the development and implementation of Excel CT. Much of its planning and many of its elements seem to be developing without regard for three of CSU's cornerstone principles: faculty governance, academic freedom, and collective bargaining.

- Curricular matters—institutional and program requirements, courses offered and their content, the evaluation of courses for transfer credit, and the like—are the domain of faculty expertise and faculty governance, in many instances protected by academic freedom. We expect that this will continue to be the case as Excel CT is developed and implemented and the ConnSCU system evolves, and are dismayed to hear little or nothing about the essential role of faculty in these processes.
- Such assurances might seem unnecessary, or to go without saying, were it not for language in the 2013-2016 Strategic Initiatives [for] Connecticut State Universities document that explicitly represents that other cornerstone of cooperative relations between ConnSCU faculty and administration, collective bargaining, as an obstacle—a “constraint to change and agility”—rather than an assurance and an opportunity. Our faculty unions have enjoyed good relations with individual campus administrations and the BoR, have made sacrifices in the face of budgetary crises, and have done valuable work lobbying on behalf of CSU when administrative leadership failed to do so. We hope that our unions will be treated as partners rather than impediments.
- Finally, we recognize that many of the concerns above may well be the result of our lack of information, and that lack may be the unintended result of a planning process that must be rapid, fluid, and attuned to multiple constituencies. We would welcome assurances that our concerns are unfounded, and the information to see that this is so. More welcome, however, would be the opportunity for genuine dialogue, both before Excel CT is presented to the governor and legislature in February and later as the plan continues to develop, so that we may be not an audience but a participant in the strategic planning for our institution and our university system.

No one is more committed to, or more intimately involved with, the success of ConnSCU and its students than its faculty. We look forward to working with you to make that success a reality.