An Academic Imperative for Transform CSCU 2020

President Gray has presented a framework for change across the ConnSCU system under Transform CSCU 2020, and there is mixed support for many of its initiatives among the Connecticut State University faculty. Many faculty members agree, however, that the plan lacks an underlying vision that supports and builds on the academic mission of a state university. Transform 2020 articulates neither the ways Connecticut's state universities provide students with valuable educations nor a rationale and plan for maintaining and enhancing that value. To be an effective plan, Transform 2020 must address CSU's academic mission and must explain why Connecticut's citizens (through their legislative representatives) should support that mission by keeping a CSU education affordable through increased (or, at the very least, stable) funding.

Moreover, we cannot support any Transform 2020 initiatives unless they support the missions of our individual institutions and their distinct identities. The four Connecticut State Universities are comprehensive universities with a strong liberal arts education as their foundation. Despite decades of diminished state funding, they continue to transform the lives of students, enabling them to develop knowledge, skills, and perspectives essential for their roles as engaged citizens in a dynamic society and as educated members of an evolving workforce. That ability to transform student lives, however, has been compromised by insufficient public funding. University budgets have cut out the fat, stripped much of the meat, and started to gnaw at the bone. Full-time faculty lines have been cut, student support services understaffed, class sizes increased, and courses necessary for on-time graduation canceled. Where money has been spent—primarily in the much-appreciated building projects—it is generally a long-overdue response to current needs and the process does not fully anticipate future needs.

To begin to address these problems, we offer this Academic Imperative to guide the Transform CSCU 2020 process. It articulates academic priorities and their relation to financial and administrative concerns in order to assure that Transform's plans and initiatives are governed first and foremost by academic considerations and that any new funds acquired or savings realized be used to enhance our students' academic success.

Finances and Academic Success. Systemic underfunding is having a direct effect on student achievement: too many students fail to graduate in four years and too many students accumulate more credits than their degrees require (120 credit for most programs; more credits for professionally accredited programs). Instead, these students are extending their degrees over more semesters and often end up with excess credit hours. While some of the reasons for these delayed graduations are beyond the scope of Transform 2020, some can and should be addressed by the Transform process:

- Ever-increasing tuition costs force students to work full- and part-time jobs, restricting their ability to take classes they need when they need them. Any presentation of Transform to state funding sources and legislative bodies must make clear that its success relies upon reversing these steady increases.
- Budget constraints lead to required courses being full or canceled, causing students who must be enrolled in 12 credit hours to be eligible for financial aid to have to take courses that do not apply to their degree plan and that they do not need for graduation. To address this problem, Transform must not weaken requirements, programs, or local control of curriculum and pedagogy, but must

instead prioritize the adequate funding of required courses taught under pedagogically appropriate conditions. This prioritization entails:

- Dedicating funds to hiring more full-time, tenure-track faculty not only in areas of immediate workforce demand, but in the core liberal arts disciplines that provide the foundation of an effective education
- Providing necessary funds to assure that pedagogical and programmatic rather than financial "efficiencies" govern whether classes are offered, at what size they are run, and in what format they are presented

The Liberal Arts Core. A broad, comprehensive liberal arts curriculum is and must remain at the heart of a CSU education. Moreover, while responding to immediate workforce needs is a necessary function of a state university system, both students and employers are disserved if that response does not include providing students with the essential reading, writing, mathematical, and critical thinking skills necessary to thrive in a changing economic environment. To provide this liberal arts core, Transform must

- Maintain pedagogically appropriate class sizes as determined by faculty, especially in writing-intensive and mathematics classes
- Support the development and maintenance of Writing across the Curriculum programs and other methods of foregrounding excellent writing skills as a hallmark of a CSU education
- Assure funding for essential academic support services like Writing Centers and Learning Centers
- Encourage the application of liberal arts learning by supporting high-impact student experiences such as service learning, internships, and research collaboration with faculty

Excellent Faculty. The success of the academic focus of Transform, and of CSU generally, depends on its faculty—and while Transform in its current state presumes the support from faculty, it offers little support for faculty. To assure its academic success, Transform must

- Prioritize the hiring of more full-time tenure-track faculty in order to reduce dependence on part-time instructors and provide the access to tenure-track faculty at all levels of the curriculum that sets a CSU education apart from other state schools like UConn. This requires
    - Providing appropriate funds and other commitments to recruit exceptional faculty nationally and internationally
    - Approving new faculty positions and the re-filling of vacant positions in a timely and reliable fashion appropriate to disciplinary expectations—allowing, for example, sufficient time to recruit according to established disciplinary timetables and interview at disciplinary conventions
- Provide adequate and appropriate faculty development for new faculty adjusting to CSU's teaching load and student population and for established faculty desiring to update and expand their skills
- Provide clerical support commensurate with quantity and nature of workload
- Encourage, support, and reward faculty research, scholarship, and creative activity that creates knowledge, keeps faculty at the forefront of their academic fields, and serves as a hallmark of university faculty. This involves

- Assuring adequate library and lab resources
- Increasing the number of available sabbaticals to meet the needs of faculty with research agendas
- Providing sufficient research reassigned time to allow faculty to maintain scholarly productivity while teaching
- Enhancing support for grant writing and grant administration
- Establishing procedures allowing faculty to receive stipends from external grants, matching common practice at other universities
- Funding more graduate student research assistantships

Instructional Technology. Instructional technology is an essential and invaluable tool for the contemporary university, and Transform's emphasis on IT development, Smart Classroom technology and on-line learning is laudable. It is, however, essential to keep in mind that technology is a tool rather than an end in itself. As such, pedagogical principles and practices that guide effective student learning must dictate decisions related to classroom technologies and their presumed financial efficiencies. To this end, Transform must

- Involve faculty members as well as IT professionals in all decisions concerning instructional technology, including the purchase of platforms
- Focus resources on educational technology that supports and supplements teaching and learning rather than replaces or diminishes student-teacher engagement
- Reserve on-line instruction for circumstances where the students are adequately prepared and the faculty members are trained and qualified rather than use it as a universal requirement or unexamined general practice

Advising. Clear, consistent and accessible advising is essential to student success—to learning, retention, transfer, adequate progress, and graduation. Underfunded, unsupported, or otherwise inadequate advising causes students to take unnecessary or inappropriate courses that interfere with learning and delay their graduation. To address this, Transform must

- Provide adequate funding for new advisors in order to effect a reasonable student/advisor ratio at all CSCU schools
- Provide appropriate support, financial and otherwise, for existing advisors
    - This must include both an awareness that advising at the CSUs for students with declared majors should be done by faculty in the discipline and a commensurate commitment to appropriately compensating faculty for advising with load credit or other contractually appropriate recognition

Faculty Governance and Shared Governance. Faculty governance and shared governance are more than academic traditions: they are the cornerstones of a functional and effective university. Faculty governance refers to the decision-making authority that faculty have over academic matters like curriculum, academic standards, and academic policy. Shared governance is the broader principle dictating that faculty share with administration expertise on, concern about, and responsibility for many aspects of the university, and should be regularly and genuinely consulted thereon. If it is to succeed, Transform must respect these principles and can do so by

- Fully involving faculty in the Transform planning process rather than presenting largely completed work to faculty for "feedback"
- Working with elected faculty representatives and governance bodies rather than administratively appointed faculty, ad-hoc committees and task forces
- When ad hoc committees and task forces are necessary, selecting faculty representatives through consultation with faculty governance bodies rather than administrators
- Respecting faculty control over curriculum and other academic matters, including transfer and articulation, pedagogy, and standards
- Providing sufficient time reassigned from teaching duties for faculty to take leadership roles on their campuses and in Transform

Graduate Education. Graduate education, one of the hallmarks of the CSU schools that sets us apart from the community colleges and makes us a valuable resource to the state and an attractive option for students both nationally and internationally, is largely ignored in Transform. President Gray has spoken of a "second Transform" for graduate education and, while this approach may well be appropriate, we believe certain aspects of graduate education are inseparable from other aspects of Transform, which can and must be addressed here. Specifically

- To enhance CSU's national and international profile, Transform should include a clear and prominent commitment to graduate education
- To attract quality students and at the same time enhance the functioning of the universities, Transform should commit resources to graduate education in the following ways:
    - Fund tuition waivers for graduate assistantships
    - Provide adequate office and research space for graduate students
    - Provide grant support and infrastructure funding

The Connecticut State Universities have been and strive to remain academically inspirational and aspirational, offering opportunities not only for career training but also for social mobility and cultural facility to Connecticut residents who cannot find those opportunities elsewhere. The academic issues outlined above are essential to our ability to fulfill our mission and to enhance the scope, efficacy and reputation of CSU. If Transform CSCU 2020 is to be genuinely transformational for our institutions and our students--rather than an exercise in consolidation, centralization and demoralization without rationale or vision--it must recognize these academic needs and aspirations and advocate for the resources and policies required to address them. In so doing, Transform will enhance student success, make CSU the university of choice for students from across the country, and garner the enthusiastic support of the faculty.

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