

The Truth about “Students First”:

An Attack on Faculty and Formula for Chaos

“Students First” is CSCU President Mark Ojakian’s plan to (1) merge the 12 Community Colleges into a single, centrally-controlled “Community College of Connecticut” and (2) consolidate the supposed “back office” functions of the four Connecticut State Universities. The first clear statement of what this plan entails is the “Substantive Change Request” submitted to the accrediting agency NEASC on March 16, 2018. Here are some highlights:

“Students First” is a huge change not made democratically

- As its designers admit, only a handful of non-academic managers – Mr. Ojakian and the members of the Board of Regents -- decided on the “model” of consolidation into “one centrally managed college” and imposed it on the colleges and universities.
- College and university leaders and experts – Presidents, administrators, deans, faculty, staff -- were only permitted, at most, “to fine tune the model” and give suggestions about “the best path” to achieve it.

It eliminates key shared governance positions for Community College faculty

- Faculty department chairs are replaced by 38 Associate Deans, who will supervise and evaluate full-time faculty, determine class schedules, and direct multiple departments.
- Deans decide what faculty teach, rather than a faculty chair and department.
- Deans are not members of the faculty union and not subject to the same collective bargaining agreement. The document admits this is intended to modify “labor relations” in favor of the administration.

It decreases faculty control over academic policies and curriculum

- A “new model of governance,” with one central senate and curriculum committee, will be designed by a “consolidation committee,” 80% of whose members are not elected faculty.
- The senate only has an “advisory role” on academic policies. Individual campuses cannot vote against anything approved by the centralized senate.
- There is not a single mention of any campus-based governance.
- A new General Education program, and the consolidation of 760 degree and certificate programs, will be directed and approved by the management-dominated “consolidation committee” even before the faculty senate and curriculum committee are operational.
- The campuses cannot vote against approval and adoption of each consolidated and standardized program as currently is part of the “standard curriculum processes.”
- Academic freedom is disregarded, as all courses with the same number must have identical content and learning outcomes, and all faculty teaching styles must support “Guided Pathways,” which mandates only one style of learning.

Please turn over for continuation

“Students First” claims to save money, but instead spends money to weaken faculty governance

- The elimination of faculty department chairs at the Community Colleges will cost close to \$4,000,000 extra per year.
- The plan claims \$1.655 million will be saved from the salaries of part-time faculty who will be fired when former department chairs no longer receive reassigned time.
- But chairs will be replaced by 34 new Associate Deans at a cost of \$5.562 million.
- Eliminating Department Chairs therefore will cost an extra \$3,907,000 annually.
- [See Substantive Change Request, pp. 50 & 51, Appendix GG & JJ]

This plan is irresponsible and will lead to chaos

- Neither Ojakian, nor the BOR, have extensive higher education experience, so they are unfamiliar with the complexity of effecting the changes they propose.
- The plan is unrealistic in projecting that it will take a mere 24 months to create a common General Education program, consolidate 760 academic programs, create a common catalog, on top of establishing a new governance structure, eliminating 200 positions, creating new enrollment and recruitment practices, implementing "guided pathways," reassigning all personnel (in human resources, finance, registrar offices, IT, IR, financial aid, facilities, and academic administration), and appointing new regional presidents.
- This is a formula for pandemonium that will have many unanticipated costs.
- This is based on an ignorance of how colleges and universities operate on a daily basis.

"Students First" is not just about the Community Colleges, its also about the CSUs

- Cost overruns and unforeseen expenses of the massive consolidation of Community Colleges may well be passed on to the CSUs.
- Ojakian's and the BOR's consolidation of the "back office" functions of the CSUs will move control away from campuses and faculty to an outside bureaucracy and reduce each university's ability to control its individual mission and daily functioning.
- The model of "standardizing" curriculum and cutting programs likely will be imposed on the CSUs.
- The new, common General Education program most certainly will be applied to the CSUs to facilitate student transfers state-wide.
- The CSUs will be drawn into this plan because greater control is the key to "Students First," not quality education.

If you believe the governance of colleges and universities should be shared between faculty and administrators who have experience in higher education, you must oppose this plan.

Ad-hoc CCSU Senate committee on "Students First"
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