FAC report of May 4, 2020 – PART ONE

1/ A the request of Pres. Toro, myself and two others -- Joe Farhat and Christina Robinso – were named as members of a CSCU working group established by Kevin Corcoran, formerly director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC, associated with Charter Oak) and since its elimination, on staff at the System Office as Executive Director of Digital Learning.

2/ The committee as constituted consists of 21 persons, of which only one (myself) is current teaching faculty at a CSU university. Western has two members, both administrative staff, Southern declined to participate and Eastern is absent.

3/ The committee meetings are led by and documents are provided by four Blackboard staff, the same company which is currently our learning management service (LMS) provider, and whose contract is up for reassessment at this time; Blackboard is one of three applicants.

4/ Other members of the committee are 3 community college faculty (Tunxis, Middlesex, and Capital) out of 12 community colleges; as well as 4 community college administrative staff (Asnuntuck, Three Rivers, Tunxis, Manchester) – for a total of 7 community colleges out of 10 represented either by teaching faculty or administrative staff, but only one by both.

5/ There are two CSCU administrators (Kevin Corcoran and the former President of Norwalk Commmunity College, David Levinson), and two persons from Charter Oak Community College (online learning and registrar).

6/ Research on online program needs was conducted by the Blackboard consultants, based on a comparison of online program offerings in New England + New York region, compared to offerings by CSCU institutions, as identified by the Office of Higher Education for the state.

7/ Ten potential programs were identified by the Blackboard consultants: Associate programs: Social Work, Criminal Justice , Nursing, Medical Clinical Assistant – Masters programs: Education Leadership & Administration, Computer & Information Science, Public Health, Health Care Administration, Education(MAT) – Doctoral program: Education Leadership & Administration.

8/ The proposal made by the Blackboard Consultants with the concurrence of Kevin Corcoran is to have the working group adopt a set of criteria to be met by proposals for new online programs (at the associate and graduate levels), and issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to be vetted by the committee and then forwarded to the CSCU (System) Provost Jane Gates.

9/ The System Office will then provide support for approved programs, including marketing, a dedicated program manager, recruitment support, curriculum development grants, and a 24/7 help desk.

10/ A further aspect of the proposal would be reconstitute the working group as a steering committee for a yet to be created Office of Digital Programs at the System Office.

I have sent an email to the committee members with the following concerns:

1/ The working group is not representative of the institutions composing CSCU, in particular the universities, with only 2 of 4 present and among those present, only one represented by a member of the teaching faculty; it is a kind of "coalition of the willing", with the severe limitations in terms of input and expected outcomes that this implies.

2/ The proposal to have online programs forwarded to the System Office Provost, presumably for approval as a CSCU program, is inconsistent with the normal procedure of having a faculty body, such as the university Senate, approve and forward programs to the university President, with the CSCU role limited to preliminary consideration of a concept paper.

3/ Concern was expressed about the advisability of a wholly online nursing program, and duplication of the existing EdD programs (Central and Southern), as well as the way that the market survey was done solely from information provided by the Office of Higher Education and other online information sources.

4/ While CSCU assistance in marketing may be welcome, it stands to reason that marketing of graduate programs would be limited to the audience for CSU universities, which those universities either individually or cooperatively are better able to determine than the System Office, preoccupied as it is with the community colleges and consolidation,

5/ Moreover, including both associate degree and university degree programs in the same process fails to distinguish between the distinct character of these levels – eg, research requirements at the graduate university level, and does not respect the statutory requirement that CSCU respect the distinct missions of the community colleges and state universities.

For these reasons, Senate should consider the following proposals:

1/ The coordination of university level programs, in particular graduate level programs for which no community college student could directly apply, should be handled by a representative committee of the four CSU institutions, including from each at least one teaching faculty, one instructional technology staff, and one administrator. No consultants from outside firms, especially those in the process of bidding for a CSCU contract should be included.

2/ Marketing for any CSU-wide programs should be based on an analysis of data for existing programs, in particular to determine the mix of in-state and out-of -state students, CSU and non-CSU bachelor-level graduates who apply, and a market survey of expected demand that could be entrusted to existing university staff or faculty rather than being outsourced at a time of growing financial shortfalls.

3/ Such a committee could be established by joint action of the University and Senate Presidents. Participation of all four universities should be a condition for setting up the committee. The

committee should report back to the university Presidents and Senates, and keep the System Office Provost informed of its recommendations. Standard university and BOR procedures should be followed (concept paper proposal to the Board Academic and Student Affairs committee, followed by the specific proposal to the University curriculum committee, to be approved there and by the Senate and university President).