

Council of Chairs

As a means of providing context for the following overview of how current leadership at CCSU is impeding Chairs from effectively addressing the needs of their faculty and students, we share the following “Preamble” from our current AAUP contract, a final draft of which was recently shared with all faculty (emphasis added):

This agreement is made and entered into as of August 26, 2021 by and between Connecticut State University American Association of University Professors, Inc., an employee association within the meaning of Secs. 5-270 - 5-280 CGS, and the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education, an employer within the meaning of Secs. 5-270 - 5-280 CGS, as follows:

PREAMBLE

The intent of the parties hereto in carrying out their responsibilities to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment of members of the bargaining unit is to promote the quality and effectiveness of education in Connecticut State University and to maintain high standards of academic excellence in all phases of instruction, research and service. The parties concur these objectives are facilitated by amicable adjustment of matters of mutual interest. It is recognized by the parties that mutual benefits are to be derived from continual improvement in Connecticut State University, and that participation of faculty and professional employees in the formulation of policies under which they provide their services is educationally sound.

While Connecticut State University-AAUP (hereinafter CSU-AAUP), as the elected bargaining agent, retains the exclusive right to negotiate and reach agreement on terms and conditions of employment for the members of the bargaining unit, and the Board of Regents (hereinafter the Board), retains the rights, under law, to manage and direct Connecticut State University, the parties recognize the desirability of a collegial governance system for faculty and professional employees in areas of academic concern. *It is desirable that the collegial system of governance be maintained and strengthened throughout Connecticut State University. In such a collegial system, the faculty of departments, and other units should play an active and responsible role in academic matters, including significant involvement in the recruitment of new faculty and professional employees, the development of high-quality programs, and other matters of professional concern. The collegial relationship is most effective when peers work critically together to carry out their duties in the most professional manner possible.*

Collegiality in academic governance at each university in the Connecticut State University System can best be accomplished through Senates selected by representatives of the appropriate university constituencies in accordance with each institution's constitution and tradition. Matters of concern to the Senate include: (a) curriculum policy and curricular structure, (b) requirements for degrees and granting of

degrees, (c) policies for recruitment, admission and retention of students, (d) academic policies relating to students, and (e) other matters of campus community concern. This preamble is a statement of intent and is not subject to grievance arbitration.

Council of Chairs Meeting With President Toro:

In an October 20, 2022 meeting convened by the Council of Chairs to meet with President Zulma Toro, three key issues were presented as topics for discussion: 1) shared governance; 2) administrative continuity; and 3) leadership practices. Chairs attended that meeting either in-person or via Teams. The meeting commenced at 3:05 pm and ended at 4:30pm.

A thorough review of the minutes and notes taken by Chairs in attendance reveals the following findings from that meeting.

Administrative Continuity: The high levels of turnover of administrative positions at all levels (e.g. Deans, Human Resources, Title IX Office, Clerical) and constant shifting of leadership's administrative responsibilities has resulted in the following: 1) lack of vision in the four schools/colleges and across the university; 2) lack of institutional memory; 3) a disconnect between management and faculty, resulting in unclear processes and lines of reporting. As a result, the long-term relationships between faculty and administration--the types of relationships that help an organization to innovate and evolve--are impossible to form and develop.

Shared governance: This overall lack of administrative continuity and problems being ignored until they are emergencies and then resolved without proper consultation on a very short timelines has produced a culture that is defined by its reliance on top-down management, where faculty and Chairs are minimally involved in decision-making and are instead presented by administrators with lists of decisions made and tasks to be performed. The turnover in administrative positions results in administrators ignoring local expertise, as the constantly changing array of administrators becomes ever more remote from those who have spent a career at CCSU. Communication runs overwhelmingly one way, with administrators dictating responsibilities at short notice (e.g., creating "Marketing Playbooks" or staffing seven hour long Open House shifts). Department budgets are cut significantly and yet departments are asked to do more. Chairs and faculty are rarely sought as sources for ideas or solutions except in the context of competitive grants (e.g., Next Gen grants), or in service on committees or Task Forces where decisions have already seemingly been made (e.g. advising processes, graduate studies).

During this meeting with the Council of Chairs, it was revealed that shared governance has been violated most clearly in the following instances:

- Elimination of PIN's for student registration in Fall 2022 – announced by the Provost two weeks prior to the beginning of spring registration.

- Elimination of School of Graduate Studies – announced by the Provost two weeks prior to a meeting where Chairs were provided with information regarding the revised organizational management of future graduate programs.
- Increasing course caps, restricting choices regarding modality, hiding of courses, and limiting summer courses by Deans with minimal or no consultation with Chairs; such decisions were not based on “peer reviewed research and educational best practice principles” as outlined in the AAUP contract.

Leadership Practices: Chairs are demoralized due to the top-down management styles described above and past threats to close programs. When advocating for faculty, Chairs are deemed “problems” to be solved rather than as valuable voices from the grassroots level of the University. Chairs are dictated to by their deans rather than being consulted. They are presumed by administrators to be disinterested in the problems of the university as is the case concerning enrollment. Chairs are not viewed as being part of the process for generating solutions. Administrators may state that they support shared governance, but their actions reveal either minimal or no meaningful Chair/faculty input. As a result of the culture and process failures described above, workloads have increased. There is no meaningful shared governance when there is no attempt to embrace grass-roots strategies. In the end, work-life balance suffers at all levels and the job of Chair becomes less and less appealing.

Additional Violations:

Additional violations of collegiality and meaningful shared governance that were not discussed during the CoC meeting but were shared in other contexts:

- SEPS - The formation of the Curriculum and Instruction Department which was split off from Educational Leadership and Instructional Technology Department. The new department was proposed in October of 2021 and officially announced in January of 2022. Four faculty members were assigned to this new department, and three of those faculty members did not consent to the reassignment. One member did not have a commonality of interest and did not teach courses in the new department. The Faculty Senate and Curriculum Committees did not support this reorganization. The faculty of the original department did not engage in any of the planning for the new department and there was no vote or consensus to form this new department.
- Continued movement to dissolve School of Graduate Studies – according to an email from Provost Kostelis dated 10/13/22, the decision to dissolve the School of Graduate Studies was made by Deans and the Office of Academic Affairs. In that message, the Provost states that conversations will be held with the Graduate Studies Committee, Program Coordinators, Department Chairs, and the Registrar's Office. A memorandum from Associate Vice President Steven Minkler and Provost Kostelis was forwarded to all faculty on 11/1/22 that sought to clarify these decisions and outlined a schedule of past meetings with the aforementioned groups. This memo confirms that only three one-on-one meetings were held with the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee during the first month of the semester, and that the proposal to dissolve the School of Graduate

Studies was presented only once to the full Graduate Studies Committee on 9/22/22, only three weeks before the 10/13/22 campus-wide announcement of the decision. The memo also outlines dates of meetings held subsequent to the 10/13/22 announcement. However, during those meetings, Chairs and Program Coordinators report that they were merely informed of pending changes and not provided with the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversation. It remains apparent that decisions about the dissolution of the School of Graduate Studies have already been made by administrators without meaningful engagement with chairs and faculty and so shared governance continues to be violated.

- Lack of meaningful discussion with faculty regarding the elimination of PINs. In an email dated 10/12/2022, faculty were informed that PINs would be discontinued due to a decision made by the Enrollment Management Council. It is not clear who serves on that Council (no information can be found on the website). Faculty Senate recently called for three faculty to be added to the "Enrollment Management Council." In the meantime, in the wake of this unilateral decision and the sharing of the joint statement from the President and AAUP regarding violations of shared governance, no update has been provided by Deans or the Provost regarding the use of PIN's although it has come to the attention of some faculty that PINs were still required for those students eligible for early registration (e.g. Honors Program students).
- School of Business - Programs and concentrations created/changed with little to no faculty input (specifically under Dean Farhat). *[Comment (not part of committee's report): click here to see Dr. Farhat's rebuttal.]*
- Decisions made about the Electrical Engineering program, including stopping transfer application, cancelling faculty search, changing laboratory layout, and cancelling equipment delivery and training, were done either without consultations to the department or abruptly without considering faculty inputs, and immediately disrupted teaching and learning. Such situation which has lasted more than one year is demotivating and compromises the department's efforts to grow the Electrical Engineering program.
- Faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences are expected to adhere to deadlines, yet Dean's Office does not adhere to deadlines (e.g. CLASS Chairs finally received their budgets on 11/10/22; generally budgets are received within 5 weeks of the start of classes).
- Departmental scholarship award decisions were reassigned to institutional advancement without consulting or even informing the awarding departments. This has led to scholarships not being awarded as the donors intended or not being awarded at all (Fall 2022)

Conclusion:

From the CCSU AAUP Executive Committee: "Shared governance is both a principle and a set of mechanisms agreed to and codified within our contract; it is the principle that faculty should have a *meaningful say* in the management of the institution in which we are employed. CCSU-AAUP believes that the poor morale on campus is a direct

consequence of this erosion of Shared Governance.” (emphasis added—email communication to all faculty 10/20/2022)

President Toro’s response to the Chair of the Council of Chairs, sent on October 21, the day following our meeting, reveals a very narrow assessment of our collective expressions of frustration, particularly regarding the topics of collegiality and violations of shared governance:

Based on our conversation yesterday, I have identified a number of action items:

- 1. Keep chairs informed and involved regarding changes to the webpage and development of marketing materials for departments. In some cases, departments will need support with the writing of the materials.*
- 2. Streamline the search and hiring process and have better coordination between OIE and HR*
- 3. Work with chairs to facilitate the awarding of the departmental scholarships*
- 4. Provide administrative support for all academic departments*
- 5. Strengthen shared governance at all levels of the administration (email communication from President Toro, 10/21/22)*

In sum, it is clear that the “collegial relationship” described in the Connecticut State University American Association of University Professors, Inc. and the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education is not evident at Central Connecticut State University.

It is also clear that meaningful “shared governance” as outlined in the joint statement by AAUP and President Toro continues to be disregarded. The issues Department Chairs are facing, as outlined in this document, cannot be resolved without shared governance, improved communication, and a change in leadership practices at this university. We will continue to be vigilant and are hopeful that the administration will want to work towards solutions to these issues with our thoughtful input and respect for our time and expertise.