

A VISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR CONNECTICUT AND THE NATION

The United States' higher education system has long enjoyed a global reputation for quality, accessibility, and research output. North American workers were able to send their children to publicly supported schools that provided both important learning opportunities and training that led to significant employment. But unregulated global capitalism, war spending, and a lack of political leadership have created a financial crisis that threatens higher education, especially in public institutions like our own. Politicians, administrators, and so-called education reformers have used this opportunity to defund universities, demonize faculty and public employees, and institute curriculum changes that emphasize degree completion over learning and individual development.

As faculty members of Central Connecticut State University, we have a responsibility to help protect educational opportunities for our students and our communities. In Chicago, Quebec, California, and other areas, teachers and students have begun to show that we do not have to meekly accept education cuts or tuition raises. We too can demand a quality, accessible, and affordable education for all who want it. Our vision of education is built on the following principles:

Education is an individual right and a public good. As a society, we face acute economic, social, and environmental problems that can only be solved by an educated citizenry. Education must cultivate critical and creative thinking, sensitivity to cultural difference, and problem-solving. It must provide students with the joy of learning, self-discovery, and the tools to build fulfilling and productive lives.

Education must be part of a larger system of economic justice and social welfare. Learning can only happen when students live in secure, supportive, and safe environments. Students and their families must have financial stability and access to adequate health care, mental health, and counseling services.

Education must be affordable. Rising tuition costs have undermined the value of education. Today, students are forced to work long hours, compromising their ability to study and learn. After college they are faced with huge debts which rob them of their choices and strap them to whatever job they can find. We must stop using students as cash cows to fund the university and the student loan industry. We can do this by ending the diversion of our financial resources to foreign wars, prisons, and tax cuts for corporations and the super-rich. New tuition increases pose a serious threat to the health of the university and must be opposed.

Quality education must be available to all, regardless of gender, race, or social class. Connecticut is plagued by economic and educational disparities. As a society, we cannot afford to reserve quality education for wealthy families and provide students in our public institutions with narrow job training programs or quickie degrees. We must break down segregation and provide opportunities for women and minorities to pursue disciplines in which they are underrepresented. The university and all academic programs must reflect the make-up of our communities and be a welcoming place for immigrants, racial minorities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, ESL students, and all who want to learn.

Quality education requires a strong culture of shared governance and academic freedom in teaching and research. Education flourishes when faculty, students, and surrounding communities determine fundamental policies, control curriculum, and oversee the working and learning environment. Attempts to standardize curriculum, mandate high stakes testing, censor faculty and students, and monitor university members' electronic communications undermine the free exchange of ideas necessary to real education.

Quality education requires fair working conditions for faculty and staff. Teachers perform their jobs best when they have fair compensation, job security, and protection from arbitrary dismissal. Students benefit from the presence of experienced faculty with whom they can develop constructive, long term relationships.

Quality higher education requires support for faculty research and creative activity. Our faculty members are actively engaged in research and creative activity. They make discoveries and conduct research that fuel their teaching and contribute to knowledge. Therefore, they must be actively supported in their endeavors, by means of time and resources necessary for effective research and creative activity.

Quality education requires a robust and supportive campus. Learning does not just happen in the classroom. The campus must provide academic advising, mentoring, access to tutoring services and academic coaching, strong research and library facilities, extracurricular activities, cultural, athletic and recreational facilities for use by ALL students, child-care for student-parents, inexpensive and quality housing and meal plans, and mental health and wellness support. Such services must not be limited or rationed for any one segment of the student body, but must be open and accessible to all.