

Gregory W. Gray
President

October 31, 2014

Dr. Vijay Nair
President AAUP
Western Connecticut State University
181 White Street
Danbury, CT 06810

Dear Vijay,

I want to thank you for spearheading the comprehensive response to Transform 2020. The Academic Imperative rightfully identifies many areas that the System (which includes the four Universities, as well as 12 Community Colleges and Charter Oak), and the State of Connecticut must collaborate on to achieve our collective aspirations. Truth be told, the Board of Regents agrees with your assessment of the importance of nearly every topic of concern identified in the Academic Imperative. I think you would agree the issues raised in the Academic Imperative have lingered in the Connecticut higher education system for decades, well before the 2012 legislation to create the Connecticut State College and University System. Our responsibility as the current stewards of the BOR system is to develop a plan to enable the institutions to compete successfully for students, faculty and for the state, and to deliver on the promise of a better education for our citizens. We also want to ensure that our four comprehensive universities, as they seek to serve their specific regions and maintain their distinct roles, have the needed resources to support their mission of teaching, research, and outreach.

You know better than most that Connecticut's finances are a major topic of discussion. The majority of the independent and non-partisan economic analysts predict a substantial state deficit. I'm sure you are also aware that the Board of Regents has set affordability as a primary objective of Transform. We cannot expect much added revenue from tuition and thus must aggressively pursue other forms of revenue as well as efficiency. Nevertheless, the System did make a commitment last year to 86 full-time faculty when positions were released system-wide. At this time it is not clear how the Legislators will address the looming budget deficit, but in the past, health care and education have generally been among those that were subject to cuts. As such, we are currently developing a comprehensive strategy for the upcoming legislative session to include faculty, students, alumni, and the university presidents to advocate for the resources the universities need to move from being "good to being great". You will hear more about this in the coming weeks and months, but I am asking you today for your commitment to assist with this effort.

Although there are many characteristics that define a great state, there is little debate that an educated citizenry is at the top of the list. As the State revolutionizes engineering with advanced manufacturing, health and human services, teacher education, performing arts, liberal arts, technology, cybersecurity and other prospering professional careers, the four universities will lead the CSCU effort to provide postsecondary education in these critical areas. The regional demand for baccalaureate and other selected graduate degrees will remain strong. The universities and the faculty are the drivers for providing the professional workforce required by the public sector and private business and industry. It is the collective responsibility of the universities and the CSCU System to take education to new heights of discovery. With their distinct role, scope, and mission, the four universities are uniquely positioned to lead education in the State of Connecticut.

The power of education will indeed lead to a better society. Transform 2020 represents the System's strategic plan to lead Connecticut's statewide efforts for public postsecondary education. Today's global economy requires graduates to have a broad knowledge on many subjects that is complemented with a concentrated in-depth knowledge in specific fields of interest. The fast pace and ever changing world requires graduates to be nimble and exceptional problem-solvers and critical thinkers. A broad, comprehensive liberal arts curriculum is therefore at the heart of a CSCU education. There is little doubt that a liberal arts education plays an essential role in providing a foundation for learning in every professional field.

Transform also acknowledges that learning is a shared responsibility between the university and the student and that learning comes in many forms. Learning does not begin nor end in the classroom, rather it continues through co-curricular and experiential education as well as online education. It is through these multiple experiences (intellectual cross-training) that students begin to appreciate real world connections with the breadth and rigor of the academic curriculum. Through the curriculum, a CSCU education should challenge ideas not only to learn, but to defend and improve upon them as well. It is via the curriculum, teaching, lecturers and intellectual discourse that students will evolve as individuals acquiring the skills and ethical base to make sound judgments that lead to habits of good citizenship, fulfilling careers, and a rewarding life.

To support the tenets of an effective broad-based liberal arts education, Transform invests in the critical infrastructure components of instructional technology, smart classrooms, on-line learning and instructional grants that afford faculty the opportunity to experiment with new technology and learning methods to supplement face-to-face instruction. In addition, Transform also makes a significant investment to develop state-of-the-art academic facilities, as well as to address the current backlog of deferred facility maintenance.

Transform acknowledges that students and adults all have different learning styles, capabilities, and expectations for their academic pursuits. Therefore, many of the Initiatives associated with Transform express a renewed commitment to the value of face-to-face instruction combined with team-based and self-directed learning along with the individual advantages of on-line courses. To better understand the expectations of our learners, Transform also recognizes the critical importance of academic advising. The Provost Gargano is leading a system-wide effort on enhancing academic advising. The System has included in its budget request a plan to address the staffing need for more effective advising at the universities. Academic advising is the foundation through which each learner can be purposefully guided to the program of study that matches his/her career aspirations.

Students may seek to begin their academic pursuits at one college and complete at another. Transform contains initiatives that are designed to greatly ease and enhance transfer. Transform, through academic program optimization, will provide a range of academic credentials that includes certificates (credit & non-credit), associate, baccalaureate, and selected doctoral degrees. The Provost is engaged with Central and Southern Connecticut State University on 3 to 5 new doctoral programs that will require legislative approval.

Transform also values the continuum of education from pre-college programs to graduate education. One of the characteristics of graduate education is research collaboration with faculty. Through Transform, the Office of Sponsored Programs was created to assist faculty with the identification of grant funding opportunities, grant writing, annual reporting and grant closeout. We are hopeful that research grants will lead to innovation in education and curriculum and the establishment of signature programs or centers of excellence.

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Student learning (for all types of students) is the heart and soul of Transform 2020. It is quality faculty through its research, publications, teachings and regional and national honors that create the prestige and reputation for the university. Students then are drawn to a university based on its faculty, confident that they will be instructed by the best in their field. Within the CSCU System, we respect and appreciate our excellent faculty. Transform is designed to provide faculty with state of the art instructional tools, whereby they will have the most current information technology resources for research and adaptive learning methods. Financial resources will also be provided for faculty to experiment with different models of classroom instruction and support their efforts to be leaders in their field of expertise.

Transform in many ways identifies what should be refined and upgraded, but not changed. On the other hand, Transform encourages the universities to be fully discerning and open to exactly what students are facing in order to structure an optimal environment for their development and success. No one can truly predict the types of careers that will be available in the future, but we do know an average person will have 6 to 10 jobs throughout his or her lifetime. It is incumbent upon all of us to proceed with our minds wide open. Why can't the universities offer five-year BA/MA degree options? Why can't the universities offer a three-year baccalaureate degree? Why can't Charter Oak explore new international markets? Why can't universities ensure that all students have access to the classes they need to graduate on-time? Because the student has a need, we have a job to do; and because the student has a choice, we must become the better choice. The CSCU System has been given the responsibility to ensure that our colleges and universities are at the center of the knowledge revolution. We must prepare our students and adult learners for the changing needs of our world by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and the ability to adapt and reinvent themselves as the economy and other factors evolve.

Everyone associated with the CSCU System, and the general public as well, will view Transform 2020 through a lens that is important to their perspectives and desires. The diverse colleges and universities within the System will have their own areas of interest and priority relating to the 36 initiatives. Finally, the BOR administration will also have its own view of the priority of initiatives. The Transform initiatives that the universities deem priorities will have an increased urgency for implementation. Through our collective leadership-in words and action-we will move forward at a pace that is collegial, respectful, practical, and supported with evidence-based research to provide Connecticut with the educated citizenry it demands and deserves. We ask simply that the faculty at the universities remain engaged in this transformative effort, and maintain a focus on the broader BOR mission as well, to provide the tools needed for all 17 system institutions to achieve our collective goals.

Sincerely,

Gregory W. Gray
President
CT Board of Regents for Higher Education

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CC: Board of Regents Members
Board of Regents Executive Staff