

September 6, 2017

Dr. Barbara W. Brittingham, President
Commission on Institutions of Higher Education
New England Association of Schools and Colleges
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100
Burlington, MA 01803-4514

Dear President Brittingham:

I write to express appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education at its June 9, 2017, meeting regarding emerging plans to implement *Students First: Securing Connecticut's Future through Excellence in Higher Education*, which proposes to consolidate back-office services for all CSCU institutions and combine the 12 community colleges into a single institution. Your response provides valuable insight and guidance as we develop a formal proposal.

At the center of the "Students First" initiative is the plan to reorganize our 12 community colleges into One College with multiple campuses. Through a streamlined administrative structure, the adoption of standardized policies and practices, and the implementation of Guided Pathways, the "One College" model will enable more consistent branding and marketing to potential students, remove many obstacles to students' academic progress, eliminate unnecessary duplication, integrate best practices in student support throughout the College, facilitate seamless transfers, and ensure all students' career readiness. Centralizing the collection and analysis of standardized data will provide a more reliable measure of institutional effectiveness and lead to increased data-based decision making.

Notable progress toward developing "Students First" since the June 2017 meeting includes the following:

- Four of the six functional administrative areas charged with consolidation for all CSCU institutions have submitted reports to the Steering Committee. They are Information Technology, Facilities, Human Resources, and Financial Aid Services. All reports will be completed by October 30, 2017.
- A community college consolidation team, led by President Michael Rooke, has been formed of the 12 community college presidents to propose a new structure under one centrally managed college. A subcommittee of the presidents and deans of administration and academic and student affairs will fine tune the model to ensure that it meets the needs of individual campuses and complies with the NEASC *Standards of Accreditation* and those of other specialized and professional accrediting bodies by October 30, 2017.

- An Orientation Meeting for the CSU Guided Pathways initiative was convened August 9, 2017.
- A subset of the Faculty Advisory Committee began work on shared governance and curricular processes for the proposed One College, August, 2017.
- Approval has been given to hire two community college administrators who will oversee the overall integration of shared and differentiated academic programs. Primary responsibility for curricular development as well as their systematic assessment to assure quality will reside with faculty.
- Launched “15 to Finish” advising campaign system-wide, August, 2017.

We are keenly aware that our proposed consolidation of back-office services and reorganization of our community colleges must comply with the NEASC *Standards of Accreditation*. As you have requested, our Substantive Change report will pay particular attention to our compliance with the following standards: Planning and Evaluation; Organization and Governance; Students; Teaching, Learning and Scholarship; Institutional Resources; and Educational Effectiveness.

We look forward to further discussions regarding our timeline and how it fits with the Commission’s schedule and continuing interactions as we develop “Students First” to provide a sustainable framework for strengthening student access and success in this fiscally challenging climate.