



Good afternoon Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. For the record, my name is Mike Gargano and I am the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs for the Board of Regents for Higher Education which governs our state's four state universities, 12 community colleges, and Charter Oak State College. Collectively, we are known as the Connecticut State Colleges & Universities, or CSCU. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here today to offer testimony on your ongoing study regarding higher education certificate programs.

First, I want to applaud the work that has been done so far by staff assigned to the project, who I believe have presented a well-informed overview of the status of certificate programs in the CSCU system, and I, along with our institutional research staff, look forward to continuing to work with them as they enter the more data-intensive phase of this study.

I believe that this study was particularly well-timed. I say that because there can be no denying that the entire world of higher education is in the midst of a transition period. That is evident through predicted enrollment challenges, both in Connecticut and nationally, where the total number of high school students graduating is declining about 1.8% each year. Not only is the quantity of students changing, but the demographics are shifting as well, and we should expect students from urban centers to represent a greater percentage of our student body moving forward.

Additionally, as costs unfortunately increase, greater debate is being had over the true value of a traditional college and university education, despite study after study repeatedly reaffirming the value of a college degree.

These facts mean that competition for students is intense, and if that fact isn't obvious, one merely needs to turn on the radio during fall and spring enrollment periods to hear promises of the value of a certificate program at private school X, or occupational school Y.

Finally, this legislature is right now grappling, through the Planning Commission for Higher Education, with what statewide policy goals in higher education should be as we complete this decade and enter the next, and it is clear that there is room in Connecticut to better promote the idea of sub-baccalaureate level credentials as a path to a steady, reliable, profitable career.

I would like to speak for a moment to provide some general context about the higher education environment pertaining to certificate programs before providing more specific information about certificates in the CSCU system.

For decades, the prevailing thought on higher education in the northeast has always been one that elicits the image of a traditional, four-year, private, liberal arts education. Historically speaking, it has been a prevailing thought that has served the region well. Six of the top 11 states for degree attainment of 25-64 year olds are in New England or the New York tri-state area. Connecticut ranks 4<sup>th</sup>, with over 46% of this demographic group having attained an associate's degree or higher. This is a great success, of course, but in terms of increasing educational attainment in the state, we must recognize this statistic is subject to diminishing returns.

We of course want to see continued increases in attainment at the associate's degree level and above, and should continue to strive for those increases. At the institutions I represent, these increases can be achieved through comprehensive efforts to improve student retention by introducing proactive advising, improving credit transfer and articulation in line with this legislature's mandate to do so, rightsizing the number of credits required for a degree to 60 or 120 when possible, improving access to financial aid, increasing dual-enrollment and early college opportunities, and other initiatives being pursued as part of Transform CSCU 2020. But, we must also grapple with the demographic realities I have previously mentioned, which indicate the possibility of increased preference toward certificate programs moving forward. No matter what goals are ultimately set for statewide higher education attainment, certificate programs will play a critical role in meeting those goals.

At our institutions, credit-bearing certificate programming is handled with the same rigor as degree programs. The 12 Connecticut Community Colleges offer three levels of academic credit bearing certificate programs. These are certificates of less than 15 credits (C1), certificates of 15 - 29 credits (C2) and certificates 30 - 59 credits (C3). The majority are C2 certificates – programs that a fully college ready student attending full-time can complete in one to two academic years. Certificate programs, like associate degree programs, emanate from local campus curriculum development in consultation with local advisory committees whose members include representatives from business and industry.

New programs and necessary modifications undergo a rigorous licensing and accreditation approval process that begins with local campus governance structures, followed by a review by academic leaders across the system, a review and recommendation by the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Regents, and finally a review and recommendation by the full Board. Once approved,

students enrolled in Certificate programs are eligible for federal, state and local financial aid as appropriate.

Although an integral part of a larger system of seventeen state colleges and universities, the 12 community colleges still retain their own uniqueness when responding to state and local needs. Because of this, there are similar programs with different identifying codes and descriptions, and there is some variation in content across the colleges.

Non-credit certificate programs are a much more difficult proposition from a program approval and data analysis perspective as the range of offerings is vast, and often tailored to the needs of one individual employer.

Continuing education divisions at the twelve Connecticut Community Colleges provide a variety of offerings that include programming for children and seniors, personal enrichment, college preparation, professional development, workforce development and more. Because they are primarily providers of non-credit offerings, they are flexible and can respond quickly to the programming needs of business, industry and the local community.

The programs currently being reviewed by the PRI Research Staff do not account for all of the numerous individual workforce development courses or all of the offerings delivered by contract training at the workplace in partnerships among college Continuing Education departments, business, and industry. This sort of training is often contracted for a specific number of students. Individual registrations often do not occur as they would for students coming to campus and enrolling as unique individuals. Such training can involve individual courses or full programs of study.

In addition it is important to note that very often students enrolled in workforce development programs provided by non-credit instruction are not seeking pathways to employment, credit certificates or Associate's degrees. Often these students are instead seeking stackable credentials. A good example is a police officer or firefighter who enrolls in and completes an emergency medical technician (EMT) or a phlebotomy program of study. The police officer or firefighter is likely not going to quit his or her job to become an EMT or go to work in a blood lab. Instead the EMT and phlebotomy credentials are stackable for a student, completed to improve performance in the job at hand and to enhance eligibility for the next promotion opportunity.

Students can move from non-credit to credit programs before completing the non-credit program. While this is a success for the college and student, it skews completion statistics. Students can also move from non-credit to credit programs of study after completing the non-credit program. This is also a success for the college and student, but it distorts employment statistics. The point is that tracking a student from enrollment

to completion to employment is an incomplete assessment at best of the value added by non-credit workforce development offerings. In order to improve the quality of data, we should require the collection of identifying information that can be matched to labor records, but the idea of doing so is unpopular with individuals and organizations that register or contract for courses and programs.

These are important data quality issues, because institutions lack the analysis tools to comprehensively answer the question, “Was the student’s need adequately served by this program or course?” This question moves beyond the meaning of the statistics we currently capture in response to federal or state mandate.

We do, however, know several things about our credit and non-credit certificate offerings.

The first is that these offerings comprise a significant portion of the business in which our institutions engage. In 2012-2013, over 29,000 students enrolled in over 56,000 non-credit courses, and around 1800 students enrolled in credit certificate programs. Fifty percent of these non-credit offerings involve workforce development.

Credit certificate programs have been successful. Over the last five years an average of 1,628 students per year graduated from credit certificate programs; 76 in C1 level, 1,544 in C2 level and 8 in C3 level programs. Of those students, about half began their studies as part-time and half as full-time students. On average, 52% of the graduates were female and 48% were male. On average, 66% of graduates were White, 12% Hispanic/Latino, and 9% were Black/African American. The five-year average time to award for credit certificate students is 2.55 years and the five-year average graduation GPA is 3.26.

It is clear then that our institutions can reliably produce certificates. But, we have a duty to ensure that these credentials are relevant, portable, and stackable, so as to enhance the value provided to the student.

We also have a duty to market the availability of these credentials better. As the study update document points out, over three-quarters of certificates awarded in this state are from for-profit institutions, and data from many other similarly situated states in the Northeast that also lead the country in degree attainment tell the same story. I strongly believe there is room to build a marketing effort around the value, relevance and career potential offered by certificate programs in our institutions. In turn, I believe we can increase enrollments and completions while offering students the opportunity to save money. However, this effort is of course constrained by available resources.

Our credit and non-credit offerings are remarkably diverse, but we cannot let that diversity be a substitute for the meaningfulness of the offerings – and so as we move

forward, the Board of Regents must work to ensure that the review of these programs is comprehensive, and that the programs we offer respond to demonstrated need. This must be accomplished without impeding on the ability of an institution to serve the community in line with its educational mission.

I believe there are other opportunities as well. As part of our Transform effort, we are working hard to increase partnerships with high schools through innovative programs that provide students opportunities to earn college and high school credits side by side. These programs do not need to be limited to credits toward an associate's degree, but can be expanded to provide students with other credentials. The result could be a graduate who is workforce-ready with the option to transfer or continue building upon credits already earned to achieve a degree.

Certificates that are geared toward workforce development can also be designed to involve an internship or other practical experiences in partnership with local businesses to greater improve the skill set and career-readiness of the student.

Finally, due to legislation passed out of this committee last year, we will soon have a common definition and parameters for what certificate programming is. This is an important step in enhancing our ability to monitor and track these programs, and to the extent possible, increase the quality of the data used in making judgments about the effectiveness of these programs.

In conclusion, I would be remiss if I did not state that workforce development is a major component of Transform CSCU 2020, the system's long-term plan for academic and operational improvement in the next decade. Dr. Wilfredo Nieves, President of Capital Community College, is dutifully leading these efforts. So, we are already in a period of examination and introspection when it comes to the kinds of program offerings we are discussing today, and I believe this conversation and further research on the part of this committee will support those efforts.

I want to thank you for your time today. I look forward to the continuation of this study and your questions.