



October 27, 2021

Mr. Terrence Cheng
President
Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
61 Woodland Street
Hartford, CT 06105

Dear President Cheng:

I write to inform you that at its meeting on September 23, 2021, the New England Commission of Higher Education considered the public comments regarding the Students First Initiative of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System (CSCU) submitted by Gateway Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, Norwalk Community College, and Tunxis Community College, and the System's response to those comments, and voted the following:

that the System's response to the public comments submitted by Gateway Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, Norwalk Community College, and Tunxis Community College be accepted;

that, in addition to the matters specified in our letter of July 21, 2021, the report prepared for CSCU's substantive change request that the Commission accredit Connecticut State Community College in lieu of twelve separately accredited colleges specifically address matters related to integrating faculty and staff into the System's shared governance structure with attention to:

- 1) demonstrating recent participation of faculty and staff from across the System in the design and review of the Students First Initiative including the names, positions, and institutions of faculty and staff who participated between January 2020 and December 2021;
- 2) providing evidence that the shared governance processes for the approval of new programs, as well as for the modification of existing programs, has been and continues to be inclusive and effective and that the alignment of curriculum in similar programs offered through multiple campuses is clear and consistent;
- 3) illustrating the degree to which faculty from across the System participated in the review of the developmental English and Mathematics curriculum that informed the Board of Regent's policy regarding the elimination of these courses;

- 4) detailing the System's plans to ensure that all faculty and staff, including those with dissenting opinions, will be provided with a substantive and appropriate voice in governance and decision-making once the 12 community colleges are consolidated.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

After reviewing the comments submitted by Gateway Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, Norwalk Community College, and Tunxis Community College, and considering the materials submitted by the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System in response, the Commission determined that the response generally addressed the public comments. We ask, however, that in addition to the matters specified in our letter of July 21, 2021, the report prepared for CSCU's substantive change request that the Commission accredit Connecticut State Community College in lieu of twelve separately accredited colleges include additional information regarding four matters related to our standards on *Organization and Governance* and *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*.

Through the public comments submitted by the four community colleges, the Commission is reminded that some faculty and staff are gravely concerned about the efficacy of the Students First Initiative, and these concerns have been expressed to the Commission and to the System throughout the consolidation process. A theme among the comments is that the participation of faculty and staff from individual institutions in the design and review of the Students First Initiative has decreased significantly since the Initiative was first begun several years ago. We appreciate that the System has provided the names of participants and their institutions in previous reports, and in addition to a general update on the ways in which constituents at each institution are participating in the consolidation process, we ask that a list of the names, positions, and institutions of faculty and staff across the System who participated in the Students First Initiative between January 2020 and December 2021 be included in the report prepared for CSCU's substantive change request as evidence that "[t]hrough its system of board and internal governance, the [System] ensures the appropriate consideration of relevant perspectives; decision-making aligned with expertise and responsibility; and timely action on institutional plans, policies, curricular change, and other key considerations" (3.17). Our standard on *Organization and Governance* also states:

In multi-campus systems organized under a single governing board, the division of responsibility and authority between the system office and the institution is clear. Where system and campus boards share governance responsibilities or dimensions of authority, system policies and procedures are clearly defined and equitably administered relative to the mission of the institution (3.6).

In addition, there appears to be a consensus among faculty and staff at individual institutions that, when they do participate in the process, they are not afforded sufficient time to review and vet proposed courses, degrees, and certificates through their shared governance processes to determine if they meet the institution's criteria. Institutions also expressed concerns that the programs listed in the proposed single academic catalog will not necessarily align with the curriculum of programs (e.g., automotive certificates and degrees) offered at a particular college and that current and prospective students may find these inconsistencies confusing. We appreciate the System's continued commitment to ensuring that "faculty are intimately involved in both local and global decision-making for the college," and we ask that the report prepared for CSCU's substantive change request include an update on the steps the System is taking to address these concerns and perceptions as evidence that it "places primary responsibility for the content, quality, and effectiveness of the curriculum with its faculty, [and that f]aculty have a substantive voice in matters of educational programs, faculty personnel, and other aspects of institutional policy that relate to their areas of responsibility and expertise" (3.15). We are also guided here by our

standards on *Organization and Governance* (cited above) and *Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*:

... In presenting the institution to students, prospective students, and other members of the public, the institutional website provides information, including information about student success, that is complete, accurate, timely, readily accessible, clear, and sufficient for intended audiences to make informed decisions (*Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure*, Statement of the Standard).

Commenters also expressed concerns that faculty and staff input at individual institutions into the Board of Regent's policy related to the elimination of developmental English and Mathematics courses was limited. While we acknowledge that "Students First is a significant organizational change," and we appreciate that the System has "made every effort to engage faculty and staff," we also seek assurance that there are mechanisms in place to ensure faculty and staff from across the System are appropriately integrated into the governance structure throughout the remainder of the consolidation process, as well as once the consolidation is complete. The substantive change proposal will allow the System to illustrate the degree to which faculty from across the System participated in the review of the developmental English and Mathematics curriculum that informed the Board of Regent's policy regarding the elimination of these courses. We are guided here by our standard on *Organization and Governance*, cited above.

Finally, as related to the concerns noted above, we acknowledge that there are constituents throughout the System who do not fully support the Students First Initiative and, as the System indicated to the Commission at its June retreat and in its response to the comments, "the opposition is vocal but a small segment of our population." However, once the 12 community colleges are consolidated into one institution, it will be necessary to ensure that all members of the campus community, including those with dissenting opinions and viewpoints, are integrated and appropriately involved in shared governance and decision-making. We appreciate learning through the System's response that the structure of the consolidated institution – the Connecticut State Community College – "places great emphasis on relationships" and, under the leadership of the Associate Vice President of Academic Program and Curriculum, "all curriculum and related decisions within this structure will be primarily composed of faculty." Through the substantive change report, we anticipate receiving information about the System's plans to bolster confidence and strengthen relationships among members of the campus community who are not currently supportive of the consolidation to demonstrate that "the institution's internal governance provides for the appropriate participation of its constituencies, promotes communications, and effectively advances the quality of the institution" (3.13).

Commenters at Gateway Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, Norwalk Community College and Tunxis Community College will be informed of Commission's disposition of this matter.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



George W. Tetler

GWT/jm