



Testimony before the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee
By David G. Carter, Chancellor, Connecticut State University System
Tuesday, October 6, 2009

Good afternoon, Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is David Carter, Chancellor of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS). I am pleased to be here today to offer comments regarding the Committee's staff briefing report on Alignment of Postsecondary Education and Employment.

I commend you for your efforts in this area, and for your interest in the relationship between education and Connecticut's economic well-being. This is a subject to which we have devoted considerable time and attention at the Connecticut State University System. We are pleased to have legislators working on this subject as well, because it is of paramount importance to the future of our state.

Time will permit me to provide comments on only a handful of points raised in the draft report, and I would certainly welcome the opportunity to continue working with you, and the Committee staff, to further explore these issues.

Let me first offer you some context. This year, for the first time in our history, CSUS set all-time records for the number of full-time undergraduate and full-time graduate students in the same year. In fact, full-time undergraduate enrollment has increased nearly 50 percent since 1996.

Our total enrollment climbed for the second consecutive year and now exceeds 36,000. And graduate enrollment increased for the first time in the past six years. Most important for this discussion is the fact that 86 percent of our graduates stay in Connecticut after graduation, to pursue their careers, raise families and contribute to the economic vitality and quality of life in Connecticut.

I would add that when considering some of the statistics included in this report, a broader understanding of what's not included is important as well. For example, the Department of Labor statistics on the number of graduates working in Connecticut does not include self-employed, federal workers, or Connecticut graduates working in other states. We would be happy to work with staff to provide further depth on some of the other statistical information that is cited.

We take tremendous pride in the work we are doing with the business community in Connecticut, responding to the workforce needs they have today, and anticipate having in the years ahead. And we are taking concrete steps to develop academic programs that respond specifically to their needs, and their concerns. Let me share four quick examples.

First, Central Connecticut State University has developed, in just the past few years, Bachelor of Science programs in mechanical engineering and most recently, civil engineering. The response, both by prospective students and businesses in those fields, has been greater than even our optimistic projections.

Currently, there are 148 students enrolled in the mechanical engineering program and 24 students enrolled in the civil engineering program that was licensed in June 2009. The Connecticut Department of Labor compared the number of graduates in Connecticut with the number of annual openings for each occupation, and found that the Engineering/Science/Technology occupations provided the best opportunities for employment. Central is also the only university in the State that offers a degree in engineering with a specialty in aerospace. In fact, enrollment in Central's School of Engineering and Technology has been up 7 to 10 percent annually for the past decade.

It is important to note that even those students who do not major in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) fields, for example, can prove to be in high demand. They benefit from the strong liberal arts foundation at the universities, which develops in them an ability to be critical thinkers and agile learners. For businesses, that will mean employees who have the capacity to adapt quickly to newly emerging jobs, and as technology changes. That's what businesses are looking for.

Second, we are responding to shortages in the nursing field, and the need for nursing educators. A *Connecticut League for Nursing* report in 2005 said Connecticut ranked 49th out of 50 states in producing nurses, predicting that by 2010, Connecticut would have a 33 percent shortage of RNs, which would increase to 57 percent by 2020. We are responding. Southern has developed an accelerated program that is graduating students. Southern and Western are jointly developing an Ed.D. program in nursing. And Central has started a 4-year BSN program.

Let me add that while the draft report rightly points out that there is not a shortage among LPN's, just the opposite is true elsewhere in the field – and it is those areas, including the shortage of nursing faculty, that we are working to address. Updating the professional credentials of nurses allows those nurses to provide better medical care in the state. And I should note that approximately 95 percent of graduating nurses at Southern and Western remain here in Connecticut.

Third, Eastern has increased academic programs in the areas of environmental policy and sustainable energy, which are consistently near the top in predictions of industries likely to offer jobs in the future.

And fourth, the universities recently received federal funding for an initiative in nanotechnology, to build program capacity and acquire necessary instrumentation for baccalaureate and master degree level research and education. The goal is to create and support collaborative nanotechnology research and educational experiences for students.

The draft report points to employer demand being greatest in the following fields: healthcare, computers, math & science, business/financial, especially accountants and auditors, management, and community/social services. To be honest, if you asked me in which areas our universities are the strongest, I would say much the same list.

In addition to the earlier examples, let me add this: Accounting broke the top ten in the list of most popular majors for our graduates last year, and at Central it is now ranked second.

Management is the leading major among graduates at Western, and fourth at Central. Business administration tops the list at Southern, and public health is also in the top ten.

CSUS awards the most bachelor's degrees in Connecticut in mathematics and statistics, computer/information science & systems, and business administration and related degrees. We have also awarded the most bachelor of science in nursing degrees over the past five years. I could go on; suffice to say we take very seriously the future of our state and our students, and we are committed to doing what's best for both.

The draft report recognizes the potential positive impact on postsecondary and workforce alignment by effective student loan incentive and post-graduate loan forgiveness programs. We couldn't agree more. In fact, we have put forth a plan that would specifically target loan forgiveness in key workforce shortage areas. We would look forward to working with you on such a plan.

The draft report also mentions the PK-20 Council. We are very involved in its work, and in fact we convened a series of Town Meetings across the state a year ago to highlight the importance of education working collaboratively at every level, and connecting with our business community. We also developed a model program, known as Bridges, which has brought high school teachers in math and English together with university faculty at Western to better align the curriculum in Danbury and Bethel. The results have been impressive, reducing the number of students needing remedial classes, improving retention, and permitting us to now expand the program not only to the sciences, but to our other universities, and communities in their respective regions.

The draft report references the higher education coordinating council, and the oversight role of the Board of Governors. Let me say that it has been refreshing and a real joy working with Commissioner Meotti, and Chairman Ridley, as they have encouraged collaboration and cooperation. One example, for the first time in my memory, they have facilitated discussion that I believe has resulted in a similar common template for financial reporting, which improves everyone's ability to analyze data.

In addition, the draft report raises the notion of reorganization and centralization. Now, I hope you accept this in the spirit in which it is intended, but I believe this section of the draft report does not fully reflect the historical experience of this state on this topic. While I believe that there are ways to make our current system more efficient and effective, I do not believe that the proposal in the current draft is the answer.

With regard to the Board of Governors, it is one thing to coordinate, and it is quite another to have direct oversight responsibility, especially when institutions have such distinct missions. Community colleges have virtually open enrollment. UConn, as a Research 1 institution and our state's flagship university, serves Connecticut and the nation. CSUS is focused, first and foremost, on Connecticut students, as our numbers reflect.

In 1991 the General Assembly recognized this diversity and increased the flexibility of the constituent units of higher education by giving them and their Boards increased authority in areas including filling positions, paying bills, and purchasing and leasing equipment.

It eliminated the authority of the Board of Governors of Higher Education to approve tuition rates and certain plans, expenditures, and leases of the constituent units, conferring such authority instead on each constituent unit's Board of Trustees.

This approach has been effective. We work closely with our colleagues at the Connecticut Community College system, at the University of Connecticut, and at the Conference of Independent Colleges, in sharing our plans and priorities, in an effort to respond effectively to business needs and student demands. The Board of Governors can become an even more effective coordinating body, and I would certainly support use of the Coordinating Council that is provided for in the statutes to more fully realize the benefits of that role.

Let me also mention, along the lines of coordinated planning and programs, the new Dual Admission program launched this fall by the Connecticut State University System and the Connecticut Community Colleges. The goals are simple but substantial: to make the transfer of credits from community college to university easier, to better advise students at the community college level so that they will take courses that will transfer, and to provide students with the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree after completing their associate's degree. This program should save students time and money, and most importantly encourage them to continue their education – and in doing so broaden their career prospects and earning potential. That is good news for the students, and for our state.

Overall, the number of students transferring from Connecticut Community Colleges to the CSUS universities has been on an upward trajectory. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of transfers grew by 46 percent. And last year, the number of students transferring reached an historic high at six of the 12 community colleges.

I believe we can do even more. As Chancellor, I have raised the idea of using a model similar to the "5 colleges" consortium in Western Massachusetts, which includes UMass along with Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke and Smith. A student at one of these schools may take classes at any of the others. This flexibility is terrific for the students, as well as the institutions. In my view, if it can work there, it can work here. So, we will be discussing this approach with the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), and with UConn, to strengthen our academic collaborations and explore new ways to benefit our students.

The framework for such a model already exists, in a limited fashion. The Hartford Consortium for Higher Education (which includes Central Connecticut State University) is a collaborative endeavor of 12 public and private colleges and universities in the Hartford area. The Consortium is a vehicle for the development of joint programs that serve faculty, students and the wider community. Generally, students of members may take courses at other member institutions, subject to certain limitations without payment of tuition and registration fee.

We are also very cognizant of the changing demographics in Connecticut, and the implications for our state. Just a week or so ago, the Hartford Courant reported on the aging of our population. And a report by the state Department of Economic and Community Development highlighted the wide gap between the higher and lower income students in our state, a distressing fact that you also point out, and rightly so.

Along those lines, I'd like to make two points. First, the landmark New England 2020 report laid out in stark terms the challenges facing Connecticut and this region. I would recommend that report to you. Among its findings, the report states that by 2020, more than a quarter of Connecticut's working age-population will be comprised of minority populations, and nearly half of 25-29 year olds in Connecticut will be minorities. Thus the education we provide this largely urban, often low income population will be key to our collective future. Second, we are reaching out to this population in many ways, even reaching down to middle schools to put college on the radar screens of our children. These efforts must be collaborative, and they must continue.

I am very pleased to report that the Board of Trustees of CSUS understands these issues very well, and is leading the way in addressing them. Through our university master plans and strategic plans, through Board initiatives and direction, we are moving thoughtfully and substantively in the best interests of our students but moreover, Connecticut's citizens. A most recent example is the Board's decision to raise the academic standards, beginning as soon as 2015, along with a commitment to continue our work with local school districts and other key constituents to assure that more of our students, whatever their backgrounds, are prepared for college level work, so that they can successfully compete in the global marketplace and fully realize their potential while making a commitment to Connecticut.

There is more I can say, but I know there will be opportunities to do so in the future.

Let me make one final observation. The draft report mentions the difficulty in "forecasting 10 years out the types of jobs that will be available in the future." A similar point was made in a report this summer by President Obama's Council of Economic Advisors. That report pointed out that "in 2003, a quarter of American workers were in jobs that were not even listed among the U.S. Census Bureau's occupational codes in 1967, and technological change has only accelerated since then."

In other words, one of every four workers is now employed in a job category that didn't even exist 40 years ago. That highlights a key point of convergence between education and the economy in 2009. If we are to keep pace, as a state and as a nation, much of the burden – and opportunity – rests with our education system. We need to prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs – jobs that we can barely conceive of, let alone predict.

What is the best way to do that? Reviews such as that which this committee is undertaking, as well as efforts underway at CSUS and other institutions. Just as CSUS began working with local school districts in Bridges, all of us together can have a significant impact on our state. We need to take a holistic approach, across all education. Although our specific missions differ, we share the same goal. That is to help our students become employed, contributing members of our society, enhancing not only our economic vitality but our cultural and civic well-being.

We are committed to working with you, and would appreciate being involved as your discussions continue. Thank you very much.