



Degrees Without Boundaries

Appropriations Committee

Testimony by

Ed Klonoski, Executive Director BSAA & President COSC

February 28, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ed Klonoski and I am President of Charter Oak College and Executive Director of the BSAA, which includes the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium. I have with me today, Dr. Diane Goldsmith who is Executive Director of the CTDLC, Cliff Williams who is the CFAO for the BSAA, and Dr. Shirley Adams, Provost of Charter Oak State College.

We have two issues before us that I would like to address, and I would like to address them in terms of the RBA report that the College recently delivered. During that discussion, we answered questions about the efficacy of our online program, and that discussion was perfectly focused on our institutional mission. Our response to the current challenges is anchored in the planning that we presented in our RBA report.

To begin, the College welcomes the governor's focus on creating a strategic plan for public higher education, and we look forward to helping produce a set of institutional measures that set our work in the context of student learning and the state's strategic higher education needs. The Governor's focus on jobs in this economy is absolutely right, and we believe our role is to be the gateway for Returning Adult students. This has always been our mission, and our recent RBA report indicates the success we have had at meeting it.

In addition, look forward to working with the Board of Regents through which we will report our budgetary and assessment results. From what we could glean from our reading of Governor's Bill 1011, that Board will be tasked with creating the strategic plan for public higher education and then measuring our progress toward meeting it. Again, both the creation of a plan and institutional measures of progress are necessary both at the state level and at the federal level.

If we have concerns, they are about the details of the new organizational structure, the particular institutional goals that get created, and how 17 institutions will report to a single board without creating a traffic jam. But we are confident that Charter Oak and our sister colleges and universities are up to the task of supporting the functions of the Board, and assisting its new President with his or her duties. If our institutional missions are the starting point for planning, Charter Oak will be fine.

The second question is the budget reductions. The Secretary of OPM is correct when he states that this 10% reduction is actually a 2-3% reduction of our total budget. That is true because the College receives only approximately 25% of its budget from our state allotment. We earn the rest. And we earn those dollars while providing the lowest cost baccalaureate in the state. So while no budget reduction is a positive thing, we fully understand why the state has the issues it does, and we stand ready to shoulder our fair share of the pain. On that same front, we are grateful that our financial aid dollars have been preserved in the Governor's budget.

Let me assure you that the budget reduction will not produce the elimination of our program or our services. Instead, it will delay our ability to produce new programs, it will require that we look carefully at programs and activities that do not "stand on their own bottom," and it may require a modest increase in our fees. We will continue to hold the line on staff growth, except in the area of instruction.

I will tell you now what I will tell the Board of Regents when it is created. Charter Oak has the mission, the educational delivery mechanisms, and the flexibility to do even more in the arena of Returning Adult students than we do now. Annually, we serve over 3,000 students and our degree seeking enrollment has increased 10% in the past year. We have increased our six year graduation rate in the past year from an all time high of 58% to an even higher 63%. That rate is consistent across our minority populations, and it is actually higher in our high risk populations, as represented by the WIT and CT/Wage programs.

We are actively working to increase the number and workforce value of our programs. As you know from our previous appearances, we offer such workforce programs as our Nurse Refresher that at put 243 nurses back to work, our Early Childhood degree completion that has graduated 100 students over the past five years, and our Public Safety concentration that counts 9 municipal police chiefs among its graduates. On a broader level, the CT DOL reports that in 2009 our students increased their weekly salaries by \$404 after the completion of the degree. This is a powerful indicator of our employee and workforce development success.

We are ready to launch our first Master's degree, and we already have a waiting list of interested students. That program will include a core focused on non-profit management, which is absolutely critical at this difficult moment for the state and the nation's non-profits. We have also done our first market research into the state's programmatic needs, and identified a bachelor's program in Health Information Management as our next target program. Of course, these programmatic developments require that the College invest in order to build, and that ability is challenged by the 10% reduction on our state allotment.

The good news is that the College has done well over the past several years to increase its efficiencies at serving an increasing student population, keeping the staff headcount level (except for a slight increase around student service and instruction), and investing where possible in technologies that will add flexibility to our resource allocation. We have increased technology driven student self-service, grown our distance learning enrollments and their associated revenue stream, re-designed parts of the curriculum to increase student success, and most recently, re-designed our fee structure to make enrollment easier (a revenue neutral re-structuring).

Those are precisely the rights sorts of improvements for the College to be making, and they will serve our students well. They indicate that we have worked hard to shelter current students from any negative effects from the budget reduction.

That is the good news. The bad news is that the budget reductions may make the next set of such improvements difficult. For us, reductions in our state support threaten our creativity. In other words, the College has plans for new programs that were chosen through a market research process that identified key growth areas in Connecticut that required a bachelors degree. We are eager to bring these programs forward. We also continue to scan the technology environment for new ways to provide academic support to our students. But as we minimize budget reductions by controlling costs, which will work in the short term, the long term risk is that it reduces are ability to innovate.

Additionally, our innovation efforts are dependent on the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium being a healthy and vibrant organization. The College, as do many other institutions, relies on many of the CTDLC's services in order to meet our students' needs in a cost effective manner.

Diane Goldsmith will give you a description of the CTDLC circumstance and then we would be happy to answer your questions.



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**Appropriations Committee
Monday, February 28, 2011**

Testimony

by

Dr. Diane J. Goldsmith, Executive Director

On February 1, 2011, the CT Distance Learning Consortium launched the first online course offered inside a CT correctional facility, a pilot project initiated by the General Assembly. Currently, eight offenders at the Carl Robinson Correctional Institution are taking a Financial Literacy course taught by an instructor who is outside the institution. The course was chosen for its importance to re-entry planning and because it provides credit toward an adult high school diploma. The CTDLC worked with the Department of Correction, the Unified School District, and community groups such as the New Haven Re-entry Roundtable to choose an appropriate course, overcome the technological barriers, re-design the course to meet the DOC's security concerns and the needs of this specific population, as well as to recruit, hire, and train a mentor to provide technological support at the site, and hire and train a subject matter expert as the teacher. These were not insignificant barriers and we are grateful for the funding that made it happen.

While not part of the plan, the CTDLC has met with other state agencies and educational institutions concerned with financial literacy and made the course available to them at no cost.

This is an example of the work that the CTDLC does and can continue to do for the State of CT. We work outside the normal "boxes," create partnerships, and provide cost savings to the state in areas related to online education and training. We do this in several ways:

- 1) We centralize technology and expertise. This allows for educational institutions and state agencies to share a single data center, call center, and instructional and web design expertise;
- 2) We build it once and share it across the state as in our online courses offered through our Adult Virtual High School to all adult education programs in CT, or those offered to high school students through CT Virtual Learning;
- 3) We create unique collaborations across traditional boundaries such as our eTutoring collaboration which involves over 90 colleges and universities across the country and our grant funded Adult Success Center;
- 4) We negotiate with software vendors for contracts with steep discounts for the State;
- 5) We collaborate nationally with other consortia to ensure our members are current with issues such as new higher education regulations or accreditation concerns that affect online learning.

These activities support the goals of increased access and improved retention and graduation rates in both secondary and post-secondary education, as well as workforce training.



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And, it is important to note that we are an exporter. We bring in money from fees from out-of-state institutions including those we host in our data center, those we provide design services to, and the over 50 institutions outside CT that participate in eTutoring.

The State provides approximately 27% of our budget; the rest must be raised through fees for services and/or grants. Currently, those fees do not cover the total cost of the work that the state has asked us to undertake and we have used our reserves to co-invest in the Adult Virtual High School, CT Virtual Learning, and for the technology needed to support programs such as eTutoring. However, we cannot continue to do so, nor can we continue to raise fees to institutions and agencies that are facing their own budget cuts.

The cuts to our budget, however, are only a part of the story. Our work requires technology and hardware which had been supported previously through Capitol Equipment Purchase Funds (CEPF) dollars. Technology costs and the costs of technology security continue to rise, while the state's support through CEPF has all but disappeared. This presents a major challenge as we go forward.

At the same time, as the state moves to consolidate services, we believe that the CTDLC is in a unique position to enhance our work for the State. But, we require your help. Here are some examples:

- 1) As state agencies move their training online, they are looking for software to support their courses, and as state agencies, they need courseware that is accessible to all including those with disabilities. Several years ago, the CTDLC negotiated the first statewide single license for Learning Management System software to support the online courses at the CSU's, Community Colleges, and UConn. We are continuing to talk with this company about expanding this statewide to include K-12 and state agencies at considerable savings to all. This would be flexible and scalable allowing institutions and agencies to opt in when they are ready, but it would require a statewide commitment,
- 2) We are working in collaboration with the Community Colleges to offer training in teaching online in this software system. Should there be a statewide commitment, we are already poised to offer this online training across the state.
- 3) For the past nine years, the State Department of Education has funded CTDLC's Adult Virtual High School through a federal grant. This program provides online GED preparation and credit diploma courses to all of CT's adult education centers. These credit diploma courses have over a 60% completion rate, which is as good as or better than those offered face to face. Since its inception we have worked to incorporate courses that would prepare these adult students for college, specifically, by offering a math course designed to ensure that students have the math skills needed to place into credit level math at a community college. We are working with both commercial and open-source publishers to incorporate more of these types of materials into our



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offerings. As the State looks to solutions to the problem of unprepared students entering college, we offer AVHS as one avenue for students.

4) Four years ago, the General Assembly funded the CTDLC to create CT's Virtual High School, with particular emphasis on credit recovery, AP courses, and world languages, to serve students in CT's high schools needing additional time to master their basic work, or to access courses their schools do not offer. We used those funds wisely in purchasing courseware, licenses, and technology, but the two-year funding became one, and now schools or parents must pay for these courses. That has become increasingly difficult as school budgets are reduced. Of more significance, the State has not made CT Virtual the preferred state solution. Currently, state dollars are going to commercial or out-of-state providers rather than to a solution designed by the CTDLC to meet CT's standards with CT certified teachers. We ask that the State look to CTDLC's VLC as the preferred solution to meet CT students' needs.

5) We provide web and instructional design development for a wide range of institutions, non-profits, and state agencies including the DEP, Dept of Public Safety, Dept of Public Health, the Workforce Investment Boards' STEM initiative, and SDE's highly successful Developing Tomorrow's Professionals program. Centralizing these functions in the CTDLC allows these agencies and institutions to buy only the staff expertise they need, and combine it with the support of our call center and technology expertise. Here again, we ask that the State look to us as the preferred provider of these services.

While the cuts to our budget are difficult, they can be offset by the State looking to us to provide these necessary services in ways that centralize expertise, build it once and share it, work across traditional boundaries, and create innovative collaborations that will save the State money.

Thank you.

