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Appropriations Committee  
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106  
Phone: 860-240-0390

January 27, 2011

Re: Testimony for February 28, 2011 Appropriations Committee Meeting on Higher Education

I am Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, and I am an Associate Professor and the Co-Chair of the History and Non-Western Cultures Department at Western Connecticut State University. I am also the Director of the Roger Sherman Debate Society, WCSU's debate team and the only policy debate team in Connecticut. I received my BA in History with High Honors and Highest Distinction from UC Berkeley and my PhD in Southeast Asian History from Cornell University. I am a specialist in early modern Vietnam and one of the less than one hundred scholars around the world capable of conducting research in *chu nom*, the premodern Vietnamese script. Cornell published my edited volume *Vietnam and the West: New Approaches* in 2010, and Yale will publish my book *Allegories of the Vietnamese Past* later this year.

The students that I teach at WCSU are top-notch. Alumni of our history department and our debate society, which has only been in existence since 2003, include an Assistant Professor at UCONN, an Associate Vice President with Morgan Stanley in New York, an IRS Special Agent, a Hospital Administrator in Sudan, a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Massachusetts, and a PhD candidate in Southeast Asian History at the University of Wisconsin who has recently been hired as a consultant to rewrite the Lao history curriculum.

Many of these students chose WCSU over prestigious universities. I myself had choices other than WCSU. I choose to stay here and teach these students because I have the opportunity to work with a truly engaging faculty in my department, each of whom has credentials that would legitimately qualify them for an Ivy-league level job, and to find and bring out the talents of the diverse student body at Western Connecticut State University.

The work of these students has been more than a return on your investment in this public university system, and an example of how CSU generates eight dollars to the economy of the state of Connecticut for every one dollar it spends. However, the reduction and consolidation proposed would make it impossible for these success stories to happen. A ten percent reduction in state aid would by necessity limit the curricula that WCSU would offer, substantially reducing the attractiveness of CSU to students like these.

While I am sympathetic with the potential cost savings involved, the consolidation of CSU under one board of regents poses substantial problems. The first is perceptual in nature. Many CSU students work hard to be admitted to a quality university offering a four-year degree. To be lumped in with community colleges send the message that this effort is not recognized because two-year and four-year colleges are functionally equivalent. This problem is exacerbated by the exclusion of UConn from the program, which gives students and faculty at CSU the distinct impression that those in Hartford regard them as second-class citizens, especially when the State Education Commissioner has asserted that UConn "attracts a very different type of student" that the CSU system does. These problems notwithstanding, the goal of establishing course equivalencies and merging programs and functions to produce budget efficiencies between the CSU system and community colleges is flawed, since in order to be accredited many such programs and courses need to be taught by faculty with doctoral degrees in their field, and many community college faculty members do not possess this designation. It seems to me that problems such as these need to be studied before any such plan is implemented.

Moreover, the stated goal of linking funding to the number of desirable economic outcomes for the state is potentially short-sighted. Privileging nursing degrees or computer science degrees today is analogous to privileging aeronautics degrees or typing degrees in the 1970s. Just because a job is in demand today does not mean that it will be useful to graduates throughout their career. What really matters to employers and to students is a broad-based liberal arts degree taught by top-notch faculty, which cannot be achieved if the CSU system is regarded as an extension of a two-year technical college, which is what these "performance initiatives" imply.

The goal also undervalues the effect of the CSU system on the greater communities of the respective campuses. It has been shown that up to 93% of CSU graduates remain within the community in which the campus is located, a fact that is critical for those interested in job development and economic growth. Consolidation would ignore the enormous contribution and loyalty of local alumni who feel a sense of pride in their *alma maters*.

Similarly, while I understand that some budget reductions may be inevitable, a ten percent reduction is too severe. So much of the CSU budget goes to immutable costs such as energy and maintenance that the only option available to deal with these budget cuts are course reductions or steep tuition increases. These reductions will directly hurt students. In the history department, we are already straining to offer the courses our students need to graduate. With this cut, our students will be prevented from graduating and entering the workforce.

In this economy, it is more critical than ever that the people of Connecticut be given access to a quality education so that they can compete in an increasingly competitive global economy. They cannot do so if their programs are reduced in stature and cut so severely that they are not given these opportunities.

I urge you to consider these points in your appropriations.