

Louise Williams, 51 High Street, Collinsville, CT 06019

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee's public hearing on S.B. No. 1011 - An Act Concerning a Reorganization of Connecticut's System of Public Higher Education.

I am a professor of history at Central Connecticut State University. I urge the committee to think carefully about the proposed reorganization of higher education in Connecticut before rushing into it. The plan as outlined in the bill is much too vague. It is not clear that it will reduce bureaucracy and save money. And it does not appear to be designed with a real understanding of the various institutions' needs and identities.

The Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee report of December 16, 2010 stated clearly that the "downside" of the type of consolidated governing board proposed in the bill "is that it can evolve into a bureaucratic organization, mired in hands-on management and slow to respond to institution and public needs." (PRI report Dec. 16, 2010, p. 16). It seems likely that this will happen in Connecticut because the board in the plan will be governing very different institutions.

Many students understand this. I described the plan to one group of students this week and they had the same immediate response as I did - "Why is UCONN left out"? I suggested that perhaps the designers of the plan believe UCONN is the "flagship" university, of so much better quality than CSU, that it must be left alone. One of my students was adamant: "I went to UCONN and it is not better than CCSU."

My students also thought it made little sense to divide the five "universities" and associate four of them with 12 "colleges." They understand that a university is a much different institution than a community college. Let me give some examples.

First, the faculty. The type of faculty and what they are expected to do is very similar in the Connecticut State Universities and University of Connecticut. In my department, for example we have as many faculty members with PhDs from top universities, who publish books and articles in the most prestigious presses in the world, as they do at UCONN. We may do slightly less research than at UCONN because we teach more courses, but that does not mean that we are significantly different or that UCONN is "the state's research university." (PRI report Dec. 16, 2010, p. 7). We too do high quality research.

Next, the students. Students in the CSU system are able to have almost the same university experience as at UCONN. This includes the ability to develop relationships with faculty members throughout their entire 4 or 6 year careers, and even beyond graduation. I, for example, taught the same student in her first class her freshman year, in upper level classes, and acted as her advisee. And I was there on the floor of the Civic Center to congratulate her when she graduated. And I will be there in the future to write letters of recommendation for jobs and graduate programs for all my students, or even just to share their successes, as happened this month when a former graduate student

published a book. I also have taught courses where students have a chance to travel abroad, in my case to Northern Ireland. I have helped students get internships, and apply to our graduate programs in History and Public History. As at UCONN we have graduate programs and graduate students, and some of those students even go on to get PhDs at UCONN and elsewhere.

And please do not underestimate CSU students. They are not necessarily less intelligent or well prepared than UCONN students. They do not all need remedial work. In fact, in the 13 years I have been at CCSU I have noticed a marked improvement in their abilities. In fact, this past weekend I graded 35 essays in a general education course. Not one of those students had to be referred to the writing center for help, much less to a remedial course.

In short, there is not much that separates CSU from UCONN – except perhaps the cost. And this is why so many talented students chose CSU; we provide a quality education for those less fortunate in terms of income.

On the other hand, it can be argued that CSU is quite different from the community colleges. This is not to say that the community colleges do not do a good job. They do. I recently was part of a program review of the History department at Tunxis Community College. I was very impressed with how they have designed their program, the quality of their courses, and the dedication and talent of their faculty.

But in the community colleges the students are expected to be matriculated for only two years. The faculty are far more likely to be part-time and have at least one other one job in a different institution to which they must travel. They teach many more courses, but cannot offer upper level courses, international experiences, or internships. Their teaching load makes it impossible except in very rare cases for them to do the research or provide as much attention to students that we do. And they can't always advise students about careers, because many students wish to have a degree beyond an associates degree before moving into the job market, and some even change their majors when they transfer. Finally, community colleges do not have graduate students, or help students transition directly to advanced degree programs.

The state of Connecticut is very lucky to have such a variety of institutions of higher education. But the institutions are different, and I cannot see how in this plan a governing board will be able to understand and deal with those differences without becoming even larger and more expensive than what exists now. And I fear that it may not truly respect what is unique about each institution in the end.

So, I urge you to think very carefully before reorganizing the system.