

Written Testimony

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Public Hearing

March 10, 2011

When Governor Malloy's Bill #1011 regarding the reorganization of higher education governance was first announced, Manchester Community College President Gena Glickman asked faculty and staff to share with her any thoughts or feelings they had about the proposed action. Those comments follow:

"I am sure you know that this is not the first time this has been suggested. Having come from Michigan where there is great respect for public institutions of higher education including community colleges, I was taken aback by the attitude I encountered in some instances when I first arrived here in 1987. One man even said to me "Oh, I didn't realize MCC had full-time teachers." We have worked very hard to change that attitude. Now I see our mission and purpose being threatened.

I know you believe, as I do, that it is so important that the Community Colleges not lose what has made them so vital and crucial to the needs of the people of the state. I tell my students of French and Spanish that other countries don't have this unique and special institution. I worry that this blending would rob us of exactly what has made us fill the void that exists in those countries."

Barbara Place, Professor of French and Spanish

"I don't object the Governor's proposed realignments in principle. In fact, any attempt to streamline the educational system and make education more accessible is worth consideration – we do exist for the sake of the students - but I would be concerned about how the streamlining is actually implemented. One of the major difficulties as far I as can perceive it, is that the CSUS is not currently very centralized – and that would need to be accomplished before the CCC curriculum could be effectively aligned with it. From what I understand of the system at CCSU, the internal politics of that one institution are already difficult, never-mind trying to implement the proposed changes within the entire CSUS."

"Malloy seems to indicate that the individual campuses would still be "empowered," and that would be critical if the community colleges are to remain adaptive. I am concerned that the new bureaucracy could prove to be more cumbersome than our current processes. This is the major hesitation I have about centralization. On one level, the CCC and the CSUS still have significantly separate roles and they should be allowed to retain those roles. On another level, at least at our campus, there is a lot of energy and synergy given out by the faculty and staff because they are allowed to invest in the decision-making processes. All that creative and intensive effort won't be sustainable if folks aren't allowed to invest in the decisions."

"Not specified in this particular announcement is what the infrastructural/technological changes would be. I am assuming that streamlining the processes (which will be a major political battle based upon what the CCC system went through) will lead to a common database system, which will require a major financial investment. That process will need to be supported by a centralized office such as we have now. What I would be concerned about is a continuation (and exacerbation) of the tension that we are already experiencing. Similar to the IT battle that we had on our own campus, there needs to be clarity on who is serving whom. Malloy does seem to desire to be maintaining services while cutting back on the bureaucracy needed to support the services. So, as much as we can, as the process moves forward, we should try to frame the case for campus independence – providing the best creative, adaptive

services to the students – while supporting the integration within the infrastructure. Let's try to get the best of both worlds."

"We have an excellent campus at MCC. We should showcase what we have - and may I refer to the newly released "Noteworthy Faculty Accomplishments" – and show our desire to move forward with the integration while making a case for how we have provided excellence in our service and what we need to do in order to maintain that service."

"As stated in the article in the Mirror and as also stated in the report about the higher ed board in Washington (<http://www.nored.us/HECBBReport1603.pdf>), it's not the structure that makes the difference but rather the people in the system - and not just the ones on the newly formed board of Regents. But the Regents, in particular, need to clearly understand the operating parameters of the colleges. In an article last year, Meotti said that we need to be creative in order to accommodate more students – but I don't think he realizes that our full/part-time faculty ratio is already overloaded not to mention our other student services. One can only do so much "more with less" before the system degrades or even breaks."

Charles Russell, Information Technology Technician

At Manchester Community College, we constantly strive to provide an academically rigorous education which is affordable for our students. We do this independently out of a sincere desire to use our resources wisely and always consider the needs of our students. The Connecticut Community College system encompasses twelve very different campuses with a variety of student demography. The surrounding communities also are a spectrum of "microclimates" of diversity of culture, business, and local heritage. Our current system office understands that we all coexist harmoniously, respectful of these differences. I have serious misgivings that a hastily contrived merging of our system with the CSUs and other entities as is being considered could be quite chaotic and disruptive. Furthermore, savings may not emerge from the ashes. The devil is in the details, and I am concerned that the details need a great deal more deliberation.

Paul Edelen, Instructor in Mathematics

"Thank you asking for our input! I am concerned that if we do not have someone at the Chancellors level like Marc Herzog the Community-Technical System not have a VOICE! How will the funds be allocated. What about our Banner Staff at the System Office, they have the best staff, we have people from the University system call them for help. Will we have access to knowledgeable people like Tom Clark. What will we lose, what will we gain? I know decisions have to be made that will be painful; I hope they are made with great care and understanding of what is our Mission. On the flip side, this will help our faculty and professional staff move towards promotion, moving from the community colleges to university level."

Grace Scollo, Administrative Assistant, Student Affairs

"Since you are asking for comments, these are the comments I posted on Governor Malloy's Facebook page.

"While I totally support making education more affordable, your new proposal raises a concern for me. Each of the institutions you propose to combine have distinct missions and cultures as well as serve different populations. In your move... to combine these organizations I hope these differences are respected and maintained. It has take Connecticut much longer than most other states to recognized the value of Community Colleges and their policy of open enrollment. These colleges have been underfunded and underappreciated in Connecticut. I hope your efforts do not undo positive steps that Connecticut has made to increase its support of Community College education and recognition of its distinct mission to provide open access, affordability, and student centered higher education."

I will keep reminding the Governor and the legislators how important CCs are for Connecticut."

Jonathan Morris, Professor of Biology

"This may seem like a minor point but many people here have commented on the fact that the press release used lower case letters when 'mentioning' the 'community college system' but all other entities were given appropriate upper case letters. It seems that someone doesn't know (?) the correct title for our system and didn't bother to find that out so just listed us as what seems without the importance given to the other education organizations. Just thought you might like to know."

"Although the Governor's idea bears study, it would seem difficult for 'one CEO' to administer the entire higher education system. I have always been a proponent of focusing more attention on getting the K-12 system to do its job so that we could focus on 'higher' education instead of remedial education."

Elaine Wiatr, Facilities Scheduler

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my thoughts and ask a couple of questions concerning the proposed organizational restructure of the Connecticut higher education system. I mainly speak from my heart about what I think this means for MCC.

Although I believe that it will be a difficult road ahead, especially in terms of maintaining the college's mission, I think that if MCC is offered a certain level of autonomy, with that comes a certain level of empowerment. I think any level of empowerment will depend upon whether or not the proposed transition to a Board of Regents runs smoothly so that there is a well defined understanding of our mission and the resources needed to continue to serve our students. If we have only one person representing our college on the Board of Regents, will that really mean more autonomy for MCC?

I hope that even a sense of empowerment will enable MCC to meet any outcomes requirements regarding retention and graduation. If the proposed Board of Regents can be realistic in terms of the time required to develop and provide annual reports on student outcomes, financial issues, enrollment and completions, transfer credits, and employment and earning outcomes of graduates, then I believe we have the ability to give them measurable data.

Now that I look at things from a broader perspective, I can understand why Connecticut ranks 34th out of 50 states in terms of the percentage of adults with degrees. As I continue to look at the economy, I see why people with degrees might want to leave this state to work elsewhere. I think that there is not enough technological industry in this state to draw young people to jobs here nor is there enough entrepreneurial business to prove people right out of college can start businesses in Connecticut. I hope that MCC can provide an avenue for those interested to build that kind of base in this state. But I believe we must ask: Is MCC's mission to produce graduates with degrees or produce life-long achievers who hold good jobs and can be productive members of society within our state? I hope our new governor doesn't get stuck on obtaining a better ranking and impose unrealistic burdens on higher education to crank out graduates that will then leave this state.

Furthermore, it seems that the Connecticut work force embraces a lot of military and aerospace employment, but if our government ever decides to cut defense spending, Connecticut will lose a large number of jobs that will further hurt our economy. I am also disheartened when I read about Pfizer building a research facility in Cambridge Massachusetts. I am afraid that tax incentives for big business that were put into place years ago have too many loopholes and no longer work, and that big business is too much smoke and mirrors these days. I believe that the tax incentive system needs closer scrutiny and perhaps an overhaul before I would want to whole heartedly support it.

I applaud Governor Malloy for proposing a pre-kindergarten program state-wide, but this is only one of many preparatory steps needed to be taken. What about all the other steps that need to be taken during pre-college years that prepare students for the community college experience? How will open enrollment be affected? Our faculty have documented case study discussions regarding unprepared students who slip through the cracks and wind up disrupting classroom settings.

I believe that MCC has always offered a "student-friendly pathway," and I hope that it can "overcome the challenges that prevent [students] from graduating," but does this mean MCC will have to revamp its college mission as it strives to churn out graduates?

Elaine Rock Lindroth, Administrative Assistant, Educational Technology & Distance Learning