

Public testimony  
On Senate Bill #1011  
March 10, 2011

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

My name is Robert Whittimore, and I speak today as a professor of anthropology in the Department of Social Sciences at Western Connecticut State University (where I also coordinate the International Student Exchange Program) and as an Associate of the Institute for Writing & Thinking at Bard College.

As I see it, you aspire to make policy about educational restructuring by facing the “efficiencies” of one form of capital: money. Our present crisis stems largely from years of public fund mismanagement at the level of our state. And also, tragically, from the consequences of more years of the misappropriation of private investments by financial managers who confused our fiscal resources with their own on a national and global scale. Many of them live with us in this very state. We all are being asked to solve the problem they and our representatives have caused. The disproportionate extent of that burden and its impact upon the faculty, staff, and students of higher education institutions in our state is untenable.

However, as a tenured faculty member, I deal in a different form of capital: the human mind. My resources are obviously contingent upon your policy decisions. But I and my colleagues are more than interchangeable “teachers” as the current proposals for consolidation suggest.

Our university curriculum is our purview, our extended advisement of our students a delicate privilege based on mutual familiarity and trust, and our on-going research the grounds upon which we write, and speak, and make any claim to our own and our students’ future as conscientious and informed members of a civil society.

Civil society’s values are not rooted:

- a) Solely in information and end-of-chapter questions from textbook publishers, assessed by examinations or short term assignments – although these too have their place;

Nor will civil society’s pulse be strengthened:

- b) Solely by courses in general education or a chosen major – though such study inspires the literacies for which the university is indeed responsible.

David Brooks, in the NYT of March 8<sup>th</sup>, writes of “human capital” as a balance between reason and passion, of individual investment in relationships to others.

To paraphrase his argument, and my agreement with it, the stuff of human capital are those individuals:

- who are attuned to others' minds and what they have to offer,
- who are poised to believe and doubt their own biases and shortcomings,
- who seek to understand patterns and polarities in their complex worlds,
- who can enter and thrive within groups with sympathy and compassion,
- who are motivated by understanding that love for people, ideas and learning is worth their own investment.

No one can convince me that human minds so conceived are less valuable than the recovery of a pile of cash. Any more than consolidation plans without careful planning could be perceived as a responsible attempt to sustain the complexities of nurturing such minds.

And the human mind is what makes a citizen.

Without educated citizens, our constitutions, state and federal, are meaningless.

Absent of a strategic planning process for the proposed consolidation, a collaboration that should involve the stake holders who practice within the Connecticut's system of higher education, the current proposal does not have my support. The risks are considerable, the presumed logic of fiscal emergency unconvincing.

Certainly, you hold the purse strings. But a university education is not a tidy bag to be torn open and yanked shut in the face of fiscal exigency.

(6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District; 30<sup>th</sup> Senate District)