



Office of the President

Fairfield University commends the Connecticut Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee for raising Bill 5361: **AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCITY AGREEMENT REGARDING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS.**

The adoption of the SARA process allowing institutions of higher education in the State of Connecticut the opportunity for reciprocal acceptance of their duly licensed and accredited online programs and courses is an important step in advancing innovative pedagogical approaches in higher education. Fairfield University, like most institutions in Connecticut, engages in rigorous, transparent accreditation at the state and regional level as well as at the national level for professional programs. Our standards are very high and provide students access to the learning and skills necessary to engage as productive citizens.

The technology advances in the twentieth first century have introduced new and exciting pedagogical approaches for higher education. Online learning allows students to intellectually engage in a timely and efficient manner. As we move to grow our economy and educate and train students to meet emerging needs, institutions are developing multiple modes of providing education. In addition, the changing demographics point to older students seeking education and continuing education to continually advance their career skills. These students, often working adults, need flexibility and require convenience to continue their education. Thus online education works for many in a variety of disciplines.

At a time when the public and elected officials are rightly asking colleges and universities to be more cost conscious and innovative to meet the pressing needs to train and educate a work force for the twentieth first century, the adoption of the SARA process makes imminent sense. SARA will set national criteria for approving online education based on the assurances of the individual states that they stand behind the quality of the educational offerings of their institutions. It provides a uniform standard and eliminates the timely and costly process for an individual institution to register its courses and programs in 50 different states. Setting a national standard insures that all students will be receiving a quality education and this process upholds the standards set by the State of Connecticut. Passage of this bill will put Connecticut in the forefront of advocating for quality online education and providing effective and efficient means for the colleges and universities in the state to deliver educational experiences so needed to build our society and our economy.

We at Fairfield University encourage you to support this bill and bring it to enactment by the Senate and the House of Representatives in the General Assembly.

Thank you.

Jeffrey P. von Arx, S.J.
President